

The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-SIXTH ISSUE - JANUARY 2022

CABBAGE THEFT SPIRALS OUT OF CONTROL!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Thirty-Sixth Issue - January 2022

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Prepare to Qualify

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Greetings everyone and Happy New Year! This is planned to be a banner year for The Retrogaming Times for a number of reasons. Make sure you don't skip over the first article below, as it contains some very important information about the year ahead and the newsletter as a whole. If you have previously written for a Retrogaming Times newsletter please contact me as soon as possible. Additionally if you have always thought about writing for The Retrogaming Times, right now is the time to do it. Things are going to change this year but it is all intended to culminate in a grand celebration.

2022 begins with a bang as we present a very large issue packed with retrogaming of every category. More C64! starts off the new year with a high-quality RPG in the Japanese style, bringing a very impressive game to the platform with Merman's review of The Briley Witch Chronicles. Donald Lee presents a retrospective on his history with Apple II publications and shares where you can read some new ones in the Apple II Incider. This issue's cover story features what was long considered to be a forgotten game created by industry pioneer Shigeru Miyamoto, as we get to the bottom of Mole Mania. After much time away, Mateus Fedozzi returns with some modern Sega Master System Memories as he presents new SMS games from French publisher 2Minds. Another familiar face that we are glad to see back again, Rob Luther, shares stories and analysis of the Genesis classic Shining Force in The Retro Junkie. If you're still feeling the Christmas spirit, be sure to check out Dan Pettis' detailed review of a recent film that attempts to capture the frantic magic of an 8-Bit Christmas. If you hunger for a portable arcade romp on the go with a little something extra on the side, bite into our review of BurgerTime Deluxe but hold the pickles, please. Additionally a personal story is shared, framed around a mystifying first encounter with the Nintendo Entertainment System. 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!

A Very Important Message For All Readers

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)



Hi everyone, I'm going to break a bit of an unwritten policy I have and address you, our readers, directly. If you're new to the newsletter, my name's David and I serve as Chief Editor of The Retrogaming Times. I was also a Contributing Writer for the previous incarnation of the newsletter, Retrogaming Times Monthly, from 2004 to 2013.

Back in 2016 when I began to get serious about restarting the newsletter, I set a few long-term goals for us to attempt to reach. These were never talked about publicly back then, as they were milestones I set for myself as editor and publisher. They would come up from time to time within our staff issue debriefs as we would complete them, and there were always four key events I was aiming for:

1. Complete one year of issues.

- This was way easier to do than I first thought it would be. The fear was that no one would come back when I sent out the initial request to spin the newsletter up again. While I did have some responses that ultimately never resulted in article submissions, the response was solid enough that we were able to get things going again and the newsletter was reborn. [We accomplished this in January 2017.](#)

2. Publish ten issues, up to September 2017, which would be the original newsletter's 20th anniversary.

- It wasn't much farther to the second goal and the response was pretty amazing, with previous Retrogaming Times and Retrogaming Times Monthly staff returning for that special anniversary issue, still our largest to date. I figured if we could get to that 20th anniversary then I would be satisfied no matter what came next and that has held true. [We accomplished this in September 2017.](#)

3. Establish a .PDF archive of the entire history of all "Retrogaming Times" newsletters.

- The Newsletter Legacy Archive as it came to be known was by far the largest undertaking I've embarked on in relation to The Retrogaming Times. Of course this is ongoing as we continue to release issues, and I have 30 RTM issues that still need to be converted into standard format, but as it stands the entire back catalog of releases is easily accessible by all. [This went live in January 2018.](#)

4. Complete five years of issues.

- I honestly always considered this to be the total pie in the sky objective. Meeting the 20th anniversary and completing the .PDF archive were the big ones in my mind and I had a fear that I would become disinterested after that. If anything I thought five years was a nice solid "best case" number in the distance and if we hit it then I would be totally content with however things would go after. Well that was a year ago, believe it or not, and the newsletter has only grown since then with new contributors and larger issues. [We accomplished this in January 2021.](#)

With those four objectives met, the question became "what comes next?" Last January when we were wrapping up that fifth year of issues, I announced to staff that while I had no intention of walking away from the newsletter or calling it a day in 2021, I knew it couldn't go on forever and I really didn't want to try to. The plan was always to continue with things as they were for the foreseeable future, which is what we did through 2021 to great success. Just the same, it was during that staff debrief that I set a final goal for The Retrogaming Times - to make it to September 2022. This September will be the 25th anniversary of the original Retrogaming Times and I figure a quarter of a century milestone would be a fitting time to say goodbye.

So it is with this issue that I publicly announce the final issue of The Retrogaming Times will be September 2022.

That will be our fortieth issue and serve as a celebration of twenty-five years of Retrogaming Times. Retrogaming Times Monthly never got to go out with the celebration it deserved nor with the banner held high that it helped create. That always bothered me, which was one of the biggest catalysts in my drive to relaunch the newsletter. As with the 20th anniversary issue, my goal is to get as many alumni to come back as possible for a final column or two.

If you or ANYONE you know has written for ANY "Retrogaming Times" family newsletter over the past 25 years, [PLEASE e-mail me!](#) I'm going to attempt to get as many alumni as possible back to write for that final issue, to write a very special article in addition to anything else they would like to contribute. I want us to go out with a grand celebration. Over the next month I will begin to reach out to as many people as I can from our history but as the digital world has changed so much since 1997, finding contacts that are still active can be difficult. PLEASE put the word out for Retrogaming Times, Bit Age Times, Retrogaming Times Monthly and The Retrogaming Times past staff to [get in touch with me](#) and take part in celebrating a **quarter century** of our incredible newsletter!

With that, we have five wonderful issues left including this one. That means there are four chances remaining for any of you, our readers, to contribute to the newsletter and join a great retrogaming tradition. Please enjoy the issue ahead and the year to come.



Upcoming Events

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

NOTICE: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many shows and events have canceled, postponed, or modified their dates.

For the latest on the events listed below, please visit their individual websites or contact their relevant customer support channels as the current situation continues to unfold. Thank you.

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KansasFest, July 19th - 24th 2022, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

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

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

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

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

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

For more information, visit <https://classicgamefest.com/>

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If there is a show or event you would like listed here, free of charge, please contact David directly at trt@classicplastic.net. Please include a short official blurb about your event along with any relevant links or contact information and it will be published in the next issue of The Retrogaming Times. The event listing will remain posted until the issue following the event date. Big or small, we want to promote your show in our newsletter.

Check out these great events, shows, and conventions and let them know you read about them in The Retrogaming Times!



More C64! - The Briley Witch Chronicles

by Merman

There have been very few Japanese Role-Playing Games (JRPGs) on the Commodore 64, which made The Briley Witch Chronicles one of the most anticipated releases of 2021. What makes a JRPG different, and why should you play the latest title from Sarah Jane Avory?



Banner for The Briley Witch Chronicles

FROM THE EAST

The JRPG evolved in a unique way. Inspiration came from the West, with Japanese designers playing the early Ultima and Wizardry titles. But the games they would go on to make - for Japanese computers and the emerging consoles, especially the Famicom / NES - would have distinct differences. Where Western RPGs embraced a 3D view for exploration in the likes of SSI's Dungeons & Dragons games or the dungeon crawl of Dungeon Master, Japanese games tended to stick with an overworld viewed from overhead. Both involved talking to NPCs (Non-Player Characters) and earning XP (experience) to improve your characters. But Japanese games often introduced Classes or Jobs, with the player earning additional Skills as they progressed.

The major difference was the turn-based battle. A random encounter in the overworld would see the player's view shifted to a side-on view, with their party on one side and the monsters encountered on the other. Menus give access to physical combat, magic powers, and items. This also led to the spin-off genre of tactical RPGs, often with an isometric battleground (as seen in Final Fantasy Tactics or the Battle Ogre series).

Of course, we can't talk about JRPGs without mentioning two of the biggest series - Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. Although

the early games in both had limited releases in the West, from the PlayStation era and Final Fantasy VII onwards the West has paid more attention to the genre - and the epic, sweeping stories that the games tell. With many hours of gameplay and intriguing plots, it is easy to get lost and deeply involved in a JRPG.

A SHORT PRELUDE

One of the few C64 JRPGs to date was an entry into the RGCD 16K Cartridge Coding Competition. Georg Rottensteiner's **PENULTIMATE FANTASY** was of course inspired by the early Final Fantasy games, down to the blue and white colours of the in-game menu. Roaming the overworld, the player's character can enter dungeons and buildings to search for items. Party members can be recruited as you search for four crystals to place on the pillars found near the start. When monsters are encountered, the action switches to the classic side-on view and the tactical menus come into play. Graphics are small and cutely drawn, with distinctive monsters. It's a fun take on the idea, but of course the limited memory means there is not much in the way of a storyline and little explanatory text.

For further adventuring, Georg also created **WONDERLAND**. This is more closely inspired by the original Legend of Zelda game on the NES, being an action RPG. And if you are someone who enjoyed the second Zelda game, it is worth checking out the less well-known **CHESTER FIELD** from Vic Tokai. This side-scrolling action RPG draws on influences from Zelda II and the later Wonder Boy games, with the player upgrading their equipment in shops and seeking out quests. In terms of story-based games, the closest to a JRPG on the C64 is **THE FAERY TALE ADVENTURE**. But that has its flaws, being a cut-down conversion of a bigger 16-bit game.

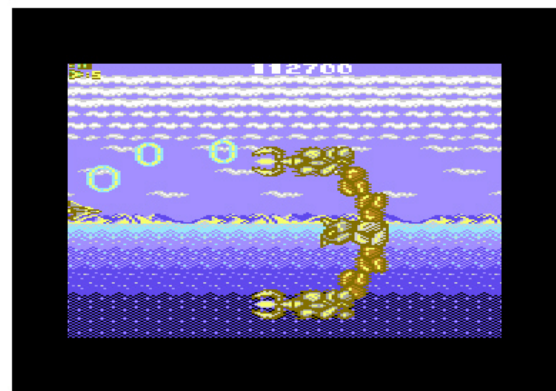


Fighting an enemy in Penultimate Fantasy - and starting out on your quest in Wonderland.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Sarah Jane Avory has become one of the top C64 game designers over the last few years. She has been in the games industry for years, starting at software house Orpheus back in the 1980s. Working for the likes of Core Design, Sarah took a break to become an author. She wrote a series of books called The Briley Witch Chronicles, following a woman drawn from Earth into another world where she gains the power of a witch - and is accompanied by her cat Smokey (who can talk to her in this magical place).

Sarah announced herself on the C64 with the vertically scrolling shoot 'em up **NEUTRON**, based on the classic arcade game Star Force. This was followed by a Christmas-skinned version known as **SANTRON**. Another vertically scrolling shoot 'em up came next, as **ZETA WING** - which Sarah based on her earlier work converting Gemini Wing to the Amiga. The large bosses and parallax scrolling are particularly impressive. The action switched to horizontal scrolling with the incredible **SOUL FORCE** released at the end of 2020. Over 20 huge levels, multiple bosses, and a clever dynamic soundtrack, this cartridge-based release deservedly sold in large numbers. (And at the time of writing, Sarah is working on Snow Force, a Christmas adaptation of Soul Force, which looks like a lot of fun. Her next big project is Zeta Wing 2).



The Christmas-themed Santron, and an impressive boss from Soul Force.

A KIND OF MAGIC

Briley returns home from an exhausting day at work and feeds her cat Smokey. When the phone rings, Briley talks to her mother who suggests lighting a candle to help her relax and meditate. This is where the player takes control, searching the house for the

candle and lighting it. And when she meditates, a strange spirit draws Briley and Smokey into another world.

The game starts with an intro sequence showing a spirit being imprisoned and then released. On the title screen the player can start a NEW GAME or CONTINUE an old game. As the game is on an EasyFlash cartridge image, there are four save slots on the cartridge - or the player can save to four slots on a formatted disk in drive 8 or 9 instead. There is a choice of difficulty. EASY makes the battles easier and allows you to follow the story, while NORMAL has tougher enemies.

Arriving in this strange world, Briley finds herself under the protection of a family - but she must perform tasks for them, such as delivering bread. And somehow Smokey can talk. Briley can then move around the village of Maepole, where the residents are under an evil curse. Can Briley find a cure, involving the herbs growing around the village? Can she develop and grow her magic powers? And will everyone welcome her to the village?

Briley moves around the village, which is split into large sections. She can enter buildings, talk to people, and pick herbs. Signposts point to important locations. Control is from the joystick, pressing Fire to perform an action or holding Fire to go into the menu system. Here the player can look at the stats of the character, use items they have found and save the game (although this is not possible in certain situations). The extremely useful REMIND option will give a hint on where to go or what to do next.



The title screen, and here in the menus you can see the REMIND option.

Talking to characters brings up a portrait of the character talking. And Sarah herself appears, giving you instructions on how to play or access certain functions. In certain situations, there will be a choice of dialogue - selecting an option will prompt the character you are talking with to give you more information on that subject. As the plot advances, other characters will join Briley in her quest, following her in the overworld.

When Briley explores the forest around the village, she will run into random encounters with enemies. Here the view switches to the turn-based battle, with the party on the left and the monsters on the right. One side will sometimes have the element of surprise, giving them the first attack. It is possible to try and flee a battle, but it is not always successful. Each character can then choose to carry out a physical attack (boosted by carrying a weapon), defend (to reduce the damage taken from an attack), use an item (often to heal), cast magic (if they have that ability) or use a Skill (which are earned as the game progresses). An example Skill is Smokey's Slash x2, giving two hits on the same enemy - but Skills are limited by Skill Points, and Magic by Magic Points. Targeting an enemy is as simple as moving the cursor to them and pressing Fire. Once the player has chosen actions for all the party, they are carried out (and if a targeted enemy has been killed, any attacks will be shifted to another enemy). Once all the enemies are wiped out, the characters earn XP (experience), Hit Points and other points (regaining spent Skill or Magic Points slowly).

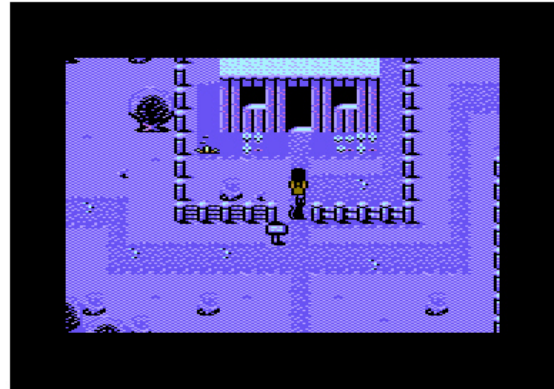


Getting ready to attack the buzzards with help from Sebastian - and choosing the right dialogue option can reveal more choices.

It is the story that makes Briley Witch so compelling. With more than fifteen hours of gameplay, and more if you complete the side-quests or take your time exploring, there is a lot of depth. Hidden around the locations are more than fifty foxes to rescue, and you can keep track of how many you have found in the menu. The way you meet new characters and gradually develop Briley's powers is managed well. The dialogue is fantastic, from the sarcastic cat Smokey to the believable worries and fears of the villagers. And once you have helped the village, the world map gives access to more locations.

Graphically the game is particularly good. The village and forest look great, and a change of palette gives day and night versions. The sprites themselves are well animated and move around with style. Best of all are the small character portraits, filled with

detail and really adding to the feeling of the game. The soundtrack, composed by Sarah herself, is an interesting one. There are themes and motifs that recur, and as your time in the village grows the music changes with the mood of the game. The dynamic and fast battle theme also adds to the urgency. Since release there have been a series of patches to fix bugs with the save routines and improve the game, so it is worth making sure you have the latest release downloaded.



The dialogue between Briley and Smokey is enjoyable, and sometimes you must explore the village at night.

At the time of writing, the game has sold over 750 digital copies in its first month. Sarah is still deciding whether there will be a physical version to purchase. The great news is that she is already planning two sequels, covering the rest of the Briley Witch novels - and an Amiga conversion of the first game is underway. For those who want to enjoy a long and involving story in the JRPG style, there is simply no missing one of the best C64 games of 2021 - and a landmark RPG for 8-bit computers.



The screen shakes as Briley mixes a spell in the cauldron, and Sarah tells you essential information about spells...

WEB LINKS

Purchase the C64 game at:

<https://sarahjaneavory.itch.io/briley-witch-chronicles>

Minimum pricing \$9.99 plus sales tax - PAL and NTSC compatible, works with the C64 Mini and THEC64, supports the 2-button C64GS joystick.

<https://sarahjaneavory.itch.io/>

Sarah's main itch.io page for her other titles

<https://www.amazon.com/Sarah-Jane-Avory/e/B00CYHDT8M>

Sarah's Amazon author page, for the Briley Witch novels



Apple II Incider - Juiced GS - Apple II Retrospective

by [Donald Lee](#)

It's early December as I write this but it will be into 2022 when you read this, so hope everyone had a happy and safe holiday season. My December will be a busy one with basketball officiating and other activities possibly with friends. Not everything is planned yet but that's ok. With the weird past few years we've had, any time spent with friends is good. As we begin a new year in 2022, I will take a look back into Apple II history, namely the mid to late 1990's via the long running Juiced.GS magazine (<https://juiced.gs>).

Some context here. As a long time Apple II user, I had always supported Apple II magazines. My dad had started with Incider, A+, and Apple Orchard. I continued reading those magazines until they folded. I then supported II Alive (via Quality Computers) and Shareware Solutions (via former Insider / A+ writer Joe Kohn). But since the late 1990's, when my subscriptions ended for

Shareware Solutions and II Alive, I have not subscribed to any Apple II magazine. However as noted in this column many times, Juiced.GS has been publishing for over 25 years.

I strongly debated subscribing to the magazine, as I don't really want more stuff occupying space in my house. Yet I wanted to support the publisher. Fortunately the publisher sold back issues of Juiced.GS in PDF format. I decided to purchase the first 10 years worth of issues (40 in total) recently. The first issue is dated Winter 1996. Reading the first two years of the magazine (8 issues) was like taking a time machine back to the mid 1990's. Most of the information that was presented had been published by other magazines at that time but it was good see the same information from a different perspective.

Looking back at the mid 1990's, while Apple Computer Inc. had discontinued the Apple II series of computers, there was still great enthusiasm in the community. A web browser for the Apple IIGS was developed. The beginnings of a long conversion of the hit Wolfenstein 3D to the Apple IIGS was started and completed in the late 1990's. Trying to read all the issues before I wrote this article would be tough so I jumped to the 1st issue of 2005 (dated February 2005) which would make it the first issue of the 10th volume (or year) of Juiced.GS. Appropriately, the cover story was talking about "A decade of Juiced.GS" and how things had changed in the decade since the magazine started. Also in this issue was a discussion of the venerable spreadsheet program VisiCalc! I'm a historian by nature and reading some of these older issues of Juiced.GS was a nice look back. I'll go through all the issues I purchased at some point and likely purchase the next ten years worth of magazines to complete my reading. Juiced.GS is set to publish in 2022 and hopefully for years to come. It's worth a read whether you are looking at historical or current Apple II news.



Mole Mania (Game Boy) - Excavating a Gem

by David Lundin, Jr.

Regardless of how you feel about Nintendo today or in the past, you have to admit that Shigeru Miyamoto is one of the most influential people in the history of video games. His ability to design quality games from the early arcade era to the modern day is something few others have even remotely come close to doing. While I'm one of the last people that will go on record saying every game he's ever worked on was an amazing title, and argue that many game mechanics he is sometimes credited with were in fact taken from earlier games, his creations have really stood the test of time. Donkey Kong, Mario, Zelda and others are industry defining series that have helped shape the face of gaming as many of us know it.

At this point it's a little hard to find a title that Miyamoto worked on that most people don't know about or treasure, with the Famicom exclusive Devil World being the odd game out that generally comes to mind. However there's one gem of a Game Boy game that many seem to overlook and unlike Devil World it was actually released outside of Japan. With a combination of action reflexes and intense puzzles, Mole Mania should have been one of the most fondly remembered titles of the platform - but it wasn't. Would you believe that it all had to do with poor timing? In Japan the game was released shortly after the original incarnations of the Pokemon games and never stood a chance to even make a dent in sales. Once Mole Mania had its North American release, the Game Boy market had just about dried up. Although the localized releases of Pokemon as Red and Blue would relight the Game Boy's fire on our shores, that was still awhile away and there wasn't much attention being paid to the aging hardware at the time. It's a shame, as Mole Mania is an awesome title and quite possibly one of the most perfect puzzle games for a handheld.

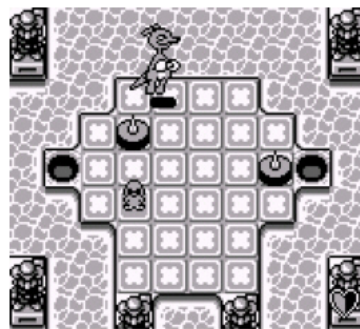


Muddy Mole returns home one day to find that the farmer Jinbe has kidnapped his wife and seven children. Each of his children have been taken to one of the seven levels of Jinbe Land, with his wife being held at Jinbe's castle. Access to the castle is only opened once all seven levels are conquered, however after completing the first level the remaining ones can be tackled in any order. Each level gets progressively more difficult, usually utilizing tricks and gameplay elements introduced in the previous areas. Due to this progressive challenge and learning curve, it's suggested to play the levels in order.

The basic premise of each level is simple. The levels are made up of a series of interconnected screens that act as a linear maze, the later the level, the more screens that it contains. This means that the levels get longer the further you play. The main objective of each screen is to open the exit by pushing or throwing a bomb into a stone square that blocks the exit. Once this is complete, any steel blockers or enemies on the screen disappear and Muddy is allowed to continue on his journey. The catch is that there is only one bomb per stone square (some screens have multiple exits that lead to bonus areas or the like) and the trick to the game is to find a way to get the bomb over to the block and blow the exit open. Of course the screens aren't that straightforward. Areas will be littered with obstacles that can help, hinder or do both to your progress. Steel blockers can be pushed but not pulled and allow a thrown object to stop against them. Barrels can fill open holes, allowing objects to be moved across them. Pipes change the direction of barrels or bombs thrown through them and are used to bank objects around tight corners. Cabbages could be considered the main bonus item of Mole Mania. There are twenty cabbages per level and while they can be used as blockers, every five that are thrown in an open hole allow Muddy to recover one quarter of his life meter. There are also arrows that redirect objects that come into contact with them, spiked areas that cannot be crossed (however objects can be moved over them) and moving enemies - lots of enemies.

Being a mole, Muddy has a unique ability that lends itself to what makes the game stand out from similar titles such as Adventures of Lolo. Anywhere there is soft soil, Muddy can dig a hole and the underground world becomes visible. Here, Muddy can navigate below the above ground hazards and surface anywhere there is soft soil. This dual level design is critical to planning strategies for clearing each screen. If the bomb is dropped into a hole anywhere on the screen, it will reappear back at its starting point. That's where the barrels come in. A plugged up hole will allow the bomb to be thrown or dragged across without submerging. However a barrel filled hole also acts as an immovable blocker underground. Additionally the below ground world can lend itself to just as many navigational challenges at the world above. As long as soft ground permits, Muddy can take a peek above ground from below the surface without making a hole. It is critical to "look before you leap" to avoid enemy encounters or an incorrectly placed hole. While most enemies stay above ground, there is one type that submerges just like Muddy and follows the tunnels beneath. All standard enemies can be dispatched by having a thrown cabbage, barrel or bomb come into contact with them. Muddy has a life meter that consists of four quadrants. Each hit from an enemy or contact with a moving object will take one away, once the meter is empty it's game over. If Muddy ends up making a screen impossible to solve, exiting and entering the screen will reset it. Every few screens Gramps Mole will offer a life meter refill as well as some words of advice. There are also signboards throughout the world of Jinbe Land with messages to help the player and advance the story.

In addition to the core game there are four special objects hidden throughout each level. A **map** will show a grid layout of the level on the status screen. The little **radar** will show where the boss, bonus stage, and life meter recharge areas are. A **potion** will refill your heart meter one time. Finally a **hand** will allow you to skip a screen you were unable to complete, however it will not be counted as cleared. The bonus stages consist of attempting to clear the screen of cabbages by throwing them down holes while Jinbe gives chase. The bonus stages can be lost and retried as many times as the player would like, there's no penalty for losing them. However the reward for completing the bonus stages doesn't happen until the end of each level. Everything the player did within the level counts toward a level ranking and ultimately the level completion score. For 100 points, every area on the map must have been cleared, all four bonus items must have been collected, all twenty cabbages must have been dropped into a hole, and the bonus stage must have been completed as well. Quite the challenge, especially on the later levels.



Muddy preparing to fling a cabbage behind him (left), pushing large tacks beneath the first boss while he is in the air (right)

As it did with the basic gameplay, Adventures of Lolo comes to mind when I think Mole Mania's visual presentation. Every movable object on the screen has on average the same size, which plays perfectly with the idea of the screens being broken down into grids. The amount of detail here for the old Game Boy is very good, easily on the same level of a game like Link's Awakening, with fluid and clean movement. All objects and enemies are clearly illustrated and easy to identify. Cabbages blend in just a bit with some of the backgrounds on the later levels but that's part of the challenge of finding them all. Muddy and Jinbe are both well drawn as are the cutscenes that play between levels and the signboards that help with information. Each boss character is completely different from one another and most take up three to four times as much space as the standard enemies. The bosses in this game really are super detailed and react to damage with different animations. The Snowman boss in particular actually splits off into smaller versions of himself as the battle goes on. There's very little slowdown or flicker and everything remains sharp throughout the entire game, especially when played on a Game Boy Pocket.

I've read some complaints about the sound design, particularly the music. Personally I find the music very enjoyable and just thinking about the game will cause its music to get stuck in my head. However the sound effects really do lack any kind of spice. There are the expected sounds when objects collide, when enemies are defeated, and when damage is taken - all of them passable but lacking anything to really make them memorable. In fact the music plays a bigger role here, with event specific jingles such as when a screen is cleared or a boss appears in addition to a handful of catchy background tunes. Again, I really enjoy the music of this game and think it fits perfectly with the type of gameplay. Never once did I turn the volume off and never once did the music or sound effects become even the least bit irritating. With a puzzle game that demands precise movement one would hope that control would be perfect and with Mole Mania it is. The basics can be figured out within a couple minutes of play and advanced techniques are explained throughout the game by the use of signboards. Any lapse in control will be caused

by a break in concentration, usually resulting in fifteen minutes of planning being smashed apart in a couple seconds.

There's a lot of game to be had initially, especially if you're going for 100% completion. Sadly there are no special bonuses or extra features for completing the game 100%. In fact the game feels a tiny bit unfinished after the credits roll and you are brought to the final statistics area. The two player mode is basically the bonus stage played with one player as Muddy and the other as Jinbe, so there's really not a lot there either. Really working hard at it, it took me a little over seven hours to complete the game the first time, going by the in game clock, and playing on a Game Boy Pocket. Some of the screens take as long as fifteen to twenty minutes to figure out and then put into motion - not counting a last minute screwup. I wish the over all replay was higher but really, after completing the game you probably won't want to come back for awhile. That said, that first playthrough is a total blast and well worth your time.

I really consider Mole Mania to be an unsung classic. If you like overhead puzzle games such as Boxxle and Adventures of Lolo then you'll probably love Mole Mania. It's a combination of both titles with a bunch of stuff in motion the entire time. The difficulty curve can be rather misleading, especially with how easy and approachable the first couple levels are. Thankfully it never becomes quite as devious as the Lolo / Eggerland games can be but a few rooms do present a complex challenge, getting close to what some of the highest level Lolo screens subject the player to. The only huge drawback are the bonus stages, which are awful. They're simply much too difficult and end up feeling like a huge chore - quite the contradiction to what most think of concerning a bonus stage. On top of that the reward for completing them is nothing but the final twenty points to get 100 for a perfect clear of the level, which itself doesn't change anything other than knowing you got 100%. The boss stages each require different strategies and are very interesting combinations of planning and reaction. Fighting Jinbe at the end of the game will pose quite a challenge to even the most experienced gamer - I know I wanted to flip my Game Boy across the room a couple times. Mole Mania is also Super Game Boy enhanced, sporting a nice palette and custom boarder. Anyone looking for a great puzzle game to take on the go couldn't do much better than Mole Mania. Admittedly I would have passed Mole Mania by like everyone else if it weren't for two of my sisters receiving Game Boy Pocket systems for Christmas in 1997. Along with the handheld, one of them received Donkey Kong Land 2 (an amazing Game Boy game in its own right) and the other Mole Mania. No idea what happened to Donkey Kong Land 2 but that copy of Mole Mania eventually found its way into my hands, where it remains to this day.



SMS Memories: Return of the Master - Starring 2Minds the French Publisher

by [Mateus Fedozzi](#)

Last time I wrote for The Retrogaming Times, I was after a copy of Sydney Hunter for the Master System. Well, it turns out it's easier to find a bottle of water in the desert! But don't you start thinking the Sega 8-bit wonder is out of other homebrew options. Enter **2Minds** (<https://www.2minds.fr/en/>), a European publisher devoted exclusively to my precious little Z80 games machine.

2Minds started with a bang: it released four GREAT games which are currently sold out but will be available again from their website in late 2022. And when I say they're great, I mean GREAT! They all play wonderfully and come in a beautiful sealed package, and what's more, a beautiful circuit board too! You'll be amazed if you open the shells to check what's inside them, believe me. They're the work of the one and only ichigo from the SMS Power forums.

All of the games' ROMs are freely available from the Homebrew or Hacks sections of the aforementioned SMS Power (<https://www.smspower.org/>), which has always been a great resource for wannabe Master System developers. The games are: Heroes Against Demons, Bara Burū, Flight of Pigarus and Voyage - A Socceress' Vacation.



Heroes Against Demons is a match-3 puzzle made by ichigo himself, with music composed by young talent Polaria Poyon. The art is - like in all of 2Minds releases - exactly the kind of art you'd expect to see on a Master System game. Which means cute, very cute. Or should I say chibi? Anyway, this game is tense. Nerve-wracking as only the truly refined puzzles can be.



Bara Burū is a Bubble Bobble type of platformer by the brilliant Kagesan. It starts easy enough but soon you will be cursing the vile sea creatures that hunt down the protagonist ninjas across the mazes. The enemies can easily group up on you if you fail to use the walls as hiding spots against them. The music is cheery, but don't let it fool you! Stay on you guard all the time!

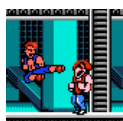


Flight of Pigarus is another one by Kagesan, but this is a very peculiar release. It's the first caravan shooter for the system. You may choose between a 2 minutes or a 5 minutes mode to rack up as high a score as you can. Both enemies and bonus items improve this score. Your fire power can also improve if you find the required power capsules. Sweet swine gameplay for the initiated.



Voyage - A Sorceress' Vacation is made in KiddEd by the SNAGS team. However, this is no cheap hack. The team spent four years building what feels like a completely original experience, with sweet music and visuals that harken back to the system's classics like *Astérix* and the *Illusion* series. It even has a waterfall stage, and no Master System platformer should go without one.

Now let me finish this article saying that it's with great joy that I witness the coming of 2Minds. While Atari, Nintendo and the Sega Genesis have thriving homebrew scenes since time immemorial, the Master System's is finally starting to heat up. With four amazing options, you don't even need to choose your poison. If you love physical media, buy them all when they're available in the near future (ichigo is busy developing Mini Paprium for the Game Gear right now and some components needed for making more carts will only ship next year). You can play the games right away, and I assure you won't regret trying them, 8-bit lover or not. Have fun!



The Retro Junkie - Shining Force

by [Rob Luther](#)

I hope everyone has had a wonderful holiday! I also want to thank The Retrogaming Times editor David Lundin, Jr. for keeping this incredible online retrogaming magazine going for several years now. Retrogaming Times has always held a special place in my heart, and to know that it is still in good hands means a lot. Thank you and cheers, my friend!

Have you ever paired a video game with a holiday? To kickstart 2022, I wanted to talk about a game that has always been special to me - Shining Force for the Sega Genesis / Mega Drive. Objectively, Shining Force was and still is a solid turn-based, tactical role playing game for the Genesis. However, I have paired Shining Force with Thanksgiving every single year since I was a kid! Why? Well, it all started on Thanksgiving, 1994...

Here's some personal history and context leading up to my first experience with Shining Force. In late 1993, my mom had remarried and my sister and I had moved into my step-dad's home in Deptford, NJ. Shortly after, I met my step-dad's neighbor, Dave, who always invited our family over on Thursday nights and Saturday afternoons. Quick side note, Dave was like a really cool big brother / uncle, as he took a special interest in me growing up. I'm grateful to say that we are still close to this day. I have him to thank for introducing me to a bunch of life-changing things as a kid - hockey, 80s metal, Star Wars, and - you guessed it - a TON of video games I otherwise never would have seen nor played!

Anyway, when I first met Dave in 1993 and discovered his game collection, I was in complete awe! He had dozens of games for the NES, Game Boy, Super Nintendo, the Sega Genesis, and even the Sega CD - which, at the time, I didn't even know was a thing! I had died and gone to gaming heaven, I thought! So, slowly but surely, I mustered up the courage to ask Dave if I could borrow a game from time to time. Once he knew I could be trusted to actually take care of his games and bring them back, I ended up borrowing at least two or three games every couple of weeks that would eventually become synonymous with my childhood - games like The Legend of Zelda, Final Fantasy III (The US SNES cart), Castlevania: Bloodlines, and of course Shining Force!



On Thanksgiving break in 1994, I asked Dave if I could borrow Shining Force. I remember seeing the cover of the game for the first time. It was absolute eye-candy for an eight-year-old kid! In the foreground, on a mountain peak above the clouds, stood our muscular, He-Manesque hero with a rad mullet battling skeletons on either side of him. In the far distance loomed a mysterious castle. Was our hero on his way to defend it? Destroy it? Was he even going to make it that far with these hordes of undead enemies relentlessly attacking him from every side?! I had to play this gem! So, on that Wednesday morning to kick off Thanksgiving break, I finally fired up the game... and my life hasn't been the same since!

Specs

Before I talk about why I love Shining Force so much, let's get some perspective on the Shining series and mechanics. Shining Force was released in Japan in March of 1992 and North America in July of 1993 as a prequel to the first game of the Shining series entitled Shining in the Darkness. While Shining in the Darkness was a dungeon crawler RPG released in 1991, Shining Force changed the dynamic of the gameplay into a turn-based, tactical RPG in the style of the Fire Emblem series. At the time, I had never played the Fire Emblem series, so this was my first foray into playing an RPG like this and I loved it!

The battles in Shining Force take place in square grids where each ally or enemy occupies a single square. Much like chess, the player has to tactically move the characters around the battlefield while also considering the unique mobility of each character as well as the design limitations of the battlefield itself. Once the player moves all the allies, then it's time for the enemy to move its characters. Once an ally is in position to attack, there is a cutscene that shows a neat animation of the ally attacking the enemy or vice versa, which I always thought was so cool! The character designs, animations, and battle music really made each battle exciting and worth the monotony of moving characters around one by one, battle after battle.

The Story

Okay, now to get into the meat and potatoes (or should I say turkey and dressing?) of why I keep coming back to Shining Force. First up is the story! It's your classic underdog hero rising to the occasion to save the world kind of story. While the story is pretty standard now, it was new and fresh to me at the time, and it blew my mind. And, you know what? I still appreciate the story today!

Shining Force opens in the Kingdom of Guardia in the land of Rune. Our hero, Max, is called to adventure in order to defeat the evil villain, Darksol. Darksol commands hordes of Runefaut demons and monsters with the sole intention of opening the Shining Path to resurrect Dark Dragon. Why does he want to resurrect Dark Dragon? Because he's evil - that's why! Some villains just want to see the world burn. Max meets plenty of allies who help him forge the legendary Chaos Breaker (what a cool name for a sword!) as he makes his way to the Castle of the Ancients. I bet that is the castle we see on the cover of the game!

During the final confrontation between Max and Darksol, Darksol sacrifices himself to resurrect the Dark Dragon. This leads to an epic battle between Max and Dark Dragon, with Max ultimately sealing Dark Dragon away with his Chaos Breaker. In the process, the Castle of the Ancients begins to crumble. In a heroic act of sacrifice, Max teleports his allies to safety while he stays behind. The allies then watch, horrified, as the castle sinks into the water, and Max is presumed dead. "Presumed" being the key word. Always stick around for the end of the credits, my friends!

Building an Army

If we're sticking with the Thanksgiving analogies where the story is the turkey and dressing, then the massive array of characters are like the wonderful, yet essential variety of side dishes of a hearty thanksgiving meal - the mashed potatoes and gravy, the cranberry sauce, the green bean casserole, the creamed corn, the fried okra, the freshly baked and buttered biscuits! Ok, ok, stomach. I hear you. I'll stop!

There is certainly both quantity and quality in the supporting cast of characters in Shining Force. Throughout the kingdoms, towns, fortresses, and even unmarked locations of Rune, the player can encounter many different characters that will join the hero along the way to fight Darksol. Along with the hero, Max, the supporting casts of characters include 18 main allies who will join the hero no matter what. However, there are also 11 unlockable allies in the game! Having these bonus characters encourage the player to veer off the beaten path to explore different locations and talk to every citizen in every town. The variety of characters are great, too. Ranging from healers, monks, knights, mages, archers, and warriors to birdmen, samurai, dragons, cyborgs, and werewolves - yes, I said cyborgs and werewolves - this game scratches every itch for those who love classic RPG archetypes and then some!

Oh, and what kid doesn't love making a good fort? When the hero of Shining Force travels to any kingdom, he establishes his own underground fortress / headquarters where all of the allies hang out! As a kid, I absolutely loved this fortress feature. Any time I would unlock a new character, I would immediately head to the fortress and see where he or she was. The underground fortress itself is laid out with several rooms. First, when the hero descends the steps, he is greeted by Nova, an NPC who gives you advice regarding each battle ahead. Down the hall to the right is the main room where most of the hero's army is located. I always found this a bit funny that they are all side by side, marching in place in their own fortress! Then there are the back rooms filled with tables and what even seems to be a bar for the more raucous allies! The hero finds several of his allies hanging out back here from time to time - perhaps taking a break from all that marching in place! It's neat to see the hero's army growing and to interact with the characters from time to time, as many of their dialogue changes throughout the game.

The Promotion System

The third, and quite possibly my favorite feature of Shining Force and Thanksgiving, is our dessert - the pumpkin, the sweet potato, the pecan, the apple pie ala mode - The Promotion System! Shining Force does an incredible job making the grind of leveling allies a ton of fun! When an ally reaches a minimum level of 10, he or she may be eligible for a promotion which is done by a priest in any town that has a shrine. A character level promotion unlocks a brand new skill set of attacks, perks, and spells as well as a fancy new character designs/wardrobe upgrades!

For instance, Anri, princess of Guardia, is initially a mage in the game who can eventually be promoted to a wizard. The promotion to wizard unlocks way more devastating magic attacks like Fire / Ice Level 3. Plus, she looks rad! Wizards with high-level magic attacks are a game changer because they can take out four or five enemies at once if the player organizes his or her character moves just right. Taking down hordes of demons with the one-two combo of Anri and Tao always proves to be super effective and super satisfying!



Ken is another great example of the promotion system done right! A knight in the Kingdom of Guardia at the start of the game, Ken can be promoted to paladin. Paladins have certain tiers of upgrades like increased armor, increased attack, or increased health - any of which can help the player tremendously. Paladins along with warriors serve as traditional tank characters who can

dish out damage just as much as they can take it. And once again - Ken looks awesome decked out his upgraded suit of steel armor and his warhorse bedecked in chainmail! While the baseline character designs are great, the promotion upgrades definitely give the player extra incentive to grind and is certainly rewarding.

The Music

How about a little Thanksgiving punch with sherbet ice cream to wash down that heavy Thanksgiving meal? That's the music for me. Quick aside - I'm not actually sure if green punch with orange sherbet is a Thanksgiving tradition, southern tradition, or just a Rob Luther family tradition thanks to my wonderful grandmother, Willamae, but the analogy still works for me! I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention the absolutely incredible soundtrack of Shining Force composed by Masahiko Yoshimora. Every song seems to fit the storyline perfectly and set the tone of each location. For instance, the Gaurdiana town theme is so chipper and upbeat when the hero first starts his adventure. However, after the town is ravaged by a surprise attack from the armies of Rune Faust, the player gets an eerie and devastating track entitled "Solemn Gaurdiana." The battle music is intense and every single town seems to have its own theme, each town getting darker theme songs as the hero gets closer to Darksol and the Castle of the Ancients. My personal favorite is the underground fortress theme called "Headquarters." Just give it a listen and tell me you're not inspired to join the cause to fight Darksol!

A Final Word

While I wish I could tell you exactly what was going through my mind when I first fired up Shining Force, I simply can't recall. I can tell you that I spent the entire Thanksgiving break that year playing and beating the game. Honestly, I think Shining Force was the first RPG I ever actually beat at the time, and it instantly became one of my favorite games to borrow from Dave. It just so happened that each time I played the game, it would be right around Thanksgiving time. Then, somewhere around my late teenage years when I moved to NC and hadn't really made a ton of friends yet, I made the conscious decision to fire up Shining Force right around Thanksgiving again. It was like that old friend that reminded me of good times, and I knew he wouldn't let me down. And I've been doing it ever since!

One would think that over time Shining Force would get old, but that's never been the case for me because of the quality story and unlockable characters, the promotion system, and the music. Shining Force for me is as timeless as Tapper, Ms. Pac-Man, or Galaga. I can easily fire it up at any time and have a big smile on my face. To bring everything full circle, when the Sega Genesis Classics Collection came out on the Switch, I instantly downloaded it and played Shining Force during these past two years with my son, Grayson. I try to be careful not to force my own interests on him, but watching him play the game for the first time only confirmed to me that he felt the same magic I did as a kid. When we beat it together last year during the pandemic, Grayson asked, "Can we play the second one now, Dad?" I was grinning for two reasons - one, because Shining Force II is another great game in the series, and two, because we are building a new family tradition. A great game and great quality time with my son. Happy New Year!!



Caught On Film - 8-Bit Christmas How I Met Your Mother of All Consoles

by [Dan Pettis](#)

Has there ever been a present that you wanted for Christmas so badly, it seemed like nothing else would compare? Has it ever felt like your entire holiday happiness hinged on getting one specific present and Christmas morning would be ruined without it? For many of us geeks of a certain age, that ultimate present was the original Nintendo Entertainment System. The obsession our generation had with owning the greatest video game gift of our childhood is hilariously explored in the new movie 8 Bit-Christmas, which recently premiered on the HBO Max streaming service.

With the North American release of the Nintendo Entertainment System, Nintendo quickly grew to dominate the industry, and it captured the imagination and attention of gamers both young and old. 8-Bit Christmas lovingly re-creates this magical time, with an inspired riff on the perennial holiday classic A Christmas Story. Only this story is centered on a young boy's quest to get his own NES for Christmas instead of a Red Ryder BB gun. This heartfelt, bitingly funny film will win over gamers who grew up on Nintendo, who will surely find plenty to relate to in this story of the struggle to obtain the unobtainable.

The film begins with main character Jake Doyle, initially fully grown and played by Neil Patrick Harris, taking his young daughter to his parent's house in Chicago to celebrate Christmas with their family. After beating the rest of his family to the house, he decides to show his daughter Annie his prized Nintendo, which he has left in his childhood bedroom. Unimpressed by the vintage hardware, she hilariously says it looks like Tupperware. Like many of the tech obsessed youth of today, all she wants for Christmas is her own cell phone.



Adult Jake shows his daughter the way we used to think made games work better

After opening a shoebox full of vintage games like Rampage, and Narc, Jake blows on the inside of the cartridge for Paperboy and it luckily starts up on the first try. He then begins to tell his story of how he got his own NES, which he describes as "possibly the most amazing, dangerous, awesome, story of all time." Then with a clever camera shot, we are transported into the 1980s through a shot of Paperboy playing on the TV as it transitions into the young version of Jake, riding his own bike through the snow.

As he begins telling the story, Jake cannot remember the exact year the story takes place and settles on it being December in the late '80s. This immediate establishment of NPH as an unreliable, over exaggerating narrator allows for a lot of the best moments of comedy in the movie to come through. His heightened version of the reality of the events of the tale adds some pretty hilarious touches to what could have otherwise been a pretty mundane story. Unnecessary explosions, over the top lighting effects, and stunts straight out of vintage karate movies add a welcome dose of humor. The casting of Neil Patrick Harris is also an enlightened one, as he brings much of the swagger and bravado of his previous iconic role as womanizer Barney Stinson on the classic sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* to his narration of the story.

After seeing a Nintendo in action at the home of the only person playing with power in the neighborhood, a bratty rich kid's house, the young version of Jake decides he must have one. He and his group of friends band together to try to score their very own NES. But coming from a middle class family, and as a kid with a lack of disposable funds, it's going to be tough. That's because one of the new NES bundles back then cost around \$150, or roughly \$335 today when adjusted for inflation. Along the way he faces many seemingly insurmountable obstacles, like trying to win a wreath sale contest, his own parents indifference, and a group of irrationally upset adults terrified of the effect of video games on their young children's minds.



Jake and his friends join the crowd and line up for their chance to play Nintendo at the house of the spoiled rich kid

Although the story's focus on acquiring a Nintendo system is a very specific item, I'm sure that just about anyone can relate to that overwhelming, insatiable desire to own a specific toy. It may not be an NES for everyone, but it's a universal feeling that can nag you even into adulthood. 8-Bit Christmas does a good job of showing how the quest to acquire an NES similarly relates to modern kids who just want a smartphone, and how many girls of the '80s similarly wanted the impossible to find at the time Cabbage Patch Kid dolls just as desperately. This is a smart framing device for viewers who perhaps won't quite relate to those of us who suffered from a debilitating case of Nintendo fever.

The screenplay for 8-Bit Christmas was written by Kevin Jakubowski, who also wrote the novel that the movie is based on. You can really tell that this is a very personal story for Jakubowski. In an interview with Up At Noon on gaming website IGN, Jakubowski said the original book version of 8-Bit Christmas was definitely an homage to *A Christmas Story*, which he also called his favorite movie of all time. He did say that although the story was ninety percent made up, it was based on his own childhood and the story is set in his hometown. The way his own experience shaped the story shows through into the movie version. Some of the regional touches are highly specific and accurate, like the very real rivalry between Chicagoans and Wisconsinites, and the inclusion of regional Chicago grocery store chain Jewel. It is very obvious that Jakubowski lived much of the story himself. It was also a wise decision to base the film in the Windy City as it's been the setting for many other classic Christmas movies, like *Home Alone* and *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*.

8-Bit Christmas is perhaps the biggest feature length Nintendo commercial since the cult classic 1989 film *The Wizard*, which starred Fred Savage. Although that film famously featured some of the first ever footage from *Super Mario Bros. 3*, Mario is missing from this new movie. He is only briefly mentioned and none of his games appear. To me this is a portly plumber sized problem, because Mario was a huge system seller and one of the big reasons why the NES was such a success. There is also only a vague link to the *Zelda* titles as they are also only given a brief shout out. Not having the rights to show Mario or Link is a pretty glaring omission, but the filmmakers still do a commendable job with the games they do have the rights for to help capture the gaming landscape of the late 1980s.



Adult Jake's shoebox stash full of retro games

Another gaming based problem happens with the games that are played on screen. At multiple times in *8-Bit Christmas*, characters play fictitious games created specifically for the movie. This is most glaringly obvious during a pivotal scene featuring the notorious NES accessory the Power Glove. Now granted, the Power Glove really only "works" with a few games, but for a movie that otherwise feels so authentic to the time period, this usage of fake games has the potential to take old school gamers out of the moment. Especially since these fake games look quite a bit better than the NES was capable of graphically, and wind up looking more 16-bit than truly 8-bit.

Time will only tell if *8-Bit Christmas* will level up to the status of other Christmas classic films and be replayed for years to come. I don't know if it will reach the heights of popularity of *A Christmas Story* and the round the clock marathons of it on cable, but I do think it's well worth watching. Especially for those who grew up in the '80s and now have their own children. It'll fill you with the requisite holiday movie warm fuzzies and also lots of nostalgia, while hopefully illustrating for the younger crowd just exactly why the Nintendo Entertainment System was so special to us and industry saving. I think it'll make a perfect addition to your geeky Christmas movie rotation, just as long as it doesn't convince people to start blowing on game cartridges again.



BurgerTime Deluxe (Game Boy) - Fast Food to Go

by David Lundin, Jr.

A game about making burgers may sound mundane but *BurgerTime* presents the task as an intense dash across a maze of platforms, combining arcade action with a bit of puzzle solving, the result feeling a bit ahead of its 1982 vintage. The premise of the original game was simple: The player controls Peter Pepper, a short order chef with a knack for stacking perfect burgers. Buns, hamburger patties, lettuce, tomato, cheese - all Peter Pepper's specialty. However Mr. Hot Dog, Mr. Egg, and Mr. Pickle are on the run to prevent Peter from assembling his burgers. Armed with nothing but your wits and a pinch of pepper, it's up to you to guide Peter on his burger building escapades. The game became an undeniable classic of the golden era of arcades and remained very popular in the years that followed. The 1984 arcade sequel, *Peter Pepper's Ice Cream Factory*, changed things up quite a bit and a modern reimagining, *Super BurgerTime*, followed in 1990. A year later another sequel would show up on the Game Boy in the form of *BurgerTime Deluxe*. While the "Deluxe" treatment was somewhat commonly shoved onto Game Boy and Game Boy Color releases, with *BurgerTime Deluxe* it's less of an enhancement to the original and more of a completely new sequel that follows in the original's style.

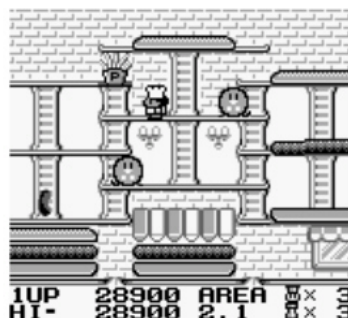


After the events of the first game things are going pretty well for our burger flipping hero, Peter Pepper. His burger restaurant is open and doing nicely. However a rival food store, the donut shop "Ninten Doughnut" opens up next door and its crazed proprietor sends Mr. Hot Dog after Peter. Unsurprisingly Mr. Pickle and Mr. Egg aren't far behind and Peter must fight back as only he can - with a drop of burger fixings and a dash of pepper. While the enemies pose the only threat to our quick footed chef, the objective remains to assemble burgers by running across their layers. Dropping a burger fixing with an enemy atop it will cause it to fall an additional level, however the enemy will simply be temporarily stunned after taking the ride. Dropping a burger fixing onto an enemy below will crush it and remove it from the board. Eventually it will rejoin from an entry door, which vary in location on each stage. Throwing pepper at an enemy will stun it temporarily. While throwing pepper makes it easier to corral multiple enemies on or under a burger fixing, the attack is usually used as a means of last resort. As one gets further into the game the amount of enemies constantly ramps up and pepper becomes more useful for escape rather than attack.

However pepper isn't the only trick Peter has under his chef's hat. BurgerTime Deluxe adds new powerup items in addition to what was in the arcade. Carried over from the original, pepper shakers will give Peter an additional pinch of pepper to throw and grabbing a cup of coffee adds bonus points to the player's score. A pack of fries will eliminate all enemies on the stage but they will eventually return through the enemy entry doors. Chocolate is the most valuable addition to the game as it makes Peter invincible for a short time. During this time touching enemies will stun them, allowing an experienced player to rack up big time points from well placed burger drops. Another power up, that appears to be a potato, will turn all the enemies into Mr. Hot Dog, the easiest to evade of Peter's foes. Extra lives also pop up from time to time and of course picking them up should be a top priority.

BurgerTime Deluxe is a great looking Game Boy game and makes up for the lack of color with a lot of detail. Everything is well animated with fitting backgrounds and solid animation of all sprites. There's nothing incredible going on but the game looks as it should and everything is clear and well-drawn. When large amounts of enemies are on screen there's a touch of slowdown but never bad sprite flicker or ghosting, which is very important in a game that requires as much concentration as this. All the graphics look as they did in the arcade but have enhanced details to give a more cartoon-like appearance. It should be noted that Mr. Egg has undergone a complete change from a walking fried egg into a hard boiled egg in a shell. When the new Mr. Egg is crushed by a burger fixing he appropriately smashes and cracks like an eggshell would. After each bracket of stages are completed, a humorous little animation plays, which usually shows how unlucky Peter can be.

The classic BurgerTime music is here, enhanced with several new tunes but every one sounds like it belongs. The little jingle that plays before the start of each stage is exactly as it was in the arcade original and sound effects alert the player when a bonus item pops up somewhere on the level. The sounds of burgers dropping and pepper being thrown also sound as they did in the arcade. All in all the audio is very upbeat and frantic, matching the gameplay perfectly. Thankfully Data East didn't try to reinvent or add complexity to the controls. The directional pad moves Peter and both the B and A buttons are used to throw pepper. This is how it has always been with BurgerTime and how it always should be - simple. Input response is exacting and responsive, and the game is simply a joy to play.



Peter sends a pair of enemies on a ride (left), larger burgers pose a different challenge (center), making a dash for an invincibility chocolate (right)

With classic arcade games replay usually comes down to attempting to achieve higher scores rather than reaching an ending. BurgerTime Deluxe does in fact have an ending but the route to it will take quite some time. Even the most experienced BurgerTime players will find plenty of challenge here with over twenty completely different stages. A simple password function comprised of four icons allows players to resume their progress, beginning at the first stage of each area bracket. The level design is quite varied and borrows a bit from Super BurgerTime, with some larger levels and extra large burgers that can take up half the width of the screen. While the larger fixings mean it's easier to smash enemies under them, it also means it takes far longer to completely run across one. These add a new challenge and an enhanced aspect of strategy to the game. Some stages actually don't have all the ladders in place at the start, instead they appear as the stage is traveled, creating some very taxing situations. Many of the stages are larger than the size of the screen and scroll with Peter as he moves. This scrolling is smooth and at no time does the game feel as if it is taking control away from the player. In fact on these stages pausing the game allows you to scroll around and view the entire level with the directional pad. Even later stages actually loop horizontally, again adding a new challenge. As soon as you feel that you have mastered a new addition, the game again throws something new at you but still in the context of the original game. In a way this is very similar to the Donkey Kong release on Game Boy, which did much of the same, and greatly expands the amount of play on offer.

If you like BurgerTime then this is a game you really must own. It truly is the perfect complement and true sequel to one of the most popular early arcade games ever created. What I love most is how it constantly mixes things up but retains the formula that began in the arcade. This seems to have been a rather uncommon one back when it was new but it's pretty easy to find these days. Surprisingly BurgerTime Deluxe has remained affordable in the \$20 range for a loose cartridge. Perhaps it's still lost in the shuffle now as it was then but without a doubt there's a lot of fun to be had with this portable follow up to an arcade classic.



The First Time I Saw a Nintendo Entertainment System

by David Lundin, Jr.

I spent my younger days in a very nice working-class neighborhood on the west edge of San Jose, California. I lived with my mother and my grandparents, and my great grandparents lived down the street and around the L-shaped corner at the end of the drive. Looking back, I feel extremely fortunate to have had such a happy and caring upbringing, in a big Italian family that all lived so close together. One of my uncles introduced me to video games at the age of two (another story on its own) and one Christmas a couple years later I received an Atari 2600 Jr. and a little 13" Montgomery Ward color TV. That was it, video games had me.

At the time the Nintendo Entertainment System was something mentioned in rumors but not a lot of my friends had one. It was that early time for the NES, with a few classmates talking about things like "the spinner for my robot" and a couple others bringing odd (and comparatively large next to an Atari 2600 game) Nintendo-branded dust covers to school for show and tell. Who had what and when is a little cloudy but there are a few things I distinctly remember about those early days. A friend using his ROB Gyro spinner to spin his lunch box around before class one morning? Absolutely! A few of my friends having Nintendo Game & Watch handhelds on the bus? Vividly! Friends who had never played the The Legend of Zelda making a comment how the raft in the game is "hard to steer" while looking at the overworld map? Yup, right along with my agreement, having yet to see the game myself! How about the very first time I saw a Nintendo Entertainment System? Of course! However that memory wasn't exactly the most pleasant...

The story I am about to tell is one I've never really shared, with anyone, and I honestly doubt those who were there when it occurred remember it - at least in as much detail. This isn't the happy memory of playing video games on a kiosk at a toy store or seeing a pictures of a game system in a mail order catalog. This is a story about encountering things that young kids probably shouldn't. The occurrence just happened to also give me my first passing glance at the NES in person but ultimately would make Nintendo's game system even more of a mystery for the immediate future. The story is kind of a long one and it definitely won't be for everybody.

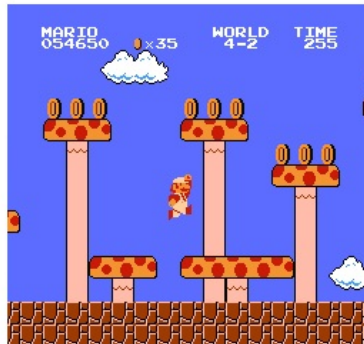
I had the normal assortment of friends at school and at home that a kid of the mid 1980's would have. One day after the school year was already in swing, a kid named Kevin moved to the area and was a new student in my class. Working out the dates it must have been in early 1988, just after the new year, which would make me six-years-old at the time and in first grade. Kevin was a bit different though, as we had the same last name. Of course as I grew older and spread out into the world this would be a slightly more frequent occurrence but at that age crossing paths with another Lundin was odd. Especially considering he pronounced his name differently, "London" rather than "Lundean" as I was always taught to. Now not only did I have to correct seemingly everyone else on the planet concerning how to pronounce my name, but now I had a kid with the same name trying to spread the inaccuracy! Yet I wasn't one to hold a grudge (that would be my high school years) and of all the places in west San Jose that Kevin could have lived, it so happened that his family had moved into a house on the exact opposite side of the L-shaped block I lived on. Generally I wasn't supposed to go all the way around on my bike but I could go to Kevin's house, as long as I went the long way, which kept me to the interior streets and away from the main drag. We weren't the closest of friends but it was nice to have another kid on my block, especially one who was in my class. I was also at the age where I was first being given just a little bit of responsibility and freedom to do something like ride my bike to a friend's house. While I didn't do so very often, and can't remember ever having a great time there or anything, I do recall doing so at least a few times. Perhaps the notion that I could be out on my wheels was the bigger draw, who knows.

Kevin lived with his parents as well as a younger brother and sister. His siblings must have been pretty close in age, not yet old enough to go to school, and I barely ever saw either of them when I was over at his house. His mother was always home, was well dressed, always very welcoming and seemed happy that Kevin had a friend over. Yet she too would often disappear into a back bedroom after welcoming me, which meant Kevin and I were on our own almost the entire time. His house was very clean, modern, and minimalistic. All the homes on our block were built in the 1950's during the defense and aerospace boom in the valley but theirs had definitely been renovated recently. Even Kevin's bedroom was very plain and clean, minimalist furniture, no

color, no toys - honestly their whole house looked like a model home or a property share. It's strange how I can still visualize that place right down to the window coverings and cabinetry but that's exactly how it was - impeccably sterile, with the exception of the garage.

They called their garage a "play room" and it appeared to be the one area in the house that hadn't been renovated. The play room amounted to a large square of carpet with a massive pile of toys atop it. They weren't boxed or stacked or even strewn about as if they had been recently played with. Rather they were simply in a big mound, like they had been gathered up with a push broom. I only went out there with Kevin a couple times, usually to get something from their garage pantry, and he never ever wanted to play with anything out there. Looking back that's kind of strange, as most kids want friends to come over and play with or show or share their toys. So with all that established, what did we even do when I would go over to his house? Well a couple times we just went and hung out in his backyard and I would leave after maybe twenty minutes. However one day we sat in his living room and he showed me a game system they had in the cabinet beneath their television. It was unfamiliar to me what it was at the time but it was in fact a Nintendo Entertainment System.

Kevin didn't present the NES with any fanfare or celebration or big introduction. In fact all he ever said about it was that his Aunt sent it to them. I don't think he even ever said the word "Nintendo" once. Along with the system he had three game cartridges, three gigantic grey cartridges that were unlike anything I had seen before. They were Super Mario Bros., Rad Racer, and Rygar. He would hold the cartridges out and let me look at them but I wasn't allowed to touch them for whatever reason. In fact the only time I ever saw his bedroom was one day when he took the cartridges in there and put them in a dresser drawer, then refused to take them back out, so I went home. I was never permitted to play any of the games either but I could watch him do so. The games were so strange compared to what I had played on the Atari 2600 or seen in arcades. I was completely fascinated by the gigantic setting sun at the beginning of Rygar, the strange enemies, and odd Indora gods. Super Mario Bros. was equally as strange with its colorful designs and warp zones. Rad Racer stuck with me most due to the music, which Kevin did actually talk about, saying how he was going to "change the radio" while playing. Funny enough, I do recall that he wasn't very good at the games and would spend more time just screwing around rather than completing an objective.



Rad Racer (left), Super Mario Bros. (center), and Rygar (right) blew my mind with how they compared to earlier games

Honestly it was those fleeting glances at those strange games that kept making me want to ride my bike over to Kevin's. A couple times it seemed as if no one else was home but him, something very uncommon to me with how large and close by my family was. One time when no one else was home, there were empty beer cans everywhere both inside the house and in the backyard. So many that I remember actually kicking them while just walking through the kitchen. Kevin's mom came home while we were in the backyard that day, and I can remember her quickly picking them all up and restoring their home to its familiar sterile state. She then apologized to me and said that it would be better if Kevin didn't play that day and that I should go home. Aside from it being weird that there were cans everywhere I didn't think anything of it, I mean, I was six.

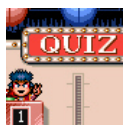
There was only ever one other time I rode over to Kevin's. It was a Friday, just after school, maybe a couple weeks after being over there last. I had only been there maybe ten minutes, just sitting in the living room and talking with Kevin when the side door into their kitchen opened. It was Kevin's dad, someone who I had never seen nor heard a word spoken about. At about the same time his mother came down the hallway and into the kitchen. Now what exactly happened next is a blur to me, it was then and it is now. Kevin's dad began to argue with his mom, and I swear I saw him drink two cans of beer within the span of five seconds, then fling the cans on the kitchen floor and go for more. I can't recall what Kevin's dad said to her but he just yelled constantly at his wife. Kevin's younger siblings emerged from the hallway and walked past without looking at or saying anything and went into the garage, the play room. It was then that Kevin's mom looked at me and I, and began to say to her husband, "We have a guest right now." She kept saying that over and over while motioning at me, "We have a guest, we have a guest." Kevin's dad got even angrier and then addressed me to his wife, "Yeah, and I have a witness." His dad then looked right down at me, and said that I was a "witness" and for me not to go anywhere. I'll never forget what he said to me next, "If you do leave, I'll go to that house where your mom lives and bring you back here, you're a witness." He then stormed down the hallway. Kevin's mom was very distraught and in tears but I don't remember Kevin's reaction.

As soon as his dad was down the hallway I ran for the front door, hopped on my bike, and road as fast as I could back around the block to my house. When I got home I was in shock I suppose - crying, terrified, confused. My mom wanted to know what happened and all I could say was that Kevin's dad said I was a witness, not even knowing what the word meant, and that I couldn't leave. If I did leave he said he would come get me. I didn't know what had unfolded back at my friend's house and certainly couldn't figure out what I had to do with it. My mom told me that no matter what anyone ever said to me, I could always leave and come home - regardless of who says otherwise. I didn't realize it until years later, but that event and my mom's words in response made a huge impact on my psyche - well into adulthood. If I'm told I have to stay late at a job or event, as an example, this little spark shorts out in the back of my head and I get really confrontational. It's actually something I've had to learn to try to cool off when it flares up from time to time.

Kevin never came to school again after that day and I never saw him again. A while later, when I was being a rebel and riding my

bike all the way around the block without permission, I passed his house and it had different people living in there. The garage door was open, it had a car parked inside. I don't know what happened to Kevin or his mom or the rest of his family. That day always stuck with me though, as a lot of things often do. It was my first encounter with alcoholism and to that extension an alcoholic. The first time I encountered a broken home. It was my first truly traumatic experience of any kind. If there is one takeaway from what happened then, I do hope that Kevin and his mom and siblings are well and that his dad got help for whatever ailed him. I was in my late teens thinking back about that day, when it clicked that the "play room" out the garage was more than likely where Kevin and his siblings were tucked away when his parents were having conflicts. Perhaps why their home was so immaculate except for that area and why everyone would disappear into bedrooms behind closed doors.

As for the NES, it remained just as mysterious after seeing it at Kevin's, for a little while at least. As the year of 1988 got more underway, a boy just a little younger than myself moved in two houses down from my great grandparents. His name was Zack and we quickly became best buddies for the couple more years we both lived in the neighborhood. Nintendo began to be far less elusive and my mom would buy me video game magazines from the grocery store full of Nintendo games and accessories. If you didn't already have an NES, it became the gift everyone wanted for Christmas that year, regardless of the price or how difficult they may have been to find. Nintendo had just released the Power Set, containing World Class Track Meet and a Power Pad along with the Super Mario Bros. / Duck Hunt pack-in that had become standard. From what my mom told me years later, there was a one-day event at a toy store that December where they were selling the Power Set as a special promotion for \$100. Both her and Zack's dad stood in line all morning so we could both have NES systems that year for Christmas. As 1988 rolled into 1989 we both became certified Nintendo maniacs, as did most kids our age. From then on, Nintendo was nothing but happy memories and a way for friends and family of all ages and backgrounds to find commonality. As anyone who has read my articles concerning the NES over the years should be able to ascertain, it has remained such to this day.



Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap

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

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

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

10/29/2021 - WEEK 237

Question: What Atari game involves exploring the mansion of Zachary Graves?

11/05/2021 - WEEK 238

Question: The bioweapon Lucifer-Alpha is the catalyst for the events of what game?

11/12/2021 - WEEK 239

Question: Although more famous for his introductory line, what Zelda II character directs Link to the Island Palace?

11/26/2021 - WEEK 240

Question: The Ninja Black Sox, Battle Angels, and Mechanical Brains are all teams in what game?

12/03/2021 - WEEK 241

Question: Top Secret Area is a power up zone in what Super Nintendo game?

12/10/2021 - WEEK 242

Question: Although they involve totally different sports, Final Lap Twin is the spiritual sequel to what earlier TurboGrafx-16 game?

12/17/2021 - WEEK 243

Question: Holiday Hare was a special Christmas themed edition of what PC game?



Error is often remembered for his opening phrase in Zelda II (left) but he provides important information later in the game (right).

Answers:

Week 237 Answer: Haunted House (1982).

Week 238 Answer: Snatcher.

Week 239 Answer: Error, "South of King's Tomb in Mido there is a tunnel."

Week 240 Answer: Super Baseball 2020.

Week 241 Answer: Super Mario World.

Week 242 Answer: World Court Tennis. Both games feature a Quest mode that combines RPG elements over their respective sports.

Week 243 Answer: Jazz Jackrabbit.



World Court Tennis' quest mode (left), was later enhanced in Final Lap Twin - complete with an inside joke of finding tennis equipment in the overworld (right)

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

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



As is evident by my contributions to this issue I've been on a bit of a Game Boy kick lately, both on original hardware and emulation-based handhelds. I actually gifted Anbernic RG300 handhelds to my siblings for Christmas as I've been having such a great time playing games on them - mostly original Game Boy. At the start of December I decided to do something I haven't done previously, that may come as a surprise to some, and that is play Pokemon Red. For whatever reason the Pokemon games just never hit me at the right time. That's not to say that Pokemon was something I scoffed at or had no interest in. I always liked the concept, the characters, the Pokemon designs, how Pokemon types interact - all of it really. Over the years I'd go in and out of the different generations of the anime, I've seen some of the films theatrically, and I buy a collectible now and again. Heck, my favorite Pokemon is Hitmonchan! No one else likes Hitmonchan, "that's some first generation Pokemon that doesn't do anything cool."

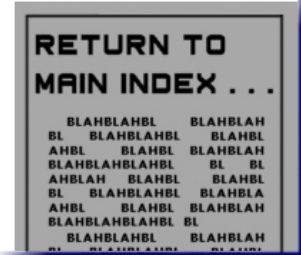
When Red and Blue were released I was deep into the PlayStation era, in addition to doubling down on older games from the NES era due to their availability and low cost at the time. When Pokemon Gold and Silver rolled around I was a retail professional and it was more important to be on top of meeting the needs of people who were trying to get the game. It was also a pretty crazy time for console gaming and with that and work and the rest of life, I didn't want to get sucked into starting on the Pokemon games. I did pick up Pokemon Crystal later but only played a couple hours before other things pulled my interest away. After that I kind of stepped away from handheld gaming for the most part and then modern gaming as well, up until a few years ago. I was gifted a 2DS and Pokemon Y upon the waning days of my retail career and while I played through most of it, toward the end it started to feel more like a chore rather than an adventure. Once again I was faced with the notion that maybe the Pokemon games just really weren't for me.

With how great Game Boy performance is on the RG300, I figured I'd give Pokemon Red a shot. While I know a big part of the game is trading with other players who are playing Pokemon Blue or those making different decisions in Red, my intention is to just play through the game at face value. In the couple weeks I've been playing I've really been enjoying it but I think that has to do with the smaller scope of the earlier games. It's not trying to be everything or add a bunch of new features or layer on extra complexity. It's just a fun little journey exploring a region of the world. I understand why Pokemon had to get more complex over time, I mean it's an RPG where the grind is the emphasis of the game at its core. However I've found that simplicity to be the perfect place to start over again.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on March 1st with our next issue. Be sure to follow [The Retrogaming Times on Facebook](#) and join our community for the latest updates and information! Additionally [The Retrogaming Times Info Club on Twitter](#) features up-to-the-moment news and notifications for all things The Retrogaming Times! I sincerely hope you enjoyed this issue and that you will return to read the next issue and possibly submit an article yourself.

Remember, this newsletter can only exist with your help. Simply send your articles directly to me at trt@classicplastic.net or check out the submission guidelines on the main page. Submit an article today and join a great retrogaming tradition!

See You Next Game!



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