

The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER
THIRTIETH ISSUE - JANUARY 2021

INDUSTRY GIANT MOUNTS NEW OFFENSIVE!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Thirtieth Issue - January 2021
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Prepare to Qualify

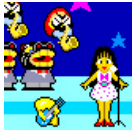
by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Happy New Year and welcome to this first issue of 2021 as we continue our celebration of all things retrogaming. Our Thirtieth Issue is a bit of a special one, as it completes a full five years of releases since relaunching as The Retrogaming Times in 2016. We're looking forward to providing another year of great articles and the continuing opportunity for you to send in your thoughts and memories concerning classic video gaming and have them published. This year of course will also hopefully bring an eventual return to some form of normalcy in the wake of the continuing coronavirus pandemic.

The year begins with More C64 and Merman's chronicle of the history of computer magazine ZZAP and its current return as a quarterly publication. Donald Lee has memories of the Nintendo Game & Watch series, as a special anniversary edition slides across Don's Desk. An almost totally forgotten driving game with a rather strange legacy in film skids into Arcade Obscure. A friendly neighborhood web-slinger swings onto the Super Nintendo with Dan Pettis' review of Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage. In this issue's cover story, the recent documentary Console Wars is reviewed, highlighting the 16-bit battles between Nintendo and Sega as detailed by Dan Pettis. Aspirations of picking up an NES Top Loader return some mixed results as Todd Friedman explains with his impressions of the hardware. All that and more are ahead in this issue of The Retrogaming Times!

I want to again remind our readers if they have comments or questions about anything covered in the newsletter, or there is something they would like featured in a future issue of The Retrogaming Times, to contact me directly at trt@classicplastic.net! Of course article submissions are also always open. If you have something ready to go, the address is the same, trt@classicplastic.net. **"If there is something you want to write about, send it in!"**

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



Upcoming Events

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

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

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KansasFest, July 19th - 25th 2021, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

KansasFest is an annual convention offering Apple II users and retrocomputing enthusiasts the opportunity to engage in beginner and technical sessions, programming contests, exhibition halls, and camaraderie. KansasFest was originally hosted by Resource Central and has been brought to you by the KFest committee since 1995. For photos, videos, and presentations from past KansasFests, please visit the official website.

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

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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! - ZZAP to the Future

by Merman

In the UK, one of the best-loved computer magazines was ZZAP (usually written with an exclamation mark after it, but it plays havoc with the spellchecker). Catering for Commodore 64 users from 1985 until 1993, the magazine has undergone a rebirth in recent years - and is now returning as a quarterly magazine. I was privileged to write for the magazine in the 1990s and am now part of its new era.



The ZZAP 64 logo designed by Oliver Frey.

BEGINNINGS

Franco Frey became heavily interested in computers in the early 1980s, and shared his enthusiasm with his brother Oliver. Oli and Roger Kean moved to Franco's home town of Ludlow to help set up CRASH MICRO ACTION - a mail-order catalogue for ZX Spectrum computer games. Its unique features were honest reviews by Ludlow schoolboys and Oli's distinctive art (including little fuzzy creatures that became known as Olibugs). When a major retailer saw the catalogue they suggested setting up a "proper" magazine, and so with the help of a distributor issue 1 of CRASH! reached the shelves. Sadly the distributor closed owing the new company Newsfield (set up by Franco, Roger and Oli) money, but they persevered. New and older journalists added a professional edge, and the circulation grew rapidly. CRASH maintained its honesty, which led to conflict with unhappy software companies who threatened to pull advertising.

In 1985 the Commodore 64 started to challenge the ZX Spectrum for dominance in the UK - and it was time for a C64 magazine from Newsfield. Rejecting the original names of Bang or Sprites & Sound, the first issue of ZZAP! 64 arrived in April 1985. There were actually two parts to the team behind that first issue. Roger and Oli worked in Ludlow, while the rest of the editorial team was in Yeovil. This was headed by Chris Anderson and Bob Wade, who had been part of an earlier magazine called Personal Computer Games. Joining them were two young gameplayers - Gary Penn and Julian Rignall, who came to PCG after winning high-score competitions. Chris would ultimately choose to move on rather than join the team in Ludlow, taking his expertise to set up the company that became Future Publishing.



The cover of issue 1, featuring a review of the classic space game Elite.

There were two main aspects to ZZAP's popularity. Each review gave at least two and usually three different reviewers the chance to express their opinion in a comment "bubble" - and the ultimate rating was decided in discussions between the three. Each reviewer had their own "head," a caricature drawn by Oli with their initials on a black sweatshirt. There were typically three poses, one good, one OK and one bad, depending on how they rated the game. Each box ending in a series of ratings using percentages. The other key factor was the amazing Oli Frey covers. In the early days Oli would add characters to the page margins by physically drawing on the boards that would be photographed for the printers. Text copy was printed out and set with glue, before more sophisticated DTP (desktop publishing) became available. Those margin characters included Rockford from the Boulder Dash games (under license from First Star Software), Thing on a Spring, the Pantomime Horse and Mr. Nose.



Reviewer and editor Gordon Houghton found a game that disagreed with him...

ZZAP's circulation also grew rapidly, with Roger Kean and then Gary Penn taking over as editor. Top scoring games were awarded a Sizzler (usually over 90%) or the ultimate accolade of a Gold Medal (above 96% or for anything considered state of the art). Later on budget games were reviewed separately, with the new Silver Medal for any that scored over 90%. A regular adventure column was written by the White Wizard (Steve Cooke) and technical

advice came from Gary Liddon (who joined because of his interest in the gaming industry, and would leave to set up Thalamus; this software house was formed by Newsfield but independent of the magazines). Brigitte van Reuben analysed C64 artwork, and a regular feature looked at the online Compunet network (which was designed primarily for C64 users). AMTIX! became the third magazine and catered for Amstrad users, although it closed much sooner than the other two. (Roger revealed that they could have called the three magazines Crash, Bang and Wallop - but I am glad they didn't).

As Newsfield grew, it spread into other ventures - including the aforementioned Thalamus software house - with The Games Machine covering more computers as well as consoles and electronic toys, and the short-lived LM (Leisure Magazine) mixing film, TV, comics and computer games. This unsuccessful title ultimately cost Newsfield a lot of money. In Italy there was a licensed version of ZZAP known as ZZAP Italia that lasted until 1992, adding reviews for other machines.



ZZAP Italia re-used Oli Frey's cover art under license, here on issue 34.

More changes of personnel saw Julian Rignall's spell as editor come to a close as he went to rivals EMAP. The new team included editor Gordon Houghton and staff writers Paul Glancey, Maff Evans and Kati Hamza. Ken D Fish became a regular, in photo stories and the margins. Wacky humour and more colour gave the magazine a different feel, brought to an abrupt end by issue 50. The writing team were all suddenly let go and new staff brought in at short notice. Editor Stuart Wynne with writers Phil King and Robin Hogg carried the magazine forward with a more professional approach - although there was still humour, such as the multi-issue "storyline" where the Scorelord stood in for Stuart. Other features such as comic and film reviews came and went.

Issue 26 had come with the Sampler Tape, a special cassette attached to the cover. This included games, demos and a special musical recording from Rob Hubbard (Thalamusik, the loading tune to Sanxion, re-recorded with synthesizers). Issue 42 saw the cassette on the front become a regular feature as the ZZAP Megatape. That issue also saw Amiga reviews become part of the mag, although some saw it as controversial. The first Megatape had its own problems, with the demo of Armalyte delayed and the promised level of shoot 'em up Katakis stopped by legal action from Activision (for its "similarity" to R-Type). The replacement was an older US Gold title Time Tunnel. In later years, there would be two Reel Action tapes on the front, carrying more full games and demos of forthcoming titles. Issue 66 saw another subtle change, as rivals Future launched its C64 magazine Commodore Format. Both covered the cartridge-based C64GS, the short lived Games System.



The bumper issue 44 Christmas Special had over 200 pages, while issue 66 competed with the newly-launched Commodore Format.

ENDINGS

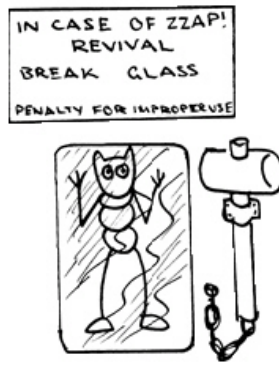
Money troubles meant that issue 78 was nearly the end of ZZAP - but with funding from Europress the story continued. However some felt this was the weakest era of the magazine, with managing editor Lucy Hickman adding puerile humour including her "alter-ego" Miss Whiplash. As Europress launched new titles dedicated to consoles, ZZAP underwent a rebranding after issue 90. The next issue was the first of Commodore Force (incorporating ZZAP 64). This is when I joined, writing as Professor Brian Strain to give technical advice (and in the last few issues as The Games Guru, with advice on how to write a game). Commodore Force closed after just sixteen issues with parent company Europress Impact going into bankruptcy. I got some freelance work for Commodore Format in the next year before that too closed. And that could have been the end of the ZZAP story...



The Terminator 2 inspired cover of issue 78, and issue 12 of Commodore Force reviewed Lemmings.

REVIVAL

First came issue 107, created by super-fans Iain Black and Stephen Studdard. This reviewed new games and looked back at classic ZZAP features. It was initially available as a downloadable PDF and had a limited print run in 2002. Next up was the Def Guide to ZZAP 64, a special supplement to issue 18 of Retro Gamer in 2005. Rob de Voogd put together a great team of old and new staff, once again reviewing recent games. It was a sad occasion though, as Live Publishing (the initial producers of Retro Gamer) went bankrupt after that issue. Fortunately Retro Gamer survived with a new publisher, and is now part of Future Publishing.



I finally got to meet Roger and Oli in recent years. In 2011 I attended the Retro Replay event in Blackpool, England. During the weekend I was the host of a discussion panel on the history of Newsfield, interviewing Roger and Oli about their work. And during the 2016 Pixels event, at the Centre for Computing History in Cambridge, England, I was the host of C64 and Amiga panels that Roger and Oli took part in alongside other programmers, artists and musicians.

Over the past 15 years Roger Kean and Oli Frey started to work with Chris Wilkins of Fusion Retro Books. Roger brought his editing and design skills to several history books, and there was a special art book celebrating The Fantasy Art of Oliver Frey. That inspired Chris to suggest a yearly Annual for Christmas. There have been three ZZAP Annuals and three CRASH Annuals from 2018 to 2020, including former staff and dedicated new fans. Each Annual has had a dedicated new cover created by Oli. Recent releases and hardware for the C64 and ZX Spectrum have been reviewed and new features written. I am really lucky to have been involved, writing new reviews and articles under my old Professor Brian Strain alias. To be part of the Annuals alongside Julian Rignall, Oli and Roger is special.



Oli's cover for the 2019 Annual celebrated the new game Sam's Journey.

In 2020 Roger Kean announced he is suffering from Motor Neurone Disease (also known as ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease) and would be stepping down from working on future annuals. This was while Chris Wilkins was negotiating with Future Publishing for the rights to the names ZZAP and CRASH. The end result is that both ZZAP and CRASH will be returning as quarterly A5 magazines, funded through Patreon. I look forward to being part of this new era for ZZAP.

WEB LINKS:

For the Patreon funding new issues of ZZAP, visit:
<https://www.patreon.com/zzapmagazine/>

For Fusion Retro Books and stock of previous Annuals, visit:
<https://fusionretrobooks.com/>

For more on ZZAP, including scans of every issue and the special issue 107, check out the brilliant Def Guide to

ZZAP by Iain Black at:
<http://www.zzap64.co.uk>

For more on the history of ZZAP, I refer you to an excellent YouTube video from Perifractic's Retro Recipes channel. (Perifractic himself is part of the 2020 Annual, having been interviewed in the 2019 book about his LEGO C64).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMS8gCQb4ok>



Don's Desk - Nintendo Game & Watch Memories

by [Donald Lee](#)

It has been a wild 2020 and I hope to find all the readers safe and sound. I'm writing this a week before Christmas and a day before the deadline. I've been busy with work and other stuff so getting time to write something was lacking. But as my usual MO, I suddenly remembered that Nintendo recently released the 35th Anniversary edition of Super Mario Bros. as a Game & Watch handheld.



For the uninitiated, Game & Watch was a series of hand held games made by Nintendo. The Game & Watch series began in 1980 with the game Ball and the final game Mario Juggler was released in 1991.

My experience with Game & Watches (and other non Nintendo hand held games) began in my elementary to middle school years. I attended school from Kindergarten to 8th grade at two schools in San Francisco's Chinatown. I remember walking around Chinatown after school with my mom and seeing various games being displayed at various electronic stores around the area.

I probably bugged the heck out of my mom through the years for various games. While I don't think i got every game I wanted, I did end up with quite a few:

- Parachute
- Donkey Kong (Dual Screen)
- Donkey Kong Jr.
- Mario Bros (Dual Screen - side ways)
- Donkey Kong 3 (double controllers - much bigger than the single screen games)

While I remember each of the games and how they looked, its been years since i played them. So I'll skip any comments on game play. But I did remember spending a ton of time on the games. Like regular arcade games, your goal wasn't to beat the game, but just beat the high school as much as you can.

While the graphics and pseudo "animation" on the Game & Watch games won't impress any of the folks playing on the current generation of systems, it was still fun to play for me at the time. While it would be cool to go back and just play the games again, I think I might get bored.

Apparently Nintendo released some official Game & Watch collections for the Nintendo Game Boy and DS systems. While I never played the modern Nintendo hand held, it might be worth exploring to see if I can get the Game & Watch collections. The alternative is that Nintendo releases Game & Watch collections for the Switch!

In any case, thanks for reading about my walk down memory lane. See you next issue!

The 35th Anniversary Super Mario Bros. Game & Watch is available directly from Nintendo:
<https://store.nintendo.com/game-watch-super-mario-bros.html>



Arcade Obscure - Stocker

by *David Lundin, Jr.*

If there is one arcade game developer that made nothing but obscure titles it would have to be Bally Sente. Tracing its roots back to the tiny ex-Atari employee founded Videia, which in turn was purchased by Atari co-founder Nolan Bushnell to become Sente Technologies, which in turn was sold to Bally during Pizza Time Theater's bankruptcy in 1984, Bally Sente never became a big player in the arcade industry. Even though they are little more than a footnote in the history of video games, the over twenty titles released during their short history left a rather interesting legacy of lesser-known arcade games. Stocker is one of their more widely distributed games, although when it comes to Bally Sente that's not saying a whole lot.

Stocker is a top-down driving game with the objective to drive from Florida to California on a cross-country illegal road rally. While the action plays out similar to the Sprint titles, each screen is only one small area of a massive multi-state map with interconnected roadways and shortcuts. Controls are a bit unique for a driving game as there is no accelerator pedal in Stocker, in fact there are no pedals at all. Speed is controlled with a two position gear shift featuring low and high gear, which means the car is always under power and cannot be brought to a complete stop by the player. The steering wheel is free spinning and anyone who has spent time playing Super Sprint or Pole Position will feel right at home with its quick response. As there are no brakes, shifting between gears and spinning the steering wheel to induce slides is often the best strategy to thread the needle around tight obstacles.

From the time your car speeds off from the starting point in Florida its fuel gauge will begin to deplete. This functions as the game's timer and is the single biggest obstacle to completing a run to California. Gas stations along the way will add fuel when driving over the "GAS" icon in front of them but the further westward you drive, the more sparse gas stations will become, and the amount of fuel provided by them will decrease as well. This means that precision driving is required to make what little fuel you have stretch out between gas stations. While your car can drive over most terrain, it will always travel fastest on the roads, which will also accumulate the most points. There are multiple paths and shortcuts along the route but often the best way to complete a state involves learning how the individual screens are laid out in relation to one another. As an example, in Texas there is an area where the road follows along the top of the screen before snaking downward and to the left. Instead of following the road down to the bottom, simply driving left off the screen, then quickly up at the very corner of the next screen, will cut these two long and windy sections with next to no speed loss - saving a massive amount of fuel. There are a lot of little tricks like this in Stocker and they reward the player who seeks them out as they memorize a route, then build a strategy to optimize it as much as possible. It really does add a lot of replay value to a game that can end rather quickly and can feel extremely difficult at first.



Setting off on the journey (left), tearing out of a gas station and leaving tire tracks (center) approaching the Alabama state line (right)

Two types of traffic are encountered throughout the journey: regular motorists and police cars. Motorists may be in cars, trucks, or on motorcycles but they all behave the same and generally follow the most standard route through each screen. Colliding with a motorist doesn't result in an accident or loss of fuel as it would in similar games. Instead the player and motorist will bounce off one another and continue on, like something out of the Data East game Bump 'n' Jump, rarely even losing any speed in the process. In fact getting hit by a motorist is actually a strategy to quickly regain speed after colliding with a roadside obstacle, building up momentum from the bounce. Police cars don't behave in a manner that may be expected, as they really don't pursue the player or other cars. For

the most part they're content to simply drive along the road like normal traffic, even smashing into their own ranks and clearing the way at roadblocks. Occasionally a police car may be sitting on the roadside and will speed off to join the chase but even then they will simply fall into the traffic line and otherwise ignore the player. The difference between police cars and regular motorists comes in the form of tickets, issued to the player for colliding with a police car. This event will bring the player's car to a full and complete stop for a couple seconds, eating up valuable fuel and wasting precious time getting back up to speed. Beyond the loss of time, by default the effect tickets have is to subtract 2000 points per ticket from a possible 6000 point "safe driving" bonus at the end of the game. However the game can be configured to issue a "game over" after three violations are issued, making an already difficult game into a maddening exercise in frustration. No matter the way the game may be set up, police cars should be avoided at all costs. I can only imagine at how much harder things would be if they actually zeroed in on the player.

Of the few people I've encountered at arcade collector's shows that remember Stocker, what they always seem to recall most is the music. It may be nothing to write home about but the background song and the audio cues when refueling are all built around automotive advertising jingles. The opening bars of the background music are undeniably the 1950's "See the U.S.A. in Your Chevrolet" jingle, which went on to be a popular advertising song for over a decade. When picking up gas, the 1960's Texaco jingle "You can trust your car to the man who wears the star" plays briefly. Other than the music there's some banging and crunching when cars impact one another and the soft whine of police sirens but for the most part game sounds are subdued by the music. While the game is colorful and has some nice variation in types of terrain and scenery, the visuals are quite simple and rather plain. What I do really enjoy is how virtually every vehicle on the road can make skid marks and tire tracks as they zip through each screen. It's not random either, it always makes sense when and where they are laid down. I can't think of another game from this era where you can essentially draw on the grass with your tire tracks.



Running out of gas just moments before pulling into the service station (left), a strangely icy desert (center), sliding around a corner near the end (right)

I actually first played Stocker years ago when I reworked a Pole Position upright cabinet to run the MAME arcade emulator. I didn't want to add additional controls or buttons, so the hunt was on to find games that worked with Pole Position's limited setup of a steering wheel, accelerator pedal, and single shift switch. Pole Position shifters only have a switch depressed when in high gear - the game program is always in low gear unless given this input, which greatly reduces the other driving games that can be played on this configuration. Stocker fit the bill perfectly, as it too is always in low gear unless the high gear switch is depressed. Although Stocker didn't seem like anything special at first I found myself playing it quite a bit, working out different strategies to maximize my score and get through each state as quickly as possible. In the end it became fairly addictive and one of my favorite games on the cabinet. Playing the game on an actual cabinet with the original controls many years later only furthered my enjoyment of this overlooked title.

It also has to be mentioned that Stocker's place in history has been cemented by the 1986 Martin Scorsese film The Color of Money, starring Paul Newman and Tom Cruise. A sequel to the 1961 film The Hustler, Eddie Felson (Newman) offers to assist Vincent Lauria (Cruise) in hustling players in nine-ball pool. At one point in the film Vincent declines Eddie's offer as he is more interested in playing Stocker, insisting that with the rise of technology his gaming skill will be his doorway to the United States Military Academy at West Point, even saying, "Ten years from now, a guy who scores heavy on Stocker is a shoe-in at The Point." Stocker is actually directly referenced by name a few times in the scene, with Eddie rather ironically asking if Vincent could make a lot of money playing Stocker. Well, I can tell you that my skills at Stocker have brought me neither fortune nor a military career, but have given me many enjoyable hours of flat out driving from coast to coast. I recommend giving this one a try if you aren't familiar with it.

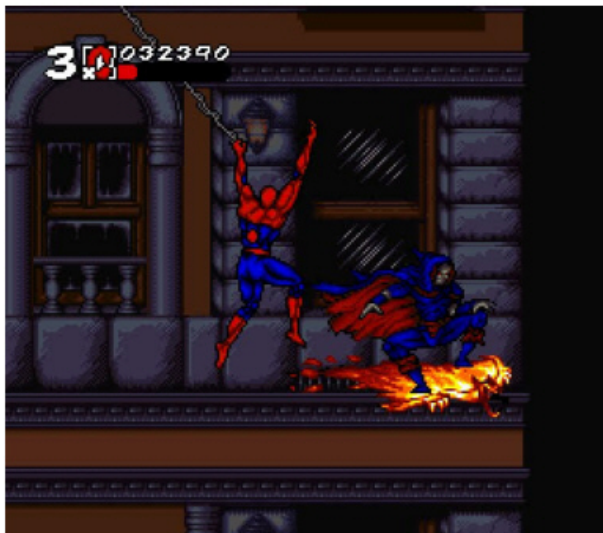


Peter Parker Picked a Pak of Near Perfect Pummeling

by [Dan Pettis](#)

Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can, and for over 40 years he's done that on nearly every console ever made. He's one of pop culture's most enduring icons and since first appearing in Marvel Comics' Amazing Fantasy 15, he has had such a long lasting streak of popularity that it would make almost any other superhero jealous. While Peter Parker may live a tough existence, juggling his personal life while battling a host of the worst super powered villains New York has to offer, Spider-Man has lived an absolutely charmed video game life. In the world of video games he's a vastly underrated super star. Starring in over 40 games, and making supporting appearances and cameos in tons more, Spidey has had arguably the greatest video game career of any super hero. So enduring is his popularity that a younger version of Spidey even helped Sony launch the PlayStation 5 last November with a brand new game, Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales.

He's also got a very diverse resume. He's traded punches with Ryu, rode a skateboard with Tony Hawk, and dodged ninja attacks from Sega's Shinobi. In North America on the Super Nintendo alone, he was featured as the headliner in four of his own games and appeared in many more. But only one of those games featured a plot adapted directly from a comic book story line, 1994's **Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage** for the Super Nintendo. It's based on a fourteen part story which spun a web across the various Spider-Man titles in the summer of 1993. The game does a great job referencing the source material as the game's plot closely follows that of the comics. In the story of the Maximum Carnage comics, all hell breaks loose as serial killer Cletus Kasady, also known as Carnage, breaks out of a prison for the criminally insane and goes on a killing spree with some of Spider-Man's worst villains in tow. To combat this chaos, Spider-Man teams up with Venom, one of his fiercest adversaries, as well as many other members of the Marvel Universe in order to stop the psycho symbiote and his posse.



Spidey swings into action against DemoGoblin (left), Venom smashes his way through San Francisco (right)

If you know a lot about old school licensed games, your Spidey-sense may start tingling for danger when you see the logo for LJN flash onscreen. It's a logo associated with some of the worst, most putrid cash-in licensed games of the 8 and 16 bit generations, games like Jaws, and the Back To The Future games. But the general low quality of LJN's games is not entirely their fault since LJN didn't actually develop their own games. They were primarily a toy company and they only published the completed games. The real fault lies in the mediocre developers that they hired on the cheap to make the games, which were guaranteed to sell a good amount of copies as long as a hot character was on the cover. This approach is the real cause of the general crappiness of most of their games. For Maximum Carnage they went with a British company for development duties, Software Creations. They were familiar with the web head from their earlier 1992 multi-platform game, Spider-Man and the X-Men in Arcade's Revenge.

Despite bearing the infamous LJN logo, this one is most certainly not a disaster and is in fact very fun and playable. Gameplay wise, Maximum Carnage is a side scrolling beat 'em up in the vein of Final Fight or The Simpsons arcade game. It's also an attempt to function as a playable version of the comic books and in this regard it mostly succeeds. Since the story of the comics is mainly an excuse for colorful fight scenes of Marvel's best beating each other down, this was the perfect direction to take the game. There are lots of comic panels shown between the levels that act as cut scenes and help keep you interested and engaged in the story between punches. Many of the actual panels from the Maximum Carnage storyline are colorfully recreated in pixelized form and are prime pieces of the over the top 1990's superhero art that ruled comics at the time.



Captain America offers his shield for assistance (left), Spidey battles his doppelganger (right)

Gameplay wise you'll start out as Spider-Man, with the option to play as the giant blue baddie Venom given later in the game. No matter who you play as, you have a lot of moves at your disposal. You have a standard punch attack which will give your thumb a serious workout through out the course of the adventure. These hits land with a satisfying thumping noise and comic book stylized words flashing on screen. There's a jump kick, a backflip, a scissor kick, and web based moves to attack and tie enemies up with. If you stand between two enemies and use your web line you can even smash two enemies together, hurting them both. Since this is a Spider-man game, you can also swing from web lines and climb buildings in the background to find hidden items. You will also find super hero icons that let you call in a screen clearing assist from many of Marvel's most popular characters like Captain America, Black Cat, and Morbius. An interesting move to master is the power hit, which is awarded to the player after scoring consecutive hits without misses on the enemies. Once activated, the power hit deals a ton of damage and knocks out most common baddies. Also one of my favorite moves at your disposal is an especially satisfying run slam move which is performed by double tapping a direction to run and then pressing the Y button to send a baddie flying across the screen. This wide variety of attacks gives the player many options to keep the repetitive mashing feeling fresh.

As far as graphics go this is a pretty good looking game for the time period. Both Spider-Man and Venom look really good and so do the other guest starring superheroes. Ditto for Carnage, and his motley crew of baddies. The characters are well designed and brought to life with smooth animations. Boggling down the good graphics though are lots of pretty generic looking streetscapes and alleyway backgrounds to fight in. Also there aren't too many different types of basic goons to fight, so expect to fight a lot of the same enemies in slightly differently colored clothing. There is a little graphical diversity on display though in areas like a trip to San Francisco with Venom, a fight against the Demogoblin in a neon drenched Times Square, a nightclub brawl, and a trip to the Fantastic Four's headquarters. These areas add a little variety to the otherwise repetitively dark scenery of New York streets. On the audio side when you fire up the game you're greeted by the sludgy rocking sounds of 1990's alternative group Green Jelly, with a digitized version of their song "Carnage Rules." The rest of the music also has a sludgy alternative rock feel which properly sets the mood for this adaptation of an edgy Spidey comic.

Unfortunately there are some other negative qualities of the game. The main one for me is the lack of multiplayer. In a game featuring both Spider-Man and Venom and tons of other Marvel characters, they should really have given the player a chance to partner up with a buddy for some cooperative smashing. If you only want to enjoy this game solo, that won't matter to you though. It's also a little weird that you can't select Venom right away, but it can be argued that this is in service of the story since Venom doesn't join Spider-Man's side right away in the Maximum Carnage comics. This choice does lead to slightly branching pathways and exclusive stages for both characters. I also am not a fan of the decision not to include a save or password system. Granted, the game is not incredibly long, but if you run out of a limited amount of continues you'll have to start all over at level one.



Firestar heats things up (left), One of the recreated comic panels (right)

But overall, I really do think Peter Parker picked a pack of pretty proficient pummeling on this one, thanks mainly to Software Creation's bang up job of adapting the Maximum Carnage storyline. If you wind up playing and enjoying this game, I'd recommend checking out their other spider success, a spiritual sequel to this game: 1995's Separation Anxiety. The game also stars Spider-Man and Venom as they battle Carnage and a host of other evil symbiotes and does feature cooperative multiplayer. If you do decide to track down a physical copy of Maximum Carnage, I'd recommend grabbing the Carnage colored red cartridge that most copies of this game were printed on. It may cost a little more than the plain gray cart versions, but it'll look much cooler when you pop it in your SNES and on your shelf. Also if you're a really serious collector, there was also an awesome collector's edition of the game released in an oversized and extremely stylish numbered box. But be prepared to shell out a lot of money for that one. But either way you go, I'd highly recommend giving this one a spin next time you're in the mood for a high quality retro Spidey beat 'em up.



Looking Back at Five Years of The Retrogaming Times

by David Lundin, Jr.

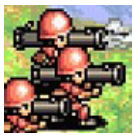
As I announced earlier, the Thirtieth Issue of The Retrogaming Times rounds out our fifth full year since returning to publication in March of 2016. While we hadn't planned anything special for this occasion, I thought I should at least acknowledge this milestone. Admittedly I am a bit of an "autopilot" editor, in that I try to step back as much as possible and allow submissions to come in and set the tone of each issue. Very rarely do I request a specific topic for an issue, outside of the Holiday Gift Guide column that began in 2019. This has been a double-edged sword in that it has allowed newsletter business to remain flexible and easily fit into the rest of life but it also means I don't put an emphasis on growing the newsletter or aggressively expanding its reach. At the beginning of the re-launch it was always my intention to preserve the newsletter as an open platform for other retrogamers to present their experiences and opinions on the hobby, which by definition would keep it small. I always loved the old school fan site aesthetic and tradition of Retrogaming Times, whether due to the era in which it began or by design of previous editors, and that is what I have tried to follow.

From the start I didn't want to change much, opting for a slightly enhanced version of the Scott Jacobi era of Retrogaming Times Monthly. Simple formatting, clean presentation, unified text and graphics. My goal was to have something that could easily be archived or printed, allowing the content to live on for as long as possible. Part of this archival push was a .PDF archive of the entire back catalog of Retrogaming Times, Bit Age Times, Retrogaming Times Monthly, and The Retrogaming Times - over 200 total issues - which was realized in January 2018. I'm continuing to standardize some of the latter issues of Retrogaming Times Monthly (issues 082 - 111) into the base format, allowing our entire history to be easily enjoyed for decades to come. The conversion of those last few RTM issues should be completed sometime this year.

The biggest change I've made to the makeup of the newsletter in my tenure is to greatly expand the opening and closing columns. It seems every editor has made these their own in different ways, right from the very start, and it was my intention to follow suit and totally run with the concept. Every editor has also titled these sections of the newsletter in their own way, a bit of an unofficial tradition, and I decided to use my history with and love of Pole Position for mine. In addition to welcoming our readers to each issue, my intention with "Prepare to Qualify" is to give a quick summary of the articles ahead and promote our always open reader submission model.

However the closing column, "See You Next Game," is truly my favorite thing to write every issue. Inspired by Howard Phillips' closing letters at the end of the early issues of Nintendo Power, I wanted to provide a consistent closing to each and every issue where I could write directly to our readers. Frequently a musing or idea brought on by a staff article in the issue, occasionally a memory that I'd like to share, sometimes a question asked to the readership, and often simply a retrogaming topic on my mind that wouldn't warrant a full article. I see the closing of every issue as an opportunity to reiterate who and what we are: retrogamers who love video games and enjoy sharing our common interest with others.

I do hope that at the very least we've have anchored our place in the greater legacy of Retrogaming Times over these past five years. I believe we've always done good work right from the start, and I truly feel humbled and privileged in the opportunity to publish outstanding content submitted by our staff - all walks of life, all interests and skill levels. Submissions remain open and I invite our readers to send in an article and be part of our tradition. I have no changes planned for 2021 and we have another wonderful year of issues ahead of us - please continue to join us, thank you.



Console Wars: A War Well Worth Joining

by [Dan Pettis](#)

When you were a gamer in the 1990's, you didn't just pick a console to buy, you picked a side in an ever expanding battle for living room dominance. Gamers got caught in the crossfire in the war between the two biggest game companies of the day: Nintendo and Sega. You had to make a stand and decide if you were a member of the aggressively edgy, cool and punk rock stylized team of Sega fans. Or if you were a part of the Disney-esque Nintendo team that made Mario, Zelda and the best games for the whole family to play. It was a potentially life changing decision, and the ramifications of this choice are illustrated perfectly in the new documentary film **Console Wars** that recently made it's debut on the streaming platform CBS All Access. This loving tribute is packed full of all new interviews with the people who started the war that exponentially expanded the reach of the industry and helped birth an entire generation of life long gamers and all the drama that went along with it.



The start of the film takes us all the way back to the start of video gaming. It starts at the beginning of the medium with black and white footage from 1968 of Ralph Baer, who is dubbed the Father of Video Games, showcasing the revolutionary game Pong that helped start everything. From there, the opening credits quickly feature the rise of video games through the Atari era and then transitioning to Nintendo's rise to dominance with the North American launch and immense popularity of the Nintendo Entertainment System through a snappy montage. Through this sequence Console Wars quickly establishes Nintendo with their 95% market share as the Goliath dominating the industry and Sega as an incredibly small but scrappy David style challenger.

Rather than focus on the leader Nintendo, this film mostly takes place from the perspective of the underdog challenger Sega. There's still plenty of attention paid to Nintendo, but since an underdog story is always interesting, it mainly focuses on Sega's efforts to break into the marketplace. The movie is produced and directed by Jonah Tulis, and Blake J. Harris, the author of the Console Wars book that the film is based on. The book was almost

entirely focused on Sega, but the movie does a better job of giving Nintendo more attention. It also had a more conversational narrative tone despite being based on true events. Be warned that if you are a Nintendo fan who thinks they could do no wrong back in the day and always played fairly, then get ready for Nintendo to not always be depicted in the most pleasant light. For a good chunk of the movie, they are depicted as the villains of the story. They are described by some of the people interviewed in the movie as "arrogant and cocky" while they were in their position of power as the number one gaming company. Some of their business practices at the time are also described as "monopolistic and wrong" by some of Sega's employees and at one point they are compared to the communist nation of Russia. The film does however give due credit to Nintendo for reviving the video game industry following Atari's collapse amid the infamous ET video game release disaster that plunged the games industry into chaos.



Former Nintendo Game Master Howard Phillips frequently appears throughout the movie.

After learning a little about Nintendo's backstory, viewers are introduced to Tom Kalinske, the mastermind behind Sega's rise to prominence in the gaming industry. Kalinske was the former CEO of Mattel and helped bring Barbie and Hot Wheels back to prominence and also launch the mega popular He-Man toy line. Strangely enough he was tapped to lead Sega of America after being stalked and recruited by a member of Sega while he was on a vacation in Hawaii with his family. After hesitantly flying to Japan and seeing some of Sega's upcoming products, he was convinced to help lead the American branch of the company in their fight against Nintendo.

It was Tom Kalinske who had the idea to take an aggressive approach and directly take on Nintendo by poking fun of their family friendly approach to gaming by making them and their games seem childish and boring. It was he who realized that the industry had grown up a little bit. He figured if he could appeal to teenage and older gamers, that it would make them appeal to their younger siblings too. He also made the decision to lower the price of the Genesis to get people to buy the console and perhaps most importantly, it was he who decided the company needed to introduce a mascot to rival Mario. This of course turned out to be the ultra iconic blue blur himself: Sonic the Hedgehog.

The movie also showcases some of Sega's other savvy guerrilla marketing techniques like targeting college campuses and an extensive mall tour. It's hard to remember now, but back then malls weren't just a place to shop. They were super cool hangout spots where teens would routinely go after school and on the weekends and meet up with friends and shop and eat and congregate for hours on end. At this mall tour, Sega challenged players to compare Nintendo's products side by side to their own and helped sway gamers to their approach but putting demos of their games directly into potential buyers hands. The movie also shows the unique way they were able to get their products into Walmart stores with more shrewd marketing when they opened an exclusively Sega video game store and demo location mere minutes from the Walmart headquarters in Bentonville Arkansas. That got the retail giant's attention and they agreed to give Sega shelf space in their previously Nintendo dominated gaming section.



Tom Kalinske being recruited to lead Sega of America while on a family vacation to Hawaii.

The movie features snappy pixel art style cartoon scenes created by Mindbomb Films to help illustrate and liven up some of the stories told by the people who were there for the battle. This is the same narrative technique used by Netflix's recent video game documentary series *High Score*. But the animation found in this movie is far superior to the one found in that show. The animation from that show was relatively simplistic, but the scenes in *Console Wars* are more complex, beautifully illustrated tributes to specific games, genres, and to 8 and 16 bit style graphics. Similar to *High Score*, these cut scenes also have a humorous undertone to add a much needed touch of humor and irreverence to the stories. The comedic sensibility of these animated scenes surely comes from famous funny man and executive producer Seth Rogen.

Another one of the best things about the movie is the treasure trove of vintage footage contained in *Console Wars*, including some rare footage inside Sega of America and Nintendo's headquarters. There's a ton of excellent archival footage here from vintage newscasts to classic commercials that'll have you screaming the word Sega all over again. The movie also features plenty of the always hilarious and heartwarming vintage family Christmas video game unwrapping videos. There are also some of the best and catchiest licensed songs from the 80's and 90's included to help lighten up the movie. The movie also features interviews with dozens of people from the front lines of the gaming wars, but Mario and Nintendo mastermind, Shigeru Miyamoto is strangely absent.

After the knock down drag out blows in the media, the console wars got a little personal. The movie even claims that Sega and Nintendo employees nearly had their own game of *Streets of Rage* in real life. The employees apparently nearly came to physical blows after an intense conference and because of the escalating rivalry between the two companies. The movie also features some of the testy footage from the senate hearing on violent video games in the wake of the *Mortal Kombat* violence controversy showing both Sega and Nintendo taking some fairly cheap swipes at one another. This saga ended with Howard Lincoln writing a bizarre poem to Kalinske, after he speculated that Nintendo started the violent game controversy on purpose in order to make Sega look bad and lead to a lot more bad blood between the two gaming companies.



Ellen Beth Van Buskirk, Director Of Communications for Sega of America, was a key player in the rise of Sega.

The film does come to a sad ending for Sega as Nintendo gets their groove back following the release of Donkey Kong Country and the launch of the Nintendo 64. It shows Sega utterly defeated after the botched launch and poor overall sales for their Saturn console. This system crashed and burned with over priced, under powered hardware and a baffling rush to the marketplace before they had enough units for retailers. In perhaps the most appropriate metaphor for Sega's downfall, the movie shows footage from the 1993 Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade when a massive Sonic balloon was popped by a lamppost and fell limply to the ground.

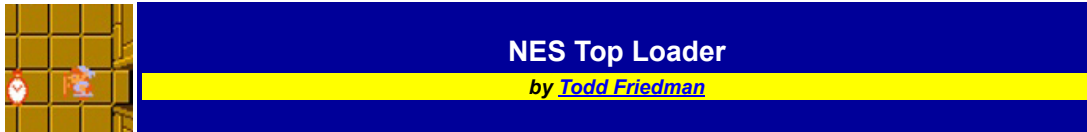
It is towards the end of the movie that the actual surprise winner of the 1990's console wars is introduced with Sony's entrance into the ring with the first PlayStation system. The movie positions this as a big mistake on Sega's part after Sony initially had a deal to make hardware with Sega before that deal fell apart. In an odd omission from the movie, Sony's similar deal with Nintendo that also fell apart is strangely not mentioned in the movie. This is an especially curious omission as that failed partnership produced actual hardware that was famously unearthed and sold recently. But regardless, after going out on their own, Sony had a smash hit with the PlayStation console, selling over 100 million units, far more than either the Super Nintendo or Sega Genesis and launching a dominant console brand that continues to this very day with the 2020 release of the PlayStation 5.



A fighting game style take on Tom Kalinske and Nintendo's Peter Main near street fight after a testy press conference.

No matter how much you think you know about the battle between the big N and the blue hedgehog's parent company, you're sure to learn something new about their battle from the Console Wars movie. Even if you think you know all there is to know, it's a real joy to hear the story from the people who lived to tell the tale. Although Netflix's High Score also did an episode about the war between Nintendo and Sega, I would recommend this as a more definitive version of the story. High Score's console war episode was much shorter and much less in depth. It

also spent just as much time in the same episode about the creation of the Madden series which is interesting but not incredibly relevant to the overall story of the battle between Nintendo and Sega. For an entertaining, educational and genuinely funny documentary, I suggest you join in the Console Wars and check it out now, on the CBS All Access streaming platform.



The NES-101 model of the NES, sometimes called the NES 2, the top-loading model, or simply the Top Loader, is a compact, top-loading redesign of the original Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) released by Nintendo in 1993. I had been wanting a top loader NES for a while now. I see how gamers can test and play their NES carts without issues or concerns of the front loading model. Being a collector of NES games recently, I wanted a reliable system that could play the NES carts I am collecting. There are RetroDuo machines that can play them and portable ones as well, but I wanted an authentic NES console. I finally found one recently at a good price, with the "dogbone" controller. I personally do not use that, I use the original NES controller, but it was nice to have to display with it.



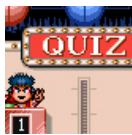
The new design offered many improvements over the original Nintendo, most notably eliminating the common problems such as flashing screens from dirty connectors. After first glance, it was exactly what I wanted and in good condition. I was excited to play a game and see if it indeed doesn't crash or freeze up as the original usually did for me. Then I saw one thing that was a bummer in my opinion, the connector to the TV was only an RF cable, no an A/V option for this system. There are also some vertical lines and color distortion in the picture compared to the original NES. I am very surprised a console that came out eight years later, with a NES original having AV hookups, that it would only have an RF connection. So, for testing games it is perfect for me, but for playing I prefer the original NES.

Then there is the controller, or what is known as the "dogbone" controller due to its shape. This was the first time I've really held the dogbone controller in my hand for an extended period of time. I think it comes down to the individual if you will like it or not. It looks and feels similar to the Super Nintendo (SNES) controllers, but they feel bulkier due to the rounded edges. The NES Top Loader can also utilize the original NES controllers as the controller port is the same configuration as the original NES.

Sure enough, there are gamers out there who have "modded" there top loader to have A/V and even HDMI hookups. Of course, there is a price and if you wan them to do it, shipping costs. I have not decided to do that as of yet, but eventually I think I may. There are kits that I can have mailed to me, but the one thing I am not great at is modding and taking apart consoles and putting them back together properly.

I would recommend getting one if you are an NES collector or fanatic. I would try to find one in the low \$100 range, for the console and controller only. Some higher priced models have the box and more controllers as well as games with it. Don't get me wrong, I love the original NES and the memories that come with it, but it is a difficult machine to

keep clean and running properly at all times. At the end of the day the NES Top Loader isn't without its flaws to consider.



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:

10/30/2020 - WEEK 187

Question: Johnny Dash is the star of what spooky DOS game?

11/06/2020 - WEEK 188

Question: SkyRoads was a remake of what earlier PC game from the same developer?

11/13/2020 - WEEK 189

Question: Club Zero-Zero is the main conversation hub in what Super Nintendo action game?

11/20/2020 - WEEK 190

Question: What video game takes place in the dream world of Subcon?

11/27/2020 - WEEK 191

Question: Bentley Bear is the star of what arcade game?

12/04/2020 - WEEK 192

Question: Metal Slug X is an upgraded remake of what game?

12/11/2020 - WEEK 193

Question: Wearing the Hammer Bros. suit in Super Mario Bros. 3 removes what standard ability from Mario and Luigi?

12/18/2020 - WEEK 194

Question: "Action," "Danger," and "Reload" are all things that may be heard while playing what arcade game series?



Monster Bash! is a strangely gory game about a kid saving cats and dogs (left), advancing the story at Club Zero-Zero in MechWarrior (right)

Answers:

Week 187 Answer: Monster Bash! (1993).

Week 188 Answer: Kosmonaut, created by Bluemoon Software.

Week 189 Answer: MechWarrior.

Week 190 Answer: Super Mario Bros. 2.

Week 191 Answer: Crystal Castles (1983).

Week 192 Answer: Metal Slug 2.

Week 193 Answer: The ability to slide, as the Hammer Bros. suit instead puts the player into a defensive duck.



Bentley Bear scoops up gems in Crystal Castles (left), being alerted to an object danger in Time Crisis (right)

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

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



See You Next Game

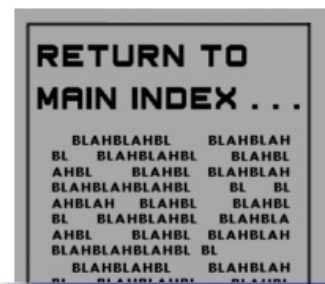
by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Thinking about the battle between Nintendo and Sega for dominance of the North American video game market in the 1990's always brings Hudson and NEC's PC Engine to mind - probably better known to most of our readers as the TurboGrafx-16. Surprisingly Sega was never able to carve out a solid share of the home video game market in Japan, with the PC Engine settling in right behind Nintendo's Famicom (NES) upon release. Incredibly ahead of its time for when it was released in Japan, the PC Engine would go on to be a spectacular success, also launching the CD-ROM as a viable video game format with a later (and equally ahead of its time) expansion. Unfortunately due to a continuous cycle of delays and poor marketing decisions, the hardware lost its advantage by the time it sputtered onto the American market, taking a seat on the sidelines while Nintendo and Sega duked it out.

If Hudson and NEC hadn't completely, totally, incredibly fumbled the ball outside of Japan with the PC Engine (but don't worry, they later did just that in Japan with its planned successor, the Super Grafx) the modern day makeup of the industry would probably be very different. Not to drift too far off into "what if" territory but with a more successful and earlier western launch of the PC Engine, the home gaming aspirations of Sega would have had even more obstacles to overcome in the 1990's. I could have totally seen Sega and Hudson merging at one point, with a theoretical Sega-Hudson operating as both a home console and arcade operations powerhouse - uniquely positioning them within the industry as a whole. Ah, then again I suppose I'm still sore with the reality of Konami letting Hudson die on the vine, only to squeeze a few drops out of them every now and again.

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

See You Next Game!



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