The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-EIGHTH ISSUE - MAY 2022

SKATEBOARDERS TAKE OVER NEWSLETTER!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Thirty-Eighth Issue - May 2022

- Prepare to Qualify
- Upcoming Events
- More C64! - Skate and Live! **COVER STORY**
- Don's Desk - Atari 5200 Zone
- RetroTINK 2X-MINI - A Quality HD Converter For the Rest of Us
- SMS Memories: Around the World in 80 Games
- Caught On Film - Sonic the Hedgehog 2 - 2 Fast 2 Furryious
- Super Mario Bros. 2 - East Meets West and Back
- Popful Mail (Sega CD) - The Pinnacle of a Platform
- Converting a Sega Saturn Virtual On Twin-Stick to PlayStation
- Midway's Arcade Failures
- Caught On Film - Super Mario Bros. (1993) - The Lone Chance at an Adult Super Mario Story
- Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap
- See You Next Game

Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

Many years ago the original Retrogaming Times would post a bit of a warning at the beginning of a long issue, an alert that the webpage was going to take a while to load on the average connection speeds of the time. Now it's my turn to do the same - even with high speed online connectivity currently being far more widespread. This is one of our largest issues ever in volume of contributions, subject variety, and article size. With everything on tap this issue I recommend that you settle in, perhaps take a pause midway, and use the index for navigation when you return... There's a lot of awesome stuff that shouldn't be missed! Additionally if you or ANYONE you know has written for ANY "Retrogaming Times" family newsletter over the past 25 years, PLEASE e-mail me as soon as possible!

The cover story leads things off with More C64 as Merman provides the definitive compendium on skateboarding, skating, and related games for Commodore 64. Even if you have a passing interest in the platform, give it a look and see just how prevalent skateboarding has been with retrogaming. Continuing to revisit his earlier columns, Donald Lee takes a fresh look at current ways to enjoy Atari 5200 games with Don's Desk. Enjoyably playing classic hardware on modern televisions can be a challenge but a number of converter solutions make it easier. An accurate but affordable approach is the RetroTINK 2X-MINI and it's covered in detail in this issue. Your ticket is booked for adventure around the world as Mateus Fedozzi shares memories of global gaming on the Master System. Sonic the Hedgehog was a surprise box office smash when the blue blur made his way to live action. Dan Pettis reviews the much anticipated sequel and leads off the first of two film reviews this issue. Super Mario Bros. 2 had an interesting release history for a game in such a popular franchise and George "mecha" Spanos gets to the bottom of its unique history, crossing the Pacific and back again. Sega CD isn't often regarded as a great platform but there were a few shining examples of what the hardware could do. See why Popful Mail is one of those examples and possibly an argument for owning the hardware itself. One of the more unique fighting games of the 1990's, Virtual On featured a control setup that could only be comfortably reproduced in the home with a specialized controller. However when one of the best home releases of the game doesn't feature a matching controller, then it's time to build one yourself with a new modding tutorial. George "mecha" Spanos returns to shed the spotlight on a few Midway arcade games that failed to take the industry by storm but remain important in the history of Williams. Our second film review this issue looks at the 1993 Super Mario Bros. movie, nearly thirty years after its release, and it might not be as terrible as you remember it to be. 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!"**

Upcoming Events

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

NOTICE: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, 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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Pintastic Pinball & Game Room Expo, June 23rd - 26th 2022, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, USA

Pintastic is the family-friendly pinball and game room show that's centrally located in the six New England states. It has

hundreds of games set on free play, tournaments, seminars, an exhibition hall full of vendors offering fun stuff for your game room, and entertainment for kids. While pinball is the most prominent type of game, there will be arcade and console video games, and always some surprises. This expo is 35,000 square feet of fun for the whole family. You can play games casually or competitively. If you have a home game room, you'll see lots of ideas to refresh and improve it. You can learn about pinball history and current happenings in the business. The show is mainly about pinball, but all about fun!

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

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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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California Extreme 2022, July 30th - 31st 2022, Santa Clara, California, USA

California Extreme is pleased to tentatively announce the dates for this year's California Extreme Arcade and Pinball Show. It will be held on July 30-31, 2022, at the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California. Please join us for our 26th show with hundreds of your favorite arcade and pinball games, both past and present, all gathered for another fun-filled weekend of arcade excitement for everyone!

We will announce later when the hotel will be accepting reservations (please don't contact the hotel as the block is not set up yet) and when show tickets will be on sale.

For more information, visit https://caextreme.org/

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Retropalooza, October 22nd - 23rd 2022, Arlington, Texas, USA

A celebration of all things retro! Retropalooza was started in 2013 in Arlington, Texas by a couple of guys who enjoy all things retro; from toys to music, to video games... especially video games. As video game collectors, they spent a lot of time and money looking for retro games when they figured it would be easier to bring the games to them. Thus, Retropalooza was born.

The goal of Retropalooza is to bring nerds from all walks of life together for an enjoyable, family friendly time. Good old fashioned fun with like minded people where it will always be affordable, and forever improving.

For more information, visit http://retropalooza.com/

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Sac Gamers Expo, December 17th - 18th 2022, Sacramento, California, USA

A video game convention founded in 2015, created by gamers for gamers. Our show features special guests, game vendors and artists, game developers, tournaments, free to play games, a console museum, VR Setups, and so much more! Sac Gamers Expo is a family oriented event for all levels of gamers!

For more information, visit http://www.sacgamersexpo.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! - Skate and Live!

by Merman

Skateboarding is the fad that keeps coming back and is higher profile than ever thanks to its inclusion in the Tokyo Olympics. The C64 has had many games based on the sport (and roller skating), so let's get rolling.

720 DEGREES *US Gold 1987 (UK) / Mindscape 1988 (USA)*

The US and UK covers of 720 Degrees.

This is of course a conversion of the Atari coin-op, with its isometric graphics and sampled speech. The action is centered around a town called Skate City (what we would now call a hub world) that contains four parks. A map can be accessed by riding into it to show where you are. Players earn points in the town to collect park tickets (you start with three) and then skate into a park to take on a challenge. There are four types - Downhill Park (time trial down slopes), slalom (ride between pairs of flags to light them all), jump (avoiding water hazards) and ramp (a basic half pipe, where the player rotates the joystick to spin and earn points). Each park has a medal target for manoeuvres / jumps completed. Cash prizes for medals are then used for upgrades at the skate shops (buying improved pads, board, helmet, and shoes to move and jump better) located around town. Complete all four parks and the difficulty increases (known as Class). Take too long skating around the town and a swarm of bees descends, with the threatening message SKATE OR DIE. If the bees touch you, it ends the game - although you can press Fire to continue in the home version.

TRIVIA: In the UK, the 720 Degrees arcade game appeared on TV show First Class. This general knowledge quiz for schools featured arcade games as extra challenges, including 720's Downhill Park, Paperboy and Track & Field's Gymnastics event.

Fleeing the bees in the UK version, and people playing frisbee in the town.

There were two distinct versions of 720 Degrees released for the C64, in UK and US flavours. Programmer Chris Butler was responsible for the UK version, with the suitably raucous cover of the arcade theme music by Ben Daglish. While the sprites are quite blocky because they use expansion, the backgrounds give a real flavour of the arcade game. The musclemen and people playing frisbee are recognisable from the original too. Control can be a bit sticky, and once you have seen all four parks the game only gets slightly tougher with each Class. US Gold included a separate audio cassette in the original game package with the arcade soundtrack, and a pin badge. ZZAP! 64 awarded the game 85% in issue 34, calling it "A faithful and enjoyable conversion." Commodore User's 7/10 was less complimentary about the graphics, but it was still awarded a Screen Star as "One of US Gold's best conversions to date."

The US version was published by Mindscape and came on two disk sides. The graphics are different, with a more realistic looking skater in bright colours. The music across the events is different too, feeling less like the arcade game than the UK

version. The biggest problem is the multiload - going to the map or entering an event means a load, and then returning to the town means another load from disk. This takes up a lot of time. There is also an extra graphic showing your board and the medals you have earned from each event; while it looks good, it does mean another load after an event. One little extra retained from the arcade game is the loose coins around the town to pick up for extra cash, which did not make it into the UK version. The events are generally similar to play between UK and US versions - although the controls and collision detection do not work as well, particularly in the Ramp event. It feels slightly inferior all round to the UK version but is still a decent effort all told. A short, pithy review from All Game Guide in 1998 sums it up as, "720 Degrees is a waste of everybody's time. For an entertaining skating experience on the Commodore 64 try Skate or Die." That comes across a little harsh but true.

The medals screen for the US version and buying extra equipment from a store.

CALIFORNIA GAMES *Epyx / US Gold, 1987*

The original American cover and US Gold's cover for the European market.

After the amazing Summer and Winter Games, this was a sun-filled exploration of six different sports set in the state of California. Two events interest here, with players able to practice each individually or compete - representing sporting goods companies such as Ocean Pacific and Santa Cruz Skateboards instead of countries.

The numberplate title screen is accompanied by a cover of Louie Louie, while the sponsors list replaces flags.

The **HALF-PIPE SKATEBOARDING** has much simpler controls than Skate Or Die that would follow, relying more on timing. The ramp itself is in front of the famous Hollywood sign. To gain speed, the player pulls down or presses up as the skater moves that way. Pressing "away" from the ramp (so, right on the left-hand side and left on the right-hand side) will do a kick-turn low down or a flip when in the air, but it must be carefully timed and held in position before releasing the joystick to land. Pressing and holding Fire as the skater reaches the rim of the pipe will go for a handplant, but again the timing is critical. There is a time limit of 1:15 or maximum of three falls.

The score is higher the higher your skater turns at, and the handplant animation is fluid.

Out on the boardwalk it is time to go **ROLLER SKATING**, with an interesting twist in that you are controlling a female skater. The controls are clever too, with a "rotating" motion from up to down and back gaining speed. Fire is held to crouch and then released to jump over obstacles and gaps. While airborne the player can repeat the rotations to spin, gaining points. There is no time limit,and a single fall ends the attempt. Great animation and little touches such as the beach volleyball game in the background make the beach setting come alive. ZZAP! 64 awarded California Games a coveted Gold Medal and 97%, stating "Epyx surpass themselves yet again with another incredible sports simulation."

Jumping over obstacles and spinning earns more points, while the skater's tantrum when she falls is amusing. Notice the volleyball game on the beach in the background.

TRIVIA: Each of the events has at least one little Easter Egg, with the funniest being in the Flying Disk. If you leave the thrower stationary for a while, a UFO will fly in and abduct the catcher! The Half-Pipe gets shaken by an earthquake damaging the Hollywood sign, and in the Foot Bag event you can hit the seagull flying past for bonus points. The other events are the tricky BMX obstacle course and Surfing, with a brilliant wave effect and an ominous shark chasing a fallen surfer...There was no C64 (or planned Atari Lynx) release of sequel California Games II, which featured hang gliding, jet-ski, snowboarding, bodyboarding, and skateboarding. Available on Amiga, Atari ST, DOS, Master System and SNES between 1990 and 1993, it did not live up to the success or review scores of the original.

CHEAP SKATE *Silverbird, 1989*

The cover of Cheap Skate from the Silverbird budget range.

This is a budget game created for Firebird's budget label. It has an isometric view like Zaxxon, the street scrolling towards the player from top right to bottom left. You must prove yourself to the Street Hawks gang by surviving a series of challenging obstacle courses. Ground obstacles can be jumped, pipes can be ducked under, and fireballs dodged. Any collision will cost you a life and precious time. Reach the finish line before time runs out and move onto the next level. The graphics are reasonable but not particularly special, there's an above-average David Whittaker tune driving the game along, and gameplay becomes very repetitive. ZZAP! 64 awarded it 64% appropriately, calling it "A cheap skate for all the family - and you don't even need to be an expert."

Dodge the fireball and duck under the bar.

TRIVIA: YouTube user Witchfinder1976 (Mat Corne) has recently completed an epic series of videos detailing every single Silverbird release, following up an earlier series on Mastertronic. His review of Cheap Skate is at: https://youtu.be/ZSyCKa2CsGQ

NEIGHBOURS *Impulze, 1991*

Impulze's cover for Neighbours shows Ramsay Street where the soap opera is set.

The Australian TV soap Neighbours is ending after more than 30 years, but in its heyday, it was viewed by millions every day. From the 1990s came a tie-in game by British publishers Zeppelin on their full-price Impulze label. It was also available on ZX Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, and Atari ST. The aim of the game is a race around Ramsay Street, with the player racing as Jason Donovan's character Scott Robinson on a skateboard against four others - some of whom had already left the TV show by that time. Charlene Ramsay (played by Kylie Minogue) rides a go-kart, her brother Henry (Craig Mclachlan) is on a ride-on lawnmower, Matt Robinson has an unfair advantage on a motorbike and Mike Young (Guy Pearce respectively) on skateboard. In the garage before the race you pick which opponents are taking part, and the speed of your skateboard (slow, medium, or fast) affecting how quickly you turn and move. There are eight races across four locations - Ramsay Street, the Lassiter's Complex, Erinsborough High School, and Anson's Corner. During the race you must skate through the pairs of flags for your lap of the track to count. Obstacles include manholes, kangaroos, emus, and Mrs. Mangel.

The loading bitmap does look like the cover, while the garage hosts the options menu (and a kangaroo cuddly toy you can hide under a tarpaulin for some reason).

The Neighbours logo at the bottom of the screen shows how popular you are - falling off costs time and popularity, but you can restore it by picking up litter. It's a mediocre racing game and a very strange use of the license, with a very average isometric view of the course, terrible sprites of the characters and some poor sound. Even the iconic theme tune is not handled very well by the SID chip. ZZAP! gave it a measly 32%, saying "If the game wasn't in a Neighbours package, it's unlikely you'd associate the monotonous gameplay with the TV soap at all." Commodore Format gave a much higher 72% on full price release, explaining "As a skateboard race game it's all good fun, and pretty damned addictive, but you'd find it hard to really justify the asking price." That mark raised to an over-the-top 80% for the budget rerelease a year later. The game is worth nowhere near that.

Tie that kangaroo down, before Henry runs over it on his mower!

TRIVIA: Many of Zeppelin's games were published under license in Poland by the company LK Avalon. They also put together a couple of disk compilations, and after the C64GS was released, they put out some rare cartridges that are much wanted by collectors.

The alternative cover from LK Avalon.

NINJA SCOOTER SIMULATOR *Firebird, 1988*

One of the few Firebird budget games to be released on disk, for which this is the cover.

Technically a scooter rather than a skateboard, but it feels like it belongs in this round-up. At the time there was confusion over the name - why is a ninja riding on a scooter? In fact it was named after the Ninja scooter brand, popular at the time. It feels like a direct clone of the arcade game Metrocross, programmed by Probe for the Silverbird range. Race through each level, dodging enemies including skulls and avoiding or jumping obstacles. You can spin (fire and left) or pull a stunt (fire and right) from a ramp for more points. Collecting a clock adds extra time to the limit. Arrows function as a speed boost, pushing you forward. The gameplay is undemanding, only becoming difficult after a few levels when the time limit is drastically reduced. ZZAP's verdict was a damning 30%, with reviewer Paul Glancey sighing, "The lifeless sprites drift about over bland, repetitive racetrack graphics and the sound is so unrealistic it's pointless. The control also leaves a lot to be desired. Often, I shouted at the computer in frustration, calling it a cheat. Budget price or not, I still think that one poor version of Metrocross is quite enough, thank you!"

You can perform stunts off these ramps in level 2, but don't run into the skulls.

TRIVIA: The skateboard has appeared as a bonus or power-up in many games. **METROCROSS** is a notable example, with the skateboard giving your hero increased speed while riding on it and acting as an extra "hit." Another classic appearance is in **WONDER BOY**, where you can open an egg to reveal the skateboard. Picking it up makes our hero wear a helmet and knee pads, and it is good to see he is safety conscious. Both these games received playable C64 conversions, although the graphics could have been done better.

Riding on the skateboard in Metrocross makes you faster, while Wonderboy had better jump over that boulder.

PIXEL CITY SKATER *Digital Monastery, 2014*

The original Windows version of Pixel City Skater, and the C64 version's title screen.

Here is a fun single-button game, ideal to be played with the SIBUGA controller (Single Button). It was originally an entry into the RGCD 16K Cartridge Coding Competition, based on the original game by A Small Game for Windows, Android, and iOS (http://www.asmallgame.com/pixelcityskater/). There are two modes. The main game challenges you to skate through 50 static screens, moving from left to right without hitting an obstacle or falling off the bottom of the screen. The Endless mode, selected by pressing S on the title screen, scrolls obstacles endlessly towards you, making the player jump and duck. Survive for long enough and the speed increases. The graphic style is great, with a sci-fi cityscape in the background, and some great music to help you skate along. Well worth trying. Note that there are two versions; the C64GS edition is designed for use with the C64 Games System (the console version of the C64 which does not have a keyboard). Instead, you can press Up on the joystick to play Endless Mode. Many RGCD games (from the official store and in the coding competitions) are designed to be C64GS compatible.

Jumping high on screen 17, and dodging obstacles in Endless mode.

TRIVIA: The SIBUGA controller is effectively a single fire button in a small round case. It makes an ideal "second button" for games that need the Space Bar, by plugging into Port 1. There have been several games designed exclusively for it. The boxed edition came with a tape of single-button games and a special manual, which contained a type-in listing for a BASIC game called Firefighter (an extended version of an earlier BASIC 10-liner competition entry). Check out the controller in my

Scene World video and the games here.

PROFESSIONAL SKATEBOARD SIMULATOR *Code Masters, 1988*

Codemasters put lots of self-written PR quotes - such as "FEATURES AMAZING SOUNDTRACK" - on their games.

Programmer Gavin Raeburn made several Simulators for budget label Code Masters, with my personal favourite being Rally Cross Sim (based on Sega arcade game Hot Rod). This was his 8th commercial release (referred to as Gaxx Game 8 on the high-score table) and he did everything - code, design, graphics, sound, and music (with sampled instruments). This game has strong echoes of 720 Degrees in its isometric display - and the name is often shortened to Pro Skateboard Sim. The first level with the angled perspective sees you collecting flags in a park before time runs out. Reach the end of the level and you face the bonus round, a vertically scrolling obstacle course where you must skate through pairs of gates.In both level types, hitting an obstacle costs time as you then get a cursor to reposition your skater and carry on. The two styles of level then alternate with the time limits getting shorter, and extra slopes and jumps making things harder. Reviewed on the same page of ZZAP! as Cheap Skate in the 1988 Christmas Special, with both reviewers finding the later levels difficulty. The 79% rating called it "one of Code Masters' best Simulators yet, but probably more suited to the more accomplished game-player." Commodore User gave a much more derisory 31%.

Completing the first overhead course and jumping towards a flag in the second isometric level.

TRIVIA: Hidden inside the game is a bonus title, something Gavin Raeburn did for other Code Masters releases. The hidden game here is called Mr. Naffo's Super Game **SLEEPWALKER** and plays like early Game & Watch title Manhole. There is a choice of three difficulty levels. The sleepwalkers are heading for the gaps in the platforms, so you must move your platform into place to keep them safe and stop them falling into the lava below. The hidden game can be accessed by using a reset switch or an SYS code.

Pressing reset on the Pro Skateboard menu leads you into the hidden Sleepwalker game.

RAD RAMP RACER *Virgin Mastertronic, 1990*

Here is another budget offering, this time from when the company was known as Virgin Mastertronic. On the title screen you can choose the setup - one player as skateboarder versus the computer on a BMX, one player as BMX versus the computer skateboarder, two-player mode, or computer versus computer. You can also press Space to get into the course designer, where you can redesign one of the three different courses included. When you start playing, there is a 2-minute time limit for each course to rack up as many points as you can. This is done by riding over jumps, between flags, doing stunts on the ramps (waggling the stick to earn more points) and collecting flashing bonus objects. It's simply a matter of pressing Fire to move faster, and then up and down to avoid obstacles. While the small sprites are quite nicely animated, the backgrounds are bland (and fall into that Commodore cliché of using lots of brown...) There is little gameplay here and even the course designer is not overly exciting to use. C&VG awarded the C64 version 79%, one percent more than the Spectrum equivalent, saying it was "More colourful than its Speccy counterpart, and just as much fun."ZZAP! were more realistic with 33%, saying "The game's most 'radical' concept is that you sometimes get points for crashing, while the 'bonus' objects are apparently worthless!" The main criticism was how quickly it became repetitive, even if the course designer was easy to use.

The course designer has the level on top and the parts on the bottom, while the skateboarder is falling behind as he bails...

SKATE CRAZY *Gremlin, 1988*

We go onto roller skates for this title, also available on 16-bit. There are two distinct game styles here. Half of the levels are the "Car Park Challenge" set on a large, overhead view that scrolls in multiple directions. Here you must collect up the rubbish and find the flags. Skate between the flashing lines to pass a flag but miss them and you are disqualified. Other skaters, frisbees and marbles will knock you off your feet costing valuable time. To qualify for the next level, you must earn cred (by picking up litter and kicking cans) and points from the judges (by doing stunts off ramps and cleaning up the level). The little judge portraits bottom right will be replaced by numbers as you score. Reach the end of the level and if you have not earned enough, you can make up for it by collecting a set amount of litter in one minute from another overhead section (with random placement of the litter making it more of a challenge). Succeed and there is a small cutscene with a choice - you can skate up a level to keep in the car park, or skate out to the other type of level.

Go through the gate to increase your time remaining, and then choose to stay in the Car Park Challenge or go out to the Championship Course.

These horizontally scrolling levels, the "Championship Course,"are where you must make your way along jumping and ducking obstacles as well as birds that will fly into you and smiling thugs that will cost you a life. You can pick up more litter here, throwing them to hit enemies. The skating action here is a little trickier, alternating left and right presses to speed up depending on the direction you are going. Ramps, ladders, and gaps make it harder, with your momentum being a factor. ZZAP! awarded an impressive 86%, although reviewer Julian Rignall was much more reticent than his two colleagues. The cartoon-style graphics came in for praise, with good music and sound to back it up. The overall assessment was "a smart skate-about which is well worth a look." The Games Machine gave 78%, saying "It certainly has graphic appeal, but gameplay is exceptionally tough, and frustration soon builds up." Finally Commodore User gave a similar 8/10 score and summed it up. "All in all Skate Crazy offers bags of entertainment and represents great value. I'm not going so far as to say you'd be Skate Crazy to miss it, 'cos that sounds crap, and this certainly isn't."

Tripping over an obstacle, and the dude in sunglasses will throw trash at you.

TRIVIA: The large cartoon-like sprites use a technique called "sprite overlay." A high-resolution single colour sprite (the black outline) is placed on top of a multicolour sprite. And in Skate Crazy's case the main player is made up of multiple sprites. The US disk release from Mastertronic allowed you to select the game style from a simple menu before loading, where the original UK release loaded in the Car Park Challenge automatically and only switched to loading the Championship Course when the player selected it after a level.

The game select from the US disk version and picking up litter after missing level 1's judging score.

SKATEBOARD JOUST *Firebird, 1988*

Less death from above, more "death from sideways" in the odd Skateboard Joust.

Another cheap game from the Silverbird budget range, but this time the skateboard theme is quite tenuous. Set in the far future, the only sport left is skateboarding - and you are a competitor. Locked into a series of chambers, waves of enemies enter and must be disposed of by "firing" your skateboard at them. Otherwise contact with the enemies is fatal. (The poorly-drawn enemies are strange, including the Daleks from Doctor Who riding on skateboards and flying turkeys!) Special coins give help, including bonus points and freezing the enemies for a brief time so you can kill them on contact. It is a very dull and repetitive game that is not much fun. The way the player and enemy can "wrap around" the screen edges is difficult to get to grips (especially as you can "drop through" parts of the scenery) and the controls are awkward. The biggest insult is that the quota of enemies to beat on each level resets every time you die, prolonging the agony. Best avoided - it is not "well radical" as the level complete screen says. You can see Mat Corne's video of Skateboard Joust at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVPTunafFQ8

Turkeys and Daleks are just some of the odd enemies you must defeat.

TRIVIA: There were also Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum versions of the game from Firebird. ZZAP! never reviewed the C64 version but the CRASH! review mark of 30% for the Spectrum game sums it up - "Skateboard Joust is another disappointing Silverbird effort, featuring very primitive graphics and minimal sound." Firebird also released a game called Skateboard Kidz on Amstrad CPC and Spectrum, where you negotiate a vertically scrolling obstacle course on a board, but that never got a C64 version either. You would be better off playing the brilliant BMX Kidz - inspired by NES classic ExciteBike - on C64 instead.

This bitmap that appears between games is probably the best aspect of Skateboard Joust...

SKATEBOARD SAM *Tronic Verlag, 1985*

Marc Doinet wrote this early German game. Get on your skateboard, move through the flick-screen forest, and jump over obstacles. It's incredibly simple, with basic presentation, graphics, and sound effects. While I played it for the purposes of this round-up, I would not recommend it. In some ways, it's the ancestor of Pixel City Skater but that game is so much more polished.

It looks very ordinary, plus this jump is going to end in disaster...

TRIVIA: Among Tronic Verlag's other C64 releases are Die Festung (The Fort) where you use cannons to shoot at pirate ships, and Pole Position (nothing to do with the classic Namco / Atari arcade game, but a simple vertically scrolling racing game where its title screen boasts about being in machine code). We will gloss over the dated title Projekt AIDS from 1985, which had good intentions but now feels awkward.

SKATEBOB! *Niklas, 2003 (Minigame 2003 Competition - 4K Category)*

This public domain effort is more of a platform game, an entry into a coding competition. Guide Skatebob the hedgehog left and right as he tries to jump up the moving platforms. Fall more than one level and a life is lost. The closest comparison is to Mastertronic title Zub, although it lacks that game's ability to move a platform you are stood on left and right. For 4K it is an undemanding little title that is worth a few minutes play to see high Bob can get.

Get ready little hedgehog, the background colours change as you get higher.

SKATEBOARDING *KAB Software, 1987*

The title screen of Skateboarding also serves as the menu.

Here is a little-known game from the USA. The main menu has a lengthy list of options, starting with whether you want to play the game or change options. There are three main modes. 1 Player against the computer gives you a time limit (1, 2 or 3 minutes) to earn as many points as possible. 2 Player is first to a fixed number of points (50, 100 or 150). Tag against the computer requires you to keep hold of the "tag" for 1, 2 or 3 minutes to claim victory. The Gravity level from 1 to 5 sets how strong the pull of gravity is, 1 being low and 5 being high. Finally, you can use F1 and F3 to change the colour of the two skaters (their board and shirt). When you start the game, you are shown an empty pool. The skaters enter and start to move around. The drain in the middle opens periodically, swallowing anyone close to it. The gravity setting affects your movement up the sides of the pool, with high/level 5 making things tricky. The vents at the side open to drop oil slicks and black disks that will knock you over, but in one or two player mode they also release coloured disks that can be collected for points. Circling the edge of the pool are yellow dots, and if you touch one you gain more points. You can perform a handplant on the rim of the pool, but do not hold it too long or you will bail. The graphics are not particularly sophisticated and there is limited sound. It is so obscure it is worth trying once to see what it is like.

Avoid the black oil slick and the middle drain, then try to score more than the other player in two-player mode.

TRIVA: KAB stood for Kevin A. Burk, the programmer and creator of Skateboarding. In total the company released three games - Skateboarding, boxing simulation Neutral Corner (in 1985) and Wrestling (1986). This is another unusual game, in that it supported up to four players. This last game also has code word protection, requiring you to look up a number in the manual. Work had begun on a game called Karate, according to Games That Weren't.

SKATE OR DIE! *Electronic Arts, 1987*

The original US gatefold cover and the later UK cassette cover.

After Summer Games and Winter Games were a big hit for Epyx, members of the development team (including Michael Kosaka and Stephen Landrum) moved on to EA and began work on a skateboard-themed compilation of events. The result was the stylish and playable Skate or Die, named after that speech sample in 720 Degrees. The action starts with your skater standing in the middle of town, with Rodney's Skate Shop at the centre. Skate there and you can change your board colour and choose other game options, as well as getting advice from Rodney (who resembles the late stand-up Rodney Dangerfield with a punk hairdo and USMC tattoo...) The player can then skate down a side street to either practice or compete in one or all the five possible events.

Move the cursor around the shop to find some hidden messages from Rodney, then skate the streets to choose your event.

FREESTYLE sees the player get ten "passes" on the half-pipe to perform tricks including ollies, plants, and grinds. The more difficult tricks require more "pumps" of the Fire button in the shaded zones of the pipe. **HIGH JUMP** re-uses the half pipe, challenging you to waggle the stick to gain altitude as measured against the metre stick on the right-hand edge.

It's amusing when your equipment falls off after a fall and tweaking your high jump by pressing Fire can add to your recorded height.

DOWNHILL RACE sees our skater attempting to get through the hazard-filled park, avoiding or jumping over obstacles, skating through a big concrete pipe, and trying to beat the time limit. **DOWNHILL JAM** pits you against Lester or a second player, fighting their way through back alleys. You can punch and kick your opponent to hold them up or force them into obstacles (and there are lots of hidden ways to score more points).

Falling in the pond in the park and crashing onto the cop car in the back streets.

Finally, **POOL JOUST** is a head-to-head challenge in an empty swimming pool. One player has the "boffing stick" and attempts to knock the other player off their board, but if they fail to do it in five passes then control of the stick switches to the other player. This is a lot of fun against the three computer opponents, giving three levels of difficulty - with the young punk Lester (Rodney's son) being the toughest.

Choosing your pool joust opponent, while performing a rail slide can get you out of danger.

The graphics are excellent throughout, with great animation on the sprites and very well-drawn backgrounds. The little touches, such as the half-pipe skater's pads falling off after a heavy fall or the player falling to pieces after skating through a wire fence, are immaculate. Sound is great too. It all starts with the classic intro tune (accompanying the great bitmap picture of a skater) created by Rob Hubbard when he joined EA in the States. This tune is famous for its sampled guitar sounds and is still one of the best-loved SID tunes ever. Each event has its own tune too. Control is sublime and once you learn an event it becomes so much fun trying for higher scores or beating another player.

The classic intro picture, and a poor skater gets shredded by the wire fence.

A true classic from Electronic Arts, ZZAP! 64 awarded it a 92% Sizzler in the Christmas 1987 issue. "Without doubt a brilliant sports simulation, falling short of a higher accolade due solely to the annoyingly slow loading system." Indeed, playing from tape is a painful experience, reloading the menu between events. The disk came in the excellent gatefold packaging - like a vinyl record - that typified early EA games, with photos of the team trying out a skateboard. ACE magazine awarded it 878 out of 1000 in their complicated rating system. The review commented, "There are some stunning graphics and animation on show in Skate or Die. You don't have to be Brain of Britain to compete... but who cares when it's such fun."

TRIVIA #1: Skate Or Die spawned a whole series of games, including a Konami LCD handheld game. The original Skate Or Die also appeared on Amstrad CPC, Apple II GS, DOS, NES and ZX Spectrum. The NES game eventually appeared on the Wii Virtual Console. Follow-up Ski Or Die was not as well received with its snow-themed events, but was available on C64, Amiga and DOS. Skate or Die 2: The Search for Double Trouble hit NES in 1991, with a ramp event and a skateboard-based adventure game where you must build a half-pipe in your community with help from Lester. Skate Or Die: Tour De Thrash (Game Boy, 1991) took the ramp mode from Skate Or Die 2 and added the Thrash Tour championship mode. The final Game Boy title, Skate Or Die: Bad 'N Rad from 1991, mixed between side-scrolling obstacle courses and overhead viewed levels in more of a run & gun style.

The cover of the NES version and the Konami handheld.

TRIVIA #2: In 2002 Criterion Games were given permission to create a 3D game based on Skate Or Die aimed at PS2 and Xbox. However, difficulties in working with Electronic Arts over the next 12 months saw the project canceled in favour of working on Burnout 3: Takedown.

SKATE ROCK aka AWESOME EARL IN SKATE ROCK *Bubble Bus, 1987*

The original Bubble Bus cover and the later Ricochet re-release.

This is a contemporary of both 720 Degrees and Paperboy, taking a horizontally scrolling side-on view of the action. The options on the title screen allow you to adjust the time limit (beginners only, average skaters or thrasher!) and the "trucks" of your skateboard (between loose, normal, and tight) which affects your turning speed. The aim in each of the ten levels is to collect the eight flags and reach the finish line before time runs out. (There is a plot about local skateboard gangs falling out, but it means little). You also have a number of lives. Hitting the kerb, a car, a pedestrian, or a fellow skater will cost a life. There are also dogs that will bite you, again costing a life. Some flags are on the path, meaning you need to find a gap or a ramp to help you get there. Oddly, you also lose a life if you are jumping and your board hits something. Turning left or right while pressing Fire slides the board to rotate quicker. Once you have completed a course, you can select it from the title screen to play in any order. Any time remaining when you cross the finish is added to the time limit for the next level you play.

Altering options on Skate Rock's menu screen and jumping over a ramp on course 2.

The ZZAP! reviewers had a mixed opinion of this, commenting that the graphics were ugly but that there was fun to be had.

The result was a 66% rating that may have put buyers off (as it did to me). Having played it years later I found it quite good fun if repetitive, but once you are used to the jumping mechanic even the obstacle-strewn later levels can be completed. The ZZAP! review called it "A rather enjoyable skateboarding game - worth a look" and I concur.Commodore User's 6/10 review was similar in tone. "Skate Rock is enjoyable, it won't take you long to complete, it won't make you faint at its breath-taking graphics, it won't make you want to dance to its astonishing soundtrack, it will however give you a few hours... days even, of entertainment."

TRIVIA: UK company Bubble Bus was based in Kent and published more than 20 games for the C64. Their best titles were Starquake (converted from the Spectrum original by Steve Crow) and Wizard's Lair (based on the Ultimate Play The Game title Atic Atac). It's also worth checking out Tazz, an unofficial conversion of the Stern arcade game Tazz Mania - a Robotron-style maze game where the walls gradually close in on the player. The budget rerelease for C64 was known as Skate Rock Simulator on the Ricochet label, while the DOS conversion was "Awesome Earl: Starring in Skate Rock!" There was an Amstrad CPC release, but the Spectrum version was never finished despite being advertised.

Awesome Earl cover art and a CGA screenshot from DOS.

SKATIN' USA aka Superkid II *Atlantis, 1991*

This is the follow-up to Superkid, an earlier budget title from Atlantis. Tom Essex has woken up, but his superpowers are gone! How is he going to clean up the streets of New York? He jumps on a skateboard and grabs his trusty catapult, using it to shoot the thugs. Tom only has limited ammo, and any contact with the enemies will cost him energy. Food will top it up again. To complete the level, Tom must collect enough dollar bills to light up the letters of the words SKATIN' USA in the status panel, then reach the far-right hand end of the level before time runs out. Reach that in time, and he gets to play a bonus round collecting extra points.Control is awkward, with Tom slipping off the ramps. There is no way to jump over obstacles too, which feels odd in a skateboarding game. The music is poor, and backgrounds are very ordinary. The sprites are small and indistinct, although the ZAP! for being hit/hitting an enemy looks all right. There would go on to be a third game in the series, known as Superkid in Space. The trilogy was originally created on the Spectrum by the Shaw Brothers and then converted to the other formats by Atlantis. ZZAP! awarded Skatin' USA just 36% in February 1991. "As with Superkid, there's a severe lack of variety with later levels having only different platform layouts - no new features whatsoever."

The tiny baddies run around the platforms, and getting hit is shown by the ZAP!

TRIVIA: Atlantis Software were formed in London in 1984 and went out of business in 1992. Many of their games were never reviewed in the mainstream magazines - either the publisher did not send them for review, or space restrictions meant the (generally) poor-quality Atlantis efforts were not worth reviewing. Superkid, for example, did not get a full ZZAP! review at the time. One of the more intriguing titles Atlantis did release was Dungeons, Amethysts, Alchemists 'n' Everything. This text adventure was created with the Graphic Adventure Creator utility, giving it a mix of text and graphics for some locations. It was marketed as being for adults only, using adult humour for its puzzles.

STREET SURFER *Entertainment USA, 1986*

Here is a game that was published by Mastertronic under its USA label for imported games, originally created by Sculptured Software and then "enhanced" in the UK by Binary Design. The player gets on their skateboard and rolls through traffic. The aim is to pick up empty bottles and throw them in the recycling bin at the end of the level. The distance left to the bin is shown at the bottom of the screen, along with your health - which is depleted by being run over or hitting obstacles such as potholes and road signs. Riding on the verges too long will slow you down and then make you fall. Fortunately, you can jump over the potholes by pressing Fire. You also must watch out for chickens crossing the road, which will knock you off your board. The player can also grab full drink bottles from passing cars, drinking the contents to refill their health, and gaining another empty bottle.For every bottle you put in the bin you get a large boost of health too. The 3D effect is reasonable, and the graphics are OK. The David Whittaker tune is good, changing speed as the player does, and there are basic but acceptable sound effects (cars sound their horns at you if you are in the way, for example). In a macabre twist, when you run out of health the skateboard rolls on without you, playing the Last Post. It can get a bit frustrating when stuck in traffic that runs you over repeatedly and there is not a lot of depth. With practice a game can last for ages, as you replenish your health and keep going, and I found it fun. ZZAP!'s 29% review calling it "one of Mastertronic's weakest releases" feels harsh. Commodore User's 7/10 rating was much better, calling the sound "a funky little ditty" and saying, "Street Surfer is reasonable fun but like most cheapos, popularity will quickly start to slide."

Drinking a bottle you picked up from a car, and then throwing the empties into the bin.

TRIVIA: Do you know that Zombie Nation track they play at sports events? That started life as a David Whittaker tune called Star Dust in the game Lazy Jones (check it out, a clever compilation of mini-games inspired by arcade games - each with their own subtune). Kernkraft 4000 would take the basic riff and turn it into a dance hitin 1999 - and then tried to claim ownership of the track, before paying a (small) undisclosed sum to settle the court case. Listen to the original here, with a clever oscilloscope view and hear the Street Surfer tune here.

OTHER SKATING TITLES

Sk8!, public domain, 2008 - one of eight minigames on the R8ro! Cartridge compilation from Simon Quernhorst.

Skate and Destroy, Bombjack Ltd, 1988 - simple scrolling game created with The Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit.

Skateboarder, Mastertronic, 1984 - early game from David & Richard Darling (the founders of Code Masters), a sample game included with their Games Creator software. Skate along a street jumping obstacles.

SkateRockMan, unknown publisher, 1988 - Italian bootleg of Metrocross preserved by GameBase64.

Skate Wars aka SkateBall, Ubi Soft, 1989/1990 - violent future sport with players on ice skates. Scored 45% in ZZAP! and just 42% on its budget rerelease.

Skating Champ, Super Game 2000 Nuova Serie, 1989 - Italian bootleg of Skate Or Die!

Superman Sam - The Skateboardin' Man, M&M Software1985 - very odd and obscure BASIC game I only discovered while researching this article. Check out a [YouTube video by sairuk](#).

TRIVIA: In Italy, the copyright rules were different and there were companies publishing bootlegs for sale in newsagents and other shops. These would typically be in the form of a compilation tape with multiple games, the names and loading screen changed and other graphics altered. The manual would be translated, often badly, and the plot / character names changed too. It was well into the 1990s before the Italian software industry began to grow and take copyright seriously.

And If you are interested in more skateboarding games, check out the Skateboarding Games Timeline at https://timeline.mameau.com/ This site is aiming to catalogue every game that features skateboarding, gathering images and video footage.

When I started this article, it was supposed to be a bit of fun - I would sit down and play a bit of Skate or Die and the other games I remembered, look up one or two more and round out a nice article for The Retrogaming Times. Its ended up at over 7000 words, 19 games and more than 200 captured images! But I think you'll agree that it stands as a comprehensive round-up of skateboarding (and roller-skating games) on the C64 and it was fun to read.

Don's Desk - Atari 5200 Zone

by Donald Lee

I write this on a beautiful Sunday Easter afternoon here in the San Francisco Bay Area. Continuing on the theme for 2022, I am revisiting some of my past columns. This month, I am revisiting my Atari 5200 Zone column. I actually had already mentally planned this article a couple of months ago. However, some additional ideas popped into my head and I am making some additions to this month's column. In a past column I mentioned that I would write about the **Atari Flashback Classics** that I purchased for my Nintendo Switch. I don't remember how much I wrote about the collection but let me revisit my rationale for picking up the collection. This collection included many Atari arcade and Atari 2600 games. That normally wouldn't be a big draw. While I liked my share of Atari arcade games, I didn't play the Atari 2600 at all. The Atari 5200 was my first game system but surprisingly, this collection included a good number of Atari 5200 games. The biggest draw was RealSports Baseball for the 5200.

As most people reading my Apple II Incider columns know, I had a love of baseball games. I've played my share of computer and arcade baseball games through the years, and today as I have Super Mega Baseball and The Show for my Xbox systems and some others for my Switch. Additionally while I was trying out Real Sports Baseball for the 5200, I got into the Tempest arcade game. Since the collection included both the arcade game and the 2600 version of Tempest, I will discuss both. Lastly, my late addition to the column is to talk about the JUM52 emulator. I've probably talked about it in the past but will revisit this month. Let's get started.

RealSports Baseball - Atari 5200 (via Atari Flashback Classics on Nintendo Switch)

Trying any game via emulation is a challenge and RealSports Baseball was no different. The game was built to map to the unique Atari 5200 controller and adapting the various buttons to a modern system's controllers definitely made for a different experience. It took some time to figure things out but it wasn't too bad. The impressive thing about RealSports Baseball for the 5200 was that you could see the whole field. The graphics are nothing special if you compare to the modern systems but at the time, it was pretty darn good.

To me the pitching was the easier to figure out. You actually could select the different types of pitches to throw which was a pretty cool thing back in the 1980's. Fielding was initially a challenge but once I figured out how the game worked, I was able to field reasonably well but hitting on the other hand was a challenge. I knew how to swing but with the perspective of the game, it was difficult to know what pitches were being thrown. So while I got some hits off the CPU, I didn't hit all that much. Out of the games I played against the CPU, I did not win one. May just be a matter of practice but I didn't have time to figure out all the nuances. One thing that was cool about Real Sports Baseball was that it had voice synthesis. A good change of pace from the usual sound effects of a video game. The game also had some limitations, I noticed there were only right hander batters and you had no player names or a roster to pick from. So effectively, you were playing an arcade baseball game with nameless players and thus no managerial options like switch pitchers or pinch hitters. But in reading the manual, there were options to steal bases or reposition fielders that I didn't get into. All in all, if I had played Real Sports Baseball back when I was young, I may have gotten into all the options and figured it out. With today's games, I may not revisit RealSports Baseball all too often but it was definitely worth a look just to see what I missed.

Tempest - Arcade and Atari 2600 (via Atari Flashback Classics on Nintendo Switch)

When I picked up the Atari Flashback Collection on my Switch, I went through all the games I was familiar with. That even included going through the granddaddy of all arcade games, Pong, but I played the more modern games like Asteroids, Centipede and Missile Command. It may surprise many folks that one game I did not play was Tempest. To be honest, *I never played Tempest* when I was young. Tempest was released in 1981 and I don't think I was playing at arcade until a few years later. For whatever reason Tempest was not a game I played, although I played the other usual suspects like Pac-Man and Galaga among others. However what finally made me play Tempest were the various articles online about the prototype Atari 5200 version that was discovered some years ago. It was an exciting find though the prototype wasn't playable. Then I saw that the original programmer (with some help) had actually finished the prototype. So that got me thinking that I needed to give Tempest a shot. Since it was part of the collection, I jumped into the arcade version of Tempest. It took me a while to figure out the gameplay but I have to say I was impressed. The graphics, sound and gameplay were great. I'm not sure if my Nintendo Switch super controller correctly mimics the original experience of playing Tempest in the arcade but I had no complaints.

The game is fairly hard after Level 5, I am able to start from Level 1 and get up to around Level 6 but hard to advance. I started at the higher levels to test myself out and I am occasionally able to get by the higher levels once or twice but tough to advance beyond that. I'm sure there is a strategy but I didn't look into it much. I just played the game straight up and had great fun with it. if you've never played Tempest it's worth a look. Heck, if time permits, I may try to find Tempest at an arcade and try it with the original controls to see how I do. At some point while playing the arcade version of Tempest, I noticed that the Atari 2600 version was included in the Flashback collection. I didn't know what to expect as I never even

knew there was a 2600 version that was released. Well, if you have never played the 2600 version, I would suggest you stick with the emulated version of Tempest or the completed 5200 version. It's unrealistic to expect the Atari 2600 to replicate the visuals the Tempest arcade game had but this release is nowhere close. I did play the game a few times and it was ok for what it is but if you want a more realistic game experience, stick with the original or the 5200 version. Maybe someone like Champ Games can make a better version of Tempest for 2600 fans!

JUM52 5200 Emulator
https://www.bannister.org/software/jum52.htm

As I was about to write this article today, I was reminded that I still had a version of the JUM52 emulator on my iMac computer. I've had the emulator for a long time now. In fact, I believe I used the emulator to play some 5200 games which I may have talked about in past Atari Zone columns. As I was writing about Atari games this month, I decided to boot the emulator up and see what I could still do with it. The good news is the emulator (version 1.1.2) still works. I tried running Pac-Man, Defender, Space Dungeon and Beamrider without issues. However, I could not get the Lucasfilm games (Rescue on Fractalus and Ballblazer) working, the theme music and title screens displayed but I couldn't start game. RealSports Baseball also did not appear playable as well. Controls were a bit hit or miss. JUM52 is defaulted to keyboard controls and not joysticks or game pads. For Defender, which requires a lot of different buttons, I couldn't quite figure out which button to use for the smart bombs. Space Dungeon is a two controller game (ala Robotron 2084). But JUM52 didn't seem to support the setup. Thus I could only control the character and fire in the same direction I was moving which is a big disadvantage. But knowing the emulator still works, I can try out some of the games (like Pac-Man, among others) that may have simpler controls and get some enjoyment of them if I wish. Worth a shot of any 5200 fans who want to fire up some old games.

As I mentioned Space Dungeon, I also wanted to say that if you have not played Space Dungeon before, it's definitely a game worth trying out. If you liked the two joystick controls of Robotron, Space Dungeon will be a similar experience, if a tad less action oriented and more strategic oriented. It's a shame Space Dungeon never really took off in the arcades, but there are quite a few comments of how Space Dungeon for the 5200 was one of the better games for the system. It's a shame I can't quite get the full experience using the JUM52 emulator. I've seen Taito release some retrogaming classics collections recently but haven't seen Space Dungeon included. It would be great to get Taito to release a proper version of Space Dungeon to play on today's systems.

That's all for this time. See you in a couple!

RetroTINK 2X-MINI - A Quality HD Converter For the Rest of Us

by David Lundin, Jr.

I think a lot of retrogamers, especially those who grew up with what are now deemed retrogames, keep at least one CRT television around. Large or small, high end studio electronics or a thrift store beater, old game systems generally work better on old displays. Some of this has to do with input latency, some of it with visual tricks to utilize the technology of the time, and some of us just think CRTs look better - myself included. While modern televisions will take legacy inputs they often do the bare minimum to display them - resulting in blurry visuals, lots of dot crawl, and input lag that can make games completely unplayable. A number of HD converters have been on the market for years, most of them hobbyist products that have grown to various levels of professional operations. These range from cheap sub-$30 boxes that offer little improvement to $300+ solutions that will accept virtually any input and offer enhancement features. The upper spectrum of these can be a pretty big investment, with limited after-purchase support and an expectation that the buyer has an understanding of how their individual consoles output signal. Additionally these have usually been marketed toward retrogamers that are looking for the absolute best output possible, for use with modified consoles paired with higher-end cables. While it's great this is an option, and the push at the top has allowed a market to manifest around the technology, it's not for everyone. At the end of the day there are a lot of people who would simply like to play a Super Nintendo or Saturn or PlayStation 2 on their regular modern TV, both with ease and without breaking the bank - myself included, again. Enter the RetroTINK 2X-MINI, a small HD converter that offers excellent performance with stock consoles.

The RetroTINK 2X-MINI package includes a 2X-MINI in a color of your choice, a micro USB cable for power, and a Nintendo 64 S-Video cable

Founded by Mike Chi, RetroTINK is a boutique electronics company that has become very well-known for creating quality HD converters for classic video game systems, beginning in 2018 with the RetroTINK-2X. The RetroTINK products that followed featured professional injection molded enclosures, compact designs, and straightforward features that simply worked right out of the package. If you were running component or RGB these were ideal solutions but for those who top out at S-Video or play a lot of older systems via composite, they were a bit of overkill. The 2X-MINI seems tailored for this demographic, featuring an even more compact design and allowing composite or S-Video to be converted to HDMI in a small and more affordable package. It's also available in a number of different colors.

With the 2X-MINI you get the converter, a micro USB power cable, and an N64 S-Video cable. The 2X-MINI is ideally

powered off a USB port on the TV and I've had no problems powering the unit off such. The front of the device has inputs for S-Video, composite video, and right and left audio. The back is where the USB power plugs in, a full size HDMI output port, and a button to activate a smoothing filter. I generally have the smoothing turned off but it's nice that the option is there and that it is very easy to toggle. The right side of the device has a small switch to set the comb filter between "Auto" and "Retro." These don't make a tremendous difference but most systems seem to look a bit better with it set to Auto, which in my opinion makes the colors pop a bit more. However I have noticed that some NES games shutter a bit in Auto mode, where having the 2X-MINI set to Retro remedies the issue. An example is with Little Nemo: The Dream Master, where jumping down the waterfall in the first level will sometimes cause the image to freeze and then catch up when in Auto but has no problem when set to Retro. This is on an AV Famicom with standard composite output.

2X-MINI is very compact but features all the connections you need to get your classic gaming hardware looking great via HDMI

The included S-Video cable is very nice and although I'm not big on the N64, it works great with Super Nintendo, providing a beautiful image. I honestly can't believe how good Super Nintendo looks and plays on a modern TV on the 2X-MINI with the included S-Video cable. I've also been impressed with AV Famicom and PC Engine over composite, PlayStation and PlayStation 2 over first party S-Video, and Saturn over composite. What I like most is how simple usage is - just plug it in and go - no settings to mess with, no configurations to cycle through. It's as easy as plugging into the TV but the performance is so much better, both in visual quality and especially in input latency. I've been able to play rhythm games without any problems and that alone confirms to me that the 2X-MINI has very minor real world latency. The only tiny complaint I can wage against the 2X-MINI is that it's very lightweight and the curved shape of the bottom means it slides around very easily. I ended up putting a few rubber pads on the bottom to keep it planted but this depends on how you integrate it into your setup.

Super Nintendo on HDMI, connected to the 2X-MINI using the included S-Video cable with a Super Wild Card DX, something I still get mileage out of

Direct list price is $89.99 and while I will admit that's still a pretty decent spend, for the usage it's going to unlock I'd say it's worth the money. Of course a lot of that depends on your retrogaming needs. If you have high-end component cables, modded systems and the like, the 2X-Pro at $129.99 may be a better fit you. That's beyond how I like to enjoy my retrogames, so the 2X-MINI falls right in line with my usage. Really that's what I see the 2X-MINI as, an HD converter for your general retrogamer or someone who has been put off by how their old games look and play when connected to a modern TV. This particular product isn't for those seeking the absolute high end, rather it's for those who want to play some games and have them look and respond as originally intended. Additionally the service from RetroTINK was top-notch. The 2X-MINI was out of stock when I went to order so I put myself on the notification list, got a notification a couple weeks later, placed my order and it reached me in less than a week. They were out of stock again pretty quickly after that so if you can't get it right now, get on the notification list.

Order a 2X-MINI directly from RetroTINK: https://www.retrotink.com/product-page/2x-mini

SMS Memories: Around the World in 80 Games

by Mateus Fedozzi

There's a fact about me that always amazes those who hear me speaking English: I've never left my own country. I mean, not physically... The Sega Master System showed me the whole world even before I got my permanent teeth. And not because it's the American version of a Japanese machine which made a lot of success in Europe and South America, or because it had games made in Japan which were modeled after the American market sensibilities, and later in the machine's shelf life modeled after the European market sensibilities. No, those are things that I would learn later, when I started researching about the history of my dearest dear. As I kid, the Master System took me around the globe in a much more direct way: by showing me infinite cultures and colors in amazing 8-bit scenery (and gameplay).

Obviously, the sports games are among those that took me for these worldwide spins. **World Grand Prix**, with tracks that are based on those from the 1976 Formula 1 season, made me drool over such sights as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Big Ben in London and Mount Fuji in Japan. World Games, with uncommon sports that are only practiced in specific parts of the globe, made me realize how different the peoples of our little planet are, as are the places they inhabit. The Great series of sports games reinforced this sense of foreignness by always bringing countries where the sport in question was famous and played by most people (Great Soccer has Brazil and Argentina, **Great Volleyball** has Cuba and China, and so on).

But not only the sports games were Great (pun intended) to make me travel to remote lands. The platform games were also Great in fulfilling this mission: from North America's darkest forest in Ren & Stimpy, to a lost Tasmanian valley in, huh, Taz-Mania, passing through all of Europe and North Africa in Astérix and visiting China in Kung Fu Kid, besides Japan in games like Kenseiden, there was no geography left untouched by the Sega and Sega-licensed developers. It helped that most Master System games adhered to the same art style, in part because of the hardware limitations, in part because there were really just a handful of Master System artists and programmers. This made all the traveling more consistent.

And I couldn't finish this article without writing about the mother of all world-traveling lovers born in the 80's. The one which made Apple II-infused students learn that the country of Peru is smaller than Alaska and that the capital of Rwanda is the busy Kigali while they searched for the elusive mistress of crime, the unreachable, untouchable Carmen Sandiego. She landed on the Master System with an incredible version of her game, one which let you walk across the landscapes, not only read about them. It was truly wonderful, reading about the countries, studying about them, and then finally visiting them and falling in love with their unique building styles and sky colors. **Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?** took me to places I'll never forget and made me forever love the alien, the unique. That's a great legacy.

Caught On Film - Sonic the Hedgehog 2
2 Fast 2 Furryious

by Dan Pettis

The first Sonic the Hedgehog movie was something of a sleeper hit. Released on Valentine's Day 2020, a few weeks before the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic closed most movie theaters, it made over $300 million world wide and became the last movie many of us saw in theaters for a while. Capitalizing on that success, Paramount Pictures and Sega quickly made a sequel, the new film Sonic 2, and it recently sped into theaters this April, just over two years after the release of the first movie. Freed from the pressure of building Sonic's universe and introducing the character to mainstream audiences, the second film expands the amount of scope, scale and amount of fuzzy characters by introducing Sonic's trusty sidekick fox Tails, and his former rival turned ally, the red echidna Knuckles. The film also doles out lots more Sonic easter eggs and plenty of references to the original Genesis video games that longtime fans are sure to enjoy. It may not be a perfect movie, but is a fun, family friendly film that kids and their parents raised on the 16-bit games are sure to enjoy.

Sonic And Knuckles square off in a match of power versus speed

When the movie opens we pick up immediately where the last Sonic movie left off, with Jim Carrey's Dr. Robotnik, featuring a much bushier mustache and newly shaved head, stranded on a distant planet full of mushrooms. It isn't long before the evil genius devises a way to get back to Earth and attempt revenge against the speedy blue hedgehog who defeated him in the last movie. Robotnik is not alone in his evil plot, as he tricks Knuckles into helping him try to defeat Sonic and recover a gigantic Chaos Emerald also located on Earth. Meanwhile Sonic is still living in the cleverly named rural town of Green Hills by day with his adopted human parents but sloppily trying to fight crime as a vigilante in bigger cities at night. When Robotnik crashes into his house with Knuckles in tow, Sonic escapes with the help of Miles "Tails" Prower and the pair try to find the emerald before Robotnik can use it to take over the universe.

As you can probably tell from the plot, which mainly takes its inspiration from the third Sonic game, the film goes for the classic "bigger is better" Hollywood approach to sequels. After the surprise success of the last movie, the film seems to have been given an exponentially bigger budget by Paramount Studios. This allows for much bigger action set pieces, more varied locations, more furry friends and foes, and a much bigger climactic show down. However, some of the small town charms and intimately lower stakes of the first film are lost in this attempt to make the movie into a much bigger blockbuster. The main humans, Sonic's adopted parents, played by James Marsden and Tika Sumpter settle into their roles as Sonic straight men and are wisely sidelined for a bulk of the movie, as they are sent to Hawaii for a wedding. For a bulk of the middle of the movie the focus is wisely put on our furry friends and Carrey's sadistically manic and whacky take on Dr. Robotnik. Appropriately the film whisks the characters and the audience quickly from location to location as the race for the emerald is on. One trip the movie makes involves an embarrassing dance contest that probably should have been left off of the itinerary.

Dr. Robotnik sips on a latte in a the perfectly named Mean Bean coffee shop

Once again, Carrey steals the show as the over the top maniacal mad man Dr. Robotnik. Playing a mix of his classic Riddler and Grinch performances, and wearing a much more video game accurate costume, he unleashes a vintage 1990s Carrey style performance, clearly relishing the chance to let his whacky side shine through. Sonic is once again winningly voiced by Ben Schwartz as a hyper active and bratty only child. Although Sonic spouts a few too many movie references for my liking, this modernized sassy version of the blue blur clearly connects with today's audiences full of children. In an inspired move of casting, Knuckles is voiced here by Idris Elba. His deep gruff voice is the perfect pairing for Sonic 2's take on Knuckles: a blockheaded but boastful warrior. This is played for many big laughs, giving Knuckles an almost Buddy The Elf style lack of understanding of human customs. This is a good omen for the Paramount Plus Knuckles TV series that is currently in the works.

Meanwhile, in another sign of faithfulness to the games, Tails is effectively voiced here by longtime Sonic video game actress Colleen O'Shaughnessey. She plays Tails here as an extremely smart, bright, and faithful Sonic fanboy. Lee Najdoub also drums up a few laughs in the return of Robotnik's lackey sidekick created for these movies, Agent Stone. Najdoub takes a lot of funny verbal abuse from Carrey's character, but just like Mr. Smithers from the Simpsons, he can't help but love his terrible boss.

Sonic and Tales visit a mysterious temple

Although there have been some commercially and critically successful video game adaptations lately, the bar is still set pretty low. This movie clears that low bar easily and delivers a much bigger movie when compared to the original. It's a crowd pleaser stuffed full of lots of great references to the classic games and other Sonic media that long-time fans are sure to get a real kick out of. The success of the first movie seems to have emboldened the creative team, and the movie goes in weirder and wilder directions. While it doesn't always work out, and relies on maybe a bit too much potty humor, adults will surely find this movie to be perfectly acceptable family entertainment. Which is perfect, since many of the kids of the 90s who grew up on the Sega games surely have kids and a family of their own now. Judging by a post credit scene, there is lots more live action Sonic to come and hopefully the creative team can build on the success of this movie to deliver another winning Sonic Adventure.

Super Mario Bros. 2 - East Meets West and Back

by George "mecha" Spanos

Shigeru Miyamoto's contributions to the video game industry span many decades. His journey began with Donkey Kong, an emergency maneuver to overcome Nintendo's failed Radar Scope release in the United States. The game had surging popularity during the arcade Golden Age, spawning sequels with Donkey Kong Jr. and Donkey Kong 3 later. The original game's player character, known as Jumpman, would later get a name and an identity in a future release called Mario Bros. A 2-player head-to-head game inspired by Williams' Joust had two plumber brothers facing off against an array of baddies in sewers. Soon after though, Miyamoto would then go on to create Super Mario Bros., a side-scrolling platforming game that expanded the brothers' adventures into a world called the Mushroom Kingdom. The game was released in 1985 to coincide with the North American release of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and in Japan for the Family Computer (Famicom). A resounding smash hit around the globe, and what put the NES on the map in a murky consumer climate in the wake of the Video Game Crash of 1983, lots of potential for alternate versions and future sequels emerged. Just prior in 1984, Nintendo had released a new arcade platform known as the Vs. System, which consisted of a game motherboard with modular capabilities to switch games for less cost than that of a traditional arcade kit. Vs. Super Mario Bros. was released in 1986 and received a few marked changes from the console version of the game, notably ramping up the difficulty in some levels to improve earnings potential for arcade operators. It was there the seed for the next game in the series was planted.

Japanese advertisement for Super Mario Bros. 2

Super Mario Bros. 2 (Japan)

Nintendo went forward in 1986 with a new Mario game on their Famicom Disk System (FDS), a console that utilized proprietary floppy disks rather than conventional cartridges sold only in Japan. While in the original game Mario and Luigi contained identical gameplay attributes, the new game gave them unique traction and jump heights. In the new game, Mario retained his normal jump height but had better traction when running. Luigi on the other hand received his now-trademark higher jumps but at the penalty of slipping around on surfaces in the game. Another change is the ability to choose which character to play as, Mario or Luigi, as the game lacked an alternating 2-player mode. Besides being built in the same engine as the original game and mostly looking visually the same with minor aesthetic changes (the clouds and bushes have eyes

now), the game is probably most known for is its increased difficulty over its predecessor. The concept for making a harder game came when the Nintendo R&D4 team that made the original game were retooling levels for added challenge, or effectively to make players lose and drop more money in to keep playing. Miyamoto and his team believed the added challenge was more fun and wished to make a game for more experienced players. While not quite to the absurdity of Super Mario Maker or Kaizo Mario Bros., it was chock full of falling into bottomless pits and getting bombarded with enemies. Adding to the difficulty, the new game added another Mushroom to go along with super power or 1ups, with the Poison Mushroom. Looking incredibly innocent in appearance, touching the Poison Mushroom results in an immediate loss of a life no matter how powered up the player is. The game also extended beyond 8 worlds, World 9 being accessible if no Warp Zones are used, and Worlds A-D if you complete the game 8 times (represented by stars on the title screen for each completion). Also, speaking of Warp Zones, there is an incentive to NOT try to find them, as players would be accustomed to taking them to advance further in the game faster, but here there are some that go backwards too. In all, the second iteration of Super Mario Bros. in Japan would effectively become its Master Levels compilation. The North American market would ultimately not even know this game existed for about seven more years, however.

Super Mario Bros. 2 (North America / Europe)

While Japan's Super Mario Bros. 2 was in the can already, Nintendo had already begun making Super Mario Bros. 3. Slated for release in Japan in 1988, North America didn't have a second game yet. Nintendo of America's Howard Phillips tested games from Japan to determine if they were viable for the United States market to consume and deemed the game cruel and too difficult. Within the scope also of the United States still rebounding from the Video Game Crash of 1983, the game looking virtually the same as Super Mario Bros. and advances in visuals would've been seen as a turn-off. In Japan, Nintendo had hired a new designer named Kensuke Tanabe to join Miyamoto's R&D4 team. The team being encouraged by Miyamoto to be creative and come up with new fun gameplay ideas, Tanabe experimented with a new vertical scrolling gameplay mechanic. Deeming the concept too much for the NES hardware to handle and not fun to play, the prototype was shelved. Nintendo engaged in a deal with Fuji TV to produce a tie-in game for their upcoming Summer 1987 festival, Dream Factory. Fuji TV supplied a sheet with characters to implement into a game, and the prototype was resurrected into a new game titled Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic. The game featured four selectable characters, each with different speed, strength, and jump attributes, with the ability to pick up objects and throw them at enemies in contrast to the older Mario games, which consisted of mostly squashing enemies. With Doki Doki Panic complete and being a success in Japan, Nintendo submitted the game to Nintendo of America with an inquiry of whether the game, with Mario characters, would be suitable for sale in the United States market. The company finally had a solution to their missing second game in North America and Europe, releasing in October 1988.

The Localizations

Nintendo released the Super Mario Bros. anthology titled Super Mario All-Stars in 1993, one of the hallmarks of their "The Best Play Here!" campaign (the somewhat failed precursor to the following "Play It Loud!" campaign). Featuring graphics modernized to look more in line with their previous Super Nintendo launch title Super Mario World, it was probably about the closest thing you could get to a "remaster" back in the early 1990s. It featured Super Mario Bros. 1-3 and an additional game called The Lost Levels, which was the Japanese version of Super Mario Bros. 2. The name was quite cryptic because without any real internet to speak of then, or perhaps lacking a Nintendo Power subscription, there was no way to really tell the origin of where this game came from. Unlike the other games in All-Stars, The Lost Levels has a more comprehensive save system in that it saves by world and level (eg. World 1-3) as opposed to just the last world played, to aid somewhat with the increased difficulty. Before the widespread advent of emulators that would follow later, this was the only way to play the game in the United States, making it a novel selling point to buy All-Stars. All-Stars topped 10 million sales, while the original FDS Super Mario Bros. 2 from 1986 reached 2.5 million.

With Super Mario Bros. 3 on the horizon in Japan in 1988, Doki Doki Panic served as the perfect foil for North America's needs for a second Mario game. It was localized replacing its Yume Kojo storybook characters with Mario, Luigi, Toad, and Princess Toadstool. Several graphical elements were altered from the strictly Arabian locales of Doki Doki Panic and into more familiar items from the Mario universe, such as the POW blocks (from Mario Bros.) or Star power-ups for invincibility. One of the boss characters, Mouser, appeared three times in Doki Doki Panic, but in the retooled Western release the third encounter was replaced with a new boss, Clawgrip. To properly complete Doki Doki Panic and see the game's ending would require beating all the levels with all four characters, this limitation was removed in the United States version. One of the most important gameplay changes was the addition of running, which was absent from Doki Doki Panic, making some of the more difficult jumps easier to perform. With 3.5 million units sold in the United States by 1990, the game was a huge success. While Japanese players had access to Doki Doki Panic, they didn't have the retooled and improved game to play. It would see a special release in Japan under the title Super Mario USA in 1992, thus totally bringing both variants of Super Mario Bros. 2 literally full circle. The game proved so popular around the world that it saw another re-release as Super Mario Advance for the Game Boy Advance in 2001 adding a multitude of new features and characters. Depending which side of the world you were on, you had a different Super Mario Bros. 2 experience. Once isolated, both flavors crossed hemispherical barriers to cross into other markets and continue to be debated in various media still to this day. Shigeru Miyamoto continues to be a force in the industry, its been fun reflecting on a couple bumps in his proverbial roadmap along the way.

Popful Mail (Sega CD) - The Pinnacle of a Platform

by David Lundin, Jr.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that Sega CD was a platform that never really found its footing in any region. A quick glance at the library reveals its bulk to be made up of not just poorly realized games - but poorly realized games on *expensive* hardware. However among all those horrible live action video games there were a few titles that genuinely shined and restored some luster to the early promise of CD based console gaming. Magical Fantasy Adventure Popful Mail was originally released in 1991 on the PC-8801 platform in Japan by RPG powerhouse Falcom. The title did well enough that it was soon ported to other platforms, one of which was the Sega Mega CD in 1994. This version was later translated and released in the United States on the Sega CD platform a year later. The game was completely reworked for the Mega CD / Sega CD and large, detailed sprites replaced the tiny characters of the earlier releases. The changes didn't stop there, as virtually every gameplay mechanic was reworked, with the resulting game becoming a fast action platformer that played much smoother. The Sega CD version was also the only Popful Mail game to be officially translated into English. Not only is it the best in the series, it also makes a good argument for owning a Sega CD.

Popful Mail is a cute little female elf with a rather large sword. Although quite skilled in battle, she is also horrible at her job as a bounty hunter. Rather than going after small bounties, Mail is always looking for the fastest way to make as much cash as possible, which usually leads to her biting off more than she can chew. The game opens with her in pursuit of Nuts Cracker, a mechanical villain with a knack for manufacturing explosives. However just before Mail can capture Nuts Cracker he detaches his head, which works like a makeshift grenade, and throws it at her to cause a distraction. With Nuts once again getting away, the discouraged Mail takes his head into town hoping that she can at least get something for her troubles. Asking a shopkeeper where she may inquire about large bounties leads her to the town square where a recent posting has been made. A bounty of two million gold has been placed on the evil magician Muttonhead. Unable to resist the call of big money, Mail sets off to track down Muttonhead and make herself filthy rich.

As Mail progresses on her quest she will gather the help of a wizard named Tatt and a small winged creature that goes by Gaw. The game plays like a traditional side scrolling hack and slash with a lot of platforming elements. It's quite a bit like Cadash but much smoother and with a higher emphasis on platforming. RPG elements are abound and the plot is very much story driven with plenty of plot twists and a few side quests. While each character doesn't earn stats, nearly every enemy drops gold which is used in a number of shops to buy more powerful weapons and armor. The shops also allow the player to purchase trinkets that grant special abilities such as being able to walk on spikes without incurring damage. Fruit may be purchased in healing shops or found in chests throughout the landscape. The more expensive the fruit, the more vitality it will replenish. The importance of these items makes killing enemies and picking up gold all that more critical and this functions a bit like building up levels in an RPG. There are a number of boss battles at the end of select areas and each one requires special tactics to defeat successfully. A nice feature is that the game can be saved at any time outside of dialogue sequences and boss battles. With three save slots and the ability to save pretty much anywhere, one would think the game to be a cakewalk. However Popful Mail puts up a solid challenge and the save method does a good job at giving the game a fair balance between taxing and fun. As with many localizations at the time, the game was made quite a bit more difficult than the Japanese original, with enemies dishing out more damage and player attacks inflicting less. It doesn't spoil the experience but it does make the game require a bit more strategy and precision than the hop-and-bop presentation would suggest.

Nearly all main character dialogue is fully voiced (left), cutscenes look great and are nicely animated (center), everything has a lot of personality and detail (right)

Throughout the game the graphics maintain a high consistency of quality and a dead solid frame rate. All sprites are beautifully rendered and well animated, giving the entire game a cartoon look. The cutscenes are fully animated and are some of the best work to be seen on the Sega CD platform. All the full motion video titles could have taken a lesson from this game. While the cutscenes don't take up the entire screen, they do cover quite a bit of it and are truly beautiful. It's hard to explain how incredible animation like this was during the time of this game's release and it's a shame more people didn't see it at the time. During dialogue scenes large fully animated portraits of the conversing characters are displayed. These contain a wide variety of expressions and are synchronized perfectly with the spoken dialogue. Boss sprites are big, colorful, and nicely detailed. This plays into the strategy of how to defeat them, as watching for subtle changes in their appearance is often the first warning of a specific attack or an opening to counterattack. On top of that, each of the five main areas has a very distinct look when compared to the others and even the map screens are very nicely rendered. This is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful games ever to grace the Sega CD platform. Nearly every shop has a different proprietor, all of which are very well drawn. Additionally each town is populated by a different species of creatures and many enemies are area specific. It's simply all very well done and there is a great deal of variety to keep things fresh and interesting, which makes exploring areas enjoyable.

Working Designs translated and published Popful Mail in the United States so you know the audio work is going to be extensive, if not top notch. Every character with spoken dialogue, no matter how minor, is wonderfully voiced. This game was released during what was, in my opinion anyway, the golden age for Working Designs and the quality really shines through. The dialogue is funny when it's supposed to be and serious when it needs to be. Without a doubt my favorite characters are my favorites because of their voice work. Nuts Cracker has a pseudo Italian accent and when he's going on about "bomba" this and "a'bomba" that it's really quite funny. Sven T. Uncommon, a villain in the later parts of the game, has been dubbed to be a parody of Arnold Schwarzenegger. His dialogue mentions many of Arnold's films in a candid and

indirect manner but the humorous writing would be nothing without the superb voice work. I know a lot of people can take or leave the localization style of Working Designs but for Popful Mail it perfectly fits the style of the game. It would have been nice if they didn't increase the difficulty and item prices but I really like the added humor they injected into this particular title. The music is all generated using the Genesis sound hardware but is still very nicely done and if you didn't know any better, you'd assume it was being streamed from the CD.

Control is everything in a platforming game and Popful Mail does not disappoint. The directional pad takes care of movement and holding Down allows your character to defend. One button attacks, one jumps, and one opens the options screen. At first it seems annoying that the options screen can be brought up via one of the face buttons. Yes, you will hit it a lot by accident early on but after playing for awhile it becomes apparent why it's there. Since healing, special item selection, and weapon equipping are all accessed through the menu it is important to be able to gain fast access. Even more important are the save and load options which are also found here. This makes saving your progress extremely easy and with a game that can become very difficult such as this, that's a great feature to have.

The shop screens have extremely detailed illustrations and a different attendant in each

Although it is a fairly linear quest, I've always felt the pure enjoyment of Popful Mail reason enough play through it again after completion. Depending on what character you are using at specific times, the dialogue will change during spoken dialogue sequences. Additionally shopkeepers will address you differently depending on who you are playing as. I suppose going through the game to experience the differences is another reason for replaying the game. Of course loading a save game just before these areas, changing characters, hearing the differences, then doing it again with another character is an option as well. If you want to have a enjoyable time playing, talk to nearly everyone, hear all the audio and be at proper power levels at the proper times - the game will take between eight to ten hours to complete. That sounds short but every moment is great and some of the boss battles are truly intense.

Admittedly I didn't play Popful Mail until many years after it was released. I stumbled upon a JVC X'Eye, which is a Sega Genesis and Sega CD in one unit, at a local flea market in 2004 and began to explore the library. I'll also admit that this exploration was conducted with CD-Rs as the Sega CD doesn't have any copy protection. I played through the more highly regarded games on the platform: Sonic CD, Snatcher, Lunar: The Silver Star, Lunar: Eternal Blue and had a great time. I noticed mentions of Popful Mail, grabbed the disc image, and burned a copy not knowing what to expect. I was immediately taken back by the presentation quality from the moment the game spun up. The intro looked great and the dialogue actually made me laugh. Then the game started proper and I was surprised how colorful the world was and how well Mail controlled. After I had a couple encounters with other game characters, fully voiced and humorously written, I was pretty much smitten. Everything was so vibrant and lively and from beginning to end I had a great time. Popful Mail became then, as it is now, my favorite game on not only Sega CD but the Genesis platform as a whole. If you own a Sega CD there is absolutely no reason you shouldn't give this game a try. Among a hardware platform that was plagued with bad games, Popful Mail stands tall as a textbook example of how to do things right and utilize the technology to provide a stellar experience.

Converting a Sega Saturn Virtual On Twin-Stick to PlayStation

by David Lundin, Jr.

Released to arcades by Sega in 1996, Cyber Troopers Virtual On carved out a niche as one of the more unique fighting games to hit the scene. It features a cast of colorful giant robots pitted against one another in one-on-one battles, each armed with a variety of unique weapons. Essentially a 3D arena fighter viewed from behind your combatant, it also contains aspects of an action shooter and plays at a much higher speed than many fighting games. In addition to quick reflexes, Virtual On also requires complex strategy and a keen understanding of how each virtuaroid (the game's mecha) operates, something that isn't always apparent to newcomers. The spartan layout of the control setup can also create a false assumption of simplicity on the surface, as the game is controlled by two identical joysticks. Each of these has a finger trigger and a turbo button (also known as a boost or dash button) at the top, an arrangement similar to what was seen on Namco's Cyber Sled from 1993.

Sega Ages 2500 Vol. 31 for PlayStation 2 (left), the back of the Japanese arcade flyer for Cyber Troopers Virtual On (right)

Virtuaroid movement is controlled similar to a tank, with direction and rotation dependent on a combination of twin-stick input. The left trigger activates the left weapon, the right trigger activates the right weapon, and both triggers together activate the center weapon. Moving both sticks outward will cause the virtuaroid to jump and moving both sticks inward while jumping will quickly cancel the upward movement. This is useful as a jump will automatically reorient you with the enemy and lock on, while quickly "jump canceling" after will return control immediately. The turbo buttons allow a virtuaroid to dash at high speed, with quickly dashing in the opposite direction used to immediately cancel the movement. This "dash canceling" is a core strategy to avoiding attacks and getting into position for your own. Additionally, dashing changes how each of the weapons are deployed and in some cases this is also affected by the direction in which a virtuaroid is moving. Activating a weapon while dashing also has the additional benefit of automatically reacquiring positioning lock on the enemy virtuaroid. Each weapon draws energy from its own power bank, which quickly deplete and refill constantly throughout a match. Each virtuaroid also features completely different weapons and movement characteristics, requiring dedication to learn the specifics of each - both to use offensively and to understand how to battle against. Later games in the series would become even more complex, layering on additional modifiers and tactics, but the elegance and visual style of the first game has always made it my favorite of the series.

The Sega Saturn Twin-Stick allowed for proper Virtual On play at home and continues to be a fan favorite

With the home release of Cyber Troopers Virtual On for the Sega Saturn, a premium home version of the Twin-Stick was also released but only in Japan. While the game can *technically* be played without a Twin-Stick, much of the experience is lost with a control pad. The Saturn version itself pales in comparison to the visuals of the arcade original but it's still a pretty fun time with the Twin-Stick controller. Subsequent sequel games would be ported to their contemporary hardware, usually with an accompanying Twin-Stick but the Saturn stick was always my favorite. The original game, known as "Operation Moongate" in the wake of the sequels, would have a few different releases as well, right up to 2018 in the Japan-only Masterpiece Collection on PlayStation 4. Yet my favorite release of the original was another Japanese exclusive, part of the Sega Ages 2500 series for PlayStation 2. Released in 2007, Sega Ages 2500 Vol. 31 is a deluxe and extremely accurate conversion of the classic Cyber Troopers Virtual On. This release was handled by developer M2, known to be the gold standard for studios converting classic games. The only drawback is there wasn't a Twin-Stick for the PlayStation 2. Well, then we'll have to make our own...

The idea is to take the electronics from a digital PS1 controller (left) and install them in the Twin-Stick (right), converting it into a native PlayStation controller

The PS2 version of Virtual On has a number of different controller configurations, including using the digital pad for the left stick, the face buttons for the right stick, and the four L and R buttons for the triggers and turbos. PlayStation 2 controllers are pressure sensitive so I didn't want to use one of those for a conversion, however an original PlayStation digital controller works fine with the game and has a much easier to work with PCB (printed circuit board). Of course there are plenty of modern adapters to allow Saturn controllers to be used on other systems. However a PS1 digital board gives you a lot more flexibility and easier compatibility, with adapters existing for decades. Heck, I still use an over twenty-year-old PS1 to USB adapter for pretty much all emulation I do on my computer. I also wouldn't have to worry about compatibility issues concerning the unique Saturn Twin-Stick PCB. With that in mind, I ordered a spare Saturn Twin-Stick from Japan and got to work on converting it to work with the PS1 controller family.

The Saturn Twin-Stick has a clean internal layout and generous space, allowing for multiple approaches to modification

The Saturn Twin-Stick is laid out very cleanly inside, with good quality microswitched joysticks and nice long wiring looms. Now, if you intend on being able to reverse the modification to the Twin-Stick, the stock wiring can simply be removed along with the Twin-Stick PCB and the re-installed when needed. In my case the intention is to make this a permanent PlayStation Twin-Stick, so I cut the stock wiring at the plug ends. The one part of the Twin-Stick that cannot simply be wired up to the PS1 controller PCB is the Start button, as it uses a conventional membrane actuator on the Twin-Stick PCB. I replaced this with a simple pushbutton momentary contact switch that screwed right into the existing Start button hole.

Preparing the PlayStation controller board for installation, the stock wires that run up to the shoulder buttons have already been de-soldered

There are a number of different revisions to the original PlayStation digital controller, so your PCB may look a little different. I honestly can't think of a better controller PCB to modify since there are nice big through-hole connections for the L1 / L2 and

R1 / R2 buttons, each with individual ground connections, in addition to test connection points for every input on the controller. Another great thing with this board is it's pretty much laid out exactly as the Twin-Stick wiring setup, with a common ground on each side. The most important thing at this point is to carefully follow the traces around and plot out where you're going to connect to each. I added a little flux and tinned each of the connection points prior to moving forward. Additionally I soldered the connections for the triggers and their respective common grounds prior to mounting the PCB, as I wanted to use the through-holes. The wires may be different on your Twin-Stick but as to what was stock on mine the color connections are as such:

<u>Sticks</u>
Black - Down
Brown - Up
Red - Left
Orange - Right
Yellow - GND

<u>Triggers</u>
Red - Boost - L1 / R1 - PCB through-hole connection 1
Brown - Weapon - L2 / R2 - PCB through-hole connection 3
Black - GND - PCB through-hole connection 2

With the PlayStation PCB mounted in the Twin-Stick the work begins (left), all connections made (right)

Mounting the PCB can be kind of tricky since the underside of the surface plate on the Twin-Stick is metal and will act as a conductor. What I decided to do was use one of the original Saturn PCB mounting holes to mount the PS1 PCB on one side, and then build up a mount out of hot glue on the other side of the board. I then used hot glue to tack the board into place. Hot glue can always be removed with isopropyl alcohol, so it's not an irreversible installation. Remember not to use hot glue on your solder work, it's a bad habit that causes more problems than anything else. **It is also important that you rotate the PS1 PCB 180 degrees before tacking it down**. Otherwise your left and right stick connections will be reversed if connected directly or the stock wires won't reach if you cross the connections. This is because the PS1 board is upside down in relation to how it would normally be held - that is the control inputs are facing the bottom of the housing, not the top. I learned this the hard way, even after writing a note to specifically remind myself of this, and had to do some rework which made my right trigger leads shorter than they would have been if I had done it right from the start.

As for the controller cable, simply wind it back through the posts like the Saturn original was. Don't force the controller cable when tacking the PCB down or orienting the outward path, simply fold it around different ways beneath the PCB until you find a position where it sits naturally. Also be cautious of the clearances around the carriage bolts that mount the upper plate to the Twin-Stick, as you don't want them to come into contact with the PCB. I elected to put a bit of hot glue on the controller cable to act as strain relief of such but it's really not all that necessary and if you have a snap-on strain relief that would look cleaner. As can be seen, this goes over where the replacement Start button is mounted, so be sure to get that installed and wired first.

The completed installation, the right (viewer's left) button wires will be longer to begin with - mine are shortened due to some rework before deciding on this final orientation

The completed conversion retains the clean layout and ability for maintenance that the original Saturn layout had. This is very important with controller modifications, as input devices will require repair over time simply due to the nature of what they are. Once everything was connected I made sure to check my work and then clean off all flux residue (remember, even no-clean flux needs to be cleaned off) before sealing the Twin-Stick back up. Connected in this way the left stick matches to the directional pad, the right stick to the face buttons (Up - Triangle, Right - Circle, Down - X, Left - Square), the left and right triggers to the respective L2 and R2 buttons, and the left and right boost buttons to the respective L1 and R2 buttons. The momentary pushbutton I installed functions as the Start button. The only functionality that is lost is the Select button but it could always be added by installing an extra button or clever usage of the existing Start button hole. I don't need Select for any of the stuff I'm going to do, so I'll live without it.

As a finishing touch, I added a PS logo emblem off a spare PlayStation lid that I had kicking around. I've given the modified Twin-Stick really hard use since the modification and it has held up wonderfully. I'm generally a Fei-Yen player when it comes to Virtual On, which should tell those who are familiar with the game that I'm not easy on my Twin-Sticks. I've also used it on my PC with MAME to play games that use tank-style controls. This includes Atari's Battlezone and Namco's Assault, which were both designed to utilize this type of input. It's kind of strange how complex the inputs are for something like Assault, when the game seems so simple. In reality a Virtual On Twin-Stick has twelve individual inputs on two sticks (four directions and two buttons each), all the reason why it simply cannot be played well via any other type of input, even a modern dual analog control pad. Anyone who has tried to play Virtual On in Yakuza Kiwami 2 can tell you that small thumbsticks simply cannot replicate the fast and precise input that a full size Twin-Stick gives you.

From the outside the modified Twin-Stick looks as if it was always designed for PlayStation

The Saturn Twin-Stick isn't as large or robust as the arcade original setup, it is a consumer-grade product for home use and is downsized both in profile and layout distances. Even with those differences, it's still my favorite of all the Virtual On Twin-Stick setups that have been released since. It seems designed to embrace home usage from the ground up, with a perfectly sized profile and comfortable grips, rather than have been built around cost compromise as the primary target. It's also one of the few arcade style controllers that doesn't take up a lot of space, something ignored by every Virtual On Twin-Stick that would come after. With this simple PlayStation modification it opens up a lot of additional possibilities for arguably coolest peripheral Sega ever made. Sure this mod is a bit crazy but Virtual On was "my" game in my teenage years, being the regular seat-two resident at my local arcade, and it has remained one of my favorite games to this day.

The arcade coin-op experience went in so many phases going as far back as the 70s through the early 2000s. The Williams-owned Midway brand in the 90s however had such a long string of hits with Mortal Kombat, NBA Jam, and NFL Blitz it's difficult to imagine the company ever having any "misses" along the way. The company's rare flops are all seemingly rooted in other games that were resounding successes for the then-branded Williams Electronics Games, which relaunched its video game division in 1988 with the release of NARC.

Strike Force (1991)

Williams released Smash TV in 1990, intended as something of a reimagining of Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar's brainchild from 1982, Robotron: 2084. The game featured bigger and bolder graphics and much deeper gameplay spanning multiple rooms with bosses at the end of the waves. The formula here worked extremely well but being developed somewhat alongside it was another game titled Saurian Front. Saurian Front was to Smash TV what Defender was to Robotron: 2084. Defender put Williams' fledgling video game division on the map in a huge way back in 1981, making it one of the golden age's vaunted billion-dollar earners. The game possessed an intimidating control scheme with five action buttons and a joystick that only moved up and down, meaning in order to move forward you had to press a Thrust button and Reverse to change directions. What became the third iteration of Defender in the guise of Saurian Front eliminated the Thrust and Reverse buttons, making it so you could move the ship with only the joystick. The game also enabled the ability to select and fire different weapons and even Transform the ship into a smaller orb shape, that gives the ship 8-way directional firing.

Approximately six Saurian Front cabinets were produced for location testing, coming in dedicated trim in the style of the 25" monitor Smash TV and another in what is assumed to be Arch Rivals with kit art applied. (I had the luxury of owning the 25" monitor Smash TV style Saurian Front for a few years.) The game was not very well received, presumably because it deviated from Defender's aggressive and well-known formula too much. The general public were apparently also confused as to what a "Saurian" was, as if no game previously ever had a fictional character referenced in its title. Considered to be doomed and not the runaway success that Smash TV was on location test, Williams would go on to shelve the game for a little while. Before the release of NARC, Williams Electronics Games had purchased its rival Bally/Midway and would go on to release a few titles under their brand name including Arch Rivals, Tri-Sports, and Trog (the latter two were in-house projects just using the newly acquired brand). The company would subsequently bring the Bally name back in 1990 as a second pinball nameplate under Midway Manufacturing and for 1991 would do something totally outlandish and rename their video game division Midway. The Saurian Front location test games emblazoned with the Williams W were each given to the members of the development team and the game itself was renamed Midway Strike Force and distributed as a kit game instead. One of the developers told me that it was effectively given away for free with the purchase of another Midway game at the time (presumably Terminator 2: Judgment Day or Super High Impact). All was not lost however in the game's location test collapse: the Mortal Kombat character Reptile was given a backstory that his race were the Saurians. In all, probably just a novel idea (or formula) executed poorly.

Total Carnage (1992)

Not enough great things can be said about Smash TV, it was a brilliant concept with excellent aesthetic flare to keep people pumping their last remnants of quarters in it. One of the Evil MC game show host character's callouts was "Total Carnage! I love it!" and even one of the rooms was titled "Total Carnage 7/91" particularly alluding to the possibility of a follow-up. I call it a follow-up, not a sequel (which was a huge misnomer with the first game where people believed it was a sequel to Robotron: 2084) because it's seemingly only set in the same universe and was intended all along to be a different concept entirely. Gone was the combat confined to single rooms, and instead it became more like Smash TV meets Ikari Warriors where the player fights in a scrolling environment instead. In contemporary 1991, the Gulf War was a hot topic and the game became a parody of the war with the character General Akhboob (voiced by Mortal Kombat co-creator Ed Boon) being the evil tyrant. The game was large enough in scope that it incorporated a password system which may have been the first arcade coin-op application of such a feature. There were portals scattered about the world that could teleport you to hidden rooms with the potential to score big points. Chock full of blistering boss battles, with my personal favorite Orcus, the game undoubtedly sounded like a winner.

The game was outfitted in a large 25" monitor cabinet with a control panel of 4 player size, but for 2 players, to give more space to its occupants to play comfortably. Unlike Saurian Front, Total Carnage fared better on location test and was put into wide release. Everything up to this point has sounded positive, right? That was of course until arcade operators, approximately less than 1000 of them, started putting the game in their locations. Being a dual joystick game just like Robotron: 2084 and Smash TV, all the player controls were to be handled by the joysticks, with no action buttons. Total Carnage added a very handy feature where you can pick up Bombs and they can be set to explode by pressing… the Start button. The Bombs give you about a second and a half of temporary invulnerability, so they become important to stockpile and have on hand in boss fights or when you're surrounded by baddies and need some way out. The Bombs are also used to explode enemy vehicles, which you will be bombarded with instruction text explaining what to do very often, especially at the start. Some 30 years removed, I can only speculate what the general public then thought, but to me it looked like the game was too ambitious for its own good, trying to cram in too many features. The familiar phrase, less is more, comes to mind, which was the formula its predecessor employed to great effect. I personally find the game to be a stroke of genius,

something I didn't come to appreciate until Sound Designer Jon Hey bestowed his first-off-the-line prototype to me back in 2013. To the casual onlooker that enjoyed Smash TV, it appears that Total Carnage's only real flaw was that it just wasn't Smash TV.

Judge Dredd (1993)

Try to imagine a time in the United States in the early 1990s where saying the words "Judge Dredd" elicited high amounts of confusion. In a period after the heavy metal band Anthrax produced a song, I Am The Law, based on the British comic books, but before the Sylvester Stallone film vehicle surfaced, there was Midway buying a licensing deal to produce a video game based on Dredd. After Terminator 2: Judgment Day was a major win for the company, they began to pursue other properties to build games around. The game's lead designer was Jake Simpson, a UK native that was a huge fan of the Judge Dredd comics tasked with producing a video game. Built on the new Midway T-unit hardware, one of the significant technical advances over its Y-unit predecessor was sprite scaling, giving the illusion that characters on screen were closer or further away from the player's perspective. Mortal Kombat had reached the arcades and was possibly one of the greatest sleeper hits in arcade history. Up to this point, Williams had a strong string of great games to their credit. Dredd employed the same digitized graphics that had been made famous by the company since NARC, and would you believe, the game even recreated NARC's button layout. Improvements had been made with the digitization process, resulting in higher quality graphics, and even the printing process for the game's art had gone beyond the traditional four-color scheme, utilizing way more colors and definition. It sounded like Dredd had all the makings for being an innovative and unique title.

Alas, this is where matters get literally complicated. Bally/Midway's Tron had multiple game types in it, that were user selectable to a degree, but was like having four different games in one. Judge Dredd on the surface appeared to be a standard affair beat-em-up, a genre that was made popular by Technos' Double Dragon or Konami's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (which Dredd was inspired by). Unlike the simplicity of those other games, Dredd employs individual punch and kick actions and a very confusing 8-way attack scheme, as well as a duck and punch to produce a Mortal Kombat style uppercut that does almost no damage. Except after completing the first Willis Power Tower stage you're greeted to a shooting practice bonus stage. Then the game is suddenly a side-scrolling run-and-gun platformer in a robot factory where you don't kick and punch anymore but fire a gun, where the game gives you no instruction on the changed controls. The final stage is the Block War which lets you move up and down in the world again, but you only fire the gun like the robot factory stage. Upon completion of the Block War stage, the game ends, as it was a prototype that was never finished because the game was a catastrophic failure on location test. After all the time, money, and assets that went into the project the team believed they should have been given more time to polish it up more and see it through completion, but Midway pulled the plug instead. Despite its glaring flaws, there was a lot of potential to be had, but the inexperienced development team had an array of struggles trying to put it all together.

Nobody knows where the dumped ROMs for the game to be used in the MAME emulator came from, as they're believed to be an older version of the game than what went out on location test. What was salvaged from the project was the better cabinet art printing process (well, except for the prominently fading red when exposed to sunlight until about 1994) and the better digitized graphics recording process which was next used on Mortal Kombat II and all other games that followed. A playable Judge Dredd cabinet can be found at Galloping Ghost Arcade in Brookfield, IL if you would like to experience the real thing up close and personal, along with Strike Force and Total Carnage.

Caught On Film - Super Mario Bros. (1993)
The Lone Chance at an Adult Super Mario Story

by David Lundin, Jr.

Super Mario Bros. had been redeveloped for the small screen with reasonable success in 1989 as The Super Mario Bros. Super Show. Featuring both live action segments and a traditional kid's cartoon, Lou Albano and Danny Wells portrayed the plumbers as a duo who would have short comedic exchanges with a celebrity guest, before moving on to the animated adventures. It plays out like a children's show from the golden age of television: not a lot of substance but plenty of improvisation and slapstick, with a couple of actors up there trying their best with what they have. For better or worse, the Super Show live action segments didn't move beyond showing the Mario Bros. as a couple of plumbers living in Brooklyn, leaving the crazier stuff to the cartoon, which itself was simply an adaptation of the first two Super Mario games. A film adaptation could have followed either of these paths, both of them rather family-friendly, however when it came to the silver screen things would go a totally different direction.

"This Ain't No Game" was the tagline for the 1993 Super Mario Bros. movie and no matter your opinion of the film that followed, they weren't lying. Starring Bob Hoskins as Mario and John Leguizamo as Luigi, the film presents the scenario of a meteorite impacting the Earth during the age of the dinosaurs, creating two parallel dimensions - one where the dinosaurs continued to evolve, and our dimension where mammals became the dominate species. Mario and Luigi run a small

plumbing business in Brooklyn and cross paths with Daisy, a college student working at an archaeological dig site, whom Luigi falls for. Daisy is kidnapped and while giving chase to her abductors, the Mario brothers travel through a portal into the other dimension, arriving in a fungus-choked city known as Dinohattan. It turns out that Daisy is the lost princess of the dino dimension and the only person able to use the power of the dormant meteorite to merge the two dimensions. Such is the desire of President Koopa, played by Dennis Hopper, who serves as the tyrannical dictator of Dinohattan. It's up to the brothers Mario to rescue Daisy and prevent Koopa from ruling both realities.

Dinohattan's sprawling multi-level set is a highlight of the film and is an impressive piece of visual design

On paper this still seems reasonably like it could be what one would expect from a Super Mario movie: the Mario brothers attempting to save a princess (in this case Daisy, who first appeared in Super Mario Land) from Koopa. However the film does a complete one-eighty from expectations right at the start. Dinohattan is like a combination of Blade Runner and Beetlejuice, with set design that rivals both. It's dark, dirty, neon-lit, and inhabited quite literally by creatures of the night. Most of the storefronts and establishments take cues from items and characters in the games but it's as if everything has been twisted and altered into a perversion of the bright and colorful video games. I think this works as it's a counterpoint to the vibrant and lively world that Brooklyn is portrayed as at the start of the film. The allusions to Blade Runner are understandable as its art director, David Snyder, was the production designer for Super Mario Bros. The sets are just insane to look at but unfortunately not enough time is spent showing the incredible scenery, as the movie is always zipping forward at a breakneck pace from one scene to the next. To sour this further, that screaming action pace makes the few slower scenes feel overly slow or stand out as possibly from a different script revision. In addition to the spectacular practical sets and effects, there are also some pretty cool special effects that were actually industry pioneering. The effect used when the dimensions are merging is essentially the disintegration effect that everyone couldn't get enough of at the end of Avengers: Infinity War, although there are 25 years between that film and Super Mario Bros.

The comedy generally falls pretty flat although there are a couple decent jokes here and there but not a lot of it really works. However much of the film that does work is largely due to the chemistry between Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo, a camaraderie that may well have been forged by reports of the two actors drinking before and during each day of filming. As strange as the film can get, as ridiculous as some of the dialogue can be, they never slip away from their roles and genuinely feel like Mario and Luigi - at least the Mario and Luigi that inhabit the world of this film. There is a very brotherly relationship between the two of them on-screen from beginning to end. Also even amid all the crazy and otherworldly stuff going on, there is a surprising amount of actual plumbing that takes place! There's a lot of talk about pipes and tools and Mario's experience coming from a long line of plumbers, which shows there's a solid script buried in there somewhere. The film had one of the rockiest development histories of any film that actually made it to production and release. From endless script revisions, constant fighting at the top of production, budgetary and distribution issues, you name it. There is a wealth of knowledge to discover on this subject that goes far beyond a review of the feature film.

The Mario Bros. don their signature colors - but not until half way into the film and as with everything else their outfits have been redesigned

Something that is truly criminal about Super Mario Bros. is how poorly it has been made available on home video. In addition to the original VHS release it has been released on DVD a couple of times but the print is of low quality and it's one of those discs where the absolute minimum was done in its mastering. Things have fared better in the UK and Japan with Blu-ray releases that included a better print and some special features. There's also a deluxe restoration currently in the works as a fan effort for planned official release in North America with no set release date. I believe a quality release of the film on Blu-ray in North America would sell very well - especially with the 30th anniversary coming up next year.

Similar to The Wizard, this movie hit at a time when I wasn't getting out to the movies much as a kid. Although I was in the middle of the media blitz for the film, I didn't see it until a video rental later on. I didn't know what to expect, in fact most of the advertising I can remember had to do with promotional Slurpee cups at 7-Eleven and a small article in Nintendo Power. Upon finally watching the film for the first time the only thing I didn't like was the strange animated opening with a couple of dinosaurs taking to one another. Aside from that I thought it was really cool, something totally unlike the games or any of the other Super Mario productions I had seen before, but still familiar enough to follow. I saw it as a more action-heavy take on the characters as a complement to the comedy of the Super Show that I had watched as a younger kid. Sure it was strange, but so is a game about a plumber who doubles in size after touching a mushroom and can throw fireballs after coming into contact with a flower.

Mario and Luigi arrive in the dinosaur dimension and begin the search for Daisy - yes, the DVD is this grainy

Is this a good film? No, not really. Is it entertaining? Oh yes. Did it have the potential for being a really great, amazing movie? Absolutely! All the trappings are there, all the potential is there to make a very stylized and neo noir take on the Mushroom Kingdom - but it never quite comes together to be that. That's a really terrible shame, as this was honestly the last chance the subject matter would ever have to be adapted as such - that is, as its own thing. As I grew older and would watch the film again from time to time, I realized what a missed opportunity the whole thing was in hindsight. As Mario and company have become more and more cutesy with each passing game, and as Nintendo has once more established itself as the most family-friendly of gaming companies, such an experimental take on their most treasured property will never be manifested again. Some say this film is a snapshot of the times, both in gaming and in Hollywood, and truth be told I think that's what makes it important - and worth watching still.

Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

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

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

02/25/2022 - WEEK 252
Question: What is the name of Pitfall Harry's niece?

03/04/2022 - WEEK 253
Question: Keeping it in the family: What is the name of Pitfall Harry's pet mountain lion?

03/11/2022 - WEEK 254
Question: Moonbeam Moss is an item acquired in what adventure game series?

03/18/2022 - WEEK 255
Question: Who designed the Soliton Radar System in Metal Gear Solid?

03/25/2022 - WEEK 256
Question: In Space Channel 5: Part 2, Pine is an officer in what association?

04/01/2022 - WEEK 257
Question: In Parasite Eve, what police station does Aya Brea work at?

04/08/2022 - WEEK 258
Question: Known as the Sega Master System in most of the world, what was the console's original name in Japan?

04/22/2022 - WEEK 259
Question: Surprisingly, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 was a final release for what system?

The Sega Mark III was redesigned into the Master System (left), in addition to the cartridge size being reworked most game packaging was notoriously redesigned (right).

Answers:
Week 244 Answer: Rhonda.

Week 245 Answer: Quickclaw.
Week 246 Answer: Neutopia (PC Engine / TurboGrafx-16).
Week 247 Answer: Mei Ling.
Week 248 Answer: The Eastern Venus Space Police.
Week 249 Answer: NYPD 17th Precinct.
Week 250 Answer: Sega Mark III.
Week 251 Answer: Nintendo 64, in the North American region.

Mei Ling talking about the hardware she designed (left), official Nintendo 64 releases rolled to a halt in North America after Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (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.

There aren't a lot of channels on YouTube that I watch on a regular basis. The few that I do watch generally pertain to hobbies and interests outside of video games but there are a couple gaming shows that I really enjoy. My favorite for many, many years has been Turbo Views - a program that eventually settled into the goal of reviewing every North American release for the TurboGrafx-16 and Turbo CD. Show creator and host Chris Bucci grew up playing the system and that nostalgia really shines in every episode. It's not just rose-colored retrospectives however, as he also gives every game a fresh play - usually a full playthrough - so that his reviews are from a current perspective. In addition Turbo Views features information on TurboGrafx-16 hardware and releases, import reviews of Japanese PC Engine games, and a whole bunch of extra content that represents the TG-16 in a positive and honest light. After twelve years he completed reviewing the entire North American library, all 135 games, quite a feat indeed.

In addition to content on YouTube, Chris also created special DVD releases of the individual Turbo Views seasons as they were completed. Now, I never buy YouTuber merchandise, ever - it's just not my thing. However I enjoy the show so much and find it to be so professional and genuine, that I started picking up the DVD releases at Volume 3. They feature additional content as well as the episodes contained within the season bracket and are really fun to kick back and explore. I bring this up now as with the final episode being in the can, the final DVD set is being prepared for release. Chris has said that after it's completed and starts shipping, sales of the DVDs will eventually be wound down and discontinued. If you're new to the series and would like to pick up the entire thing as a special five volume box set, he is offering that currently as well. You can find more details and links to watch every episode of Turbo Views on YouTube at TurboViews.com. I think it's something our readers may enjoy watching, I certainly have for years.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on July 1st with our next issue, our second to last! 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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