The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-FIFTH ISSUE - NOVEMBER 2021

MYSTERIOUS COIN REVIVES NOSTALGIA!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

The Retrogaming Times

Thirty-Fifth Issue - November 2021

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Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

As we close out yet another year it is my sincerest hope that our readers and their families are doing well, mentally as well as physically. Although things continue to be in a constant state of readjustment, classic video games remain a great way to take a break and have an entertaining experience. I truly feel that 2021 has been one of the best years of The Retrogaming Times in terms of the breadth of its content and contributions, with this issue as no exception. Before we get into it I wish you all an enjoyable conclusion to 2021, safe travels if you are planning on such, and hope that you will return in 2022 for another excellent year of The Retrogaming Times.

There has become an expectation that we cap off the year with a great issue and we're back to do just that. More C64! begins with Merman's wrap up of new Commodore 64 releases to hit the scene throughout 2021. The Apple II Incider pays homage to its original namesake with a collection of digital archival issues presented by Donald Lee. Thirty years after The Rocketeer made his silver screen debut, the NES game created as a film tie-in is given an in depth review. It wouldn't be the holiday season without our annual Holiday Gift Guide, containing an assortment of retrogaming gift ideas as chosen by current newsletter staff. Check out our picks and spread some retrogaming cheer. Battletoads is a much loved and talked about franchise that got its start with an ambitious NES release but find out if notoriety makes for a good game. Dan Pettis celebrates his first year with the newsletter by looking at another anniversary, the GameCube's 20th, with a collection of twenty games that defined the system. Totally new original games made in the style of older hardware concessions are nothing new, in fact they have become a huge genre unto themselves. However back in 1997 one such collection of games released for the PlayStation may have introduced this idea. That game was Cellophanes, a title that has been mostly lost to time and its fascinating history is detailed in this issue's cover story. At the launch of the Game Boy a new Super Mario game was created specifically to showcase what could be done on the hardware. Take a look at Mario's first true expansive portable adventure with a game that would spawn a series. 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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KansasFest, July 19th - 24th 2022, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

KansasFest is the world's only annual convention dedicated to the Apple II computer that revolutionized the personal computing industry. KansasFest invites hobbyists, retrocomputing enthusiasts, and diehard aficionados to gather from all corners of the world.

KansasFest is about a computer and a camaraderie unlike anything else. The Apple II attracts people of a certain mindset and spirit who exhibit a rare creativity, resilience, dedication, history, and nonconformity. The Apple II has lasted for more than 40 years, and the friendships and memories made at KansasFest will last even longer.

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

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Classic Game Fest, July 23rd - 24th 2022, Austin, Texas, USA

The biggest retro gaming event in Texas is back for its 15th anniversary! Enjoy 70,000 square feet of retro video games and fun at the Palmer Events Center. The annual summer event will feature all the expected attractions including special guests, live music, free play games, a massive vendor hall and more. 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! - 2021 New Releases

by Merman

Its been another amazing year for new releases on the Commodore 64, and as we head towards 2022 and the 40th anniversary of the computer there doesn't seem to be any signs of the games stopping. Here is a round up of some of my favourites so far this year and news of my own new project...

TINY QUEST

Reunite Mr Cube with his lost love, traveling through hazard-filled screens. Each screen must be completed quickly before his energy runs out. He must also pick up coins to pay for the journey home again. Cute, minimalist graphics and good controls make this fun to play if ultimately a little repetitive. The password system gives you input codes to skip forward, but these only work for the current session; switch off and the codes change. Bitmap Soft have produced physical versions on tape, disk, and cartridge, or it can be downloaded digitally from itch.io.

Digital download from $2.99 plus tax:
https://bitmapsoft.itch.io/tiny-quest

Tape £10 plus postage:
https://www.bitmapsoft.co.uk/product/tiny-quest-tape/

Deluxe disk version £25 plus postage:
https://www.bitmapsoft.co.uk/product/tiny-quest-disk/

Cartridge version £32 plus postage in association with RGCD:
https://rgcd.bigcartel.com/product/tiny-quest-commodore-64

Jumping towards the exit of the current screen and finding a hidden key in Tiny Quest.

SPACE FIREHAWK

This is inspired by the classic Nintendo arcade game Space Firebird and really creates the atmosphere of an early 1980s coin-op. Shoot your way through waves of enemies, upgrading your ship to improve your chances. You can increase the speed of movement, the number of bullets and the speed of firing - but die and you lose the last upgrade. You have five defence shields and can earn / add extras. You can also trigger the Assault Shield (hold Fire & Up) to launch the now-invulnerable ship into enemies for a brief time. But you only have a limited supply of these. It's an addictive game for those chasing high scores. Available as a free digital download.

Name your own price (PAL compatible, will run slightly faster in NTSC):
https://senkel64.itch.io/space-firehawk

With your shield gone one more hit is fatal and taking on the large Emperor.

DR. MORTALWOMBAT

That's an unusual name, and it represents a coder who used to have a C64 and has made a return recently with two quite different games - a horizontally scrolling shoot ‘em up and a 3D space trading game.

PLEKTHORA

Here is a nifty little game for shooting fans, with some neat parallax scrolling. Take on the enemy invasion fleet, collecting power-ups and dodging obstacles. Shooting enemies drops crystals and collecting enough will earn extra continues to let you carry on playing. As you shoot more enemies, your score multiplier increases - but die and it resets. Clever presentation touches include the ship's shadow on the ground, the incoming radio messages that tell you what is happening and the homing missiles (once you find them). While the difficulty curve is well designed, it does lack a little variety in the enemy types and hazards.

Name your own price (PAL only):
https://drmortalwombat.itch.io/plekthora

Picking up the L will give you a laser, while this formation will take multiple shots to destroy.

GATES OF THE ANCIENT

Inspired by Elite and Space Rogue, you are a space pilot exploring the galaxy. Sectors are linked by Gates left behind by the Ancients - some are locked requiring you to activate the switch, and all Gates require you to line up your ship with the centre of the three beacons and hit the central portal correctly. As you explore, there are other ships and targets found by your sensors - with readings appearing in the cockpit readout below the main view. They might not be hostile or turn hostile if you shoot at them. Ancient robots, minefields and space traders can also be encountered; defeat the robots as fast as possible, shoot the mines to clear the field and enter the trader's fortress to buy extra equipment. Defeated ships leave behind cargo, either Credits to buy things with or items to add to your ship - upgrading your sensors, engine, shields and weapons, but you will need a stronger generator to make extra power for better devices. There's no doubting how smooth the filled 3D graphics are, with ships and cargo pods looking great with textures. The starfield effect is convincing too, and sound is basic but adequate. It does take some getting used to the controls and learning to read the sensors, with the low-powered laser you start with making things tricky too. The digital download comes with a PDF of the instructions that is worth reading. The game also gives you a code to continue where you left off (at the last sector entered, or the start) retaining your Credits and equipment. There's a large galaxy to explore for those that persevere.

Name your own price (PAL optimized, will run faster on NTSC; version 1.01 adds support for hardware acceleration):
https://drmortalwombat.itch.io/gates-of-the-ancient

Lining up a Gate to jump to a new sector, then the player comes under enemy fire.

ICON64

Trevor Storey (known as Smila) has been a prolific designer and graphic artist on the C64 in recent years, and two more of his titles have been released this year through Psytronik Software. These are available as digital downloads and in physical form, supporting both PAL and NTSC machines as well as the C64 Mini and THEC64.

SOULLESS 2 - THE ARMOUR OF GODS

The original Soulless had a Special Edition released as part of the Kickstarter for the vinyl soundtrack album covering Soulless 1 and 2. Soulless 2 is the follow-up, with King Razik (transformed into a beast in the first game) fighting the evil wizard Kalen again. The wizard is after the fabled Armour of Gods, and so Razik must find it first. Starting in the Forest, the player must find useful equipment and the keys to unlock the door to the next level. The pistol once found lets the player shoot enemies, which will drop extra energy and ammo. The keys in the first level are in chests located behind a pool of water, with a colour combination (matched by shooting the orbs found on a particular screen) creating a bridge to the chest. Once all six keys have been found, the player must fight the large monster behind the locks to get to the next level. On level 2, the Temple, the actual Armour and the items to power it can be found as well as more keys. Once the Armour is activated, the player can fly and hover around to move faster - and a more powerful gun will do more damage. Hidden in each of the four levels are Crowns that will award an extra life, and there are ten in total to find.

This is another good-looking game, inspired by Metroid and the C64 classic The Sacred Armour of Antiriad (known as Rad Warrior in the USA). Unlocking new abilities lets you progress further, and the game will automatically save your progress at the end of each level. The intro sequence is outstanding and sets the scene, and the title screen includes a continue option allowing you to restart at the highest level reached in a previous game (with the number of lives at that point). Brilliant music and sound FX add to the atmosphere, and the four levels (each with a distinctive graphic style) are huge. Some of the enemies can be quite fiddly to get past, but learning their patterns and movements helps. This is one that will need to be mapped out and studied to succeed.

Digital download from $7.99 plus tax:
https://psytronik.itch.io/soulless2

Physical versions from £9.99 plus postage (budget disk £9.99, Premium+ disk £14.99, USB cassette £19.99, Basic Box set £24.99, Collector's Edition box set with soundtrack CD, poster, disk, keyring, and stickers £39.99):
https://psytronik.bigcartel.com/product/soulless-2-the-armour-of-gods

Level 1 requires you to set the Orbs to the correct colour combination to reach the chests, while exploring the Caverns in the Armour you encounter these large spiders.

BATTLE KINGDOM

Inspired by the Exidy arcade game Venture, use your magic bow to defeat enemies and find the pieces of the Master Sword. A random selection of buildings is open each level on the castle map, with diverse types of enemies appearing in each room. Once all the enemies are shot, a bonus item appears - a piece of the sword, a quiver of arrows or jewelery for bonus points. Shooting arrows depletes your stock but they will regenerate slowly. When the sword is reassembled, you must fight the dragon in the main castle. Graphically this is nicely made and backed by an excellent soundtrack. However, there is not much variety between levels - it simply gets harder and requires more sword pieces to reach the tougher dragons.

Digital download $4.99 or more:
https://psytronik.itch.io/battle

Physical edition from £8.99 plus postage (budget disk £8.99, standard cassette £9.99, Premium+ disk £14.99, clamshell cassette £14.99):
https://psytronik.bigcartel.com/product/battle-kingdom-c64

This room is crowded with enemies to be killed with your magic arrows; on the overhead map you must avoid the dots and enter a room before the dragon flies after you.

C64BOOKS.CO.UK

This was announced a couple of months ago, but I have started a new website at https://www.c64books.co.uk. This will serve as the selling point for a new series of books and eBooks aimed at C64 owners and retrogamers.

The first two releases are due in November 2021. **THE COMMODORE 64 BOOK 1982-199X** was originally only available in a limited-edition paperback, but now is finally available as an eBook (PDF) to view on many formats. There have been changes and

updates to the text, and the layouts have been altered to make them easier to read electronically.

PIXEL POETRY is a collection of my poems based on the themes of video games and technology. From famous characters to social media, Pong to the Millennium Bug I'm sure there will be many familiar ideas to the readers of my More C64 columns. This one will be available as eBook and printed paperback (printed on demand), with specially commissioned bead artwork by Cave of Pixels (https://www.caveofpixels.com) for the cover and inside illustration.

The big announcement is for August 2022, and the 40th anniversary of the C64. **THE COMMODORE 64 BOOK 199X-2022** will serve as the sequel to the original book, reviewing over 200 games released since 1992 (including a few not covered in the first book). This will also be available as paperback and eBook.

And finally, there are plans for a fourth book to be released in November 2022. **MORE C64 - COLUMNS & CUTTINGS** will bring together in eBook and printed paperback my More C64 columns from ten years writing for the Retrogaming Times newsletters, along with some of my other online and printed articles, together for the first time. More details will be in a future issue.

Apple II Incider - The Original Magazine

by Donald Lee

It's hard to believe that the 2021 year is almost over. Depending on the part of the country you live in, how you live your life may vary quite a bit. In California we have had a lot of lockdowns and mask requirements. I have been fortunate to be able to get back to some sense of normalcy with some things I do like basketball but not everything is quite back to normal just yet. As I've noted before, the name of this column (Apple II Incider) is a nod to one of the original Apple II magazines (Incider, later Incider A+).

For quite a few years I had kept copies of the old Incider / Incider A+ magazines at my parents house. I guess I was the sentimental sort as I would occasionally go back and re-read the old issues but keeping all the old stuff around isn't always practical. So I put some old issues on eBay and sold a few to people. Unfortunately not every issue was sold and I ended up trashing the rest. With the rise of scanning, I was hoping that the owners / publishers of Incider (and other Apple II magazines) would publish the contents online or sell some archives.

Recently due to COVID, I was home and online searching for some books on the website archive.org and I stumbled upon multiple issues of Incider / Incider A+ that were available: https://archive.org/details/incidermagazine I haven't looked through the entire list but there's a good number of issues there, though maybe some of the older issues may be missing. Regardless, this is a reason why modern day technology and Internet archival is so good. You get the chance to look at some of the older things you used to read.

Have a great rest of 2021 and see you in 2022!

Looking Back At Thirty Years of The Rocketeer (NES)

by David Lundin, Jr.

On June 21st, 1991 The Rocketeer was released to movie theaters after navigating nearly a decade of development and production conflicts. An adaptation of the late Dave Stevens' most popular creation, it follows Cliff Secord, a race plane pilot who has his life turned upside down after discovering a stolen experimental rocket pack. Unwillingly thrust into adventure, Cliff becomes The Rocketeer, a proto-superhero set against the backdrop of the golden age of aviation in 1938 Los Angeles. Intended to launch a series of at least three films, the good but not spectacular box office returns and hard-fought production history resulted in The Rocketeer quietly disappearing from mainstream attention. With everything that was working against it, that the film was even completed is an incredible feat - even more so that the result is a superb period piece that sweetly captures the characters and world that Dave Stevens created.

A collection of Dave Stevens books including the complete adventures of The Rocketeer and other merchandise, author's collection

I was nine-years-old when The Rocketeer was released and saw it that week at Century 21, a massive domed theater that was originally designed to show widescreen Cinerama films in San Jose, California. It completely blew me away - so much that later that afternoon I set to work building my own Cirrus X3 rocket pack out of cardboard sheets, boxes, soda bottles, construction paper and tape. That October I made the request that I wanted to be The Rocketeer for Halloween. Of course there were no costumes, as the movie didn't do that well, but my mother obliged and somehow fashioned a reasonable representation of the trademark helmet out of felt. She also helped me spiff up a new rocket pack I made, as the first had been beat up over the rigors of summer play. So I went to school with an improvised rocket pack on my back, made of bits and pieces of things I found, that I made myself - which was actually the second one I built! No one knew what to make of it... and I freaking loved it!! I was The Rocketeer!! Crude as my rocket pack may have been, I knew Nazi agents were waiting to ambush me for it. I was at school as a 1930's reluctant pulp hero and I couldn't have been happier. Now looking back thirty years later, my first brush with The Rocketeer wasn't the feature film or the comics, but the NES video game.

The May 1991 issue of Nintendo Power featured a rather large section detailing the upcoming Rocketeer NES game. At the time I had no idea who the character was and the advertising push for the upcoming film hadn't really gotten underway... but something about the game shown in those magazine pages clicked with me. The entire game with the exception of the final boss fight was detailed in that issue, finishing with the line, "The high-flying adventures of the Rocketeer are soon bound for the silver screen. Watch for him this summer at a theater near you!" I soon found the game at a local video rental store and although I did find the later stages rather difficult, I really enjoyed it and it got me excited for the upcoming movie. After the movie made me a certified Rocketeer maniac, I received my own copy of the game for my tenth birthday.

Published by Bandai and developed by Realtime Associates with assistance of staff from Ironwind Software and LucasFilm Games, The Rocketeer is an action platformer in the vein of Sunsoft's Batman or Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden. The narrative follows a slightly reworked version of the film's plot, possibly influenced by a slightly earlier film script, but hits many of the same major beats with characters that are clearly based upon their film counterparts. In the game Cliff Secord discovers the stolen rocket pack tucked away in one of his planes. With his friend and mechanic Ambrose "Peevy" Peabody, he is preparing for a test flight when they are surrounded by thugs. The hired muscle is attempting to recover the rocket for Hollywood film star Neville Sinclair, who is in secret a Nazi agent with the goal of using the rocket to create a flying infantry. Although not the hero type, Cliff has no choice but to use the rocket to escape, becoming known as The Rocketeer. Most of the main characters resemble the film cast, especially Cliff who is easily recognizable as being modeled on Billy Campbell in closeups and looks surprisingly good. The game is broken up into six chapters, usually bookended by a cutscene at the beginning and end, with a simple password code presented upon the completion of each. The action begins at Chaplin Field, moves to the streets for a couple chapters, heads to the South Seas Club, a brief escape from the Hughes Aircraft Company, through Griffith Park, and finally aboard the airship Luxembourg for the final confrontation.

The game has a ton of visual depth and detail (left), easily one of the nicest portraits on the hardware (center), The Rocketeer battles an enemy rocketman (right)

Similar to Sunsoft's Batman, Cliff has an array of weapons that all draw from the same pool of ammunition, with more powerful armaments consuming more ammo. The Select Button cycles through the weapons, including a short-range pistol, a quick-firing rifle, three-shot pistol, hand grenade, and a powerful bazooka. There are times when selecting a weapon can feel a bit clunky but the quick change is fast and responsive. He can also use his fists for no ammunition cost and this will be the attack of choice for dispatching the majority of the game's standard low level enemies. Collision detection is often in your favor, as Cliff's punch has a slightly greater range than may be assumed. Also while Cliff has a moment of invulnerability when hit by an enemy or projectile, the enemies do not - so wail away on them for fast takedowns. Although I prefer to punch my way through most of the game, ammo drops are very frequent throughout, allowing quite a bit of choice in how to approach each situation. Also be sure to punch at lockers in the backgrounds, quite a few of them can be broken open to reveal ammo or health replenishments.

The rocket pack is activated by quickly pressing the B Button twice, essentially a double-jump motion in other games. It is deactivated by either running out of fuel or landing on a surface. Motion in flight has a completely different feel to the rest of the movement in the game, with a very specific momentum that allows for both level flight and slow movement along a vector in any direction. Cliff feels as if he has controllable weight, being suspended and propelled by the Cirrus X3 rocket pack strapped to his back. It's honestly pretty amazing that this game mechanic is so perfectly nailed and feels both predictable and totally natural. There are a lot of side scrollers with characters that can fly and they just never feel right but The Rocketeer shows them how it's done. I have seen some discussion that this game is "about a man with a rocket pack who barely uses his rocket pack" but I disagree. Fuel can be somewhat limited but this factors into the level design and enemy placement. In areas where the rocket pack comes into play, there are often spots where a full tank of fuel can be quickly and easily farmed by defeating respawning enemies. This is by design, as if the game is suggesting use of the rocket pack but ultimately leaving the decision to continue

using it up to the player. Many areas have multiple paths that can be taken, allowing Cliff to stay near the ground, fight along the rooftops, or quickly rocket through the skies.

Although Cliff can be controlled in mid-fall and mid-jump, his jumping motion feels somehow both stiff and floaty at the same time, and will take a little adjustment to feel comfortable with. Thankfully this can be worked out in the very first area but learning the parameters of where Cliff's jump both begins and ends becomes critical as the game progresses. In addition to avoiding hazards there are some very complex platforming areas in the later portion of the game that require precision. It's very easy to loose a ton of health rapidly, not because of poor design but due to the amount of projectiles and enemies Cliff has to deal with constantly. While Cliff can fall from dizzying heights without penalty, touching the smallest bit of fire or flame will hurt him.

The freezer area reminds me of The Goonies II (left), rocketing through high society in the South Seas Club (center), closing in on the final battle (right)

My biggest gripe with The Rocketeer is the same one I had when I first played it thirty years ago and that is the sudden increase in difficulty. The first two chapters have some challenging areas but for the most part can be taken slowly and are rather direct. The third chapter introduces floating cannons, rotating turrets, and enemies that match themselves to Cliff's position. While methodical and controlled movements are still the smoothest way to advance, the screen is simply swamped with enemies and projectiles from start to finish. The fourth chapter is where the game really starts to stretch out, with multiple and complex environments to navigate, each riddled with enemies and traps. Chapter five was always the breaking point for me as a kid. It takes place in Griffith Park at night and adds flying bats to the regular complement of enemies. The bats here give the bats in Castlevania a run for their money in terms of causing cheap damage. Not only do they move quickly and occasionally blend in with the dark background, they can also attack at a difficult to counter altitude. However Griffith Park features something even worse than the bats - tree branches that break off and fall to the ground, injuring Cliff. Some of the branches are extremely hard to differentiate from the static background as they are the exact same color as the trees they fall from, giving only the slightest indication before breaking loose. Coupled with these factors, Griffith Park is also a very long stage that finishes with multiple tight areas that are crammed with enemies. The final chapter moves back to a more conventional environment but ramps up the areas in terms of both size and difficulty. One area has electrified barriers that can only be shut off by destroying a radio transmitter, then backtracking to the start and following the newly opened path. It's neat that they tried something new here but it's not made completely obvious that the radio dish is what is controlling the barriers.

For the most part enemy design is appropriate, consisting mainly of mobsters in suits along with enemy rocketmen flying with experimental prototype rocket packs. Admittedly there are some flat out video game-y enemies thrown in - little tanks, mounted cannons that fire constantly, hovering satellites - as well as clever little traps that require both fast reflexes and calm strategy to clear cleanly. There are four boss encounters throughout the game but two of the bosses can be dispatched almost immediately with a couple well-aimed bazooka shots or grenade lobs. The only boss fight that feels reasonably out of the film is against Lothar, Neville Sinclair's top operative, however it occurs far earlier in the game's narrative. Lothar kicks all of Cliff's weapons away at the start of the fight, similar to what happens in the movie, but he's easy enough to defeat with jumping punches and is of little challenge. The final battle against Neville Sinclair is essentially no different than dispatching any regular shooting enemy in the game, except he shoots a larger burst and requires more hits to take down.

Background graphics are very detailed, beautifully so in a few areas, with lots of little touches to add depth. The hangar environment from the first chapter is reused briefly at the start of chapter five but aside from that there's pretty good variety and a solid attempt to re-create the locations from the film. Cutscenes are upper tier for what is seen on the NES, with good color, nice details and consistent character designs from beginning to end. This is one of those games that really looks phenomenally better on a CRT, as there is quite a bit of dithering in both the backgrounds and cutscene graphics designed to take advantage of the technology of the time. The sprites are a bit small but in line with most NES action games and have an acceptable amount of detail for their size, although admittedly their animation is a bit limited. The Rocketeer himself looks pretty good with some nice color separation. On a technical level the game runs very smoothly and predictably, with the only real slowdown occurring during the first boss fight, which slows the tempo of the music a bit. Speaking of the music, The Rocketeer has some of my favorite musical compositions of any NES game. While none of the late James Horner's incredible film score is used, the game features a wonderful assortment of tracks that range from heroic and action packed to smooth and jazzy. Each piece of music clearly establishes a character or mood and the entire game is scored as if it were a film itself. It should be no surprise the music is so good as it was produced by The Fat Man himself, George Sanger.

Referencing a line of dialogue from the film (left), The Rocketeer ascends toward the Luxembourg (center), cutscenes are very nicely detailed (right)

While The Rocketeer is far from being one of the greatest games of all time, I think its reputation as being mediocre is unfair, same with the film of which it is based upon. It's not the deepest game and if you know what you're doing and are on top of the challenge it can be completed pretty briskly, yet during that brisk run it tells a coherent and complete narrative. Being comprised of only six chapters may seem light on content for an action game but many of them are quite lengthly with multiple continuous areas and can be very challenging. The long and winding nature of many levels, with their surprising amount of vertical movement, feels like something out of a Super Nintendo game rather than a NES game based on a movie license. At the end of the day that's what this is - a licensed game based on a movie, which generally yields some pretty poor video games but The Rocketeer is an exception to that. After thirty years I still love The Rocketeer, miss the immense talent and dedication of its creator Dave Stevens, and really enjoy this video game adaptation of the feature film.

I have often said that Dave Stevens' high flying adventures of Cliff Secord had a profound influence upon me, probably more than anything else I encountered in any media. My love of the air age, pin-up women, Art Deco style, building things on the kitchen table, air races, the Gee Bee Model Z and so much more all sprung from that film and have never left me since. This game is what gave me that first taste of the world of The Rocketeer and it only got more interesting from then on. Shortly after Dave Stevens passed away in 2008 the entire collection of Rocketeer stories was combined, recolored, and reprinted in a single volume

as The Rocketeer - The Complete Adventures. The comic was an homage to everything he loved, especially the 1949 Republic Pictures serial "King of the Rocket Men," and still stands as an amazing work from an incredible artist who left this world far too soon. If you have even the slightest interest in The Rocketeer and have never read the original stories, then I urge you to pick up a copy.

The Retrogaming Times 2021 Holiday Gift Guide

by Merman, David Lundin, Jr., Dan Pettis, Donald Lee - Introduction by David Lundin, Jr.

Continuing as an annual tradition, The Retrogaming Times Holiday Gift Guide features gift recommendations and ideas from newsletter staff. Holiday gift guide features were always my favorite seasonal inclusion in video game magazines and on game review shows, as they provided a little more insight into the personalities behind the productions. Please enjoy our newsletter's annual showcase of special gifts for the retrogamers on your list.

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Merman:

This year I am going to choose a book as my holiday gift. **Life is a Game - The Inspirational Success Story of a Legendary Game Developer** is the autobiography of Mevlut Dinc. Mev was born in Turkey and moved to Britain in the late 1970s. Working in a factory, a colleague suggested he buy a ZX81 - one of the early computers from the recently deceased Sir Clive Sinclair. It changed Mev's life. Teaching himself how to program, Mev then became one of the UK's top developers for the later ZX Spectrum. Turning his hand to game design, Mev worked on several formats and created some legendary titles - including First Samurai, Street Racer and S.C.A.R.S. Moving back to Turkey, Mev helped start new companies and game design courses that led to a thriving Turkish software industry. And while he has now officially retired, the book's closing sections deal with his life as he moved round Europe and sat down to write his life story.

It is a fascinating rags-to-riches tale, filled with hardship and moments of inspiration. While there is some technical detail it is never too much for a casual reader. The short sections and style of text are very readable, and I found it difficult to put down as I became engrossed in the story. There are plenty of screenshots and photos too. I have had the pleasure of meeting and talking to Mev, and the book describes him perfectly, a mix of knowledge, passion, and a humble nature. One of the best books on video games I have read in recent years.

Order from Amazon:
https://www.amazon.com/Life-Game-inspirational-legendary-developer/dp/1914078594/

Also available at a discount from Fusion Retro Books (UK/Europe):
https://fusionretrobooks.com/collections/retro-books/products/life-is-a-game-the-inspirational-success-story-of-a-legendary-game-developer

And if you are after something different, I can also recommend NBA JAM by Reyan Ali, published by Boss Fight Books:
https://bossfightbooks.com/products/nba-jam-by-reyan-ali

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David Lundin, Jr:

There are a lot of really good bands specializing in video game music that are active right now, showcasing both the artistry of the original compositions and adding their own unique flavor to create something totally new. Super Soul Bros. is one such band and their most recent album, **Motherlode**, is my pick for this year. Although they are based in my hometown, I first encountered Super Soul Bros. on YouTube before attending live performances at local conventions and venues. They are by far my favorite video game music ensemble, building an energy akin to what was seen in live performances by the Sega and Taito house bands of the 1990's. However it's not just high energy live covers of video game music on offer. The members of the band are each accomplished musicians in their own right and combine that professionalism and experience with the beauty and fun of video game music to create a very unique sound.

Released a few years ago, Motherlode is their first full-length studio produced album, spanning the Mother / EarthBound trilogy of games. The Mother games have always been renowned for their diverse and funky soundtracks, which combined with the musical stylings of Super Soul Bros. is a match made in Magicant. At least one composition from EarthBound is usually in the setlist for a Super Soul Bros. performance but an entire album of hand-picked songs from arguably the biggest cult classic RPG series is a treat for the senses. Each track is true to the original source while at the same time features the band's own soulful jazz spin on one of the most eclectic songbooks in video game history. What I find most enjoyable about the album is how all the different types of music seamlessly blend together in one amazing and oddly nostalgic collection. I suppose that's one of the reasons the Mother games are so popular. This is an outstanding gift for anyone who enjoys video game music, the EarthBound games, funk and soul music, or absolutely sparkling jazz. The current pandemic has been especially hard on musicians and this is a great way to support a spectacular band who continues to create spectacular music.

Purchase the physical CD directly from the Super Soul Bros. store:
https://www.supersoulbros.com/product-page/motherlode

Listen and purchase digitally from Bandcamp:
https://supersoulbros.bandcamp.com/album/motherlode-3

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Dan Pettis:

I'm taking a big swing of the bo staff with my holiday gift pick. If you're really looking to do it up big for the gaming geek in your life this holiday season, then perhaps there is no way to do it bigger than with one of Arcade 1up's at home arcade machines. For 88 lbs. of gaming fun, I highly recommend the brand new **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Turtles In Time Arcade Machine**. Enjoy playing as Leo, Donnie, Raph, and Mikey as they travel through time to defeat Shredder and mow down wave after wave of Foot Soldiers and other baddies. There's no better way to say "I wish you a Turtle Christmas" than by giving them their very own arcade!

Turtles In Time is a fantastic arcade brawler and a massive improvement over the original Turtles arcade game. For starters, there are brighter more colorful graphics, bigger bosses, better animations, and more varied levels. If you wanna compare and play the original Turtles arcade game, it's included in the cabinet too. The cabinet art looks authentically retro, online play is included, and the buttons even light up! And if the Turtles aren't quite their thing, there's a full line of other excellent arcade cabinets on the Arcade 1up website, including newer models like The Simpsons, Killer Instinct, and the original Tron arcade. With Arcade 1up you're sure to find something perfect for the arcade lover in your life that'll help bring their gaming area to life. As an extremely happy owner of their NBA Jam cabinet, I can confidently say that this would make an excellent gift for that special dorky someone in your life. Cowabunga!

Order directly from Arcade 1up at:
https://arcade1up.com/products/turtles-in-time-arcade-cabinet

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Donald Lee:

For this year's guide I suggest a pair of games for your Apple II lover, **Nox Archaist** and **Attack of the PETSCII Robots**. I've mentioned Nox Archaist some time ago. I bought both a physical copy and the digital download version. Alas, while I've had the game for a while, I haven't delved into it fully. While the concept of a new retro game is cool, it's just so much easier to boot my Nintendo Switch and play Nintendo Arms which has been my modern go to game for over a year. Attack of the PETSCII Robots is an interesting game, which I got after Nox Archaist. I think I was in a buying mood and when I saw another new Apple II game and I decided to give it a spin. I also got the physical and digital copies. Unlike Nox Archaist, I have played Attack a few times, though I have yet to figure out exactly what I'm support to be doing. There isn't much information describing the game play on the website, although it recently occurred to me that I should read the included manual (which I just did) and I learned a little more.

In any case it's incredible that in 2021, about 28 years after the last Apple II (Apple IIc) was discontinued, there are still Apple II games being developed.

Purchase Nox Archaist both digitally and physically:
https://www.6502workshop.com/p/nox-archaist.html

Purchase Attack of the PETSCII Robots both digitally and physically:
https://www.the8bitguy.com/product/petscii-robots-for-apple/

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

Battletoads (NES) - Mad, Bad, Crazy and Irritatingly Unbalanced

by David Lundin, Jr.

Battletoads is a very interesting beast in the NES library. Regarded by some as one of the greatest games on the platform, by others as one of the most difficult games ever made, and by many as one of the most frustrating games they've ever played. Released in the summer of 1991 among the impending 16 bit generation of home consoles, Battletoads was able to take advantage of the later years of the NES to provide a noticeable step up in graphics over other titles on the platform. Although billed as a beat 'em up, the gameplay in Battletoads features a diverse mix of already established styles including traditional side scrolling platforming and high speed vehicle based action. The bright colors, varied gameplay, and immense challenge won Battletoads many industry accolades and awards - becoming a favorite of many gamers.

On the flip side, the challenge would often border on absurd, earning Battletoads the reputation as one of the most difficult games ever created. More often than not the difficulty comes not from challenge but from high levels of frustration which only increase as the game rolls on. This is compounded with an extremely limited continue system and a two player option that severely punishes mistakes made in the high speed sections of the game. Those looking for a game similar to the Ninja Turtles arcade games would end up with something far more than they expected, for both better and worse. Yet Battletoads continues to be on many "best of" lists concerning NES era video games and beat 'em ups in general, so I thought I would give it a fresh play and a fair shake.

The Battletoads, a trio of intergalactic crime fighters, are en route to the Terran homeworld escorting Princess Angelica home. One of the Battletoads, Pimple, sets off in a smaller transport with the princess for some relaxation before continuing the journey. Along the way they are both captured by the Dark Queen and taken as prisoner on her home planet. It's up to Rash and Zitz, the remaining Battletoads, to infiltrate Ragnarok's World and rescue Princess Angelica and their captured comrade. The Battletoads repel down to the planet's surface from their ship, under the guidance of Professor T. Bird. Where as many games would follow the same gameplay formula from start to finish or possibly switch between two different styles, Battletoads strives to throw everything at you one level after another. This variety becomes both the biggest triumph and the greatest disappointment of the game but it does a good job to lure you in initially.

The first stage plays like an arcade style beat 'em up, similar to Double Dragon or the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles arcade games. The stage ends with a very impressive looking boss battle shown from the perspective of the boss in first person. After that the second stage plays completely different, the Battletoads now repelling down a long shaft from ropes. The third stage opens up with much of the same beat 'em up gameplay from the first stage but then moves to a game of high speed obstacle avoidance. These are often considered to be the most difficult parts of the game and while they're no cakewalk, there are more difficult areas to come later on. Most players however tend not to be able to get passed the third stage, especially those who were younger during the game's original release. It wouldn't be a stretch to call stage three one of the most initially irritating areas in an NES game, as I can imagine many NES control pads being thrown across the room in disgust over the challenge here. The dirty secret is that the game will tend to repeat stages similar to these, always with a few changes such as different vehicles, a couple more times before the end - and they only get worse.

While many would say the high speed obstacle course levels are the most difficult, personally I find some of the later parts of the game far more frustrating. One stage in particular is set up as a flooded maze with instant kill spikes, huge gears that appear at a moments notice, enemies that are almost impossible to defeat without taking damage, and some jumps that border on impossible. I must have spent at least three straight hours attempting to complete that stage. The problem was that rather than having an enjoyable, challenging gameplay experience, I only grew more frustrated with every death and continue - having to go back to the very start of the stage each time. This joy of a stage is followed up by yet another exercise in frustration where you must outrun a series of crazed rats that will set off explosives if they beat you to them. Attacking the currently running rat will slow it down but only slightly. I'm sure there are people out there that can get through this area without even breaking a sweat but for me the stage felt poorly tested, bordering on broken in terms of level design. That's a good way to sum up those two levels, nearly broken in design. Another stage that proved to be overly frustrating is one in which you use a vehicle that resembles the front wheel and handlebars off a bicycle with suction cups on the tires. You must direct the vehicle all over the stage, making sure that you make your turns efficiently as possible as deadly giant energy orbs give chase from start to finish. The more cornering mistakes you make, the closer the orb gets. This stage will wear your thumb down to the bone and your directional pad won't like it very much either.

However the final stage of the game proves to be the absolute most frustrating. I suppose it could be assumed that it would be, since it's the last stage after all. This stage involves a long, long, long tower climb in which missing a jump usually means death. The gameplay of the tower climb changes slightly as you ascend and the cylindrical design reminds me of the classic action / puzzle game Nebulus (better known as Tower Toppler or Castelian in the USA). The climb feels like a haphazard mash up between Nebulus and Double Dragon, with the game sometimes forgetting exactly what it's trying to do. If you don't believe me, run around the tower a few times and then try to change direction and see what happens. Also along the climb there are parts where you must hang onto poles sticking out of the tower and do nothing else to avoid being blown off. As with the rest of the game, this is all trial and error. The platforming here is also very loose, again, feeling like the game can't decide how it wants to proceed. Some platforms float around the tower in opposite directions and unless you jump in exactly the precise spot that the game wants to cooperate with, expect to fall through platforms or fly off in an unexpected direction. Add into this my most hated item in platforming games, the springboard, and anyone reading this should know that by the end I was at my wits end with this game. Then to add insult to injury, the battle at the top with the Dark Queen is a total piece of cake.

Things start off excellent (left), a challenging area that is actually my favorite in the game (center), challenge becomes flat out irritation (right)

For all the difficulty and frustration that Battletoads will dump on a player, at least the journey is stunning to look at. The 16 bit console era was in its earliest days and Battletoads showed that Nintendo's 8 bit workhorse still had a few visual tricks up its sleeve. Sprites are amazingly detailed, especially the Battletoads themselves. The most well-known examples are that of the Battletoads' finishing attacks with their hands becoming giant fists, a foot stretching out into a huge boot, ram horns morphing from their heads during a headbutt, or turning into a wrecking ball when hanging from a rope. These moves are done with smooth, slick animation that lends to a very comic book feel in each stage. Added to that are the large sprites that are used for almost everything in the game, with minimal flicker. Backgrounds and terrain are very colorful, bright, and also well animated where required. Cutscenes are very nicely done and as with everything else, well detailed. Again, the lack of flicker is what really pulls together the look. Sure, it's still there but only in it's most minimal form and it never gets in the way of the game. If there is one big letdown graphically it's the lack of polish during the final battle. Unfortunately the attention given to the detailed look of the game sadly wasn't paid to the audio. While completely passable there really isn't much here that's very memorable. The main theme never really gets going and plays out more like a string of sound effects. Individual stage themes won't be sticking in your head, in fact it may be hard to recall them after a play session. Amazingly enough the music from Battletoads that everyone remembers is the beat heavy tune that plays when the game is paused. Even this can get extremely annoying after prolonged listening and with a game as difficult as Battletoads, pausing out to take a breather is near mandatory. Sound effects are decent, if not subdued, but do their job. A symphony for the eyes but not for the ears. I know many may disagree with that, as most Rare games have incredible audio, just not this one in my opinion.

My biggest gripe with Battletoads is how the play control can go from rock solid to nearly completely falling apart, sometimes within the same stage. The beat 'em up based portions of the game play spectacularly. Control is solid, fast, the Battletoads do exactly what you want them to do. Even during the high speed parts of the game, the control is right where it should be and is fairly precise. Where the game tends to have problems is during the traditional side scrolling platform levels. This is most apparent in level nine, the flooded maze. There are jumps in this stage that I must have done over one hundred times and regardless of my input, positioning, enemy placement - everything being exactly the same, the outcome would vary wildly. Whether this is due to poor level design, programming issues, lack of enough playtesting or too much playtesting to the point where the issues were accepted and overlooked - it makes the game far too frustrating. This also applies to the tower climb at the end of the game but to less of an extent there. The arcade style drop-in two player mode may add some replay but due to the tight extra life and continue setup the game uses, don't expect to have a very good time. If anything it makes the game even more difficult. When I first played Battletoads years ago I said that the only way one could have a reasonable amount of enjoyment with it was to use a Game Genie and my opinion is the same today. Without using a Game Genie code, once you're out of extra lives you'll only have three continues for the entire game. That's just not enough for a game of this size and brutal difficulty, even if you're skipping levels by warping. Which begs the question why even have warp points in an action game? The better idea from square one was to make continues unlimited or at the very least implement a password feature.

Now I know I sound very harsh in my criticisms of this game but I think that is more because it's a game that I have always really wanted to like. It has a lot going for it - beautiful graphics, a detailed world, tons of variety. However the problem with Battletoads is it can't decide what type of game it wants to be. There are some parts that are simply excellent and others that are frustrating to the point where you want to stop playing and turn the game off. Any game that makes you want to stop playing games, not just change to something else but actually end your gaming session, should not be considered a good game. While I didn't care for the SNES sequel "Battletoads in Battlemaniacs" I did enjoy both the first follow-up "Battletoads & Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team" and the Battletoads arcade game. Both of those mainly stick to the beat 'em style and feel consistently designed start to finish. I suppose all I can really say about Battletoads is if you have a couple days to kill doing nothing but playing a tough as nails classic NES game, and you own a Game Genie, then you'll find some entertainment here. Otherwise you'll play a couple stages in, get frustrated, and put the game on a shelf and never come back to it. I may go against the grain but for anything other than graphics, this game deserves no place on any "best of" lists in my opinion.

20 Great GameCube Games For 20 Years

by Dan Pettis

Ah, the Nintendo GameCube. A misunderstood system to say the least. Approximately twenty years ago, it was released to the world at large to a collective shrug, and was promptly trounced on the sales charts by the PlayStation 2 and the original Xbox. The system was a big flop by Nintendo standards, becoming their weakest selling home console at the time by a wide margin. Many people chose not to buy it, but for those who didn't get one, they really missed out on a library chock full of fantastic and unique experiences. Although it may have finished in third place on the sales charts, it finished first in many a gamer's heart as the quirky home of some of Nintendo's finest and most bizarre games.

While not as much of quantum leap forward in technology as the N64, which held the hand of gamers as they jumped into the 3D generation, the GameCube took 3D gaming and refined it, giving us a much better game playing experience. The GameCube era found the big N taking some wild swings with the installments of their big franchises, their choice of media format, the lunchbox style design of the console, the layout of the controller and some pretty random accessories. But time has been kind to the legacy of the GameCube, and so in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the GameCube's release in 2001, here are twenty of my picks for the greatest GameCube games ever.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker: A gorgeous seafaring adventure through the sunken kingdom of Hyrule. It was initially dissed by the hardcore Zelda fan base for its controversial cel-shaded graphics and cartoony art style. But the game and its colorful graphics have aged like a fine wine and the game has rightfully taken its place among the greatest Zelda adventures of all time. With a massive ocean to explore, an engrossing story, and a crazy amount of secrets to discover, this game finally delivered the gigantic world map that Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask only hinted at. The game is full of offbeat characters like Tingle and Tetra, who you'll grow to love. It is a must play for anyone, so come sail away, come sail away, come sail away with Link!

Resident Evil 4: A sheer triumph and still arguably the greatest game in the series, this installment first appeared exclusively on the GameCube before being ported to virtually every platform released in its wake, including an upcoming VR release for the Oculus Quest 2 headset. Starting Leon Kennedy from Resident Evil 2, this was the first game to push the series into a more action oriented direction. This game was mind blowing, and I mean that quite literally. Who can ever forget their first explosive head shot, or their first encounter with the chainsaw villager? Settings like a creepy village and a chilling castle will fill you full of fear while still delivering a ton of fun. It's the perfect blend of terror and delight, so as the sales guy in the game always says, "What are yah buyin'?" Hopefully this gem of a game.

Super Smash Bros. Melee: The first Smash Bros. was a truly revolutionary party game. As a fighter that was simple, unique, accessible, and full of Nintendo's greatest mascots, it was a brilliant idea. But it was merely a trial run compared to this killer sequel which packed in so much content, it's no wonder it's still played like crazy today by a lovingly devoted fan base. Infinitely better than the original, this is the one that set the bar for all future Smash Bros. games to follow. This game is so beloved that it has helped keep the GameCube controller alive as the primary choice of control for many Smash pro gamers and it continues to be supported by Nintendo. Melee is complete with all the trademarks of the series fans have grown to love like bigger, crazier stages, truly random playable characters, tons of weapons and match options, collectible in-game trophies, and a lengthy story mode. It truly is the total package.

The Legend of Zelda The Wind Waker: Link brings home the bacon (left), Super Smash Bros. Melee: Melee is a faster, fuller, Smash game (right)

Metroid Prime: As the first Metroid game to be released in over a decade, the first developed by American based Retro Studios, and the first to mainly use a first person 3D perspective for gameplay, this game had a lot riding on it. Every previous installment in the Samus saga was a bona fide classic, so any slippage in quality could've been disastrous for the franchise. But once Metroid Prime was released by Nintendo in November of 2002, it was heralded for the masterpiece it truly is. The first-person perspective was incredibly immersive, as it truly made you feel like the kick-ass bounty hunter as you used her trademark visor to scan the environment of planet Tallon IV for information. Third person morph ball segments also help to give it just enough of a classic Metroid feel. It was a true triumph in every way, and one of the best action games not just on the GameCube but of all time.

Animal Crossing: When the COVID-19 pandemic started to truly rage last spring, so many people took solace in crafting their perfect island getaway in the sunny land of Animal Crossing New Horizons on Switch. But that wouldn't have been possible without the debut of this feel good series in North America with the release of first Animal Crossing game on the GameCube. The game was completely packed full of personality and charm, as you moved into a fairly empty town and grew and customized it as you saw fit. It was the ultimate low stakes friendship simulator which has exploded into a phenomenon with millions of fans. Future installments improved and refined the formula, but there are still people out there customizing and tinkering their original town on the GameCube daily and still finding plenty to do even twenty years later.

Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II: This is spaceship combat perfected. Launch title Rogue Leader put players back in the cockpit of their favorite alphabet shaped Star Wars air ships, and let them duke it out against the oppressive Empire and their disposable army of TIE fighters. The graphics and presentation of this game are still stunning 20 years later, and the gameplay is still simply fantastic too. The recreations of some of the most famous battles from the films, especially the ever present Hoth battle, are a true joy to live out. If you don't get goosebumps while making the trench run on the first Death Star as

Luke, well, I guess you must be more of a Star Trek person. The force with was strong with this one indeed.

Resident Evil 4: Don't lose your head while in the village (left), Viewtiful Joe: The graphics give this game a comic book look (right)

Viewtiful Joe: VJ was born out of Capcom's game-changing GameCube Five partnership with Nintendo for five exclusive games including Resident Evil 4. It is a radically unique side scrolling beat 'em up, released at a time when those type of games were really considered old news. The game featured mind blowing Matrix-style time control powers at the player's disposal and simply blew minds back in the day. Luckily the game is still a ton of fun to play. With absolutely Viewtiful cel-shaded graphics to give the game a comic book style appearance, this is a playful trip into the movies with plenty of superhero and sci-fi love. I definitely think this game deserves an HD remake or another form of re-release, so that the modern superhero obsessed society we live in can experience this campy classic for the first time. Or it could make a pretty epic live action movie... just sayin'...

Super Mario Sunshine: After perfecting the 3D platformer with Super Mario 64, Nintendo switched it up for the follow-up. This game finds Mario traveling to the gorgeously sunny Isle Delfino where he's promptly framed for vandalism, and forced to clean up the mess with the help of super water powered backpack named FLUDD. This backpack gives Mario a whole new set of unique tools to use for platforming, that have yet to show up in another mainline Mario game, like a watery jet pack and a spray of water that rockets Mario upwards. For those who were expecting a more straight forward follow up to Mario 64, there are several secret levels where Mario is water-pack free for some more basic platforming sections. But be warned, the challenge in these areas is off the charts. Who said the Mario games were only for kids? Even if Nintendo didn't quite top Mario 64, this game was a ton of fun, and received a worthy inclusion in the Mario 3D All-Stars compilation released for Nintendo Switch in 2020.

Pikmin: Just another odd stroke of genius design from the legendary mind of Shigeru Miyamoto. This game that he apparently dreamed up while gardening, finds you in the role of Captain Olimar, a would be astronaut, who has crash-landed on a strange planet full of lush greenery that may or may not be Earth. Olimar enlists the help of the human / plant hybrid Red, Blue, and Yellow Pikmin to recover the parts of his damaged spaceship and escape. It's essentially a real time army simulator, wrapped up in an irresistibly cute, easily digestible package. The power of the GameCube's CPU let you put up to 100 of the little guys on screen without slowdown and commanding a Pikmin army of that size feels incredibly satisfying. As the day's clock ticks down, you'll frantically try to recover the spaceship parts and you may even find a wave of sadness washing over you every time you accidentally get your trusty Pikmin killed. This was a great way to showcase the power under the hood of the GameCube and a great start to an under appreciated series that continues to this day with the port of Wii U's fantastic Pikmin 3 on Nintendo Switch last year.

Super Mario Sunshine: This game is so bright, it might make you thirsty (left), Mario Kart Double Dash: Baby Park is a mad dash trough a tiny course (right)

F-Zero GX: This futuristic racer was born out of a once seemingly impossible partnership between former blood rivals Sega and Nintendo. Developed by the Sega owned developer Amusement Vision, the pair of former enemies collaborated to release this devilishly, controller spikingly hard racing game. Get your eye drops ready, and get your game face on, because if you so much as blink on some courses, it will ruin an entire trophy cup run. The AI of your 29 opponents are out for blood and looking to wreck your space racer at any opportunity.The game is packed with features including a frantic and still fun four-player mode. There's even a story mode where you take on the role of the Falcon Puncher himself, Captain Falcon. Sadly there has not been an original, full scale F-Zero game released on a home Nintendo console since this one. Hopefully the time is coming very soon for Nintendo to finally give the fans of this adrenaline pumping series a true sequel with modern hardware.

Mario Kart Double Dash: This is another perfect example of Nintendo using the GameCube to try something a little different with one of their classic franchises. For Mario Kart Double Dash they took a hard swerve away from making a basic follow up to the classic N64 and SNES games. They zigged where others may have zagged with this left turn of a sequel. Nintendo could have played it safe but instead added a very interesting wrinkle, putting two riders inside each kart, hence the subtitle Double Dash. This opened up a new world of strategy and item management, as well as a unique co-op mode where both players rode together and shared a Kart. The battle mode was also refreshed with new modes in addition to the classic Balloon Battle as a welcome extra treat. Although many of the tracks from this game have made their way to other Mario Kart games, this dual rider mechanic has not been repeated in any of the other MK installments, making this a very special kart racer to add to your Cube's library.

Super Monkey Ball 2: For those who have never had the pleasure of playing a Super Monkey Ball game, let me try to explain. It's kind of like the classic game Marble Madness only with monkeys inside of transparent balls for lots of inspired monkey madness. The game starts simply enough but as it goes on it becomes pleasantly, absurdly challenging. Only the finest gamers alive will be able to get through all 150 stages. I'm featuring the second game in this list since it has a lot of the content the first game did plus lots of extra bonus goodies. In addition to the main mode Super Monkey Ball 2 is a damn fine party game, featuring all kinds of four player mayhem. Players can play Monkey Billiards, Monkey Golf, Monkey Bowling and perhaps the wildest of them all, Monkey Fight, in which players have a boxing glove attached to their ball and attempt to knock the others off a stage using wild 'n crazy power ups. It's a great time and a fantastic addition to your party game lineup.

Luigi's Mansion: When there's something strange, in your old mansion, who you gonna call? Luigi!! That's right, in this game you play as Luigi as he inherits a spooky mansion and gets outfitted with a super powered vacuum to help make it ghost free and

rescue a kidnapped Mario. This game is basically Nintendo's version of Ghostbusters and it's a ton of fun while it lasts. Stylistically, this was a bold choice to launch the GameCube with. It showed right out of the gate that Nintendo was willing to take chances and experiment with their big marquee franchises this time around. The mansion Luigi inherits is dripping with a creepy, gloomy, Resident Evil for kids atmosphere. Perhaps if it hadn't had the intense burden of being the Mario Bros. launch title and had to live up to that incredible legacy, it would have performed better. Who knows how differently the GameCube era would have gone if they had made Super Mario Sunshine first and launched the console with that game instead of this ghoulishly creepy spinoff.

Super Monkey Ball 2: Going for the goal in a jam packed game (left), Luigi's Mansion: The view from the lobby of the mansion (right)

Super Mario Strikers: Nintendo let developer Next Level Games give the Mario cast an aggressive edge that was never seen before for this soccer outing that suits the game very well. In an era of super popular extreme sports games, this is about as extreme as Nintendo ever got with their usually cuddly cast of characters. You feel the pain of all the tackles as Koopa Troopas scream out in pain as they get electrocuted and bone crunching slide attacks swipe the ball from defenseless Toads. Waluigi is extra bratty here, cementing his role as a weirdo cult Mario Bros. icon. It's a very underrated Mario sports title that came out late in the system's life but now seems to have found it's target audience. That's at least if the average overinflated price on eBay for a used copy of the game is any indication. Goal!!

Sonic Adventure 2 Battle: The Sega Dreamcast is kind of like Sega's version of the GameCube. A massively under appreciated console with lots of creative, fantastic games that sold relatively poorly. After the failure of the Dreamcast, Sega did the unthinkable and started to release Sonic games on a Nintendo system. This felt so wrong at the the time but yet it felt so right. It helped Sega step up and became one of Nintendo's MVP's: or Most Valuable Publishers. This was the first time Sonic ever appeared on a Nintendo console and it was mind blowing at the time, which is easy to forget because it has become so normal to see Sonic appear in Mario games today. This improved port of the Dreamcast game added better graphics and a variety of other small upgrades. This game also introduced Sonic's rival hedgehog Shadow, and a huge campaign with tons of characters to play as and things to collect. Sonic has had some shaky games come out after this one, so this may very well still be the best 3D Sonic experience ever made.

Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem: Nintendo allowed for some genuinely mature experiences on the GameCube even though their primary focus was being family and kiddie friendly. Eternal Darkness is an unforgettable, terrifying experience from developer Silicon Nights and publisher Nintendo. The game features a story spanning the globe and generations, starting with a female protagonist named Alexandra Rovas as she discovers a sinister book made of human flesh and body parts known only as the Tome of Eternal Darkness. This genuinely creepy game may just drive you insane with some of the tricks it plays on the player as your on-screen character loses their sanity. I won't spoil them here but you'll question your own grip on reality as the game plays fourth wall breaking tricks on you. It's the kind of experience that sticks with you and you may never be able to forget, no matter how you try. Play it and see, and it may even become your favorite GameCube game.

Soul Calibur II: The sequel to Soul Calibur was released on PS2, Xbox, and GameCube on the exact same day. But the real stroke of genius in the pre-DLC world by publisher Namco, was to include a special guest character for each platform's version of the sword fighting button masher. The Xbox got comics character Spawn, PlayStation got Heihachi from Tekken, but the Cube got the best exclusive character, hands down, by letting you play as the adult version of Link. This version by far sold the best on Nintendo's system and opened the door to all kinds of other guest appearances in other GameCube games. It also didn't hurt that Soul Calibur II is loaded with things to do and to unlock and is hands down one of the best fighting games of all time.

Sonic Adventure 2 Battle: Sonic meets his Shadow in this upgraded sequel (left), NBA Street Volume 3: Peach in mid-slam dunk (right)

Donkey Konga: Before Guitar Hero and Rockband cluttered living rooms with a variety of guitars and other plastic instruments, there was Donkey Konga. Apparently at that time, DK didn't want to work, he just wanted to bang on his drums all day. Playing a rhythm game with a pair of plastic bongos seems weird at first but if you give in to the strangeness, you'll soon be clapping and smashing and singing along with Donkey Konga. The game is an absolute hoot and the song selection of the first game is very eclectic and interesting. It's definitely the only video game featuring Rock Lobster, Blink 182, the Pokémon anime theme, and the Happy Birthday song in its playlist. There's also a multiplayer mode that can get very heated and competitive. If you've got space in your game room for another plastic instrument, I highly recommend picking this one up.

Pac-Man VS: Believe it or not, this game was conceived by none other than Shigeru Miyamoto, and is one of the killer apps that justify the reason of the existence of the Game Boy Advance link cable. In this game, the player with the Game Boy is Pac-Man and runs through a standard view of a maze. Meanwhile on the TV the other players are the ghosts trying to catch him, only they can't see the entire maze. This makes for some very intense and often hilarious fun. The brilliance of this concept lives on to the day with a recent port to the Nintendo Switch, that's much easier to pick up and play today. It's overall a little short on content, but will surely be a big hit at your future four player GameCube party.

NBA Street Volume 3: The GameCube was a stealthily sweet sports gaming device. EA and Nintendo were tight back in the day and GCN owners got lots of great sports content including the Madden NFL games, NBA, Golf, and FIFA games, just like owners

of the the other big two consoles. They also got multiple installments of EA's Big extreme sports series, including the NBA Street games. These games were like a spiritual successor to NBA Jam, with tons of over the top dribble moves and dunks. The roster of playable characters was always a fantastic treat with an amazing mix of legends like MJ and Dr. J and fantastical creatures like a yeti and a rock monster. I'm giving Vol. 3 the nod here, because it gave you the incredibly bizarre sight of a stubby Mario, Luigi, and Peach ballin' and playing hoops against the more traditional looking NBA players. Sadly, this partnership would not last, and EA's support of Nintendo consoles has gotten increasingly spotty over the years. But we'll always have their fantastic GameCube sports collaborations.

Cellophanes - The Beginning of Modern Retro

by David Lundin, Jr.

Released only in Japan for the original PlayStation in 1997, **Cellophanes** is an obscure and forgotten game that was ahead of its time for the notion of looking back at the past. Cellophanes may very well be the first commercially released game designed around the style, aesthetic, and limitations of games from decades earlier. Not conversions of existing older games, or a compilation release, or a repackaging, or even an homage to any specific title. Rather Cellophanes is a collection of twelve original games that would feel at home in the arcades of the 1970's and very early 1980's. The idea here is to invoke feelings of nostalgia for an already bygone era of gaming, without directly duplicating any of the games from that time. In essence, Cellophanes is a deliberate attempt to create what we would now term a modern retrogame. Published by the equally obscure Ninelives as apparently their lone video game release, the game is rather uncommon bordering on rare, and I can't imagine it was a very big title in its day.

The game opens with long video sequence, with a style in that of colored pencil illustrations. A door opens on a small darkened Japanese arcade and a young boy steps in. Looking out at the games before him, he sees a 1970's style cocktail cabinet beckoning to him with a glowing display. In his hand is a 100 yen coin, synonymous with a single credit in a Japanese arcade game both then and now. Light cascades along the silver coin in the palm of his hand before it flies across the arcade toward the cocktail cabinet. The coin falls into the cabinet's coin slot, awakening a group of tiny creatures - electron gnomes perhaps - who were slumbering within. The creatures run around the circuitry, reviving the dormant arcade game as the boy takes a seat at it, his reflection caught in the monitor briefly as the title screen appears. The intro really cements the intention of nostalgia and the wonder of being a kid with pocket money in an arcade during the golden era. Then there's a crackling power on sound as the title screen rolls upward as if the vertical hold on a CRT is locking into place.

A 100 yen coin leaps out of the boy's hand (left), zips across the room into a cocktail cabinet (center), where tiny creatures bring the game to life (right)

The menu is very simple and contains four options - Game Select, Memory Card, Akiba Parts Shop, and Staff Credit. The individual menus and options will be in Japanese beyond this point and while some of the selections can be felt out, the deeper options can be difficult to navigate if you can't read the language. Thankfully the text set used is very clean and white against black, meaning that a smartphone translation utility such as Google Translate should at the very least give you more of an idea of what each option is. Game Select takes you to a simple menu with each of the twelve game titles written in Japanese. These can generally be figured out through repeated play or compared to the text in the instruction booklet. Memory Card is the save / load system and the Staff Credit option is exactly what it says but shouldn't be skipped over as it has some great music. Akiba Parts Shop allows for the purchase of modifiers and enhancements for each of the twelve games and we'll be getting back to that shortly. First let's take a look at the twelve games in the order they appear in the Game Select menu.

The Cellophanes title screen introduces the concept of cellophane strips over a black and white display (left), which is used in Computer Block (right)

Computer Block starts things off as the perfect example of the type of game that not only the collection represents but also where it gets its name from. Computer Block is a block breaker game, a genre that became very popular in Japan and continued as such well into the late 1980's. This type of game involves knocking down rows of blocks by hitting them with a ball, directed by a paddle at the bottom of the screen, which the player controls. The most famous examples of the genre are Breakout and Arkanoid, however there are countless games that play in a similar manner. Most of the early block games, and early arcade games in general, used black and white monitors with strips of colored cellophane attached over the screen to add the effect of color. As a representation of this era of gaming, "Cellophanes" is a rather perfect title for a collection of games styled after this type of hardware. Computer Block is a reasonably bare-bones block breaker game with three areas of colored strips and chunky graphics that would be right at home in an arcade game of the mid 1970's. The ball will accelerate and the paddle will shrink after coming into contact with the higher areas, creating a familiar difficulty curve. After clearing all the blocks on the screen another set loads in, each time in a different configuration. The illusion of colored cellophane across a black and white screen is done pretty well, with the ball changing color as it moves beneath the different zones. Sound is also appropriate for what would be heard out of an analog game such as this. Block breaker games are the most widely represented genre within Cellophanes and it's nice they started off with the most textbook representation of this type of game.

World Travel's title screen is very simple (left), while its gameplay is a step forward from first generation paddle games (right)

World Travel is a slightly newer generation of block breaker than Computer Block, featuring color graphics and slightly higher resolution. The biggest difference is that the individual blocks are now smaller and square, only slightly larger than the ball. This allows them to create large dot grid pictures of various landmarks and sights from around the world, hence the title. While this adds a lot more variety to each stage, the smaller blocks also tend to cause the levels to drag out longer as they can be more difficult to hit with the ball. Even with the much larger number of blocks to break and complex patterns the ball physics are good and quite predictable. Some stages can be difficult due to the lower levels of blocks being positioned so close to the paddle but I still found World Travel to be a fun block breaker. The game also features some rudimentary music and wonderfully authentic sound effects.

Lord Block has a rather striking title screen title screen (left), however the gameplay is similar to World Travel (right)

Very similar to World Travel is **Lord Block**, which uses the same size blocks but has a feudal Japan theme rather than one of modern world travel. While it plays much the same as World Travel, I find the patterns less fun to work through and ultimately a bit frustrating to play. The audio package is different than World Travel with very heavily compressed speech samples at the beginning and end of a game. My Japanese isn't good enough to understand what is being said but it certainly has the low fidelity of a very early talking arcade game.

Dancing Zoo's title screen looks right out of the early 1980's (left), but the gameplay is rather frustrating (right)

Dancing Zoo is my least favorite game in the collection although it has an interesting concept and good presentation. Another paddle game, this one eschews breaking blocks and instead is about collecting animals in a zoo. The graphics are a step forward from the previous three games, will full color animated sprites more akin to what was seen in the early 1980's. In addition to the different animals there are also barriers which can be broken open or used to deflect the ball upon impact. The physics of Dancing Zoo are the sticking point with me as it plays unlike a traditional block breaker. Instead there is an element of downward gravity that makes the whole thing feel like the bonus stage in Nintendo's Famicom / NES Pinball game. It always feels like the ball is building more momentum downward than you can ever hit back with. It's as if, physics wise, the playfield is situated almost totally vertical. This also means the ball is prone to some wild and often random deflections and sudden acceleration. While the visuals are cute and have some personality I find the frustration factor just a bit too high with Dancing Zoo.

The title screen for Delta is minimalist as most vector games were (left), it presents a unique take on the ball and paddle genre with interesting quirks (right)

Going from my least favorite to most favorite game on the disc, **Delta** combines block breaker gameplay with the visuals of a color vector game. The playfield is presented in a 3/4 perspective with a scrolling starfield behind it. The first stage starts out rather standard with a few rows of rectangular blocks that simply need to be hit once to be destroyed. Further stages add different objects which must be hit multiple times to clear out the playfield. These range from things like cacti on a barren backdrop, a schematic diagram on a neon grid, musical notes along a staff, and many more unexpected challenges. The creativity present in Delta really shines and goes far beyond simply making a vector-based block breaker. It's quirky, extremely fast paced, and a lot of fun. The visuals are bright and crisp, easily some of the better representations of vector graphics I've seen for a standard raster display. The ball especially looks good, with a sparkling twinkle that looks absolutely authentic. It's like if Tempest were a block breaker rather than a tube shooter. If there is one negative for Delta it is that the visuals can sometimes feel a tad bit overdriven and hard to follow depending on your display, especially if being played on a smaller screen.

A fictional developer and copyright adorn Mystery Planet's title screen (left), with its deeper gameplay it feels more like a home computer game (right)

Easily the most full-featured game of the collection, **Mystery Planet** is a space shooter with the element of planetary gravity. It actually plays similar to Atari's Gravitar but the objective in Mystery Planet is to collect numbered panels in order before collecting the goal panel, labeled with a "G" on it, to complete a zone. Enemies can be shot and destroyed but they will respawn constantly so pursuing them makes little sense outside of clearing paths to the panels. The zone layouts are well designed with various gimmicks such as destructible walls that are added in as the game progresses. The graphics are very plain with only a few colors used, which makes the game feel more like an early Japanese computer game rather than an arcade title. That said, it's very easy to understand what direction your ship is facing, it features a little flame out the back when thrusting, the enemies have some good animation, and everything moves very smoothly. The gravitational physics feel predictable and while you can get yourself into trouble with excess momentum, it never feels like your ship is going to careen out of control as with some other gravitational shooters. I also really like the minimal sound design as it has some pretty cool sound effects that add to the retro ambiance.

Sea Fighter has a cool title screen of large letters beneath colored cellophane (left), navigating through large squid to attack the battleship (right)

Moving back to the concept of colored cellophane strips over a black and white display, **Sea Fighter** is a single screen shooter that takes place underwater. If you were to think of Space Invaders except the only objective would be to destroy the UFO at the top of the screen, with the invaders acting as interference and defense, you'd have Sea Fighter. The player controls a submarine that can move anywhere along the bottom two-thirds of the screen. Armed with a vertical cannon, the objective is to destroy a patrolling battleship on the surface. The waters are filled with different forms of sea life that not only stand between you and the battleship but also seem to want you out of their domain.

Sea Fighter may seem very plain at first as the sea life enemies take multiple shots to defeat, with some of them effectively being bullet sponges. That's exactly why they are there - to block shots directed at the battleship and often fire at the submarine in return. Once realizing their role is not that of an objective but rather as a hindrance, the deeper strategy of the game is revealed. The action becomes very frantic as the submarine blasts paths through the sea life, navigates toward clearings in their ranks, and opens fire on the battleship. I find it to be one of the most engaging games in the collection and lining up a series of rapid shots on the battleship is extremely satisfying. The sea creatures all have a very unique look and in some instances completely swarm the screen with their numbers or numbers of shots directed toward the submarine. The effect of simulated cellophane strips over a black and white display is done superbly, even better than in Computer Block. Sound design in Sea Fighter is excellent, with authentic sound effects and music appropriate for an arcade game of its simulated vintage. The music on the screen where the crab enemies show up is super funky. While Delta is my favorite game on the disc, Sea Fighter is a very close second.

Carnival Hunt's title screen is the most detailed part of the game (left), shooting out targets with simulated screen burn from the title screen in the background (right)

A vertical shooting gallery game, **Carnival Hunt** is the one title in the collection that I can say is pretty much a straight up homage to an existing arcade game. That game would be Sega's Carnival from 1980, a game which I really like and I'm sure many Colecovision owners are very familiar with. In Carnival Hunt the player controls a gun that can be moved to the left and right at the bottom of the screen. Three rows of objects move back and forth in the area above and are shot at for points. The skill of the game involves timing each shot so that the vertically moving bullets impact the horizontally moving targets. Some targets will break free and drift down at the player, consuming reserve bullets similar to the ducks in Sega's Carnival. Additionally reserve bullets can be replenished by shooting specific targets. Presentation is a little strange, with very large and oddly illustrated enemies. Honestly of all the games in Cellophanes this one feels the least like an old arcade game and more like a simple 1980's homemade computer game. One thing that I do think is kind of cool is that the playfield has a simulated screen burn in the background, shown as a faded image of the title screen.

Dragon Walker features an animated high score table (left), running around the grid and avoiding the large numbers of enemies (right)

Dragon Walker takes concepts from a few different arcade games such as Amidar and Q*bert and reworks them into something a little different but ultimately not as fun. The player controls a little green dragon who walks along a grid with switches at each junction. Upon stepping on a switch it will become activated and stepping on an adjacent switch will illuminate the pathway between them. Stepping on a switch more than once will change its color however it can only be changed again once a different switch is touched. Connecting switches of the same color builds bonus points, with blocks of connected switches earning even more. The dragon can also jump over switches to prevent them from being changed. Enemy animals patrol the grid as well and will knock the dragon off the board if touched. The enemies cannot be jumped over but the dragon can knock them away with this fire breath. The dragon's fire breath slowly replenishes as the he walks around the grid but it drains very quickly when used, so a short and well-time tap of the button when dispatching enemies is key. The dragon's movement can also be sped up by double tapping in the direction he is facing but fast movement often sends him into paths congested with enemies. Dragon Walker looks very much like a game from the very early 1980's and it plays fine but I don't find the concept very entertaining. For the most part

the game boils down to managing the dragon's speed as he walks between groups of enemies. Things do become challenging as the number of enemies on the grid gets pretty crazy but the additional challenge doesn't do much in the way of making the game more engaging.

A dusty shootout in Gun Fighter (left), pop-up targets in Uiui Jungle (center), illuminated bombers are a cool vintage effect in Tank (right)

The final three games in the collection are all representations of the mechanical shooting gallery games popular in the early 1970's. All three of them are simple single-screen challenges where targets will pop up or move across the screen. The objective of each is to shoot as many of the targets as possible within the allotted time. **Gun Fighter** is set in the Old West with gunslingers popping up in windows and doorways, riding by on horseback, and rolling through in covered wagons. **Uiui Jungle** features jungle animals that pop up from behind plants and trees. **Tank** is set in the middle of a battlefield as tanks tear across the landscape and bombers drop their payloads from overhead. Gun Fighter and Uiui Jungle both have civilian characters that must be avoided as shooting them will incur a penalty in the form of a point deduction. Each of the three shooting games play pretty well for what they are and are decent representations of the type of games they are recreating. Sound is a little odd in all three, as each shot is accompanied by a hissing sound, perhaps to simulate the sound of an air rifle. I find this sound detracts from the experience just a bit as it's pretty much the only thing you'll hear when playing these games.

Cellophanes keeps track of how much time has been spent playing its games and accumulates this total into credit for the Akiba Parts Shop. Here a list of modifications, enhancements, and expansions for each of the twelve games can be purchased in exchange for time played. I really like this system, as it allows for all twelve games to be accessible at the start, with the bonus stuff made available as you play and the order in which it is unlocked completely up to the player. Additionally the available options differ between each game. Some of these include the ability to continue, additional levels, larger paddles, visual enhancements, gameplay upgrades and more. These work to encourage more play, which in turn accumulates more play time, which in turn brings you back to the Akiba Parts Shop to buy more modifiers. Most of the game modifiers are accessed by pressing L1 + L2 + Start on the title screen, which will put the game into "Test Mode" and allow modifications to be applied as well as game adjustments - similar to a real arcade game. Additionally pressing Start + Select at the same time while in a game will instantly exit back out to the main menu.

A Namco Guncon and Volume Controller are must haves for Cellophanes, as well as a standard PlayStation control pad

As Cellophanes attempts to simulate the vintage era of arcade gaming before joystick control was commonplace, to get the most out of it you're going to need some additional peripherals. The most obscure of these is Namco's "Volume Controller" which amounts to an analog paddle controller for the PlayStation. Although in Japan it was both sold separately and bundled in with the limited edition release of Namco Museum Volume 2, very few games supported the Volume Controller, making it an uncommon sight. Surprisingly the most common version of the controller is a Taito redesign that was included with the limited edition of Puchi Carat in European markets. The Volume Controller is small and kind of fragile feeling but in Cellophanes it makes all the difference in the paddle games, in addition to providing precise rotary control in Mystery Planet. The paddle games can also be played with a regular controller, the analog sticks on a Dual Shock, or with the PlayStation Mouse but a properly maintained Volume Controller is definitely the way to go. It will also open up the ability to properly play a few other really fun PlayStation paddle games. The three shooting gallery games can all be played with a Namco Guncon light gun, and as with the Volume Controller for the paddle games, a Guncon is really the best way to play the shooting galleries. A standard controller or PlayStation Mouse can also be used but they are no substitute for using a light gun. The "Test Mode" menu for each game will have a peripheral setting option where the endpoints for analog input can easily be set, a nice touch that I wish more games featured.

To further the vintage experience the instruction booklet features faux arcade cabinet instruction cards for each game. These not only go over the basic controls but also feature simulated cabinet art and fictional game developer names. While you can tell Cellophanes was never intended to be a very big game, it was obviously very close to the hearts of those who worked on it. This is truly the perfect game to play on a CRT with the lights turned down and the sound turned up. Although I've mentioned the sound design in many of the included games, it really must be praised again as being overall wonderful and very representative of the earliest era of arcade games.

Although none of these games existed outside of this PlayStation game, the instruction booklet contains authentic retro style instruction cards for each

These days, new games in the style of a previous generation have become commonplace, with many independent game developers using such as a way to make modern games with smaller budgets. Even major studios have created games in the nostalgic retro styling, the three GameCenter CX games (the first released in English as Retro Game Challenge) come to mind as an example. It may be almost completely unknown and forgotten but Cellophanes embraced and celebrated the spirit of an earlier generation of games long before it was trendy. Not just nostalgia for what was but nostalgia for the experience of the time. I find it elicits those feelings of nostalgia in me, although admittedly it was an era of gaming that I was born into the very tail end of. Similar to the scene of the young boy sitting down at a cocktail cabinet in a small forgotten arcade in its intro, Cellophanes isn't supposed to be substantial or profound - just fun.

Some very nice retro artwork as seen in Lord Block (left), taking the ball and block concept and running with it in Delta (right)

As a side note, the website for Ninelives is still active and contains a small information page on Cellophanes. It also states that Ninelives is currently closed as a corporation, with the site acting more like a fan page. I suppose that's almost poetic for a publisher that only released a single title, which feels like a fan game and love letter to the early arcade era.

Archival information on Cellophanes at the Ninelives official website:
http://ninelives.co.jp/2000/01/01/

Super Mario Land (Game Boy) - Small Change

by David Lundin, Jr.

While the Famicom was first released prior to Super Mario Bros., and its redesign as the NES would see Gyromite and Duck Hunt packed in initially, shortly after that it became assumed that a Nintendo console would not only have a Super Mario game at launch but often include it in the box. Yet it was the humble Game Boy that was the first Nintendo system to have a Super Mario game on offer right from the beginning, on April 21st, 1989 - actually being released two months prior to the Game Boy version of Tetris in Japan! Of course once the Game Boy hit American shores that July, Tetris was the pack in title but Super Mario Land was right there as well. While games like Tennis and Baseball were mostly reworks of their NES counterparts, Super Mario Land was a totally new alternate adventure for the world's most famous plumber. Instead of being designed by Shigeru Miyamoto, Super Mario Land was created and produced by Gunpei Yokoi's R&D1 team, which created the Game Boy itself. This gave the game an intentionally different flavor than any game in the Mario lineage and became a runaway success, going on to sell as as many copies as Super Mario Bros. 3, possibly outselling it slightly.

Super Mario Land doesn't take place in the Mushroom Kingdom but instead in an area known as Sarasaland. Four worlds compose Sarasaland, each modeled after a specific theme. World 1 is known as Birabuto and is heavily influenced by Egypt with deserts and pyramids. World 2 is Muda, an aquatic beach front world that includes a submarine stage piloting the Marine Pop. World 3 is Easton, a compression of "Easter Island" famous for its Moai statues (also common in the Gradius games) which appear in this world. World 4 is known as Chai, based on mythical China complete with hopping vampires. World 4 is also best known for its final stage which puts Mario in an airplane, the Sky Pop. Rather than the goal being to rescue Princess Toadstool, Super Mario Land introduced Princess Daisy who would go on to appear in many spin-off Mario games. She would eventually become Princess Toadstool's counterpart, often appearing with Luigi. Super Mario Land sticks to the traditional platforming action of the original Super Mario Bros., however adds the challenge of world specific boss battles and totally new stages such as the Marine Pop and Sky Pop levels. All of this is a welcome addition that sets Super Mario Land apart from anything that came before it and keeps the game feeling like a separate adventure from the console versions.

Super Mario Land also introduced the concept of having multiple non-warp exits to a level to the Mario games, even if both proceed to the next world. In Super Mario Land there is an upper exit that leads to a bonus stage and a lower exit that simply goes to the next stage. While the upper exits are easy to get to in the earlier levels, they become increasingly harder to reach as the game progresses but never get all that challenging. The bonus stage is comprised of four platforms, three of them with a number of extra lives at the end and one with a Superball Flower powerup. Mario flashes down each row along with a ladder that flashes in the middle of each row. Pressing the A Button will stop the sequence and Mario will walk across the row he stopped on. If the ladder ends up touching the same platform then Mario will either climb it to the above platform or descend it to the platform below. Mario will then continue to the other side and collect the prize at the end. While the sequence can be stopped whenever the player wishes, it's still pretty random since the ladder is always moving along with Mario and the order of the prizes comes up randomly when the bonus stage begins.

Things start off in a conventional fashion (left), the first boss battle plays out a bit like a Bowser fight (center), each world has different terrain (right)

I can remember being amazed as a kid when this game came out, not only in how it looked but with how much content was packed into it. Super Mario Land was the perfect balance of quick fix portability and expanding challenge. There were always new enemies appearing, different looking stages, and new backgrounds. For a monochromatic portable at the time it was pretty incredible compared to the LCD handhelds that were common. All the sprites are nicely detailed and show up well, even under fast movement. Each sprite has genuine animation sequences from the lowly Goombos to Mario himself. Each stage has true backgrounds, not just a simple endlessly repeating pattern, things appear to have been placed where they are for a reason. Everything moves very smoothly although blur and refresh rate caveats of the original Game Boy screen do come into play. The only place the visuals get a little dodgy due to the limited contrast is in World 3-2 and 3-3, where there are large waterfalls with platforms in front of them. All the new enemies, and there are a lot of them, are well designed and animated with nice details especially considering this was a launch title. Yet that doesn't truly describe how well designed the boss enemies are, especially at the end of World 2-3. Honestly the graphics feel like a rework and enhancement of the original Mario Bros. arcade game mixed with some of the Game & Watch visuals, it's very unique and very well done.

Super Mario Land still has some of my favorite game music to this day. The early stages have a fitting light Super Mario Bros. like soundtrack with interior levels having melodies that play upon the theme of exploring far off lands. However without a doubt the music in Worlds 2-1 and 2-2 is my favorite, it's hard to explain why, other than it simply being a unique and happy sounding piece of digital music. The Marine Pop and Sky Pop stages play a direct enhanced remix of the theme from the original Super Mario Bros., which again is excellent and fits the pace of the stages perfectly. Boss battles have a specific tune as does the bonus stage. Sound effects are equally impressive. There are the usual enemy squash sounds and powerup alerts but they are clear and don't get garbled up with nor overpower the music. This is also the first Super Mario game to be in true stereo sound when using a pair of stereo headphones. Some of the sound effects need to be listened to in true stereo to be properly appreciated. For instance jumping on a Koopa leaves behind his shell, which is actually a bomb and explodes a few seconds later. Under the normal Game Boy speaker this has a nice effect but it's totally different when using the headphones. Instead of just an explosion sound there's a nice reverberation effect that I've still heard nothing like. When some enemies are defeated they peel off of the screen and fall down to the bottom like in the original Mario Bros. and this too has a rather unique sound effect that sounds great in stereo. When boss enemies are hit with Superballs, torpedoes (Marine Pop) or missiles (Sky Pop) they give off one of the strangest sounds in gaming history. They actually sound like sheep, "baah, baah." Perhaps this was the best sound to differentiate boss damage they could create at the time on the hardware? Who knows but it does the job and lets you know when your shots are making contact.

The biggest difference in Super Mario Land is how Mario moves and reacts to player input, which takes a moment to get used to. Initially things feel a little stiff but most of that is due to the size of the screen and how fast Mario responds to commands. In the later levels, especially World 3, the controls can seem to get away from you again. This isn't the case, the jumps are just really intense. In fact I've always considered this one of the most technically challenging Super Mario games in terms of platform jumping. While it may not be the most difficult Super Mario game overall, there are some parts here and there that require you to be perfect with your jumps. Missing these can lead to frustration which will rapidly deplete your extra lives. Another aspect of the

game that is different from any Super Mario game before or since is the powerup the flower gives you. Instead of changing you into Fiery Mario and adding fireballs to your arsenal, the Superball Flower turns you into Superball Mario. Superballs are shot like fireballs however that's where the similarities end. Only one superball can be onscreen at a time. Instead of bouncing on the ground and disappearing or rolling off screen, superballs ricochet off anything and everything until they hit an enemy or deflect off screen. This means missed shots can cost you, sometimes leaving you open for an attack. On the other side of the coin superballs allow you to make bank shots to take care of enemies. Superballs can also be used to collect coins from hard to reach areas. The Marine Pop and Sky Pop stages are very responsive and intuitive as well.

A fun boss encounter while piloting the Marine Pop (left), a cannon hidden in a pipe (center), Mario takes to the skies in the Sky Pop (right)

This game is an absolute classic and a must have for anyone with a Game Boy, a perfect mix of old and new. Even though there's a lot of game here, it still can be completed rather quickly if you know what you're doing. To this end the game doesn't feature a backup battery, password system, or warp zones. If you're looking for a long in depth gaming session you won't find it here but it keeps the game from feeling stale. Some replay is added in that upon completing the game it can be played through again in a "hard mode" with more enemies and level hazards. There are also a couple different paths that can be taken through a few levels but they don't add enough to demand being explored.

Super Mario Land 2 would go on to surpass this title and become one of my favorite Mario games but the original Super Mario Land is still a good way to kill an hour or so. Of all the original Game Boy games I've ever owned this one has probably gotten the most playtime and it was the bane of my existence in my younger days. Plowing away at it for days at a time, month after month, until finally reaching Tatanga in his spaceship at the end of the game with my last life, only to be rapidly put to death. Of course this resulted in more months of playing the game until I could get to the end with enough lives to figure out Tatanga's attack patterns and finally complete the game. For a game that was so popular and sold so well, it's strange that I've encountered so few copies of it out in the wild over the years. Perhaps it's just one people don't want to give up. If that's the case then they have good reason not to, it's simply still a fun and unique Mario game.

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:

08/27/2021 - WEEK 228
Question: The Famicom game "Moeru! Onii-san" was reworked into what radically different game for the NES?

09/03/2021 - WEEK 229
Question: Who is the first character to encounter Link in The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening?

09/10/2021 - WEEK 230
Question: Virtua Cop 2 for Dreamcast was only released outside of Japan as part of what compilation release?

09/17/2021 - WEEK 231
Question: Famous radio host Wolfman Jack provided his voice to what arcade game?

09/24/2021 - WEEK 232
Question: In The Legend of Zelda what item will a Like Like eat?

10/01/2021 - WEEK 233
Question: For its North American release Kirby's Dream Land had Kirby changed to what color on the box art?

10/08/2021 - WEEK 234
Question: What was the first pinball machine to feature speech?

10/15/2021 - WEEK 235
Question: The space alien Tatanga is the main antagonist of what game?

10/22/2021 - WEEK 236
Question: Dr. Don and Dr. Dan are the mascot characters for what series of light gun games?

Moeru! Onii-san was a terrible game based on a licensed property (left), that for some reason had its game engine used for another terrible game (right)

Answers:
Week 228 Answer: Circus Caper.
Week 229 Answer: Marin, who finds him washed up on the beach at Toronbo Shores.
Week 230 Answer: Sega Smash Pack Volume 1.
Week 231 Answer: DJ Boy.
Week 232 Answer: A Magical Shield.
Week 233 Answer: White.
Week 234 Answer: Gorgar (1979).
Week 235 Answer: Super Mario Land.
Week 236 Answer: Point Blank.

Wolfman Jack being credited at the start of DJ Boy (left), Dr. Don and Dr. Dan on the cover of the PlayStation version of Point Blank (right)

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

We need your questions! If you have a trivia question you would like to submit for possible inclusion in the Weekly Retrogaming Trivia question pool, e-mail it to trt@classicplastic.net! If you question is selected to be featured, you will be entered in our year-end prize drawing!

See You Next Game

by David Lundin, Jr.

It seems crazy to me that this November 18th will be the 20th anniversary of the GameCube's launch in America, which completely slipped my mind until Dan sent in his column about such. I know exactly where I was on launch day or rather where I was for the ten hours leading up to it. At the time I was twenty years old and working for Target Corporation as an electronics department supervisor - back when said department was referred to as Camera / Sound to give an idea of how technology has changed. During the launch of the PlayStation 2 the year prior, there were widespread instances of people camping out in front of stores for days to get their hands on the fabled system. In the small town I resided in at the time we didn't think there would be that type of demand and didn't plan for anything of such magnitude, other than maybe lining up a few hours before opening that morning. That all changed when upon walking out the door after closing up the night before launch we spotted a number of people parking their vehicles and preparing to line up overnight. A co-worker of mine, who also was originally going to come back in the morning, immediately sat down in front of the entrance door and claimed position number one. Knowing we had 93 consoles for the launch I went home to change and get something to eat, returning to find myself twelfth in line. That night was miserable - blisteringly cold, unseasonably wet, and isolated in a line of over 500 people who wanted nothing more than for those in front to bail and give up a spot. In the end my co-worker and I both got our PlayStation 2's in addition to a pair of nasty colds. Not wanting to repeat that night, when the GameCube came around a year later I was going to be prepared.

Buzz about the system was very high among our staff and regulars. I had sat out the N64 era in favor of PlayStation but on the eve of GameCube I had the financial means to support a second mainline console, which is what the GameCube would be for a lot of people initially. Although the launch lineup was slim, Rogue Leader and Super Monkey Ball were the driving factors for me, in addition to the hype of upcoming games such as Super Smash Bros. Melee. I had also dove head first into the Game Boy Advance so it was a time of truly rekindled interest in Nintendo's then current products. Our store was slated to receive 48 consoles at launch, 24 in Indigo (purple) and 24 in Jet (black). While I was more interested in the Spice (orange) color that had been released in Japan, I decided to pick up a Jet system at launch with plans to sell it once Spice hit American shores, something that would never happen although it was announced early on. After confirming our console numbers, game and controller stock, and how the opening was going to be structured that day, it was time to make our plans for launch night.

My much younger self kicking off the night (left), the Cube Count sign made from an Xbox box (center), preparing to move into Hour 7 with a Metal Gear Solid spoof (right)

Not wanting to be dead tired as with the PlayStation 2 line, I worked the morning before and took launch day off. Chris, a co-worker and friend from high school who was also planning on being in the launch line, volunteered to work the night before to ensure everything was set up properly. That evening when he came in I tagged out and headed home to get some sleep before planning on returning at 10pm. We were all going to be ready this time: plenty of warm clothing, folding chairs, food to eat, drinks in coolers, games to play, notebook computers, you name it - and the whole thing would be documented on video. Around 7pm I called the store to see how things were going and I heard some distressing news: there were already people starting to line up while the store was still open. Thinking quickly, I asked if he could talk with assets protection about that being a "safety hazard" with people sitting at the doors during business hours and that they couldn't wait there. That's what he did and sure enough the group was disbursed, with word spreading that you couldn't wait overnight at that Target. Of course when the doors closed at 10pm that all changed and I arrived at the store to find our friends and a couple of our regulars getting set up. They were holding position one for me as the orchestrator of the event and just a little before 10:30 Chris exited the store and joined the line in position two. It was then I revealed something special I created for the occasion, a sign with tear-away numbers denoting the

amount of remaining hours until the store opened and the launch was upon us. The sign was actually made from an Xbox display box from the promotional kit for its launch three days earlier, complete with the Xbox jewel logo cut out and a strikethrough placed over it. This sign also had the title for what the night would come to be known as - Cube Count.

From 10pm until 8am the following morning we hosted a small overnight launch party filled with conversation, laughs, and good times. Throughout the night video was recorded of the events and antics that took place on a very cold and foggy November night in California's central valley. Every hour we would act out a small vignette of sorts as a number was torn off of the sign, bringing us one step closer to launch. In addition to simply being stupid fun, these interludes also helped to move the night along. Most of us there had met in high school years before in electrical engineering class, and it wasn't long before that spirit lead to finding a place to tap power to run a trunk load of electronics that had made the journey out. This was found via a junction box at the bottom of the parking lot light closest to the entrance. Coupled with a long extension cord and a power strip, we had power for a legendary Samsung GX TV, a Sega Dreamcast, modern laptop, and anything else desired. Fueling us throughout the night were a couple cases of Krating Daeng, better known as the concentrated Thai energy drink that was reformulated to become Red Bull in the west. At one point a few of us hopped in the back of a truck and navigated to the fogged in and incomplete shopping center across the street on a snack replenishment run. This yielded a resupply of the Japanese snack food Yan Yan, as well as the surprising acquisition of Nintendo fruit snacks - cosmic serendipity.

As the night wore on the line really never grew much beyond our group, although people would come and go throughout the night. Most knew that Chris and myself worked there, and after being given information about how many consoles would be available and how the launch morning was going to work out, would head back home to return later. There was one strange guy that was out there with us right at the start of the night, even chugged a few rounds of Krating Daeng, before taking off a few hours before the store opened. A couple days later it became apparent that none of us knew who he was, all assuming he was there with someone else or was another gamer in line, of which it appears he was neither. In the middle of the night a bootleg copy of Capcom vs. SNK was fired up on the Dreamcast and an impromptu tournament began. There were also multiplayer sessions of ChuChu Rocket! on Game Boy Advance, still the only time I've played that version with a full complement of four players.

Patching into power at a parking lot light pole (left), leaving Hour 6 along with Mario and Capcom vs. SNK on a GX TV (center), leading the crowd back to electronics (right)

An hour or so before the store was to open a real line had built up behind us, maybe about twenty deep not including our group of a dozen or so. Many of those people had popped in at one point or another throughout the night. We packed up most of the circus act as that last hour began but I can only imagine what some people thought looking at our setup as they pulled in that morning. Then it was that magical time and the doors were opened. In a moment of selfless cinematic genius, Joey who was primarily behind the camera all night, got in front and turned around to record the crowd fanning out behind us as we walked through the store toward the electronics department. Once we arrived and the purchases had begun to be made, there was already a feeling of reflection on the night's events. Everyone that was out there that night was able to buy a console and any games and accessories they wanted. In fact if you walked through the doors right when the store opened that morning you would have been able to buy a GameCube. The truth of the matter was, unlike with the PlayStation 2 launch, there had been no reason to wait outside all night. However when I think back twenty years ago the strongest memories I have of that day aren't of buying a video game system or going home and playing Rogue Leader - they're of hanging out all night, getting to know people, having fun, and coming away with a broader perspective of what it is to love video gaming. While the footage that night was shot on Digital8 tape, a lone low resolution VCD copy of the raw footage is all that still exists.

To this day I still think it crazy that I was able to host an overnight launch party and have the fabled privilege of leading a crowd to be the first to buy a game system on launch day, like some half-assed video game Moses. While the moment wasn't entirely organic, as we did everything we could to ensure that we would be there first and have full control throughout the night, it was still incredible. Truthfully that opportunity only occurred due to rad people who allowed me to lead the night, share in their company, and not mind me being obnoxious, tired, and filled with the insane amount of confidence I once exhibited in abundance. I still talk with a few people who were there way back when and I think that's pretty cool. Even twenty years on I thank them for that night, as it was pretty damn fun.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on January 7th, 2022 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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