

The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-SECOND ISSUE - MAY 2021

SHINING STAR SPARKS CAREERS!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

The Retrogaming Times

Thirty-Second Issue - May 2021

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Prepare to Qualify

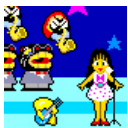
by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Time passes and seasons change but retrogames remain as entertaining as ever. Welcome to another packed issue of The Retrogaming Times! I am always impressed by the different gaming interests of our staff and the opinions and stories they share in their articles. Remember that if you are reading this issue, you can contribute to a future one as well! Take a look at the outstanding issue presented below and if you're feeling inspired, send in an article of your own!

The cover story leads things off this time, as Merman looks at all the Commodore 64 games released by Sirius Software, a company that had a brush with a lot of big names at one time or another. Don Lee continues to modify his home retrogaming workout with Wii Fit Plus and the once hugely in demand Wii Balance Board. In space no one may be able to hear you scream but they can sure hear frustration as Space Panic mutates in Arcade Obscure. After a year of amusement park closures and restrictions, Dan Pettis explores an 8-bit parkgoing alternative with Adventures in the Magic Kingdom on the NES. Jerry Terrifying outlines his encounters with the Intellivision, diving into the library and hardware quirks of this very popular piece of vintage gaming. The Magic Kingdom isn't the only MK that Dan Pettis has on tap this issue, as he returns in Caught On Film with a review of the sequel to 1995's Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat: Annihilation. Video game development is often a long road with many pitfalls and setbacks, with the true story of how many popular games came to fruition buried in secrecy. Sonic the Hedgehog 3 is one such game and George "mecha" Spanos delivers a detailed look at what has been decoded concerning Sega's iconic blue blur. School is back in session with the final of the first three original games for the Tomy Pyuuta, a Space Panic clone with a difference by the name of Monster Inn. 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! - The Bright Stars of Sirius Software

by Merman

Sirius, the Dog Star, is the brightest star in the sky over Earth. Sirius Software Inc. was a short-lived but bright star in the early software industry and created a dozen Commodore 64 games.

Picture the scene - at the Computerland store in Sacramento, California, employee Jerry Jewell gets talking to a young Iranian man. Nasir Gebelli was a regular visitor and demonstrates some of his Apple II software to Jerry - and Jerry likes it so much, he quits to set up his own software company with the store's owner Terry Bradley to market Nasir's software. That included the landmark E-Z Draw on Apple II, one of the first graphic editors for home computers. Nasir was paid royalties rather than a fixed salary and responded by writing eight games in a year - reportedly earning him nearly a quarter of a million dollars. The company mascot was a jolly alien that appeared in several games and on cover artwork.



The title screens of the 12 Sirius Software release on Commodore 64.

Sirius Software Inc. expanded rapidly in its first two years and sought out new markets beyond the Apple II. Other talented programmers who worked for the company included Tony Ngo and Paul Allen Edelstein. It also saw the start of programmer Mark Turmell's career, years before his Midway arcade hit NBA Jam, and future Epyx star Chuck Sommerville also spent time at Sirius. With Sierra On-Line thriving thanks to its line of graphic adventures, Sirius tried to follow suit. And then the big money arrived - 20th Century Fox Video Games offered a lucrative deal to publish Sirius titles on Atari 2600, including tie-in titles to Fox movies. The deal turned sour with the "crash" of 1983. As companies turned their back on video games, Sirius claimed Fox owed over \$14 million in unpaid royalties. Fox refused to pay, and Sirius would not recover from the financial blow. Although Alpine Encounter (1985) and Bob Blauschild's Escape from Rungistan (1986 conversions to PC-88 and FM7, based on the 1982 Apple II original) were released later, the company was in steep decline from 1984. InfoWorld had named it the 15th largest software company in 1983 based on \$15 million of sales, but by the next year it was almost over and done with.

The story of Sirius and Jerry Jewell was featured in Steven Levy's 1984 book Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (published by Doubleday). After 160 releases across multiple formats, the star had burned out. So now it is time to look back at the Sirius releases for the C64, with a couple of interesting titles that are still very playable.

Note: in the list below, release and copyright dates have been checked with a few sources. This can be complicated, with some games displaying a different year to the actual release. It is often down to being a conversion of an older game from a different format.

FAST EDDIE, 1982

Kathy Bradley (game design by Mark Turmell)

Fast Eddie is on a treasure hunt, climbing up and down ladders. Roaming the platforms or standing in the way are the Sneakers, and Eddie must jump over or avoid them. At the top of the screen is the tall High-Top, carrying the key. Once Eddie has collected nine prizes, High-Top shrinks so that Eddie can jump over him to collect the key on his head and unlock the next level. Scoring is simple, 10 points for the first prize and increasing by 10 points for each prize; the tenth prize with its bonus 90 points is optional. An extra life is awarded for completing each screen. The enemies were based on the ones that appeared in Mark Turmell's first ever video game - 1981's Sneakers for the Atari 2600 (a Space Invaders clone). It is an amazingly simple score-chasing game, gradually becoming more difficult as more Sneakers start moving. I did like that the prize changes shape for each level, but the gameplay is very dated now.

Kathy Bradley also programmed the VIC-20 version of Fast Eddie.



The prizes become fish on level 2 of Fast Eddie, while grabbing all the telephones on level 5 reveals the key at the top.

TYPE ATTACK, 1982

Ernie Brock & Jim Hauser

On the planet of Lexicon, letters have started to fall from the sky! Luckily, the inhabitants are great typists who can repel the falling letters and symbols by typing them on a keyboard. Educator Jim Hauser teamed up with Sirius programmer Ernie Brock to create this typing tutor game mixed with Space Invaders. Each lesson starts with two waves of Character Attack, where a formation of single characters appears and descends towards the bottom of the screen. If a letter or symbol is at the bottom of a column, the player zaps it by pressing the matching key. Any mistake drains the player's energy (shown on the right), and later lessons add shifted characters. To complete the lesson the player must finish the Word Attack wave by typing in a series of "words" made up of that lesson's keys correctly - but can delete mistakes in this section before hitting Return. A Bonus Words section then offers more points. There are 39 lessons to complete, at a speed ranging from 1 (slow) to 99 (incredibly fast). The final score is based on the typing speed in words per minute (WPM, shown by the bar on the left of the screen) and the number of letters destroyed, minus points for mistakes. The disk version can save the high scores to beat another day. An interesting twist on the typing tutor format but ultimately short-lived in excitement.



Shooting the letters A, S and D on lesson 1 of Type Attack, and then tackling Word Attack on lesson 2.

GRUDS IN SPACE, 1983

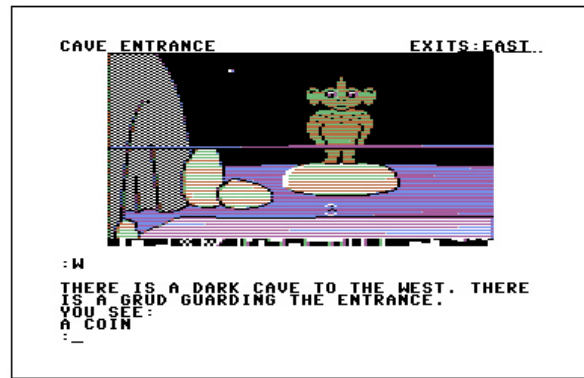
Chuck Sommerville & Joseph Dudar

The funny description on the back of the box was inspired by the way Valley Girls spoke, but the in-game descriptions were rather more formal. President Fred asks you to help a spy stranded on Pluto, by obtaining the spaceship fuel and taking it to him. However, the Solar System has been invaded by an alien species known as Gruds and things are not that simple.

This text adventure has a large graphical view of each location, with a bar at the top showing the location name and possible exits. Traveling around your ship and exploring the galaxy, you use simple commands such as EXAMINE, TAKE and SHOOT GRUDS. There is a short disk access between screens, and the display has an annoying "flicker" in emulation. This is down to the graphic drawing routine requiring a particular make of NTSC chip inside the computer. The spot sound effects are a cute addition, examples including your spaceship engaging warp drive or when you use the teleporter. With multiple planets to visit and some obscure puzzles, there is a real challenge here.

This is the only game on Joseph Dudar's resume, but Chuck would go on to greater fame working on the Epyx Games

series, the Atari Lynx handheld and his classic puzzle game Chuck's Challenge.



Setting the warp drive for Saturn, and finding a Grud outside a cave on Saturn.

REPTON, 1983

Dan Thompson & Andy Kaluzniacki
iOS 2011

For UK fans, the name is confusing. First there is the town in Derbyshire famous for its exclusive boarding school, and then there is a best-selling series of games called Repton. This started on the BBC Micro with the C64 only getting a conversion of Repton 3. In this game the planet is called Repton, defended by the Starfighter Armageddon under the player's control. This has an invincibility shield (active when not firing) and Nuke Bombs to destroy everything onscreen (released by pressing Space). A radar display shows where enemies are, with threat warnings appearing onscreen in large letters. The screen scrolls horizontally left and right like Defender, with a couple of twists.

The animated instructions introduce the various enemy types and explain your objectives, or the player can enter Training Mode to get used to the controls. You must defend your base, which is made of blocks. The Quarriors will try to steal these blocks to build an enemy base, and the bigger that base gets the more enemies are launched. Nova Cruisers split into smaller ships when shot, and Minelayers drop deadly mines. Drayns steal energy from the Grid to power the enemy base. By flying through the energy beam, the player gets the energy back, to be deposited in the Power Transformer. This also allows you to gain extra Nuke Bombs. If the Grid is fully drained or the enemy base completed, you enter a new phase as you try to destroy the underground reactor. The graphics are reasonable, although some may dislike the green and purple colour scheme. It is quite complex to get to grips with but shoot 'em up fans will love it.

Dan Thompson is predominantly associated with the Atari 8-bit and Apple II, while Andy went on to work for Infocom, Accolade and LucasArts. Andy would be behind the 2011 remake of Repton for iOS. However veteran programmer Jeff Minter of Llamasoft was strongly critical of this new version, claiming the graphics were poor and the onscreen controls were clumsily done.



Putting yourself into the energy beam to recover stolen energy from a Drayn, and the ship is shielded while you are stationary.

SNAKE BYTE, 1983

Dan Stanfield & Ray Elzey (game design by Chuck Sommerville)

The packaging had the tagline "Antidote for Boredom" under the drawing of a snake eating an apple. The player can choose how many the Perilous Purple Plums are present, adding difficulty. On each level the snake must eat ten apples to unlock the door to the next level. A timer counts down, and if the snake has not eaten an apple in time then three more

apples are added on the target amount needed. As the snake eats, its tail grows and will kill the snake if it collides with it. The Plums bounce around off the walls, the snake's tail and each other and will kill the snake if they hit its head.

Irritatingly the controls are keyboard only, with the choice of IJKM being tough to use. Graphics are simple and sound is just beeps. There are much better Snake games on the C64.

Dan was the programmer, while Ray produced the music and sound effects. The original game design was by Chuck Sommerville.



Bouncing purple plums can add to the difficulty, while eating enough apples opens the door.

SQUISH 'EM, 1983

Tony Ngo

This was based on an Atari 2600 prototype called The Fall Guy, but it was only released on that format by AtariAge in 2007 (based on the Atari 8-Bit). Sam must climb vertically-scrolling buildings to collect suitcases filled with money. Sam can only move up if there is a girder above him to climb, else he must move left and right to find one. Creepy monsters and falling objects will knock Sam off. He can stretch his legs up and then stamp on the monsters. This will disable them for a short time, but they will reappear.

This is a simple premise, seemingly inspired by classic arcade game Crazy Climber. The graphics are ok, with colours changing as you progress through the levels. There is also a nice screen shake effect on Game Over. But it will not hold your attention for long.



Dodging a falling object on level 2, and about to pick up the briefcase (when Sam will parachute down to the bottom of the building to start again).

TURMOIL, 1983

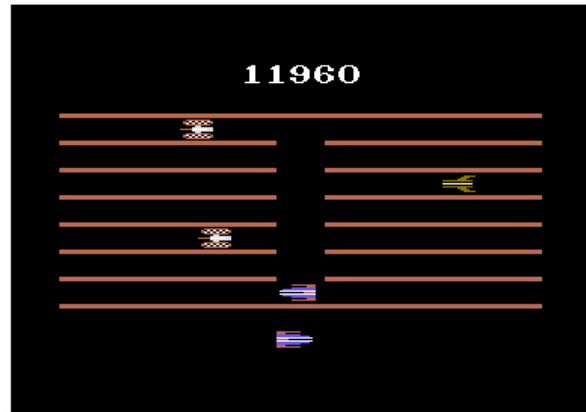
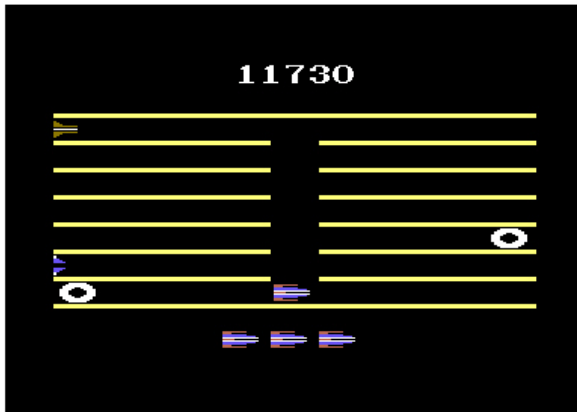
Jeremy ("Jay") Jones (game design by Mark Turmell)

Starting out on the Atari 2600 in 1982, this fast-paced shoot 'em up was converted to other formats. Your intergalactic fighter is trapped in a chamber with seven corridors. Aliens, including a familiar ship from the earlier Fast Eddie, will move at various speeds along the corridors. Your ship can travel up and down the central lane, shooting to the left or right, but stay in one corridor too long and an indestructible Ghost Ship will hurtle towards you. Every now and then a glowing Orb will appear - race towards it and grab it for bonus points, but you must return it to the centre of the screen before the Ghost Ship catches you. Leave an Orb too long and it will shoot towards the middle and kill the player on contact. If an Arrow makes it across the screen without being shot, it turns into a Tank. A Tank can only be destroyed by shooting it from behind; shots at its front will merely push it backwards along the lane. There are nine levels to conquer featuring

multiple waves of enemies. You start with five ships and gain an extra ship for clearing a level, with up to six in reserve.

This is very much an old-fashioned blaster, probably better suited to the Atari 2600 it was designed for. There are some good presentation touches, including the title screen's rainbow-coloured logo and the full-screen rainbow effect introducing each level. Sprites are a mixed bag, with the Orb being incredibly simple. Sound is alright but doesn't stretch the SID chip.

Jeremy Jones was known as Jay Jones when he created the C64 conversion of Turmoil. He also programmed the VIC-20 version of another Sirius title, Deadly Duck.



Grab the white Orbs before they shoot at you, and these Tanks can only be destroyed from behind.

WAVY NAVY, 1983

Rodney McAuley

Take control of a PT boat (patrol torpedo) as it battles giant waves and the enemy attacks from above. Kamikaze planes dive towards you and helicopters fly down to shoot at you. At higher levels bombers fly across the screen, mines float by on the waves and Exocet missiles zoom by. The boat moves left and right, its path altered by the huge waves. On the main menu the player can choose from 1 to 4 players with joystick or keyboard, at one of three difficulty levels (beginner, advanced, expert). Completing a level earns you a higher rank. This was the game that inspired this feature when I saw it on a Twitter thread. Looking back, it is an interesting variation on Galaxian with the well-rendered waves adding a new twist.

Rodney McAuley is credited for the game design and programming on all three versions of Wavy Navy - C64, Atari 8-bit and Apple II. Paul Lutus created the Electric Duet music driver used for the Apple II version's music, which creates the illusion of two separate channels of sound by combining waveforms.



Dodging the helicopter's cannon fire, and trying to destroy the second formation.

WAY OUT (aka WAYOUT), 1983

Paul Allen Edelstein

Called "A 3D-Action Maze" on the packaging, the player must find their way out of 26 different mazes. This is an early example of a first-person perspective game. Fortunately, the player has a map-making kit and a compass to help them; an "automap" is drawn as the player explores. Unfortunately, the lurking Cleptangle beast will steal these useful items if it catches the player - but they can chase it to retrieve them. The wind is also blowing, meaning the player cannot move against it. Small moving fireflies give a clue to where the wind is blowing. Find the exit and your score is the number of

movements needed to complete the level, with the game disk saving the best scores for each maze. The player can also save up to nine games in progress to be reloaded later. The movement takes a little getting used to, especially from a modern point of view. The graphics generate a good illusion of being in a maze, and the automap is helpful. Working out a quicker route to get that elusive high score can still be fun, even after all these years.

Paul Edelstein is credited with the Apple II, Atari 8-bit and C64 versions. The sequel was known as Capture the Flag, with a split-screen display designed for two players. One was the Invader, trying to break into the maze and escape with the flag for a point. The Defender must simply run into the Invader to capture them and score a point. The game then randomly generates a new maze. Both games used innovative interactive music developed by George "The Fat Man" Sanger. Separate bass and melody lines would be played, and as the player got closer to the exit or an enemy/opponent, the music layers were changed.



Pursuing the distant Cleptangle as it has stolen the map maker and compass, while the fireflies buzz around you.

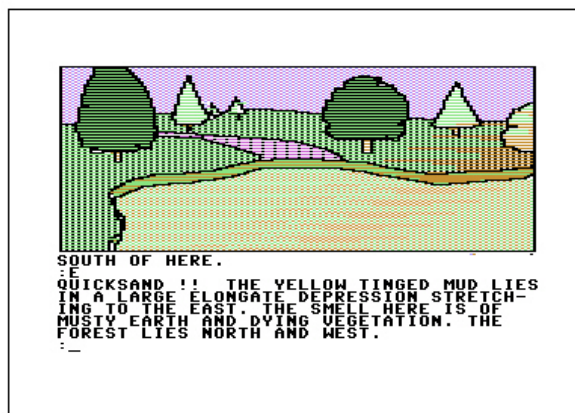
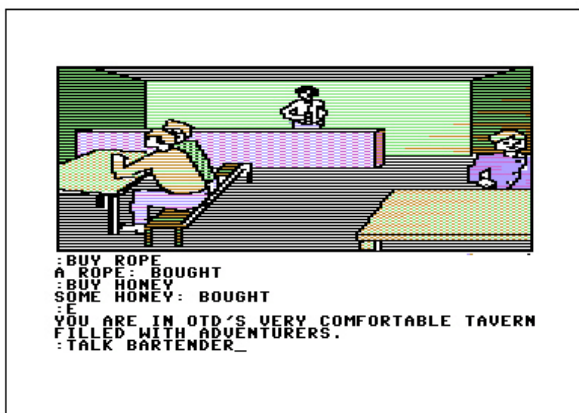
THE BLADE OF BLACKPOOLE, August 1983

Tim Wilson

In a fantasy land, the player must find the magic sword Myraglym, last seen near the lake at Blackpoole. The game has 60 locations, with each having a graphical picture shown at the top of the screen above the descriptive text and player inputs. The parser accepts slightly more complicated commands than the typical verb noun structure that was common. It does have an interesting limit on the player's inventory, meaning they can only carry six objects at once. The maximum possible score is 500, with points earned for solving puzzles and reaching locations.

The C64 version uses a similar graphic engine to Gruds in Space, designed to give extra colour in the image - at the cost of some flicker in emulation. The parser is reasonable, accepting quite a few words. It is a long quest to solve and the inventory limit does make certain sections difficult - especially with so many red herrings lying around. There is a lot of disk access to load in the pictures, which then redraw every time you pick up an object (to remove them from the scene). This really slows down the pace of the game.

Tim Wilson coded the Apple II version and is credited with the C64 conversion the following year. He would go on to code David Lubar's brilliant Pastfinder for the C64 too.



Talking to a friendly bartender, and stuck in some quicksand...

BANDITS, October 1983

Leonard Bertoni (game design by Tony Ngo)

This single-screen shooter appeared on Apple II and Atari 8-bit, before Leonard created the VIC-20 and C64 conversions. Supplies at a lunar base are under threat from the attacking aliens, so the player must use their missile base and its shield (limited by an energy bar shown at the bottom of the screen) to protect the vital fruit. If an alien picks up a piece of fruit from the supply domes, the player can shoot it to regain the piece before the alien leaves the screen. Later levels introduce more enemy types, including drones that zigzag down the screen, Centipede-like strings of enemies that drop bombs and the clusters that break into bouncing balls.

French magazine Micro 7 gave the C64 game a favourable review. "Arguably the best game of Space Invaders. The waves follow each other and do not look alike. The colours, graphics and animation are exceptional, although they were originally created on Apple. There is no music, but good sound effects." After the interesting intro animation and the mothership dropping the player off, the in-game graphics are quite nice with the different types of fruit well drawn. Sound is reasonable for the time but nothing special. It does have an addictive quality as you try to get further and beat your high score.

Designer Tony Ngo also created Squish 'Em and the Activision classic Park Patrol. The Activision Atari 2600 game Spider Fighter, the first by designer Larry Miller, has similar gameplay (protecting fruit from being stolen) and has had a recent C64 remake. Both may have been inspired by Stratovox (known as Speak & Rescue in Japan), a 1981 arcade game that was one of the first to feature speech. Stratovox had aliens attempt to abduct human colonists, who would shout "Help Me!" when abducted.



Underneath the bouncing balls from cluster enemies, and a bandit makes away with a bunch of grapes.

CRITICAL MASS, November 1983

Bob Blauschild

When the United Nations receives a threat to destroy five large cities with nuclear weapons, it is up to the player to travel the world to stop the evil Count Stuportino and find his hidden lair. From a faulty elevator in New York to a water-ski contest in Miami, the Eiffel Tower to the island of Martinique, the player uses basic verb noun inputs to solve the puzzles and plays some simplistic arcade sequences to stop the Count - against a time limit that could see the game end in a not-too-subtle mushroom cloud.

The graphics draw quickly but are typical of the line drawings of the era. There is some humour in the game, from a message self-destructing in classic spy fashion to the sudden appearance of a bomb. But the arcade sequences make things much harder for an adventure player, and some of the puzzles are very tricky to work out.

This was Bob's second game, after 1982's Escape from Rungistan for Apple II (also published by Sirius).





Don's Desk - Wii Fit Plus

by Donald Lee

Happy May everyone! I hope this issue finds everyone well. Work was quite busy from January until the end of March, however since the second quarter started things have slowed down a little bit. On a personal note, I was able to get my first COVID-19 vaccine shot this past Sunday. I'm happy as my side gig of officiating high school sports (basketball and volleyball) is also beginning. I admit to being surprised to actually have games to work this season. It will be good to be get into a gym and be part of some sports activities as an official. Hopefully, I'll be able to play some sports myself at some point in the near future.

Last issue I mentioned I had picked some programs and I would comment on them. For this month, I'm going to talk about Wii Fit Plus for the Nintendo Wii. Why did I decide to get Wii Fit Plus and the associated balance board? As I've written about previously, most of my exercise in the past year has been at home. I've used a mix of machines and Nintendo Switch / Wii programs. But doing the same thing over and over again can be pretty boring so I like to have some variety to mix things up. When I saw Wii Fit Plus and the balance board on eBay, I read some old reviews and thought it might be worth a spin. The purchase was not cheap but I thought I would get some use out of Wii Fit Plus. After using it off and on for the past couple of months, I will say that it was worth the purchase.



Wii Fit Plus has a variety of short (a few minutes) exercises including aerobic, yoga and strength exercises using the balance board (though some don't need the balance board). Wii Fit Plus can also allow you to group favorite exercises together into a workout plan. There are also some pre-defined exercises you could do also. However you couldn't group the aerobic exercises together which was disappointing. Upon my first few days of testing, the short aerobic exercises were ok though some admittedly were a little slow and boring. Certainly not enough to get my heart rate going. Through the last past few weeks, I also tried some of the yoga exercises. I will say that yoga is pretty difficult. I may be in decent shape but I don't think I have great balance! Wii Fit Plus also has some strength exercises but I have not tried them out yet as I do strength work through a few other means at the moment.

The main functions I have found the most useful recently are Free Steps and Free Run. Basically you just load the program, get to either Free Step (using the balance board) or Free Run (no balance board, jog in place), set up the duration (10, 20, or 30 minutes) and you can begin exercising. Why have I used these two functions more recently? Because once you have things setup, you can switch your TV back to a TV program and exercise while the Wii talks to you through the Wii Remote. Really the talk is just motivation and a talking timer but it's useful to be able to exercise while watching TV instead of having to stare at the Wii program screen instead. The Free Step is good for me when I want some light exercise. The Free Run gets my heart rate going more and I definitely break a sweat even though it's not the hardest exercise I've ever done.

All in all, I'm glad I picked up Wii Fit Plus and the balance board. While I may not use every feature regularly, I found a couple of things useful and I could see myself using those features long after things go back to normal. It will be nice to have some exercise options to fall back on when I'm not out and about in the future. See you next issue!

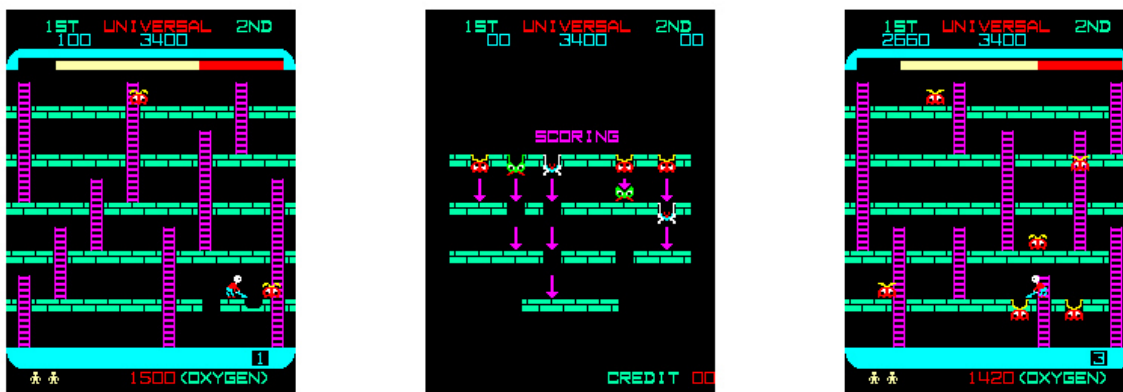
Arcade Obscure - Space Panic

by David Lundin, Jr.



When released by Universal in 1980, Space Panic presented a novel concept: a playfield made up of multiple levels with ladders running between them. Rather than an open expanse or a flat maze, the action took place vertically on multiple floors. While it predated similar arcade climbing games such as Donkey Kong, Space Panic really shouldn't be considered a platforming game as it lacks any form of a jump mechanic. Instead the only ability of offense or defense the player possesses is the power to dig holes, making Space Panic more of a climbing and digging game, similar to the later released and massively successful computer game Lode Runner. However being first doesn't always make you best - or even all that good.

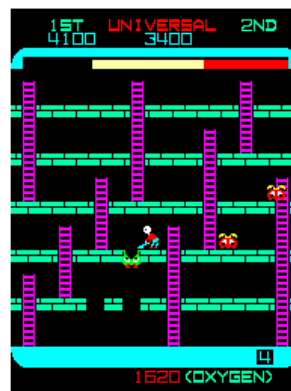
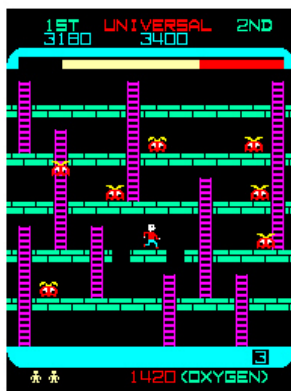
Armed only with a shovel, the player must run along platforms and defeat swarms of aliens. This is accomplished by digging a hole in a platform, coaxing an alien to fall into it and become trapped, then filling the hole back in to knock the alien off the screen before it can climb out. If an alien is allowed to climb out of a hole, it will fill it in and resume its pursuit of the player. The further an alien drops, the more points it is worth. Additional points can be earned by dropping aliens onto one another, either passing below or trapped in multiple aligned holes. However this is difficult to set up and tends to be more of a surprise rather than a strategy - at least to me. Thankfully the player may fall through a fully excavated hole to the platform below without penalty and this is often a way to escape and trick a pursuing alien.



Digging a hole with an alien close by (left), the worst explained enemy mechanics screen ever (center), working fast to bury an alien (right)

The twist to this mechanic, and ultimately what makes the game extremely difficult, begins on the second stage. From stage two onward an alien that climbs out of a hole will mutate into the next strongest type of alien, three types in all - red, green, and white. These more powerful green aliens appear as stock beginning on the fourth stage and require dropping through two floors or to have another alien dropped onto them from above to be killed. If these aliens climb out of a hole, they mutate again into the even stronger white aliens. The white aliens require dropping through three floors or to have another alien dropped onto them while they are climbing out of a hole directly below to be killed. Eventually the white aliens will begin to appear as stock at the beginning of a stage, creating a massive disadvantage for the player right from the start. Honestly the hole digging, trapping, and filling mechanic is frantic enough without expanding it twice - each time doubling the effort required to defeat a single alien. Additionally you have to be sure an alien is totally in a hole before approaching to bury it, otherwise it'll spring across the gap and kill you instantly. In fact the alien to player hit detection can be a bit strange as it is very easy to have an alien kill you when you're anywhere near one, sometimes feeling as no contact was even made.

Thankfully player movement is reasonably quick with good response both when running along platforms and scurrying up and down ladders. There is both a button to dig and a button to bury (or a "holing" and "closing" button on the original arcade cabinet - yes, HOLING and CLOSING), with the respective action performed in the direction the player is facing. Resist the urge to tap the button and just hold it down for maximum effectiveness. Although the controls are pretty snappy they are betrayed by some game design choices. The multi-drop higher power aliens wouldn't be so bad if you didn't have to be nearly pixel-perfect in aligning holes down through multiple floors. The individual sections of a floor aren't divided into an easily interpreted grid or equal spacing that can be quickly ascertained. This makes it unreasonably challenging to dig a hole precisely where you want. This isn't because the control lacks responsiveness, as stated earlier input is actually quite quick and prompt - the problem is **everything** is quick and prompt. The entire game moves way too fast for what it throws at the player. The swarm of aliens will be right on top of you at a moment's notice, giving next to no time to formulate a strategy. Your character may not swing his shovel slow but compared to everything else in the game it sure feels that way. If you could simply lay out traps and wait for the aliens to come to you things would be easier but your oxygen supply is always decreasing. This also functions as an end of stage bonus, with a point value given to remaining oxygen. Oxygen cannot be replenished and it drains pretty quickly. There is a bit of a nice touch here though, as the player's face will turn red when oxygen level is critical and his movement will slow just before death. Perhaps this is a bit morbid for a game where the player controls what amounts to a stick figure but it's an interesting detail nonetheless.



Dashing to get set up when more powerful aliens are near (left), it's all too easy to get overrun (center), dropping a green alien two floors (right)

Sound is very basic but reasonable given the game's vintage. It's mainly just a few beeps and bops on tap, although I like the "woo... tsssh" sound when aliens fall through a hole. Following suit the graphics are very simple but nice for what they are. I do find it strange that a "space" game that features an oxygen meter has an everyday stick figure man as the player character. Wearing a space helmet would make more sense and I doubt would be outside the game's graphical limits. The later Colecovision conversion of Space Panic did just this, cladding the player in a space suit complete with a bubble helmet. The three types of aliens look alright with clearly defined colors to denote what strength they are but they don't have much personality beyond that. Unfortunately the aliens' movement seems to be totally random. This makes setting up a sequence of holes overly difficult sometimes. While they can be lead around, more often than not an alien in close pursuit will simply go another way, while another alien three floors away will zero in on the player out of the blue. Coupled with how fast they move and the different requirements to defeat them, the frustration factor can quickly build which prevents the game from building any form of an addictive quality.

On its surface I don't think the concept of Space Panic is bad or something that was half-baked, only to be enjoyable once it was powered up with the generation of arcade platform games that would follow it. The mechanics of the game are sound, they are just poorly implemented and unpolished. To some this won't be an obscure game, as the aforementioned Colecovision version was reasonably popular but I have never come across a Space Panic cabinet at any arcade show or retro arcade, nor have I met anyone who had an affection for the arcade original. Coleco actually took quite a few old obscure arcade games they could get the rights to cheaply and converted them into much enjoyed games on their home console. I vastly prefer the Colecovision version myself in every way. Sure it's still not a spectacular game but it has way better graphics and really nice sound. It also plays far slower, giving the player time to actually strategize and react. That idea of strategy being the most important aspect of this style of game would be something Lode Runner would expand most on, utilizing a much larger playfield and building in puzzle elements for its primary challenge over simple high speed difficulty. I really can't recommend the original arcade Space Panic but if it looks interesting do check out the Colecovision version, as well as a game inspired by Space Panic - Monster Inn - featured later in this issue.



A Brief But Safe Theme Park Visit

by [Dan Pettis](#)

Capcom was responsible for some incredible licensed games for the NES based on Disney properties. We're talking stone cold classic games like DuckTales, Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers and many more. These are not only among the best licensed games on the Nintendo Entertainment System, they are some of the absolute best games for the console, period. But one of their games that seems to have been lost in the magical shuffle is based on taking a trip to the actual Disney theme parks: **Adventures in the Magic Kingdom**. This game may not be among Capcom's best Disney related work, but it is still very enjoyable while it lasts, and features a unique mini-game based concept for a video game of the era. Although this game is far from perfect, there's still lots of fun to be had and it deserves not to be forgotten.



Not to be confused with the stubby Disney Adventures magazine that you used to see at grocery store checkout lanes, this game is a collection of five different mini-game levels and a trivia question quest based on some of the most popular theme park attractions of all time. The game begins with an opening scene featuring Donald, Goofy, and Mickey, where you learn that wacky ol' Goofy Goof has lost six super important silver keys inside of the Magic Kingdom. I don't know why Mickey and his friends trusted that bumbling goof with those ultra important keys, but anyway, Mickey wisely assigns you to collect these keys instead of Goofy, so that they can open the gates of the Magic Kingdom.

After this opening scene, you and your playable character are transported inside the park to the game's overworld hub. Your playable character is wearing a pretty strange outfit, you're a boy dressed in a giant orange cowboy hat and boots. It's a weird look and it would've been a really nice feature to be able to swap the gender of your character and be able to play as a girl. It would've been nice for female gamers to have a character on screen to better identify with. Capcom eventually did make it up to the gaming girls of the world with a very solid Little Mermaid game, based on the classic Disney film, that was released on the NES the following year.

The overworld area features a bouncy tune reminiscent of the first few Pokemon games and a colorful but sparse rendition of the inside of the actual Magic Kingdom. Here you can walk to the five different attractions in any order you choose, or find other NPC tourists who will challenge you to a trivia question. There are four different types of gameplay here: two side scrolling platforming stages, a racing level, a downhill train ride, and a first person flight through space. The main collectibles of the game are stars, found in each level except Space Mountain, which you can redeem for power ups by pressing the Select button. These perks include extra health, extra lives and temporary invincibility, which is useful since this game, while not being quite "NES hard," is still a little bit challenging at first.



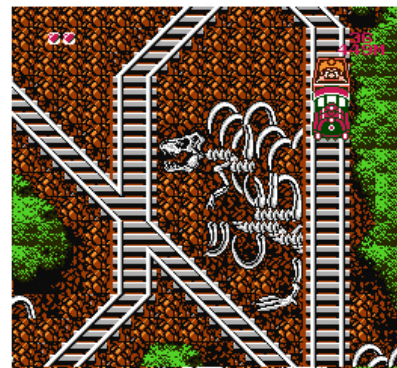
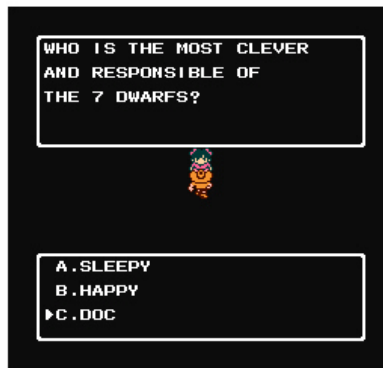
Mickey and the gang wisely ask for your help finding the keys (left), the overworld hub inside The Magic Kingdom (center), the view on Space Mountain (right)

The two side scrolling levels are based on the most famous rides included in the game: Pirates of The Caribbean and the

Haunted Mansion. In both of them your character has pretty floaty physics and can jump really really high. So high in fact, that changing your direction multiple times in air is pretty easy. These floaty physics will take time getting used to for gamers more used to the shorter hops Mario and Mega Man take. The frame rate is also a little wonky at times, making jumping a little trickier than in those games. Of the two platforming stages, the Haunted Mansion stage is much more straightforward and easier as your character begins with candles to throw at oncoming ghouls. It's no Castlevania but it does have a spooky atmosphere and a catchy background song with a little bit of a hip-hop beat. The Pirates of The Caribbean stage finds you rescuing six hostages with a much more non-linear stage design. For most of the Pirates stage, you have no real attack against the enemies other than pushing the occasional barrel at them. In either stage you have only three health pieces and there is also a ton of pushback after you are hit, so it's much better to kill all of the ghosts you can in the Haunted Mansion stage and avoid the baddies whenever possible in the Pirates of The Caribbean stage.

But the most visually impressive and interesting stage in the game is the mini game based on Space Mountain. I may be just a tad biased as, full disclosure, it's my favorite ride in real life as well. It is fairly simple, kind of like an outer space game of Simon, but therein lies the charm. From a first person style view inside of your cockpit, directions and button commands flash on the screen and you must enter them as quickly as possible. The margin of error is pretty slim, especially as the game goes on. It's both exhilarating and disorienting as you watch stars whiz by your spaceship as you attempt to match the icons that display on the screen to avoid crashes and to blast other space rocks and ships. The way the stars whiz past your ship is similar to the look of outer space NES shoot 'em up Gyruss. The fast paced music that plays in the background of this attraction only adds to the intensity and excitement of this challenging segment.

The next two sections are also vehicular in nature: Big Thunder Mountain and Autopia. For the section based on Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, you speed down the screen in your runaway train as you avoid boulders and closed road signs in order to get to the bottom. It has a good sense of speed but is fairly short and otherwise forgettable. Finally of the five mini-game attractions featured in Adventures in the Magic Kingdom, the Autopia one is by far the weakest of the bunch. It's a top down racer with weird controls and simply put, the NES did not really have the horsepower to properly convey racing in this style but being able to make your car jump off of ramps is admittedly kind of cool.



Jumping around in the Pirates of the Caribbean level (left), one of the trivia questions (center), riding on Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (right)

After you've finished the trivia quest and have collected all six silver keys, you simply enter Cinderella's Castle in the center of the map and the ending of the game begins. There's no final boss to battle, that's all folks. In fact there are no real final bosses in any of the levels except for a ghost you must bust before finishing the Haunted Mansion stage. It's a little bit of an anti-climactic ending, so if you were expecting a battle with a giant robot mech version of Mickey or a horde of angry tourists to defeat, you're out of luck. I'm fine with it but if you're one of those players who loves seeing a crazy screen filling boss to conquer before the credits roll in your game, you're out of luck here.

Overall I'd say that this is certainly not Capcom's most magical Disney related work but I do think there's definitely still some fun to be had here, particularly in the platforming and Space Mountain stages. These parts are so good it made me wonder how good they could've been if they were expanded upon or if they were fleshed out in their own full length games. But Adventures in the Magic Kingdom is a fun, nostalgia inducing trip for kids who played this game back in the day, and for classic gaming lovers who haven't tried it yet. It is not a must play game for every player but if you are a theme park aficionado, a fan of Capcom's various other Disney games, or if you are feeling cooped up at home and want a perfectly safe way to virtually visit a theme park, then visit in classic 8-bit style with Adventures in the Magic Kingdom. With unnecessary travel still not the best idea with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it's a great time to give this game a try and see what theme park adventures you can have from your own home.



When I first started collecting heavily around fifteen years ago I started amassing consoles I had never heard of growing up. Anything older than the Nintendo Entertainment System was largely a mystery. So from time to time I would check

ebay for various systems. When looking for an Intellivision I was unhappy with the ebay pricing and thought I would take a gamble on an untested \$10 Intellivision. It didn't work. So I sat it in a box and there it lay to this day. A few years later a buddy of mine, Kyle, familiar with my affinity for old video game junk would give me another untested Intellivision. It also didn't work. Well dang. At this point I did a little research.

There seems to be a fairly common issue with the Model 1 Intellivision. There is a big fat capacitor that suffers from cold solder joints and just ends up coming loose from the board. Occasionally slapping the system around will make the capacitor make contact with the board again and you can get a game to work for a moment. That's a good sign! All you have to do is reflow that solder joint and you're back in business. However I never found myself in a hurry to attempt this.



Eventually my girlfriend would find a Facebook posting for a Model 2 Intellivision with 16 games mostly complete for \$40. So I hopped in my vehicle and headed on over to the owners house and secured an Intellivision III! The first game I tested out with this bad boy was Frogger, which was an excellent home conversion of the arcade classic. Going through the collection of games, few held my interest but one game stood above all others. Beauty and the Beast. This title is clearly inspired by Donkey Kong but I actually enjoyed this much more than Nintendo's gorilla combat infused dating simulator. Also check out the artwork in Beauty and the Beast's manual. Truly a work of art.



My game collecting addiction takes me to many places but none quite so ghoulish as the estate sale. People lined up like orderly vultures ready to pick through the collections of the deceased that the survivors don't have the space to keep. I tend not to spend too much time going to estate sales as the companies that run them price things using ebay as a guide, there is much more competition there and deals hardly ever tend to happen. However my third Model 1 Intellivision this

time with a box and a loose copy of BurgerTime were picked up for \$25. At this estate sale there was a bidding system using printed cards. I made my offer for \$25 and hoped for the best. Seems I was the only one pining after the Intellivision. This one actually fired up and worked for about 10 minutes. Then that dang capacitor was rocked loose from that cold solder joint.



One of these days I'm going to get a wild hare up my butt and crack all three Model 1 Intellivisions open and reflow that solder. There's plenty of reason to do it as there are a few titles that are incompatible with the Model 2 Intellivision, so I have heard, and of course I love the 70's aesthetic. As I sit here hammering away at the keyboard thinking about my relationship with the Intellivision, I have an Intellivision classic en route that I cannot wait to play. Utopia is often described as the first God game. This is a two player competitive game, where like Sim City, you build up your civilization on a land mass. Unlike Sim City you can send marauding hordes of banditos to the other player's island to lower the population's happiness and lower the other player's score. Sounds pretty excellent and I can't wait to get that in my hands and force my loving girlfriend to give it a shot with me.



Caught On Film - Mortal Kombat: Annihilation (1997) How To Annihilate A Movie Franchise

by [Dan Pettis](#)

The second Mortal Kombat film, subtitled Annihilation, opens in virtually the same way as the first movie. Some guy screams "Mortal Kombat," we see the same flaming dragon logo, and the subtitle of the movie flies into place. But this trick does not work nearly as well this time around. By copying the opening of the original nearly note for note, a feeling of deja vu will wash over you. It diminishes the impact of what was a very exciting opening in the first movie. The same thing can be said for the rest of the movie too, as it falls victim to similar diminishing returns. It tries too hard to recapture the magic of the first Mortal Kombat movie by doing virtually the exact same things the first one did, while also featuring a toxic mix of lame dialogue, unintentional comedy and overstuffing. The element of surprise the first movie had is gone and this second movie ultimately falls flat on its face and is nowhere near as good as the first was. But if you lower your expectations and enjoy campy movies that are so bad they're good, then maybe you'll get a kick out of this second MK movie.

Annihilation picks up where we left off at the ending of the first movie when, after a killer cliffhanger, big bad Shao Kahn descends on Earthrealm to wreak havoc. Despite the epic sequel teased at the end of the first movie this movie starts out with a thud as Shao Kahn, in an extremely plastic looking skull mask, delivers a cringey monologue about the earth being destroyed in a biblical style seven days. He's also flanked by an unimposing looking goon squad of henchman characters plucked primarily from MK3 including Ermac, Rain, Sheeva, and Kintaro. Just when it seems like the movie can't possibly get any lamer, silver haired Sindel as played by Musetta Vander saunters into the frame and spouts an epically cheesy line at princess Kitana, "Too bad you... will die!!" If you're interested in watching a clip of this, it's currently viewable on YouTube in a video titled "Worst Line Ever," and even though that sounds like a overly harsh thing Comic Book Guy from The Simpsons would say, the scene is pretty hilariously cringe inducing.



Raiden played by James Remar looks... different

Unfortunately there are lots more unintentionally funny moments to come. Since they couldn't convince most of the cast to return from the first Mortal Kombat movie, Raiden, Sonya, and Johnny Cage all look weird and out of place as played by different looking actors. The only main actor from the first one who returns is Robin Shou, who did a spectacular job during the fighting scenes as Liu Kang in the first film. Picking up this second installment exactly where the first one left off makes the replaced actors seem even more blatantly out of place. The new Johnny Cage's first line of the movie, "this is not good," sets an ominously unintended bad omen for the rest of the movie.

Not only did many of the key actors not come back for this movie, the director unfortunately changed too. Gone is Paul W.S. Anderson, the mastermind behind the camera for the first movie. As a reportedly huge fan of the video games, he was responsible for nailing the proper look and tone of what a live action Mortal Kombat movie should be. In his place, director John R. Leonetti subs in and does a decent job making sure things still look like the video games, but the tone of this movie is just way off. With the cheesiness and ridiculousness ramped up to dangerously high levels, it's pretty darn impossible to take this film seriously.

Unfortunately the movie never fully recovers from its weak and cheesy opening moments. After the whimper of the opening scene, there's a lot of redeeming to do and the movie does get slightly better, but never reaches the highs of the first movie. After the opening our main heroes are almost immediately split up to go on separate missions, and they ride off in some American Gladiator looking gyroscopes. Liu Kang and Kitana go on a quest to find Nightwolf, who looks like a sillier version of the WWE's Ultimate Warrior and is wearing a ton of eyeliner. While Raiden and Sonya travel to recruit her famously metal armed cop partner Jax to give them a hand.



The second Sub-Zero and Scorpion get in a much needed fight

Not only that, but there are just an overwhelming amount of other new characters crammed into this movie, many of which are introduced only to die within moments of showing up on screen. I'd like to give the film makers credit for taking a big swing by including so many of them, but they really should've saved more of them for a potential third movie. It just makes it extremely hard to get emotionally invested in these new characters when so many are gone within minutes and

not given much else to do. With everything stuffed into the movie, I'm a little surprised that the guy who says "toasty" from the games didn't appear. But the crazy thing is this movie could've been even more jam packed as Kabal and Stryker are mentioned but never show up on camera. Hopefully the soon to be released new Mortal Kombat reboot will be better at working a lot of characters into the story more organically.

One of the main things I thought was missing from the first movie was a battle between Scorpion and Sub-Zero. Thankfully, this movie has them fight for a scene but that's about it. In a plot arc matching the games, the Sub-Zero of this film is the brother of the deceased first one, including his trademark scarred eye. He takes over the mantle of Sub-Zero and gets in a battle with Scorpion, despite the yellow ninja having pretty definitively died in the first installment after having part of his skull chopped off and then exploding into a massive ball of fire. Although I guess being an undead ninja specter will help you come back to fight another day despite that explosive demise. Anyway, they both pop into the movie for one scene and then are never to be heard from again in just another example of the wasted potential of this movie.

The overwhelming box office success of the first movie did not translate to better effects or a better looking sequel. The costumes of the new characters are severely lacking. Shao Kahn looks like a Power Rangers villain in his iconic skull mask and even weirder out of it, sapping the intimidation factor away from the big bad. As Kahn, Brian Thompson does his best to make the character scary, but his performance is practically all shouting and not very menacing. It's like an amped up version of Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa's Shang Tsung from the first movie, but it lacks the smarmy charm that made that a fun scenery chewing performance. Cyborgs Cyrax and Smoke look rubbery and Jax's arms are not very convincing as well. Worst of all is fan favorite character Baraka, who just looks plain ridiculous, despite having his trademark sword arms. The movie was perhaps just a little too faithful to the increasingly over the top looks of the characters in the games and it just didn't translate well to the big screen. Also somehow the special effects and computer animation got worse, and the climax is a mess of silly looking computer animated characters smashing against each other.



Shao and Sindel enjoy a nice horse ride

The fighting in this movie is also much weaker than the first film. Perhaps feeling the pressure from Congress and the parents of America to tone it down, the fighting is much more cartoony. It's weird to say this about a movie that involved a sorcerer stealing souls and a rubbery looking four armed monster, but the first movie was much more grounded in reality, especially in the fight scenes, which looked extremely brutal and painful. Those ones effectively captured the pain you'd expect a Mortal Kombat fight to inflict upon its combatants. But the fights found in this sequel for the most part do not. At least they had the common sense to get stellar fighter Robin Shou back for the sequel, but he doesn't have as much to do in this one and his fight scenes lack the pop and emotional intensity they had in the last movie.

Thanks to the lukewarm at best audience reception, and a massive underperformance at the box office, this film seemingly killed the Mortal Kombat live action film franchise for good. But like an undead ninja rising from the grave, the film series will be resurrected in a new rebooted film appearing in theaters and on HBO Max this April. It took over twenty years to get another one made and hopefully the filmmakers behind the new movie have learned a few lessons about what not to do from this cautionary tale of a film. Here's hoping that the new installment will be closer to the quality level of the original Mortal Kombat movie and can satisfy gamers and critics alike while avoiding the many mistakes that were made by this franchise annihilating misfire.



Exploring the Developmental Lore of Sonic 3

by [George "mecha" Spanos](#)

One of the most compelling development stories of the 16-bit era was about Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog 3. Finally

gaining their footing in the 16-bit war against the Super Nintendo, Sonic the Hedgehog notched wins in 1991 and 1992 with the original game and its sequel. For 1993 however they had different plans for the series' third outing. Sonic 2 had its share of developmental struggles. Series Lead Programmer Yuji Naka and Designer Hirokazu Yasuhara departed Sega of Japan to cross over into the United States under the direction of Mark Cerny at Sega Technical Institute (STI). STI consisted of staff from both the United States and Japan, and Sonic 2 was the first crossover effort to utilize both. Difficulties arose due to different languages and respective cultures in the studio, as well as a race against time to get the game out for a November 1992 release. As a result, a time travel concept (later revisited the following year in Sonic CD) and several levels were cut. Sonic 3 would thus employ a different development strategy, giving Naka an Executive Producer title and to not impose as strict of a deadline to have the game made by. This meant there would be no compromises to the game's core concepts, and Naka would be given an all-Japanese team to work with, leaving the American staff idle for a time until they were given a different project to work on.

Naka was adamant about not repeating the same game again, so Sonic 3 was intended to be a much larger and deeper gameplay experience over its predecessor. Sega held a contest for a new character to appear in the game, which would become Knuckles the Echidna. With the game taking place on Angel Island, Knuckles was the protector of the island and the Master Emerald. After being duped by Dr. Robotnik into thinking Sonic was coming to steal the Chaos Emeralds, Knuckles bolted into action to serve as a foil throughout Sonic's adventure. The levels consisted of unique paths depending if you played as Sonic or Knuckles, enabling access to different and sometimes more challenging sections depending who you played as, as well as different bosses at points. The game was supposed to weigh in at 14 playable Zones, and the sheer memory capacity needed to fit the whole game had become a problem. To produce 32-megabit cartridges for the Genesis wouldn't have been cost effective for the company or the consumer, so Sega had to come up with alternate plans for dealing with this conundrum.



Sonic the Hedgehog 3 Japanese cover art (left), and North American cover art (right)

With Sonic 3 not slated to be ready in 1993, and growing quite infamous for its many delays to the point Sega had to address it, the company had come up with an alternate block of Sonic games to take its place. Sega of Japan produced Sonic CD for their Sega CD add-on, making a bigger adventure with time travel (repurposed from where it was inevitably not used in Sonic 2) and a Redbook CD audio soundtrack. Although released in the summer time, it would continue to be aggressively plugged for the lucky few that actually bought a Sega CD. STI's American staff were tasked with creating Sonic Spinball for the Genesis and Game Gear, a pinball-themed game where Sonic is the ball and he must reclaim the Chaos Emeralds from Dr. Robotnik to destroy his fortress. Sonic Chaos was a Game Gear release that saw Sonic and Tails both as playable characters with unique abilities such as being the first game where players could control Tails' flight. Lastly there was Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine also on Genesis and Game Gear, a reskinning of Compile's Puyo Puyo using characters from the animated Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog series. In all, there were a whole lot of offerings of Sonic games to go around in Sonic 3's absence.

With 1994 nearing, Sega entered into a promotion through McDonald's to serve Sonic 3-themed Happy Meals, consisting of the Happy Meal boxes decorated with stage art from the game and toys based on the characters. The looming issue was Sega had no game to release for it, yet. To overcome the cartridge memory problem and to meet their new deadline a decision was made to split the game in half. Thus Sonic 3 saw release in February 1994 on schedule, but at a much smaller 6 Zone campaign and with only Sonic and Tails playable. A later release that year with the remainder of the content would be announced in Summer 1994. It was there Sonic fans were greeted with Lock-On Technology, an innovative cartridge that flips open to plug another one into it. This would be known as Sonic & Knuckles: a standalone campaign of the second half of Sonic 3 was in the cartridge, or you could plug Sonic 3 into it and assemble the full game

as Sonic 3 & Knuckles. It was kind of gutsy to expect players to buy two separate games to make one, but an additional incentive was included with the ability to lock on Sonic 2 and play as Knuckles in that. In 1994 however, seeing these two games, nobody outside of Sega or STI were aware that Sonic 3 & Knuckles was intended to be just one whole game all along.

Rounding out the new gameplay features are the Insta-Shield for Sonic, performed by pressing a button after jumping. Additional power-ups such as the Flame Shield (prevents damage from fire attacks), Lightning Shield (makes nearby rings gravitate to the player), and Water Shield (enables breathing underwater) unlock special moves when playing as Sonic. Knuckles has different abilities from Sonic or Tails in that he can climb walls, glide downward through the air, and also break through otherwise unbreakable walls with his spiked fists. He does have one disadvantage though with a lower jumping height. This is predominantly the mechanism for determining the unique paths for characters, keeping Knuckles out of reach of places Sonic or Tails can jump higher to reach or blocking Sonic or Tails behind the walls only Knuckles can break. On the Genesis in Sonic 3, Tails has been given the ability to fly on command for a limited time and also dog paddle swim underwater. All of these features greatly increase the gameplay depth for Sonic 3.



Sonic & Knuckles Japanese cover art (left), a Sonic the Hedgehog 3 cartridge connected to a Sonic & Knuckles cartridge (right)

One of the more prevalent elements of Sonic games lie within the great background music heard throughout. With the departure of composer Masato Nakamura (of the J-pop band Dreams Come True) there was a vacancy at the music composer role. Michael Jackson, in an impromptu visit to STI, would wind up netting the job and assembled a crew consisting of various artists that worked on his albums - Brad Buxer, Cirroco Jones, and Bobby Brooks to name a few. Sonic 3 also had contributions from Sega's Sound Team and Cube Corp. Jackson's team would go on to assemble 41 themes but with a combination of Jackson's turbulent personal life matters and an alleged dislike for the sound reproduction capabilities of the Sega Genesis, they would drop out of the project. Buxer would go on to issue a few musical numbers in the style of Jackson instead. To date there's much speculation as to Jackson's final involvement and if his material was used and he went uncredited, but his collaborators seem to indicate most that he wasn't pleased with how the music sounded on Genesis vs. the real recordings they did.

After Sonic 3's release Sega entered the PC market branding their games under the Sega PC banner. Sonic CD (known as Sonic PC early in development) would be the first release, followed later by Sonic & Knuckles Collection. The Collection entry came with options to play just Sonic 3, just Sonic & Knuckles, or Sonic 3 & Knuckles. Curiously back then fans noted that the music in a few of the Sonic 3 stages were entirely different, coincidentally Brad Buxer's music being the ones replaced. What went unknown for many years, until 2019 when a Sonic 3 prototype emerged, was the Collection music was actually from the prototype before the Jackson team's contributions were added. Adding to the great mystery of the game, it continues to be one of the only Sonic games that hasn't been re-released in recent times, indicating that the Team Jackson material is embroiled in a rights ownership or royalty dispute. Brad Buxer revealed sometime later that the music he wrote for IceCap Zone was based on a song he recorded with a New Wave band in the 80s, which would later go on to see a retail release chock filled with IceCap Zone art on the vinyl sleeve. (!!)

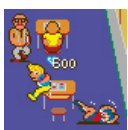
Sonic the Hedgehog 3 received a variety of revisions throughout its development cycle. It also had a certain chronology based on which character you played as, further adding to its depth. Sega were highly protective of their prototype builds of the game after numerous thefts of Sonic 2 cartridges throughout its production. As such, a number of Sonic 2 prototypes were demonstrated over the years, but for Sonic 3 it seemed any would be ever elusive and never see the light of day. Courtesy of drx from Hidden Palace the November 3, 1993 prototype of Sonic 3 emerged, and showcased a very different perspective from the final game. (This will be referred to as Sonic 3 Proto from this point forward.)

Sonic 3 Proto comes with a Level Select option built in, and contained all the Zones that had been worked on up to that point. The levels that came to be known in Sonic & Knuckles were almost all inaccessible, with exception of Flying Battery Zone. With the decision already having been made to split Sonic 3 into two separate games so as to dedicate time to getting the first half finished and handle the rest of the game later, alterations to the Zone order had to be made. Flying Battery Zone was to take place between Carnival Night Zone and IceCap Zone, but the implementation of Knuckles as a playable character later would have left him with only three complete Zones to play through, far too short of a campaign for a standalone game. With the Zones having unique paths for Sonic or Knuckles, Flying Battery Zone would become notable for not having one for Knuckles. Also one of the more famous "bugs" was the Hang Mobile boss had Dr. Robotnik in the cockpit instead of Knuckles' nemesis Eggrobo. These various quirks with Flying Battery Zone were the byproducts of Knuckles having not been originally intended to play in it at all. Sega even admitted they just didn't draw the Eggrobo sprite for the boss some time later.



Sonic 3 was dubbed internally as Sonic 3A, while Sonic & Knuckles was Sonic 3B, making the case they were to be two halves of the same game. The release schedule for Sonic 3 was unusual in that the North American release in February 1994 came first, and it wouldn't surface in Japan for another 2 months. Sega's original plan for Japan was to release Sonic 3C, known as Sonic 3 Limited Edition, carrying the entire game in a single cartridge as opposed to the Lock-On Technology method that was used. This idea was eventually scrapped, and as it never materialized it was unknown if Lock-On Technology to be compatible with Sonic 2 would've been an option for this version at all. Prototypes of this exist, the last being Sonic 3C 0517, which features the full-fledged Sonic 3 & Knuckles experience under the Sonic 3 name albeit with some bugs. Quizzically, Sonic 3 & Knuckles weighed in at 32-megabits and the Japanese Limited Edition was slated to be 24-megabits, which begs the question how a significant size difference in the memory capacity could even happen.

Although both Sonic 3 and Sonic & Knuckles were pretty highly regarded upon release, it's a bit comical looking back to reviewer critiques citing that Sonic & Knuckles was too similar. Why wouldn't they be similar though? They were supposed to be the same game. With a lot of Sonic 3's design elements marking a stark departure from the norm dictated in Sonic 1 and 2, it has raised many debates not just as to whether it's the best of the classic Sonic games, but as being the best platforming game ever made. For being planned to be a single game, its become a game that can be played a multitude of different ways, and if you're very crafty, you can even break the game to mix-match characters into paths they shouldn't belong. All in all, this is a celebration of one of the 16-bit era's crowning achievements. To garner the true scope of what it took to get there would require a gigantic book. There are still many secrets and unturned stones in this saga that Sega have yet to shed light on. Until then it will continue to be one of the most talked about tales in video gaming lore. This has been a very compelling topic to revisit after over 25 years since playing through with each character and collecting all the Chaos and Hyper Emeralds. It's amazing it's such a widely discussed topic today and has seen new life with a variety of fan community mods.



Pyuuta Tutor - Monster Inn

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

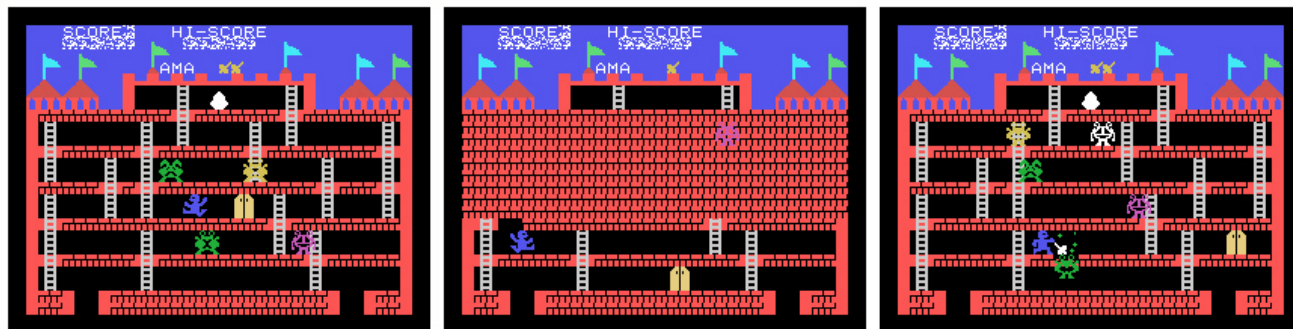
Labeled as the second cartridge in the Tomy Pyuuta lineup, Monster Inn feels cut from a completely different cloth than Bombman and Saurusland, the games that bookend it. While Bombman and Saurusland have a rather simplistic and similar feel to one another in terms of visual design and gameplay, Monster Inn attempts to present something more akin to contemporary arcade games. These would soon become the mainstay of the Pyuuta library with straight up arcade

conversions and arcade style original games dominating the release catalog. Monster Inn falls in between these two categories, as while it is inspired by an earlier arcade game it also incorporates some new gameplay mechanics and challenges.



Monster Inn takes place within a castle (or is it an inn) featuring six floors with ladders linking the multiple floors in different ways. The castle is inhabited by monsters that will roam about, freely climbing and descending the ladders and walking along the floors. Armed with a pickaxe, the player is tasked with knocking out sections of the floor, coaxing a monster to fall into the gap, then filling the area back in with the pickaxe while the monster is trapped. If this sounds similar to Space Panic, an arcade game released by Universal in 1980, you would be correct. The basic design and objective of Monster Inn is most certainly lifted from that earlier title. Monsters cannot be harmed unless they are trapped in a gap and contact with one at any time will cost the player a life. Additionally if a ladder is atop or below a floor it cannot be knocked out, limiting the amount of areas that can be used to trap monsters. A gap is only filled back in if a monster is dispatched with the pickaxe while trapped or if the monster is allowed to climb out of the gap on its own. While the player cannot cross a partially cracked floor or open gap, he can fall through a fully open gap without penalty as long as there is solid ground below. This is a good strategy for a quick escape when monsters are in hot pursuit and multiple floors can be fallen through without harming the player.

In addition to the monsters appearing at the beginning of a stage, there will be a set of double doors that first appear on the second floor. These act as a fast escape warp, similar to the hyperspace button in Asteroids. Standing in front of the doors and pressing either Up or Down will enter them and warp the player to a new location after a moment. Interestingly the doors also move to the same new position as the player, so pressing Up or Down once again will warp the player and the doors again as well and this can be repeated. Although there are only a handful of places the doors move to, which of these locations you will reappear at is random - sometimes reappearing in the same place you began and sometimes reappearing directly on top of a monster and losing a life. Often in stages that feature five monsters at the start, using the doors to get to a more advantageous area of the castle can be a useful strategy.



Disembarking from the doors to an empty floor (left), the egg hatches and ends the game (center), defeating a monster with the pickaxe (right)

Each stage features a timer in the form of a monster egg that will appear on the uppermost floor of the castle. The egg starts out white and static, looking like nothing more than decoration but it will soon begin to flash pink as it prepares to hatch. Once the egg hatches the entire screen will be bricked over and the game will end - no matter how many lives may remain in reserve. The monster egg can be picked up at any time by standing in front of it and pressing the SR button. Once picked up it can be carried anywhere and set down by pressing SR once again. If the monster egg is taken to the lowest floor of the castle and thrown into one of the two pits bonus points will be awarded. Eventually another monster egg will appear at the top of the screen, beginning in its restful state. No only does the monster egg introduce a bit of risk / reward to the gameplay as disposing of them yields the most points, it also serves as a way to reset the use of the egg as a game-ending timer. Thankfully the pickaxe can still be used when carrying the egg but if an egg hatches while being carried it will still end the game. The monster egg adds some pressure as without it the game would feel pretty lethargic in some spots.

Movement is reasonably responsive although it is hampered by the stiff input of either the Pyuuta Joy Controllers or Joy Stick. The SL button is used for the pickaxe, with the player chipping away in the direction he is facing. As described above, the SR button is used to both pick up and set down a monster egg. Facing in the direction of a pit on the lowest floor and pressing SR will toss the monster egg off the edge into the pit. With all that is going on at once I found overall control responsiveness to be really good, especially for an early Pyuuta game, with the pickaxe motion being surprisingly fast. There are still a few moments of input stall here and there but nothing that will cause much frustration, at least in my opinion - although as usual it's a shame this hardware has such stiff controllers.

Audio is surprisingly good for a Pyuuta game, with a soft and even sound package. At the beginning of a stage an audio cue plays as each monster appears, the "pat-pat-pat" of the player's footsteps is nice, and the pickaxe makes an appropriate chipping sound when used. The monsters make little chirp and step noises as well, all in relation to how many are currently left in a stage. The only loud sound is an alert from the egg as it begins to hatch. This is still reasonable as it's a critical alert and doesn't overpower the other sounds. For the Game Over music a few bars of "London Bridge" are used, which seems fitting considering the core gameplay mechanic revolves around things falling down. There is also a short melody played on the title screen while the player character runs along the bottom of the screen swinging his pickaxe, which I believe may be an original composition. I actually found the title screen melody a bit irritating at first but after playing the game for awhile it got stuck in my head. There are some Pyuuta games with really grating audio but Monster Inn isn't one of them.

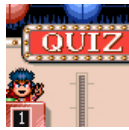


When played on a Pyuuta all numbers display correctly (left), grabbing the egg and making a run for it (center), disposing of the egg for big bonus points (right)

Sprites are all single-color and while not exceptionally detailed, they each have a bit of personality and a tiny bit of animation. There are three different styles of monsters to avoid and dispatch and although their designs are simple I really like them. They actually remind me a bit of the troggles from the "Munchers" educational series of games by MECC, although that series came years after Monster Inn and is unrelated. I also really like how when the player falls through a gap he does a little spin before landing on the floor below and he also has a humorous little death animation. Another nice touch is that the monster egg shrinks and is carried by the player when picked up, still retaining its flashing cue when about to hatch. As with many early Pyuuta games there is some text corruption when played on a Tomy Tutor or later model Pyuuta hardware due to differences in the system ROM character set. In the case of Monster Inn this corruption has to do with all scoring and point displays outside of monster egg disposal bonuses. The game still plays fine but high score games obviously lose something when you can't see your score. For this one I would recommend playing on original Pyuuta hardware or using the Pyuuta driver in MESS / MAME, which will display the game as intended.

While Monster Inn may not set your world on fire, I found it to be a very enjoyable and fun little game. In addition to adding in more monsters, up to five on a stage at most, later stages also increase game speed with everything moving faster. This includes how quickly the egg begins to hatch and monsters appearing to both be more aggressive and more difficult to coax into gaps. The AMAtEUR mode starts off a bit slow for my liking but PROfessional mode gets things off to a quicker start and is my recommendation for most people once they understand the basic concept. As much as I really like Bombman, of the three original Pyuuta games this is the one I've come to enjoy most and the one I think would have been acceptable to release stateside on the Tomy Tutor. As if Tomy knew that arcade style games would have more appeal than original titles, the other three cartridges that round out the six first-generation Pyuuta games from 1982 would be just that - licensed arcade conversions. However the first of those would be an arcade game even more obscure than Space Panic...

As always, a huge thanks to those who acquired, archived and added these Pyuuta cartridges to fill out the entire Tutor / Pyuuta library in MESS (Multi Emulator Super System), particularly Team Europe. It is due to the efforts of these hobbyists that we are able to enjoy these games and ensure the Pyuuta's place in video game history is preserved. Thank you!



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:

02/26/2021 - WEEK 203

Question: Red Falcon is the antagonist of what influential run and gun game?

03/05/2021 - WEEK 204

Question: What game featured a Trance Vibrator accessory intended to increase vibration feedback?

03/12/2021 - WEEK 205

Question: What is the name of Harrier's dragon companion in Space Harrier?

03/19/2021 - WEEK 206

Question: "Demons of Death" was a subtitle tacked on to the NES release of what classic Namco shooter?

03/26/2021 - WEEK 207

Question: Calypso is the host of what vehicular combat tournament?

04/02/2021 - WEEK 208

Question: What is the name of the player's ship in Xevious?

04/09/2021 - WEEK 209

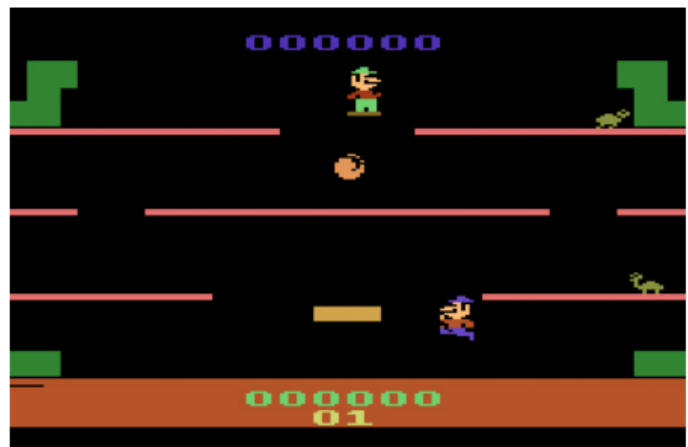
Question: The goal of what radical Atari 2600 game is to complete thirty tricks and get to school in under five minutes?

04/16/2021 - WEEK 210

Question: Better known for his Nintendo adventures, how many Atari 2600 games did Luigi appear in?

04/23/2021 - WEEK 211

Question: An upside-down version of what Apple II game can be found on the flipside of its diskette?



Red Falcon is the alien invader that Bill and Lance go to war with in Contra (left), Mario Bros. on the Atari 2600 is a very playable and decent looking conversion (right)

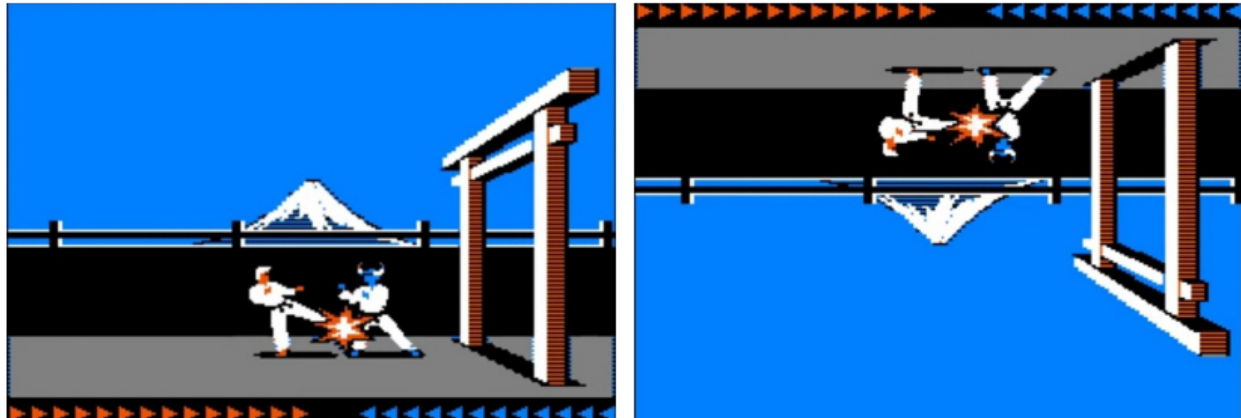
Answers:

Week 203 Answer: Contra.

Week 204 Answer: Rez, for the Japanese PlayStation 2 release.

Week 205 Answer: Uriah.

Week 206 Answer: Galaga.
Week 207 Answer: Twisted Metal.
Week 208 Answer: Solvalou.
Week 209 Answer: Skate Boardin'.
Week 210 Answer: One, Mario Bros.
Week 211 Answer: Karateka.



Karateka side A (left), and Karateka side B that features the same game except upside-down as a joke (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.](#)

May is generally the big kick off month for events and conventions that I attend, with Memorial Day Weekend considered both the first and biggest convention weekend of the year. It has also become the de facto beginning of the summer for many years, influencing film openings and media releases. Since 2012 the month of May has meant one thing to me: preparation for FanimeCon, an annual celebration of Japanese animation and comic art (as well as all the other fandoms that modern conventions have embraced) held in San Jose, California. As the years have gone on my involvement with the convention has grown, not only cosplaying as vintage video game and anime characters, but also hosting retro gatherings and vintage anime panels. It's also one of the few places I can still have really good matches against other people in the 90's arcade mecha fighting game VirtualOn. With large in-person gatherings still prohibited or restricted in the area, the convention will have a limited virtual presence for 2021, electing to roll forward once again to 2022 to resume as it was before the pandemic.



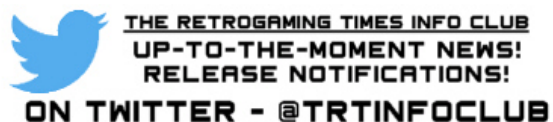
Myself at FanimeCon 2014 as an amalgamation of Taizo Hori / Dig Dug's appearances over the years, namely in Namco X Capcom

While I fully understand and support this decision, it does feel strange to be sliding into another May without the preparation and anticipation of the convention season. However I know another restricted Memorial Day Weekend this year affects far more people than convention attendees. I touched on something similar to this in closing out the previous issue, musing how convention vendors have been greatly affected by the evaporation of the convention schedule. Who should not be overlooked or forgotten are all the people who work to support the facilities and areas where these events take place. Hotel staff, convention center facilities, concessions, street food vendors, businesses and restaurants in the area of the convention grounds, city funds gained from parking fees, shuttle and cab drivers (independent or otherwise), greater area mass transit, and the list goes on and on. For my kick off convention, millions and millions of dollars are generally pumped into the downtown economy *outside* of any events taking place within the convention center itself. That's all money that supports local businesses and local residents - and that large amount of money changing hands occurs during that one weekend alone.

Things are looking up, at least in my area, and as the year continues on there may be some of these events with modifications or limitations. I do believe it will rebound going forward, and the events that have been outright discontinued will be replaced with other new events, but I think it doubly important to support the infrastructure that has been greatly affected by over a year of convention pause. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to obtain a vaccination and hope to be able to support these businesses and workers in the near future. Who knows, maybe you'll be sitting across from me in a game of VirtualOn sometime later this year. Until then, please everyone do take care of yourselves.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on July 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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