The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-THIRD ISSUE - JULY 2021

GIANT MONSTER BRAWL LEVELS CITY!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Thirty-Third Issue - July 2021

- Prepare to Qualify
- Upcoming Events
- More C64! - Giant Monsters **COVER STORY**
- Don's Desk - Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout
- The Legend of Zelda Game & Watch Announced
- A Pirate's Life For Me - Tenth Journey *(CoolBoy 198 in 1, Games 176 - 190)*
- Caught On Film - Mortal Kombat (2021)
- John Romero Interview
- Pyuuta Tutor - Turpin and Frogger
- Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap
- See You Next Game

Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

Amid record heat in the western United States we present our July issue! One thing I want to mention right up top is that if you regularly attend or host a retrogaming event or show, anywhere in the world, and are starting to resume operations please let me know! I understand things are tentative with most shows right now, and the situation is different everywhere, but when things get going again I want to ensure that we have a robust events listing in each issue as before. From the day our first issue went to publication we have always maintained a listing of retrogaming shows and events - big or small - and will continue to do so. We have international readership so even if your show is a small local gathering outside the USA we still want to put it in our events listing, as we have offered since the start. Just e-mail me your event details!

We kick off the back half of our publication year with this issue's cover story, Merman's look at some classic Commodore 64 games played from the perspective of giant monsters, including a new one. Donald Lee continues to expand home exercise routine offerings with Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout for Nintendo Wii. Nintendo recently announced a new modern Game & Watch equivalent for the classic Legend of Zelda games and Dan Pettis relays the details of what is sure to be a hot gift item this November. Nearly three years since it was last dusted off, the CoolBoy 198 in 1 Famicom multicart finally returns in A Pirate's Life For Me with the next set of fifteen games. Following his retrospective reviews of the previous two Mortal Kombat feature films, Dan Pettis enters the arena with his review of the new Mortal Kombat film, which promises to finally deliver the cinematic experience that MK fans have been waiting for. Todd Friedman presents a special interview with industry legend John Romero, as they discuss the iconic first person shooter Wolfenstein 3D and current gaming. Rounding out the original Tomy Pyuuta releases, both Turpin and Frogger are reviewed in tandem, as two classic Sega arcade games make the jump to the obscure computer with mixed results. 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 23rd - 24th 2021, Kansas City, Missouri, USA - ONLINE ONLY

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.

Since last July, we had hoped that things would have returned to normal in time to hold KansasFest 2021 in person. Although the pandemic situation has improved and vaccines are on their way, there are still too many health risks and potential travel restrictions to attempt an in-person gathering in 2021.

Given the success of last year's 8-bit Virtual KansasFest (over 500 attendees!), the KansasFest Board is pleased to announce "KansasFest 2021: 16-Bit Virtual Edition." Similar to 2020, our plan is to hold an online event Friday and Saturday, July 23-24. The event will include lots of exciting talks, panel discussions, and other fun events. We'll also have time in the evenings for get togethers on Discord, where you can chat through text or video, get advice on hardware or software mods, or just hang out with fellow Apple II enthusiasts.

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! - Giant Monsters

by Merman

With the cinema release of Godzilla vs. Kong, my mind turned to giant monsters - especially with the release of a new C64 game that features kaiju*-style monsters battling it out. Here is a look back at some classic games where you get to play the monster.

**kaiju translates from Japanese as "strange beast," used both for the giant monsters themselves and the whole monster movie genre in Japanese film-making. The original Godzilla film from 1954 started Toho Pictures' long association with this form of movie, using actors in rubber suits.*

I am going to kick off with a special mention for **GODZILLA**, a 1983 title that was based on an earlier PET game from CURSOR magazine. Here you must protect the shores of Japan from the giant lizard, sending in troops and the air force to stop massive civilian deaths.

Godzilla finally succumbed to a long-range missile, but millions are dead.

CRUSH, CRUMBLE & CHOMP
Epyx, 1983

Back in the early history of Epyx, its founder Jim Connelley programmed a game engine that allowed titles to be ported easily between machines. The original release of this game was in 1981 for TRS-80, Apple-II and Atari 8-bit, before the later ports to VIC-20, C64 and MS-DOS. (The first versions were under the original company name Automated Systems, the later ones as Epyx).

The player creates a giant monster to attack one of four cities - San Francisco, New York, Washington D.C., and Tokyo. The monster can then attack the buildings and features across the scrolling 2D city map. Crunch credits are spent to make the monster grow bigger or buy

extra abilities. The final score is based on the damage caused, even if the monster is defeated by the defending forces. Among the classic monster types are giant lizard Goshilla (with fiery breath and radioactive trail), Kraken (that can only move through water), giant spider Arachnis (that can tunnel underground), The Glob (based on classic horror movie The Blob, it can absorb obstacles and use tunnels), alien robot Mechismo (armed with ray guns but unable to heal itself) and the flying Mantra (based on Mothra). Except for Mechismo, the flesh monsters can heal slowly or eat humans to regain strength. The player can also make their own monster, using the base types and giving it a name before choosing its abilities. Although it looks quite primitive and play is quite slow (despite the optional Fast setting), there is still some fun to be had trying out the different monster types.

Introducing my sea monster Mermaniac, which can use its Atomize breath on buildings and people.

THE MOVIE MONSTER GAME
Epyx, 1986

Epyx returned to the genre with this follow-up, for Apple-II and Commodore 64. The game menu uses a cinema marquee, with the player choosing the monster, city location and scenario. Then the cinema screen is shown, with adverts (for fictional products and other Epyx titles) appearing before the "Feature Presentation." The isometric display replaces the 2D map of the earlier Crush, Crumble & Chomp, with more detailed monster sprites. The five scenarios are - Berserk (do as much damage as possible), Escape (get out of the city with the military chasing), Search (find the monster's offspring hidden in a building), Destroy Landmark (destroy a specific building) and Lunch (eat humans and vehicles until the monster's hunger is satisfied). San Francisco, New York, Washington D.C., and Tokyo are joined by Paris and Moscow as backdrops, with familiar landmarks present in each.

Choosing the monster, location, and scenario outside the cinema before the audience watches adverts for other Epyx games.

There are also six different monsters with their own abilities, although selecting an action can be quite cumbersome during the gameplay. Godzilla was officially licensed from Toho Pictures for this game; he is joined by Sphectra the giant wasp, The Glog (a giant green blob), Tarantus (this game's giant spider), Mechatron (a giant robot based on Topspin from Transformers), and finally Mr. Meringue (who resembles the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man made famous by Ghostbusters). ZZAP's review score of 75% is fair, for a game with tricky controls and long loading times (thanks to the movie-style presentation).

Sphectra flies over St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, and its Sonic Weapon takes time to recharge.

RAMPAGE
Activision, 1987 - European & American versions, Rampage Gold 2003

Who would have believed a 1986 arcade game about giant monsters would end up as a Hollywood film starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson? In the original Midway arcade game, three humans could play as the giant monsters simultaneously - George the giant gorilla, Lizzie the giant lizard (based on Ymir from 20 Million Miles To Earth, not Godzilla) and Ralph the werewolf. George was transformed by an experimental vitamin, Lizzie by a radioactive lake and Ralph by a food additive. The game is split into days, with each day representing a different US or Canadian city (covering 43 US states and two Canadian provinces). The monsters can punch each other but would be better suited to damaging the buildings and the military forces. Humans can be eaten along with food and other bonus items - but do not eat the cacti or light bulbs! Falling too far or being hit by bullets reduces energy levels, and when it runs out the monster humorously transforms back into a naked human that shuffles off the screen. Once all the buildings are down (either by monster action or army demolition) the play moves to the next city.

In the USA version of Rampage, Lizzie has changed back to human form while George chows down on a soldier he plucked from a window.

There were two C64 conversions, one for the US market and one for Europe. There are some minor graphic differences, and the UK version seems tougher. The pickups seem to appear less frequently in the US version, and that version also lacks the ability for the monsters to jump at ground level. The later Rampage Gold adds support for different adapters including the Protovision 4-player interface, allowing three players at the same time in either US or UK games - just like the original arcade game.

In the UK version of Rampage, the three monsters prepare to cause carnage before Ralph changes back into human form.

RAMPARTS*
US Gold/Go!, 1987

Proving that a good idea will be copied, US Gold released Ramparts just months after the home version of Rampage arrived in Europe. The premise here is that Sir Griswold and Sir Larkin have been turned into giants by the Evil One's curse and must now track down the wizard to get him to reverse it. They do this by destroying all the castle buildings they can find until they can uncover the cowardly one. Much like Rampage there are enemies firing at you and flying around to overcome. However, the controls are much tougher, particularly climbing. Despite an interesting filter option to tailor the sounds, the music is rather ordinary. It is a poor clone and not worth playing.

**Ramparts is not to be confused with the later Atari arcade game Rampart, where up to three players built a castle from Tetris-like pieces and then defended it from bombardment - a precursor to the modern "tower defence" genre. Rampart also got some home conversions.*

The knights in Ramparts are flown in by winged creatures, but they soon died on level 1 of this game...

THE MUNCHER EATS CHEWITS
Gremlin Graphics / Beam Software, 1988

Australian developers Beam Software had been developing their game T-Wrecks for some time before Gremlin Graphics became the publisher. With it came a change of name. Gremlin signed a sponsorship deal with a candy manufacturer, who promoted their chewy candy Chewits with a giant monster. The game thus became THE MUNCHER EATS CHEWITS. The large green prehistoric monster is on a mission to rescue its eggs, fighting off the army with its flame breath. To replenish its breath power, the monster can eat fuel tankers. Much like Rampage, the Muncher can climb and damage buildings. Pressing Down lets you pick up the tiny people to eat, while the giant monster can also make a surprisingly nimble jump to eat passing helicopters. Waiting at the end of some levels is another giant monster to fight with punches and breath power. The main monster sprite is impressively big, and the screen scrolls smoothly. It does become a little repetitive and some of the boss battles are tricky. Still, it is quite satisfying to wreck the levels.

The Muncher has run out of fire breath in the first image, while the creature meets a sad demise in Nintendo Village.

AAAAARGH!
Arcadia / Melbourne House, 1989

Arcadia was an arcade board based on Amiga hardware, and became the label for home conversions from that hardware. UK firm Mastertronic invested a lot of money in the project. Aaaaargh saw one or two players take the role of a monster - a giant lizard or a cyclops. On each level the aim was to find the golden egg, destroying buildings to find it and eating the tiny humans that emerge. Once the egg had been found, there was a one-on-one battle to see who kept the egg. Sadly, the home conversion to the C64 was poor, with terrible graphics (including tiny exclamation marks supposed to represent the humans) and losing some of the scale of the original monsters.

The lizard tries to eat the tiny people, before the cyclops and lizard battle over possession of a golden egg.

MONSTRO GIGANTO

RGCD / Pirates of Zanzibar, 2021

And that brings us right up to date and the year of Godzilla vs. Kong. Our new release to look at here features four different monsters. There's giant eyeball Eyeye of Poughkeepsie (USA), huge lizard Gorgo of Minamiminowa (Japan), sea creature Jojo of Hellisandur (Iceland) and humungous ape Mojo (Zanzibar) - plus a secret fifth monster to unlock known as Bogie. You can battle the computer or another player, with each fight being the best of three rounds. Each monster can punch, uppercut, headbutt or block. At the top of the screen are the energy meters gradually depleted by hits and the fatigue bar that increases with each move made. So, it becomes tactical, as you have to choose between attack and defence (blocking also increases your fatigue). Working out the range of each monster's attack is also crucial so that your blows connect. As a solo player you keep fighting monsters until defeated. Winning against all the monsters twice will unlock the Origin tale for that monster. Unlocking all four Origin tales will then unlock the hidden monster. The action is all created with PETSCII graphics, the built-in graphics characters of the C64. They animate smoothly and have a lot of character, particularly the "dazed" expression for each monster. There is an excellent musical score, with different pieces for each monster. Best of all the sampled roars and speech, particularly the long Origin stories narrated by a professional actor! This all uses up a lot of memory, so the game is presented on a GMOD cartridge - and is PAL and NTSC compatible.

Selecting your fighter (here is giant ape Mojo), and the two combatants get ready to fight.

The first two batches of physical games have sold out from the RGCD website, and a digital image file (in GMOD and EasyFlash images) is now available to purchase.

https://pirates-of-zanzibar.itch.io/monstro-giganto - the digital download, $7.99 plus sales tax
https://rgcd.bigcartel.com/product/monstro-giganto-commodore-64 - £35.00 (roughly $49 at time of writing) plus postage - there will be limited availability of physical cartridges, with the third batch already sold out.

Goro defeats a stunned Jojo, and a still from Eyeye's Origin story.

So, I hope you have enjoyed this trip filled with giant monsters. See you in the next issue!

Don's Desk - Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout

by Donald Lee

Happy July! Hope everyone is well. It's actually June 19th as I write this and California has finally reopened completely. We shall see how things go as there are a lot of unknowns at this point. Personally, I am vaccinated and I've done some indoor dining and play outdoor basketball with friends and have been fine. So speaking of exercise, I've written about my home exercises in the past year. As I mentioned a few months ago, I picked up a couple of additional programs for my Nintendo Wii.

Last issue, I wrote about Wii Fit Plus and the balance board. This time I'll talk about Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout. In retrospect I'm not 100% sure why I picked up the program. After all, I already had Fitness Boxing and Fitness Boxing 2 on my Nintendo Switch. However, I had read that Gold's Gym had a couple of features that sounded interesting. At that point, things weren't opened up yet so an additional program to add some variety would be nice. As it turns out, it appears that Gold's Gym was actually the spiritual predecessor to Fitness Boxing. The original company that produced Gold's Gym was merged into the company that made Fitness Boxing so that might explain some of the similarities.

I've only used the program about five times since I've had it but I have a good feel for it. The main purpose of the program is to do what the program calls "shape boxing." It's not 100% clear that the program involves boxing if you looked at the title. The original Japanese release of the program was called Shape Boxing but in the US the program was renamed Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout. The program has a daily workout for year that lasts about 15 minutes so through three different workouts or exercises. On the initial few tries you do some basics and later advance to more advanced routines. This is quite similar to Fitness Boxing if you've played it on the Switch. The additional features I saw that I thought might be cool was that Gold's Gym had some side exercises besides boxing. There was some jump rope and other exercises that I haven't 100% unlocked yet. While the additional exercises are a cool idea in theory, the execution is a bit spotty and I'm not sure how useful it is to me as I have other programs on both the Wii and Switch to do jump rope and running in place.

Gold's Gym: Cardio Workout released in North America (left), Shape Boxing released in Japan (right)

But the key portion is the boxing right? For the most part the program does what it's supposed to do. It's very similar to Fitness Boxing and if you've used Fitness Boxing then you can jump right into Gold's Gym without problems. In fact you may have a slightly better workout as you can use both Wii-motes to punch. The Wii-motes are a tad heavier than the Joycons on the Switch so people may prefer them. The downside? Unlike Fitness Boxing, you can't seem to set the length of the workouts so you're stuck at about 15 minutes which sucks if you like a longer workout.

To summarize, Gold's Gym isn't bad and you get a little exercise in with the boxing. The additional exercises are cool in theory but what you get out of it may vary with the person. All in all, if you are looking to get some movement in, it's not a bad pick up for the Wii. I may not be using it a ton personally as I have other options but for a quick, short burst, it's worth looking at.

The Legend of Zelda Game & Watch Announced

by Dan Pettis

During Nintendo's latest E3 presentation, the company announced an unexpected treat for longtime Zelda fans. In the middle of a Nintendo Direct that featured lots of surprises and new game announcements, there was also a very exciting blast from the past revealed. A spiffy new green and gold Zelda themed Game & Watch system was announced and will be released on November 12th of this year. This system is being released in honor of the 35th anniversary of the release of the original Legend of Zelda game. Now you can be the true hero of time with this incredible collectible!

This Game & Watch comes packed full of Link's early adventures and other interesting features. It contains playable versions of the original NES Legend of Zelda game, divisive side scrolling sequel Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, the original Game Boy version of The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening, and a special remade version of the classic 1980 Game & Watch game Vermin, where you essentially play whack-a-mole as Link. Of course it wouldn't be a Game & Watch without some kind of actual time keeping, and this one has a very special clock for fans of the series. The internal clock is themed after the original Legend of Zelda and is actually playable! It also includes a timer that allows you to play a survival mode in Zelda II to see how many baddies you can defeat before time runs out. It also includes both the Japanese and English versions of these games if want to see the games in their original non-localized forms.

If you are buying this purely for your collection's sake, this Game & Watch has another treat for you. The nifty packaging includes a stylish black frame featuring the iconic image of the Triforce, with a kickstand that allows you to display the Game & Watch like you would display a framed picture. So even if you don't actually play the games and are just buying it to display, this makes it a near perfect Nintendo desktop clock. That is if you're one of the types who is okay with taking it out of the box.

This is the second brand new Game & Watch console featuring one of Nintendo's marquee franchises, following last year's launch of the similar Super Mario Bros. themed edition. While that version contained both the original Super Mario Bros. game and the extra hard sequel Super Mario Bros. 2, known in America as the Lost Levels, this Zelda version contains even more content. With three lengthy games, the display frame, and the playable clock, it has a little extra value and bang for your gaming buck when compared to the Super Mario version.

Nintendo is not quite as giving as the old man who generously gave you a sword for free in the first Zelda game, since it was pretty dangerous to go without one. Hope you've got extra Rupees saved up, because this Game & Watch is going to be sold for around $50. Pre-orders are being taken now online, and with that upcoming November release date, it is sure to be a highly sought after Christmas gift. For more Zelda fun on the go than you can shake a sword at, be sure to order yours now!

A Pirate's Life For Me - Tenth Journey

CoolBoy 198 in 1 Real Game, Games 176 - 190

by David Lundin, Jr.

Welcome back as we continue our voyage with the CoolBoy Real Game 198 in 1 bootleg Famicom multicart. If this is your first journey with us, a bootleg pirate multicart is a video game cartridge containing multiple games that would otherwise have single cartridge retail releases. Pirate multicarts have become bigger and better over the past few years. Although these days you have options such as flash memory cartridges if you want to play a bunch of games off a single cartridge, there's just something about these bootlegs that appeal to me. I've found collecting multicarts a fun collecting sub genre since the early to mid 2000's. Two of the most popular multicarts are branded under the "CoolBoy" name and are generally known as "198 in 1 Real Game" and "400 in 1 Real Game" and these cartridges are usually sold together as a pair.

CoolBoy "198 in 1" and "400 in 1" cartridges along with a custom made Famicom to NES converter

While the 400 in 1 cartridge contains more total games, I find that the 198 in 1 contains a more interesting mix of titles with less filler. This is due to the 400 in 1 cartridge containing more pirate originals including a rather large library of games released by Thin Chen Enterprise, the Taiwanese company better known as Sachen, history's most prolific producer of unlicensed Famicom games. While these games are an interesting collecting sub-genre unto themselves, and a sadly forgotten part of modern NES and Famicom collector culture, they're not necessarily all that fun to play. It should also be said that the back half of the game list for each cartridge is generally filled with these type of Taiwanese and Chinese pirate original games. The 198 in 1 cartridge isn't too bad in this respect, with fifty or so games falling into this category.

This scope of this ongoing column is to evaluate the 198 in 1 cartridge, fifteen games at a time, until the entire list is completed. Additionally each issue will also evaluate a single game from the 400 in 1 cartridge that does not appear on the 198 in 1 counterpart. For the entire duration of this column, each cartridge will be played on an original toaster-style North American NES console. To convert the bootleg Famicom cartridges for play the NES, I will be using a Famicom to NES converter cartridge built from parts out of an early release copy of Gyromite. The abbreviated title given after the game number is how it appears in the on-screen menu. As a final note, many of the games contained on these bootleg cartridges have their title screens altered to strip away any copyright dates or the like.

Now, back on to high seas and high excitement!

Today we have a pretty mixed bag of titles including some solid action games, a few odd hacks featuring Mario, an unreleased English prototype, an amazing Konami game that no one ever talks about, and lots more. Let's set sail!

CoolBoy Real Game 198 in 1, Games 176 - 190:

Whomp 'Em and Wolverine

176. Whomp'Em - Whomp 'Em is a strange half-hearted conversion of Saiyuuki World II, the Famicom game it was originally released as. The first Saiyuuki World was a clone of Wonder Boy in Monster Land, with the characters and scenario reworked to reflect the classical Chinese novel Journey to the West. We'll actually take a look at the first Saiyuuki World game near the end of the multicart. Saiyuuki World II was an original title, once again themed after Journey to the West, but with gameplay more akin to the action games that were popular at the time such as Mega Man. When Jaleco decided to release the game on the NES it was readapted since Journey to the West generally isn't as widely known outside of East Asia. The protagonist was changed to a Native American named Soaring

Eagle, on an adventure to collect seven totems but very little else in the game was changed to follow the new narrative. The result of this long journey of localization is a rather standard action platformer. Soaring Eagle's movements are quick but his jumping is a bit weighted which makes some of the platforming more challenging than it should be. The totems are obtained by defeating stage bosses, again similar to Mega Man, and act as special weapons and utilities. However unlike Mega Man each special weapon's energy is unlimited, although most of them aren't very useful. There are also quite a few power-up items to collect but they amount to grinding them out very early on to build up your life meter before setting out. In all Whomp 'Em is a slightly above average game from a distinctly B-grade developer but I do enjoy the music.

177. Wolverine - Based upon the Marvel Comics character of the same name, **Wolverine** falls victim to the pattern of video games based on licensed properties usually not being very good. Seeing the LJN logo upon startup may make some people run for the hills and this game being developed by Software Creations certainly doesn't help much, however they could at least do competent work on the NES from time to time. Unfortunately Wolverine isn't an example of anything approaching a competent or coherent game. The graphics are bland with small sprites that lack detail, boring level environments, and muddy colors throughout. Control is somehow both stiff and floaty at the same time, as while the jumping feels delayed, it also is all too easy to walk off the edge of a platform to your doom. Level design is some of the worst seen on the NES as most stages are seemingly just a bunch of random platforms that eventually lead to the exit door. Even the soundtrack by Geoff Follin is pretty terrible. However the worst offense in Wolverine is the combat, which feels broken from the moment of the first enemy encounter. Not only are your attacks weak with incredibly short range, using Wolverine's signature claws actually hurts him with every slash. Additionally there is no temporary invulnerably when you are damaged, not even a moment's worth, so Wolverine's health bar can go from full to empty in a matter of seconds when trying to get close enough to an enemy to attack. This leads to trying to avoid most enemies rather than fight them, running completely opposite to the experience one would assume a game based on Wolverine would feature. Soulless contract work is one thing, lots of developers did that, but this is an absolutely abysmal game that shouldn't even be considered and effort at such.

The Legend of Prince Valiant and Top Gun: Dual Fighters

178. The Legend of Pri - Based upon the 1990's cartoon series based on the classic comic strip, **The Legend of Prince Valiant** is a European exclusive NES game that isn't talked about much. Although often labeled as a side-scrolling action game, The Legend of Prince Valiant has always reminded me more of a greatly expanded take on the classic Activision game Pitfall! more than anything else. The game more or less follows the television show's basic premise, with Prince Valiant on a quest to find Camelot and become a knight. Most levels involve running from left to right, jumping over traps, swinging on ropes and vines, hopping across platforms, and defending yourself from endless streams of enemies. Control in these areas is decent but a bit sluggish and Valiant cannot attack while ducking or jumping, which can get him into trouble. The second level introduces a scrolling shooter mechanic, viewed from a first person perspective while Valiant is armed with a crossbow. This stage is nicely done with some good detail and responsive targeting, playing like a light gun game without the light gun. This type of gameplay returns in the fourth level, framed around a naval battle where Valiant must man a series of cannons against a Viking fleet. While I think the color palette is a little dark for a game based upon the Prince Valiant cartoon, the varying types of gameplay and solid game design make this a decent one. The music plays a little fast on a Famicom or NTSC NES but isn't distracting, although it does sound much better when played at the proper frequency. In all, a perfectly serviceable little game although the amount of enemies and hazards can sometimes feel overwhelming.

197. Top Gun - One may assume by the title in the list that this would be the very well-known NES game based on the 1986 feature film of the same name. However the game included here is **Top Gun: Dual Fighters**, the Japanese version of the sequel better known in the west as Top Gun: The Second Mission. Outside of the different title, Dual Fighters is the exact same game as Second Mission and is completely in English. Maverick is called back to action in his F-14 Tomcat with a new mission to destroy enemy secret weapons. The mission is comprised of three sorties, targeting a high-tech heavy bomber, an advanced helicopter, and a Buran space shuttle. Although not specifically named as Soviet targets, each of the three objectives are clearly based on Soviet hardware. The game plays much like the previous title, with a cockpit view and gameplay that mostly involves lining up enemies in the center target reticle and avoiding enemy projectiles. The Tomcat's loadout consists of a cannon with unlimited rounds and a selection of one of three different missile types, with more powerful missiles having a greater lock on area at the cost of increasingly limited capacity.

Dual Fighters seems to have been influenced by Sega's After Burner, with far more control input freedom over the previous game. Holding the A Button increases your plane's speed, with it automatically reducing and leveling off once released. A quick double-tap of either left or right on the directional pad will cause the plane to roll and evade enemy fire, with the maneuver able to be performed repeatedly and reversed on a dime. Additionally loops can be performed by climbing or diving, allowing reacquisition of passing targets. Holding the B Button fires the cannon in an endless stream, with a double tap firing a missile once radar lock on a target has been acquired. While this all sounds great and admittedly makes for frantic gameplay, everything simply zips around too fast for my liking. There's never really much of a feeling of being in a dogfight or pursuing enemy planes, it's more like chasing around little dots to hit them with your other dots. Surprising, considering a big part of the gameplay is taking on enemy aces one-on-one but it never feels quite right in my opinion. The graphics aren't upgraded over the original so much as they are just different. Sure you can spin around and fly all over the place, but the lower horizon is made up of repeating stripes that really don't look good. Although it too has its flaws, I still vastly prefer the original Top Gun.

TaleSpin and Squashed

180. TaleSpin - In addition to their original creations at the time, Capcom was very respected for developing a series of NES games based upon Disney properties. Disney animation of the era was bright, action packed, and the perfect subject material for games from a developer with a consistent record of quality on the hardware. This ran counter to the establishing trend of games based on licensed properties not being the most engaging or enjoyable to play. Yet in the stack of great Disney games from Capcom, there is one that sticks out like a bear crammed into a tiny seaplane - **TaleSpin**. Rather than following the platforming conventions of Capcom's earlier Disney games, TaleSpin is a shooter that plays like an automatically scrolling platformer. The TaleSpin cartoon took characters from The Jungle Book and dropped them into a neo-1930's world of aviation adventure, mobsters, pulp heroes, and air pirates. In the series Baloo is a down on his luck pilot who performs air cargo delivery services in the Sea Duck, a seaplane he once owned, so it makes sense that a video game would put him in the air.

The problem with this is that Capcom didn't go all in and make TaleSpin simply shooter or flying game featuring elements of the cartoon. Instead you control a super-deformed Baloo in a tiny Sea Duck as he flies through what seem more like platforming stages, with the ability to pitch the Sea Duck up and down and shoot forward. The screen is always scrolling in one direction or another but its horizontal direction of travel can be influenced by the direction the Sea Duck is facing. This is changed by flipping the Sea Duck upside down, yes - the sprite will simply go inverted at the press of the A Button, which will immediately reverse the scrolling. In theory this can be used to backtrack through stages, slow the horizontal progress, or pursue passing enemies but it doesn't work very well in practice. The problem is the flip motion feels really jerky as the game will always attempt to give the Sea Duck forward momentum in the direction it is facing. This is an immediate and uncontrollable response once the plane is flipped and often will careen Baloo into an enemy or a pinch spot. No matter how much I play this mechanic never feels natural or smooths out, ultimately making the game frustrating and hard to control. The game looks okay, it actually sounds really good, but it is simply and completely unfun to play. Perhaps Capcom figured that a traditional shooter would be too difficult for the target audience and wanted to try something different but the game that was released is far more difficult of a game than a straight up TaleSpin shooter would have been. Kind of a shame this series never had a good video game.

181. Squashed - One of the more interesting finds on the cartridge, **Squashed** is actually the unreleased English prototype of the Famicom game Ninja Jajamaru: Ginga Daisakusen. Jaleco had great success with their Ninja Jajamaru series, making Jajamaru essentially Jaleco's unofficial mascot throughout the Famicom era, and this game was to be his big breakout into platforming stardom. More or less Ninja Jajamaru: Ginga Daisakusen was Jaleco's take on Super Mario Bros. 3 from a design, audio visual, and gameplay perspective. The term "clone" gets unfairly used a lot for games that resemble others or utilize similar mechanics but Ginga Daisakusen is absolutely and unapologetically a Super Mario 3 clone. For the planned US release the title was changed to Squashed, with Jajamaru's name shortened to Maru and Princess Sakura's changed to Cori. The newly minted title is a play on the environments and many enemies in the game being vegetable-themed, with the rewritten English dialogue absolutely crammed full of vegetable puns at every turn. For whatever reason the localized game was never released, with a prototype surfacing many years later, and that is what is included on the multicart.

After Maru and Cori discover a crashed spaceship, they are greeted by it's occupant, King Kale who asks for their assistance in defeating the evil Vegetron - ruler of the mutant Squashoids. This is accomplished through the usual platforming gameplay of avoiding hazards and jumping on enemies, all quite standard by 1991. While the A Button jumps and is utilized both as a means of platform traversal and for defeating enemies, the B Button works more like Sonic the Hedgehog 2's spin dash. Briefly holding the B Button will cause your character to begin to run in place, then pressing either left or right will cause them to dash off in that direction, giving both a burst of speed and a higher jump ceiling. Holding the B Button a bit longer will cause your character to go into a spin, which in addition to the increased speed and jump height of the brief hold, will also allow you to plow through enemies unharmed. If the B Button is held too long without a directional input, your character will become temporarily stunned as they catch their breath. The animation for these sequences is very nice, with little dust clouds being kicked up as they run in place like something out of a Hanna-Barbera cartoon. The speed burst and spin mechanic is actually used quite a bit throughout the game in how its platforming is designed, which makes it play a bit different than other games. Visuals are nice throughout with a really cutesy style, responsive controls, and good music. Squashed is honestly a fun platformer that feels like Jaleco's take on gaming conventions of the time, particularly Mario and Mega Man, but is a far better game than a patchwork of cloned ideas has any right to be. While it doesn't do anything new to advance the genre, it is a perfectly serviceable game that should have been released outside of Japan as I'm sure it would have found an audience had it been.

The NewZealand Story and Mission: Impossible

182. Newzealand Story - A cutesy action platformer, **The NewZealand Story** plays a bit like if Taito's earlier Bubble Bobble were stretched out in long form, with a bigger emphasis on platforming rather than enemy displacement. Tiki the kiwi bird must rescue his girlfriend Phee Phee and several of his kiwi friends who have been kidnapped by a blue seal. Complex mazes must be navigated as Tiki travels throughout all of New Zealand, freeing his imprisoned friends along his journey to Phee Phee. While Tiki cannot fly on his own, many of the rather expansive stages require careful use of flying vehicles to navigate both vertical and horizontal landscapes, often lined with deadly spikes or thorns. Enemies constantly pour into the areas and can be defeated with Tiki's rapid fire arrows, which can also be upgraded to more powerful weapons as they are picked up. The objective of each stage is the find the caged kiwi chick but the route to them is often rather indirect and lined with obstacles and enemies. While nowhere near as colorful or detailed as the arcade original, the NES release is a solid conversion that plays well and is very enjoyable. One drawback to this version is it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between platforms that will hurt Tiki and those that can be walked on due to them blending into the background colors. This home conversion was handled by Software Creations, showing that they were quite capable of doing good work and making enjoyable games on the NES, although they were few and far between. My personal favorite home version of The NewZealand Story is the PC Engine release but as an NES conversion goes I really can't fault this one, I do enjoy it. This is the European PAL version so the audio will run faster than intended when played on a Famicom or an NTSC NES but the game itself plays fine and the music honestly doesn't sound out of place at the slightly faster tempo. Some gamers may know this one better as Kiwi Kraze, the title it carried for its American NES release.

183 . Mission Impossibl - Based upon the 1988 revival of the television series, **Mission: Impossible** is an often overlooked Konami action game with a distinctly ahead of its time lean toward stealth and espionage. Things open with an incredible rendition of the 1988 television theme, complete with a limited re-creation of the opening sequence featuring the likenesses of the five principal cast members. The game begins with Jim Phelps receiving the mission assignment for his Impossible Missions Force via the optical disc device, again something taken directly from the 1988 series. Rather than a lone operative heading out into the field, three members of Jim's IMF team are at your disposal, each with different weaponry and special abilities. Max Harte is the heavy hitter of the team - equipped with a powerful long-range rifle and remote explosives, however he moves the slowest. Grant Collier is the technology expert - fighting with his bare hands and equipped with knock-out gas grenades, he moves the fastest and can disable electronic locks. Nicholas Black is the disguise specialist - equipped with medium range boomerangs and the ability to use disguises to blend in with the enemy unnoticed, he moves at a speed in between that of his fellow agents.

Most stages involve gathering intelligence and then finding the exit point, disabling traps and opening passages along the way. While each of the three team members can soak up quite a bit of damage and medical kits can be found to heal them, falling off a ledge or into water will kill an agent immediately. Attempting to complete a stage while a man or two down often feels futile, as it greatly limits your tactics in how to approach each area. Thankfully the game offers unlimited continues and each stage features a password, so a couple of critical mistakes are often best remedied with a restart. If the game can be faulted for anything it's the somewhat non-standard overhead perspective the majority of it is played from. While it may not be the most conventional way to present a game, the graphical detail of the environments is very good and it allows the maps to be quite expansive and nonlinear. It's certainly a whole lot better than how the Golgo 13 games presented their massive worlds. The game is also excruciatingly difficult, easily one of the most difficult NES games ever made. It can take a long time to navigate through an area, completing every objective, and then make one small mistake near the end and have it all fall apart in an instant. There is a lot of trial and error in figuring most of the game out, with the enjoyment factor ultimately falling upon whether you find learning from your mistakes fun or frustrating. Things are also broken up a bit with two high speed action sequences, a boat chase and a downhill skiing area, which add some variety but can be challenging as well.

The license is an odd one as by the time the game was released in late 1990, the television series had been off the air for almost a year and I doubt it was very popular with the NES target audience. Although I read about this one in Nintendo Power, I never encountered game until almost a decade after it was released, purchasing a loose copy at a flea market. The presentation and unique gameplay really surprised me, as did the respect paid to the source material that it was based on. There's a lot to like here, including some of the best music Konami ever put in an NES game and an amazing cover art illustration, but it is a challenge absolutely not for everyone.

Monster in My Pocket and Gun-Dec

184 . Monster In My Poc - Probably best known for its series of pocket-sized action figures, **Monster in My Pocket** is an interesting property as although it featured trading cards, comics, a board game, and tons of toys there was never a cartoon series outside of a Halloween special. While I don't believe the franchise was all that popular (I never encountered anyone that was really into it as a kid) it certainly wasn't for the lack of trying. It may not be surprising that a video adaptation of the franchise was released, however what may be surprising is that it was developed and published by none other than Konami. While not top tier Konami, the resulting game is actually a really fun and well designed action game in the vein of Castlevania. Playing as either Vampire or The Monster, smash your way through hordes of enemies in an attempt to defeat the evil Warlock who aims to have control over all monsters. The environments are properly scaled, giving a clear perspective that all the characters in the game are tiny little monsters only a couple of inches tall. Animation and detail on both the player characters and enemies is surprisingly good. Some items can be picked up and thrown as offensive weapons and play control is fast and responsive with a double jump mechanic that feels great to perform right from the start. The coolest thing here by far is that Monster in My Pocket supports two players simultaneously, quite a rarity in a platform brawler, and executes this perfectly. Fans of the franchise will no doubt get a bit more of a kick out of this game but anyone else looking for a solid action game that can be played with a friend should give Monster in My Pocket a try. For those collecting the original games this is also a bit of an odd one as it featured an exclusive Monster in My Pocket figure, Blemmyae, included in the box - making a truly complete package extremely rare. Again, so much crazy merchandising for a property that never really got moving.

185. Gun Dec - In an attempt to stand out from the crowd a few side-scrolling action games tried to change up the formula by mixing in other genres. The results of these experiments were often mixed but **Gun-Dec** is a game that does it right. This is the Famicom version of the much loved Vice: Project Doom, a game that opens with a driving stage reminiscent of the arcade classic Spy Hunter. In fact if you were to go into the game totally cold you may be surprised when the second stage begins and the gameplay changes to an action platformer, complete with multiple weapons, tricky enemy patterns, and devious platforming. These areas make up the bulk of the game and play very similar to Sunsoft's Batman or Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden. Gun-Dec actually seems to draw quite a bit of inspiration from Ninja Gaiden, as it features long cutscenes filled with detailed visuals and a more involved plot than the standard Famicom action game. Presentation is top notch throughout, with a true cinematic feel - the title screen doesn't even appear after the introduction, first stage, and another dialogue sequence are seen.

It really cannot be stated enough how good everything looks, with a consistent visual style even between the different types of gameplay included. The vehicular sequences would have made a fun game on their own, and while the shooting sequences aren't incredible they still look and play fine. No matter the type of gameplay presented, everything moves at a fast clip with no flicker or slowdown. The detail in most of the environments is absolutely spectacular, some of the best seen on the hardware, with lots of animation and multiplane scrolling. Unfortunately this game was released during the boom of the 16-bit generation and was often overlooked, garnering low review scores as it was on what at the time was deemed aging and inferior hardware. It's a great playing, expanded cyberpunk take on Ninja Gaiden, with a mature story and top notch action. Sure doesn't sound like a generic game on inferior hardware to me. If you've never played it give this one a try but please do play the English version, as the story is one of the more compelling seen in this generation of video games.

Conquest of the Crystal Palace and Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu

186. Conquest of the C - Another lesser known action platformer, **Conquest of the Crystal Palace** is a quirky game that mixes ancient mysticism with a bit of modern humor. Farron is on a journey to defeat the evil Zaras and retake the Crystal Palace, accompanied by Zap, a dog who once served as the palace's keeper. Along they way they will encounter Kim, a shop owner who also takes on the persona of a modern television news anchor to deliver hints, tips, and story advancement. A lot of the game's personality comes from these interactions with Kim and it wasn't until many years later that I realized her news segments were a parody of Japanese TV news.

The platforming is rather standard but Farron is equipped with a limited range sword that takes a bit of getting used to. Farron also isn't the fastest or most agile warrior to swing a sword on the NES, as the game has a slower pace than the best of the genre, although it throws just as many enemies on the screen as those faster moving games. While I find Conquest of the Crystal Palace fun, a lot of the sprites tend to blend into the background at more than a few places during the adventure. This can make everything look a bit garbled or undetailed when in actuality the game features a cute style and good sprite work. I find it a bit of a mixed bag over all but it's certainly a mid-tier NES action game at the very least and one a lot of people seem to enjoy.

187. Mario 10 - First up in a small block of three games with "Mario" in the title that aren't really Mario games is a pretty great one. This is a hack of **Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu** as "Super Bros. Kung Fu Mari" with a rather odd, but rather large, Mario sprite taking the place of Jackie Chan. Mario doesn't look too bad but there are issues with the animation in his walk cycle that give him a weird shaky split across his face below his nose. A few other character graphics are changed up here and there but from a gameplay perspective this Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu with very minor edits. The titular martial arts master must battle his way through five levels of platforming action to rescue his sister, utilizing special kung fu techniques along the way. These techniques are acquired by attacking frogs, who will then spit out a technique orb that gives limited use of that specific move once collected - kind of like the special powers in a Kirby game. Jackie can also charge and fire an energy wave that has very limited usage but can get him out of a tough spot. The game is very colorful, control is smooth and responsive, the action is well paced, level design is top notch, and the soundtrack is outstanding.

One genuinely interesting thing about this hack is that the special technique energy never decreases, meaning special abilities can be used constantly. This also applies to the charge shot, which will eventually run out but only after way more than the usual five uses. While this doesn't make or break the game, it does make it easier and adds a couple of built in cheats to this hack. I have played the game all the way through on the multicart so at the very least nothing has been changed that makes the game unbeatable. This is honestly a really fun game that tends to slide under the radar, both during the NES days due to Jackie Chan's mainstream obscurity at the time and presently due to being buried among all the other action platformers on the system. The only shame with the version included on the multicart is that the strange hacked sprites are nowhere near as nice or expressive as the originals. The cutesy, super-deformed Jackie Chan sprite gives this game a ton of character and that's something a cut-and-paste job with graphics from the Super Mario Bros. 3 spade panel minigames just can't equal. This is a great game and everyone should check it out but I recommend doing so in its original form, along with the excellent enhanced TurboGrafx-16 version.

Yoshi's Cookie and Kaiketsu Yanchamaru 3

188. Mario 12 - Yet another hack of an existing game but at least this one is tangentially a Mario tile. Mario 12 is the Famicom version of **Yoshi's Cookie** with the title graphics mangled and hacked. Interestingly, Yoshi's Cookie began development as a completely non-Mario puzzle game, with Nintendo eventually acquiring the rights and redesigning it to feature Mario series characters and the cookie motif. A tile matching game at heart, different types of cookies begin in a stack in the lower left of the playfield. As more cookies are produced by the factory, they enter the playfield from the top and right, eventually attaching to the stack in the lower left corner. The objective is to rotate individual lines of cookies vertically or horizontally, so that a column or row of cookies matches one another, removing them from the screen. Once all the cookies in the playfield have been matched and cleared, the level is completed and things begin again with a faster pace and more complex starting patterns. If the playfield becomes overrun with cookies the game ends. A special Yoshi-shaped cookie, the game's namesake, will clear any row or column of cookies it comes into contact with. The game is simple and cute, with some catchy music, but I've never found it one to hold my attention for very long.

189. Mario 14 - Back to another completely non-Mario game with a Mario sprite hack, Super Mario 14 is actually the Famicom game **Kaiketsu Yanchamaru 3**. The series may seem unfamiliar to most NES players but the first Kaiketsu Yanchamaru game was localized as the reasonably popular NES game Kid Niki: Radical Ninja. Each of the three Famicom games look and feel quite removed from one another, with this third entry being the biggest departure of the bunch. While a standard action platformer, Yanchamaru has the ability to catch the edge of platforms with his attack pole and then spin off them in the opposite direction. This mixes the platforming up quite a bit and is a little like a springboard take on the wall jumping from Ninja Gaiden. In the hack, Yanchamaru's head has been replaced with that of Mario's from his Super Mario Bros. 3 action sprite. Unfortunately only Yanchamaru's standard sprite has been reworked, as any time he performs an action with his attack pole the sprites used are unhacked, meaning Yanchamaru's head goes back and forth between Mario's and the original assets. The enemies have been replaced with those from Super Mario Bros. and Yanchamaru's wave attack is now a row of fireballs but the over all hacking presentation comes across as rather sloppy and poorly implemented. Kaiketsu Yanchamaru 3 had a rather clean and bold pen-and-ink style that classic Mario sprites just don't pair well with. The title screen does crack me up a bit as it credits "1993 Wario" as the game's developer - yeah, I can totally see Wario being in on the Famicom bootleg scene. Personally, Kaiketsu Yanchamaru 2 is my favorite game in the series, although I don't find any of the Yanchamaru games all that compelling.

Super Werewolf Chronicle Warwolf and Star Luster

190. War Wolf - A rather obscure one, **Super Werewolf Chronicle Warwolf** is an action platformer that plays a lot like a modern update on the formula of Altered Beast. The player controls Ken, a seemingly regular man who can transform into Warwolf, the only hero left in the world. The transformation is triggered by collecting a power up, a generic red W, and grants Ken a variety abilities in addition to growing giant claws to power up his regular attacks. These include the ability to crawl into small passages, perform spin jumps to reach higher areas, scale walls, and walk along the ceiling hand-over-hand while hanging from it. The action is reasonably fast with some complex platforming that requires accurate use of Warwolf's skills, but it never quite gets into something like Ninja Gaiden territory. An interesting aspect of the game is that fights against bosses and mid bosses don't look much different than regular enemy encounters, save for some occasional dialogue and the enemy life bar filling out at the beginning of the battle. The game was released in English on the NES as Werewolf: The Last Warrior, with a different story and completely different backgrounds, level layouts, and enemy placement, although the gameplay is much the same. As the Famicom version was released over half a year after the NES game, it appears to have been given a bit more polish with a better color palette and more refined level design. I've heard that some people consider this to be an unofficial X-Men game, it's certainly a lot better than the official Wolverine game featured earlier on the multicart. While I admit that some of the cutscenes are nicely done, this is a game I've never really been able to get into. I never liked Altered Beast either, so maybe I just don't care for werewolf themed games.

CoolBoy 400 in 1 Real Game, Spotlight Selection:

091. Star Luster - My pick this time for a spotlight game included on the 400 in 1 cartridge is Namco's **Star Luster**, an early Famicom release that is often discounted as yet another clone of Atari's influential 1979 game Star Raiders. However I consider Star Luster an evolution of the Star Raiders formula, with streamlined interstellar navigation that allows more emphasis to be placed on intense space combat. The cockpit perspective provides a good sense of immersion with a minimal canopy and a radar display that can show either a long range or local scan. The long range scan shows the current location of all enemy squadrons, refueling and repair bases, planets, and asteroid fields. If you have a stock of photon torpedoes they can be fired into a sector containing enemies to reduce their numbers from afar, simply move your cursor over that sector and fire away. To travel to a sector of space simply move the cursor over it and press the A Button and your ship will enter hyperspace and be taken there. Once you arrive, the display will change to the local scan, giving a representation of nearby objects in 3D space. Holding the A Button with the scanner in this mode will increase the ship's thrust, while the B Button fires phasers and the directional pad maneuvers the ship.

The sensation of movement and speed is amazing for a Famicom game from 1985, with smooth and fluid movement as distant stars and near objects swirl around your spacecraft. Enemy combat is fast and engaging as there is a lot of risk and reward in pursuing enemy vessels and avoiding their shots. Bases can be docked with to replenish fuel and upgrade weapon systems but they can be overrun and destroyed by enemy ships, which are always moving from sector to sector. Destroying all the enemy squadrons is the basic objective of the game, which then will award a final score and ranking. However the "Adventure" game mode greatly expands on the core game, featuring more enemy squadrons and an extra objective. To complete Adventure mode, seven planets must be landed on, with a key collected on each. After obtaining all seven keys a hidden planet will be revealed, swarming with the most difficult enemy ships. Defeating the squadron at the hidden planet will complete Adventure mode, considered as the "true" ending of the game. It has been speculated that the complex presentation of a 3D perspective, coupled with requiring the player to constantly adapt to changing conditions on the long range scanner, was overly advanced compared to what a Famicom player was accustomed to in 1985. History has been far kinder to the game since, with it now regarded as an important and influential title, and Namco even releasing a sequel on the PlayStation in 1999 - Star Ixiom, which stays unapologetically true to its Star Luster roots. I find Star Luster infinitely replayable and it although it is a very early title it has remained one of my favorite Famicom games.

Next time we'll head to port as the journey finally comes to an end with the final fifteen games on the cartridge. These will include a ton of Nekketsu sports games, three outstanding Konami arcade conversions, a handful of strange hacks based on Chinese television, and an odd Japanese fire rescue game I really like. See you then!

Caught On Film - Mortal Kombat (2021)
A Bloody Good Time

by Dan Pettis

Warning: This review contains major spoilers for the entire plot of the new Mortal Kombat movie: please look away if you don't want any of the gory details spoiled.

Get over here and I'll get this out of the way right away: the new 2021 Mortal Kombat film finally gives fans the hard R rated MK movie they've been longing for since the dawn of the game series. It's a stomach churningly brutal film that perfectly captures the much darker style of the modern next-gen Mortal Kombat games with plenty of laughs too. It's chock full of incredible fight scenes, fatalities, tons of blood splattering, and many memorable performances. It's a worthy successor to the first film, and easily tops it in many bloody and

gruesome ways to create a much more authentic Mortal Kombat movie. It delivers on fan service too as the iconic things you'd expect to see are worked in, but not too cheesily. It's the komplete package, and a contender for the title of best video game based movie of all time.

An opening prologue set in ancient Japan quickly establishes the central blood feud between pallet swapped ninjas Scorpion and Sub Zero. You soon learn just why they hate each other so much, and spoiler alert: it's not just their similar fashion sense. The dark and brutal tone of this movie is established extremely effectively in this prologue, with easily more blood spilled in this opening scene than in the entire run time of both of the previous films. As you may be aware from my previous Mortal Kombat movie reviews, one of my biggest gripes about the first two movies was how far to the background these main ninjas were pushed, but this film wastes no time effectively setting up their rivalry and making Sub-Zero into the bad kind of dude you don't want to mess with. The film then makes excellent use of the blue Lin Kuei ninja's ice related freezing powers throughout.

MMA Fighter Cole Young is a brand new character created just for this movie

Although they are all over the marketing, the yellow and blue ninjas are not exactly the focal point. In a risky but bold choice that ultimately pays off, the focus is on a brand new character, Cole Young, who is played here by Lewis Tan. He has MK experience from appearing in a Mortal Kombat web series called X Generations, which set up the tenth game in the mainline game series. He's an MMA fighter, and sure to be future DLC character, with an unknown past and a marking shaped suspiciously like the iconic Mortal Kombat dragon logo. Turns out that marking means he's destined to compete in the actual Mortal Kombat tournament to decide the fate of all of the realms. The dragon marking stuff is a sort of silly premise but works fine enough for me. After Outworld has claimed nine straight Mortal Kombat victories, Shang Tsung and his group of baddies need just one more victory to take over Earthrealm and enslave the entire human race. It's up to Cole and some familiar good guys to unite and save the day.

Introducing a brand new character to anchor the film could've backfired spectacularly, but instead pays big dividends, especially if as has been suggested, this is indeed the start of a long running new movie series. Cole functions perfectly as the audience surrogate, much like the role Johnny Cage played in the original first film. See, Cole is just a pretty regular guy who gets caught up in this fantastical universe full of mystical gods, ninjas, vampires, and four armed Shokans. After he's attacked by Sub-Zero, Jax (Mahcad Brooks) helps him escape to Gary Indiana of all places, where he meets up with Sonya Blade (Jessica McNamee), who has her nemesis Kano (Josh Layson) captured and in chains. From there, the rest of the group of people with Mortal Kombat dragon markings get together and try to find their secret special powers to thwart Shang Tsung's plans to take over the world.

Sub-Zero says "Ice to see you" as he freezes Jax's gun mid-fire

This version of Mortal Kombat is technically a remake, but it feels fresh and I'd say that's mainly due to the different characters the film gives the spotlight to. Especially in Liu Kang's case, as the previous protagonist is reduced to more of a supporting role here. Kang doesn't even appear until close to the halfway point of the film and his partnership with Raiden, which was so vital to the first movies, is also minimized. The creative team wisely switches it up, giving certain characters who barely appeared in the originals lots more to do

here. Like standout actress Sisi Stringer as the many toothed badass Mileena. They also wisely introduce characters that should've been no brainers to appear in the originals but didn't, like Kung Lao, played by Max Huang, and Kabal, who is played by the combination of Daniel Nelson in live action and voiced by Damon Herriman.

Although this movie is much darker and violent, with a more self serious tone than the first set of movies, and is perhaps played even straighter, it still finds a lot of time for the sometimes silly Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) style of humor. There's lots of Tony Stark style quips, self aware deprecating humor, and pop culture references that have come to define the Marvel series, including a pretty hilarious zinger on the franchise's obsession with the letter K. There's also serious world building and plenty of easter eggs peppered into the background for longtime fans to salivate and geek out over, just like in a Marvel movie. It's a wise technique to try, because if you're going to try to follow the blueprint of any film series, why not try to be like the biggest blockbuster film series of our generation?

A beaten up Liu Kang wields the power of fire in his hands

The breakout character of this film then is the one who quips the hardest and that's Josh Layson as the Australian accented, red eyed, Terminator homage Kano. With his introduction into the film, the movie fully turns into Marvel Kombat. With his Thor style accent, posturing, swaggering, and casual swearing as a mercenary with no manners, Layson takes off with the film. He does so much wisecracking that he threatens to over do it, but luckily cracks just the right amount of wise. Despite all the quipping and Avengers style banter, the movie is still played deadly seriously. Luckily, there is also not a trace of the camp that crept into the previous film series and helped kill it off for good.

The fighting is absolutely top notch and staged just gorily enough to work without looking like a particularly violent Looney Tunes cartoon. The fighting looks incredibly painful and very Mortal Kombat-esque, including some series staple moves like the classic leg sweeps and lighting fast punches that'll make you feel like you just mashed the high punch button in the original games. The characters also look the part, using the special moves and striking the poses they are known for, especially the coolest lethal hat wearer since Oddjob, Kung Lao, portrayed here by Max Huang. Many of them get incredibly accurate looking costumes without looking too goofy, like many of them did in Mortal Kombat: Annihilation. Plus the movie contains actual fatalities, including an absolutely brutal one taken straight from the games courtesy of Kung Lao.

Also, it's pretty incredible to see how far visual effects and computer animation have come especially when compared to the twenty-five year old effects of the originals. Goro makes an appearance and now looks a lot less like the rubber outfits used on the old Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movies and much more like the Marvel movie version of Hulk. Despite my usual love of practical effects and puppets, this is a much better look for Goro. Another character who looks a lot better thanks to modern effects is Jax. Once he gets his metal arms, the new version of them just look video game perfect. In addition, the film's use of ice effects involving Sub-Zero are seriously impressive looking.

The thunder god Raiden uses his considerable powers to help Earthrealm survive

When the movie ends, you'll be glad that many of the key players are left alive, and a potential sequel is teased. As longtime followers of the convoluted story of the Mortal Kombat games know, death is never the end in this universe. Luckily this funny and fatality filled film breathes new life into the film franchise, delivering all the goods that fans could hope for. Hopefully this is the start of a new brutal universe that can rival the cinematic one that Marvel has built. Get over here indeed.

John Romero Interview

by Todd Friedman

First-person shooting games would not be where they are today without John Romero, who has created some of the most classic FPS games of all time. Most of the games he created in the 1990's are still played today. John's resume of games is so long it would take pages to list them all. His most talked about games are titles such as Quake, Red Faction, and Doom but it was Wolfenstein 3D in 1992 that changed the whole dynamic of first-person shooters. John helped create the company "id Software" in 1991 and planned on changing the way PC games were played forever. Before id Software developed Wolfenstein 3D, Wolfenstein's beginnings had been created by Muse Software in the 1980's with Castle Wolfenstein and Beyond Castle Wolfenstein. These games were not first-person shooters but more like an arcade style shooter similar to Berzerk. The style of play was exciting for the time and made the Wolfenstein games very popular. John Romero and id Software took it to the next level. id Software firmly established the genre of first person shooters with Wolfenstein 3D and with its ray casting rendering, it created the illusion of walking around a map through the eyes of the player. Wolfenstein 3D was a commercial success and has been recognized as one of the greatest games of all time.

I interviewed John, talking about Wolfenstein 3D and his opinions on current gaming and first-person shooters.

When did you know you were going to be in the video game business?

It was most likely after I got my Apple II+ in 1982. Making games was the only thing I wanted to do since then.

Do you remember when you created your first game and what do you remember about the experience?

The first game I created was in 1979 when I started learning HP-BASIC on the community college's mainframe. I was 11 years old and taught myself how to code in the computer lab. My first game was a simple adventure game with about 5 rooms. It was really amazing to create something that ran on a TV screen, and it was so much fun learning the language.

What were your goals and expectations when you co-founded id Software?

id was my fourth startup. The goal was to take the amazing horizontal scrolling tech that John C. wrote and make games with it. Beyond that, we were excited to experiment and try to make the best games we could. The expectation was to have fun making games, no matter what they were. As long as we all shared the same passion for game development, we knew we would make magic.

How many people first started working for id Software and how many people were involved designing Wolfenstein 3D?

At the very beginning in 1990, three of us created the original Commander Keen trilogy: me, Tom Hall, and John Carmack. In February 1991, Adrian Carmack joined us when the company officially started. A year later, it was still just the four of us when we started making Wolfenstein 3D.

What gave you the idea of the look and feel of Wolfenstein 3D?

We had made two FPS games before Wolfenstein 3D: Hovertank One, and Catacomb 3D. We knew with Wolfenstein that you were going to be a military character who is breaking out of a Nazi castle. I came up with the idea to make a 3D version of the original Castle Wolfenstein from 1981 because it was such an incredible classic game. I felt that if we were going to make a state-of-the-art game, we should recreate a previous state-of-the-art game and design it in a new way.

How long did it take to create Wolfenstein 3D and was it the time you expected?

We spent four months from concept to uploading the shareware version. It took another month for us to finish the other five episodes of levels and create the hint book. We had no expectations about how long it was going to take - we were experimenting and working hard at it, so whenever we finished, we knew we'd have something great to play.

Most critics call Wolfenstein 3D one of the greatest games ever made. How does it feel that you were involved in creating it?

Well, we owe a huge debt to Silas Warner for creating the original. The design of Castle Wolfenstein is the reason why we wanted to make a new one, to follow in his legendary footsteps and modify the design to better fit this new category of game we would eventually call an FPS.

What was your goal for Wolfenstein 3D when it was released? Did it meet or exceed your expectations?

The goal was for Wolfenstein 3D to be a really fun game that would make people want to buy the registered version. We were making decent money from our Commander Keen sales still and adding Wolfenstein 3D's income would ensure we could keep making games together. The first month, Wolfenstein 3D's sales exceeded all our expectations. With no advertising the game sold 4000 copies in the first month at $60 each.

Some view Wolfenstein 3D as the pioneer for first person shooters. Do you believe it was the game that started it all?

Yes, Wolf3D was the first shooter to embody the speed and violence of the genre. Wolf3D ran at 70fps on a VGA CRT in 1992 running on a 386 PC. The design of the game was simplified to its core run-and-gun gameplay. Anything that slowed you down, we removed it. Also important was the digitized audio we used for the first time on the Sound Blaster. It so fitting because Castle Wolfenstein in 1981 was the first Apple II game to use digitized audio and it scared the hell out of you when a character opened the door and yelled "SS!" That was the cue to flip the drive door open in case you got caught. The millisecond you were caught, the disk was updated that you died. Without writing to the disk, you could resume where you left off after quitting and running the game again.

Before Wolfenstein 3D, what were some of your favorite games you worked on and why?

Definitely the Commander Keen games were lots of fun to make. We created seven of those and received lots of mail from kids with hand-drawn pictures of the various characters we put in the games. Before id, I made a game called Dangerous Dave that ended up being more popular than DOOM in India and Pakistan due to its installation on every new PC sold for years. In 1984 and 1985 I made a couple games named Subnodule and Pyramids of Egypt that I sold in computer stores. Those were fun games to make because they were bigger than my average game and were more polished.

Who did the cover art for the game and what was the vision?

The cover art for Wolfenstein 3D was painted by Ken Reiger, the artist that painted the Commander Keen: Aliens Ate My Baby Sitter box cover. There wasn't really a vision for the cover - we just told him you were a beefy Schwarzenegger-like soldier with a chaingun blasting your way through Nazis. Ken figured it out.

What are some interesting and/or funny stories that happened while working on the game?

You might not believe it, but Wolfenstein 3D's levels was the most boring chore for Tom and I to do. The Commander Keen levels were so much more fun to make because we could directly see the level on the screen the way we would play it. With Wolfenstein 3D, the level is abstracted because we created them in 2D from above - to see them in 3D we had to run the game and see if the level looked and felt good. Our design palette was limited, so we didn't have much we could do in a level beside do cool things with sound areas.

Due to the chore of W3D level design being boring, Tom and I would play Fatal Fury on the NEOGEO next to us. Or Street Fighter 2 on the SNES. Or go swimming in the pool. I used to remind Tom we needed to get those levels done so we didn't have to do them again. This was mostly during the time we had to create the last 50 levels after we had created the 10 shareware levels.

If you could make a change to Wolfenstein 3D, what would it be and why?

I would remove the score items, remove lives, add more weapons, give away less ammo depending on difficulty, improve melee combat, and lots of other things. This is for the original DOS game. Those changes would make the game easier to finish, add more variety to the weapons, and toughen up the balance.

You have designed and created many more first-person shooters after Wolfenstein 3D, what are your favorite and was Wolfenstein the game that influenced the others?

DOOM and Quake were my favorites after Wolfenstein 3D. Each game was unique, and its design was informed by the success and failures of the previous game.

What are your opinions about today's generation of video games? How do you compare them to older, classic games?

Today's games are absolutely incredible. I wish I was growing up right now - the variety and quality is stunning. Important games have their place when they are created, and everything ages and becomes simplistic. There's no need to compare today's games to their antecedents, just appreciate that they existed so today's games could likewise exist. Just remember how those games made you feel - that was entirely their point.

How do you feel about consoles and handhelds playing Wolfenstein 3D on its platform?

Well, it's great of course. Being able to play a game that's almost 30 years old on new hardware is always a sign that the game did something right. People are still playing Tetris!

Do you believe first-person shooter games are too violent and lead to violence in America?

Absolutely not. If anything, they were a release valve.

Who is your favorite video game character of all time and what makes that character special?

I would have to pick Chrono from Chrono Trigger. The entire story is designed around Chrono, and he's only trying to save the world from Lavos with a rag-tag group of friends from various timelines.

Is there a game that you wished you were on the development team of and why?

I would have loved to be part of World of Warcraft, and I wish I had made Minecraft. The reason is simple: both games are incredible and have had a massive impact on people for a long time.

Doom was inducted into the International Video Game Hall of Fame in 2019. What was your thoughts and feelings about it?

I'm definitely honored that DOOM was one of the recipients of the first cohort of the IVGHOF. Back in the 90's, Wolfenstein 3D and DOOM were both added to the Computer Gaming World Hall of Fame, which was the same thing, only decades earlier. We'll always remember Johnny Wilson and Scorpia.

In recent years you have created Romero Games, LTD. Where do you see your next generation of games going and what are your goals?

Our newest game, Empire of Sin, [launched] on December 1, 2020. It's an example of how we always try to do something new, to explore genres and push them further. Most of all, it represents a really great time making a game with an exceptional team in a wonderful country, Ireland.

Where do you see video gaming in the next 10 years?

Better tech, every genre inching forward, and possibly something unexpected that changes everything.

Images used with permission from John Romero

Pyuuta Tutor - Turpin and Frogger

by David Lundin, Jr.

While the first three cartridges released for the Pyuuta were original games, the other three initial 1982 offerings were all conversions of contemporary arcade titles originally developed by Konami. The sixth of these games, a conversion of the 1982 shooter Scramble, would be the only one of the group to have a Tomy Tutor release (covered in our newsletter's previous incarnation, Retrogaming Times Monthly issue 105, February 2013). The two other games are conversions of early arcade action titles Turtles and Frogger, the former a game that would fall into obscurity and the latter a game that would become one of the most successful arcade games of all time. As both releases are fairly simple games, we're going to cover both of their Pyuuta releases in this article.

Turpin (left) and Frogger (right)

Turpin is based on a 1981 arcade game developed by Konami, released in the USA as "Turtles" by Stern Electronics and in Japan as "Turpin" by Sega. It is a simplified maze game where the player controls an adult turtle who must guide lost baby turtles home, one at a time, while avoiding deadly beetles. The playfield is a rather simple maze filled with question mark boxes along dead ends. Touching a question mark box will reveal its contents - either a baby turtle or another beetle. If a beetle pops out of a box, it must quickly be avoided as it scrambles out to join the maze patrol with the others. If a baby turtle is revealed in a box, it will climb on the back of the adult turtle and a house will appear in a corner of the maze. The baby turtle must be carried to the house, where it will disembark and award points, allowing another question mark box to then be opened. The only defense against the beetles is in the form of bombs that the adult turtle can drop. If a beetle touches a bomb it will be temporarily stunned but only one bomb can be deployed at a time. Bomb stock is limited but more can be picked up at the center of the maze. After guiding all baby turtles in a stage home, the next will begin with a fresh group of question mark boxes.

The Pyuuta version begins with a very limited attract sequence and opening song that is nice but plays non-stop throughout the entire game, which also features very basic sound effects even compared to other Pyuuta games. The arcade's introduction sequence of an adult turtle entering a high-rise to save baby turtles trapped on the roof is missing but surprisingly the between floor ladder climbing intermissions do make the jump to the Pyuuta. Although the beetles move faster on higher floors, the maze layout always remains the same on the Pyuuta, removing what little variety the original game had. Graphics are extremely simple and barely animated, easily the worst of the early Pyuuta games. Stunned beetles actually use a recolor of the baby turtle sprite, as if this were an LCD game or something with limited screen location parameters. The whole thing feels very amateurish, even for a game as simple as Turpin.

Play control is okay but movement feels very sticky and often delayed. Turning corners can sometimes feel labored, as does backing away from beetles in question boxes. Both SL and SR drop a bomb but this too feels excruciatingly delayed, especially when evading a chasing beetle, and often leads to cheap deaths. Turpin isn't the most engaging game to being with, as its avoidance based gameplay is slow by design, but the Pyuuta version is even more lethargic. It lacks any of the visual or auditory charm of the arcade original, which at least had a lot of nice music. Of the six original Pyuuta games this is by far the weakest, even compared to something like Saurusland.

Turpin's title screen shows all you'll ever interact with (left), carrying a baby turtle home (center), the between floor intermission (right)

At the other end of the spectrum, **Frogger** is based on another 1981 arcade game developed by Konami and released by Sega, just as with Turpin in Japan. This very well-known action game involves the player guiding frogs across a busy road and fast-moving river to their homes on the other side, while avoiding hazards every hop along the way. Frogger was converted to pretty much every game system at the time, even an honestly spectacular Coleco VFD tabletop, and the Pyuuta was no different. Each frog begins at the bottom of the screen, with the first task to cross a busy roadway filled with traffic that moves at different speeds. An embankment divides the road from the river, which itself is populated with moving logs, diving turtles, and chomping alligators. These must be hopped across to reach one of five frog homes at the top of the screen. Getting hit by an automobile, falling into the water, jumping into the mouth of an alligator, being touched by a snake, missing the leap into a frog home, or riding an object off screen will all kill your fragile frog, as will running out of time.

The Pyuuta version uses its own music, different than the mostly anime-inspired tunes of the arcade original (seriously, the most well known Frogger music is actually from Araiguma Rascal, a 1977 anime series) but pleasant and fitting just the same. The play area is slightly compressed compared to the arcade version, with four lanes of traffic rather than five and three rows of river hazards rather than five. Everything moves at a good speed but feels a bit spazzy, with questionable hit detection that will cause some unexpected deaths in the river area. The whole presentation also feels a bit flickery with all the objects moving on the screen, something not many Pyuuta games attempt to tackle. A real attempt was made to translate the constant movement of the arcade original to the Pyuuta hardware and I have to respect the effort.

Even with the compromises, it still plays pretty well and features most of the arcade gimmicks like insects and alligators appearing in the frog homes and the lady frog, who can be guided home for bonus points. One difference I noticed is that the timer runs really fast in this version, sometimes leading to an unexpected death. When a frog is killed there is barely a rest in the action, which can be disorienting even with the iconic skull and crossbones death marker. Graphically there is a lot less detail than the original but everything is still identifiable and has a consistent visual style. With all that taken into consideration the game is a fun and reasonable interpretation of Frogger. I still much prefer the Atari VCS version by Parker Brothers but this is a fine early home version of Frogger and would have done fine with a Tomy Tutor release.

A frog hops along the third lane of traffic (left), approaching a lady frog on a log (center), a mistimed jump sends a frog to a watery death (right)

Looking back at the six original Pyuuta games - Bombman, Monster Inn, Saurusland, Turpin, Frogger, and Scramble - I will honestly have to say if I were to pick one for inclusion in the USA library it would be Monster Inn. Yeah, I know Scramble had a Tomy Tutor release but it's not a very fun conversion at all. I'm actually kind of shocked that Monster Inn would be my pick but truthfully it's the game I had the most fun with. Bombman is also a really fun little game but Monster Inn had a lot more longevity with me while putting these games through their paces. None of them will set your world on fire but for a simple first-generation Tomy Pyuuta game, Monster Inn would be the one I'd choose to play. Thankfully the next generation of Pyuuta games would be quite a bit more advanced, with many of them making their way to the Tomy Tutor. Yet a good number of Pyuuta games were still left behind in Japan and we'll continue to investigate them going forward.

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:

04/30/2021 - WEEK 212
Question: Who is the only enemy that cannot be destroyed in the arcade game Berzerk?

05/07/2021 - WEEK 213
Question: Who is Sir Cucumber's sidekick in the NES game Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom?

05/14/2021 - WEEK 214
Question: Big Forest, Bay Bridge, and Acropolis are all locations you can visit in what game?

05/21/2021 - WEEK 215
Question: What game was the final North American release for both the Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis?

05/28/2021 - WEEK 216
Question: Developed by Tatsumi, what three-screen driving game was released by Atari as their unofficial successor to the Pole Position series?

06/04/2021 - WEEK 217
Question: Laurel Palace, The Hideaway, and The 2020 are all locations in what game?

06/11/2021 - WEEK 218
Question: A song in Namco's Ridge Racer features an audio sample of what American President?

06/18/2021 - WEEK 219
Question: Clu Clu Land: Welcome to New Clu Clu Land has the distinction of being the final commercial release for what platform?

Checking out another casino in Vegas Stakes (left), TX-1 was housed in one of the larger cabinets of its time (right)

Answers:
Week 212 Answer: Evil Otto, although he can be destroyed in the sequel, Frenzy.
Week 213 Answer: Percy. (You should have known that, Boss)
Week 214 Answer: Virtua Racing (1992).
Week 215 Answer: Frogger, in 1998 incredibly, although they are both different games.
Week 216 Answer: TX-1 (1983).
Week 217 Answer: Vegas Stakes (SNES).
Week 218 Answer: Richard Nixon. The song Speedster samples him speaking to to Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the surface of the Moon, "...in the whole history of man, all the people on this Earth are truly one."
Week 219 Answer: Famicom Disk System.

Virtua Racing features three different courses (left), Percy often loses items in Princess Tomato but it serves as an automatic inventory clean up (right)

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

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

See You Next Game

by David Lundin, Jr.

Resuming the Pirate's Life column after almost three years was a bit of a throwback in a publication that is all about throwbacks. The converter cartridge that I use for playing Famicom games on NES hardware also brought back some memories. It had been known since the mid 1990's that Nintendo repackaged the internals of some early Famicom games into NES sized shells during the early rollout of the hardware in North America. It has been theorized that this was to move older inventory across the Pacific and in the case of the game

Stack Up because not enough cartridges would be needed to produce a rather small run of the NES version anyway. These cartridges would have the 60 pin Famicom board, a double socketed 60 pin to 60 pin passthrough connector, and then a 60 pin to NES 72 pin board all in the same cartridge. The socketed connector and 60 to 72 pin board could be removed and have any Famicom game connected to them, which would then work on the NES. Sure, there were other options for this at the time, most notably the "HoneyBee" converter, but there was something cool about having a Nintendo-made one - and one that was "free" at that.

Some illustrative pictures from my old webpage circa 2006, showing the difference between the two cartridges and how to spot them from the outside

Of course not every early NES game had the converter parts inside and debates would often arise about the best way to tell if a cartridge was "converter rich" without opening it, including comparing label prints and cartridge weight. In early 2006 I figured out the trick was to look down inside the cartridge at where the connectors meet the edge of the board. On an early Nintendo released "black box" game, with a five screw cartridge shell, if the little assembly tabs on the ends of the connectors were off to the side rather than in the middle - the cartridge would always have converter hardware inside. Every single time. So I would go to flea markets and look through all the copies of Gyromite, Duck Hunt, Wild Gunman, etc. and check what the edge connectors looked like. Following my guidelines, I was always 100% accurate in my purchases. As mentioned above, Stack Up was only ever released in this fashion but as it was a rather hard to find game I thought it better not to gut them, while the other early games were all rather common.

My Mk.I Famicom to NES converter cartridge (left), a copy of Million Dollar Kid ready to be played on an NES (right)

Now unless you wanted to swap around and play bare Famicom circuit boards you couldn't easily use the converter hardware. Even after flipping the 60 pin passthrough around it was still too thick for most Famicom games to fit onto it and retrieving the stack of components from inside an NES deck could be challenging. I decided to remedy this by making fully finished and sealed "Nintendo parts" converter cartridges. I would grind down the 60 pin passthrough to match the size of the Famicom connector socket and then cut the cartridge shell to the appropriate size so that a Famicom game would saddle onto it at the perfect distance. After reassembly the entire shell would be packed with hot glue, then I'd cover up the open areas on the sides with little panels cut from NES cartridge dust sleeves - keeping things authentic. Then I would tack a ribbon on the top of the cartridge to facilitate easy removal from a front loading NES and call it a day. It doesn't look like much but the process took a long time, between four and six hours to make a cartridge, carefully making sure the edges were all even and level and that the fit tolerances were all smooth. I made a dozen or so of these and would sell them for $50 each, mainly on the old Digital Press forums where I was a regular for over a decade. The one pictured above is the prototype I first built and then later used as the basis for every other one I made. I still have enough parts to make one more, intended to show the first and last of the production, but I've never gotten around to making it. Occasionally I still get an e-mail asking about them - messages from another time perhaps but I'm still surprised when a request comes along. If you happen to see this and are curious if I still make and sell them, the answer is no.

I think people forget about how cool and small the retrogaming hobby once was. There were all kinds of us making stuff like this and selling it to the community. Some people made these ventures into commercial products but so many of us did little handmade limited

runs for people who asked, just for fun and because we could. An example I will always remember was a forum member at Digital Press who took a Virtual Boy security bit, had a metal shop grind it down and weld it to the end of a screwdriver shaft so it would fit into the Virtual Boy housing, used it to fix his Virtual Boy, and then sold that one-off tool to someone else on the forums for like five bucks. Those were exceptional times, no doubt.

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

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