The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

THIRTY-NINTH ISSUE - JULY 2022

TEENAGER DISCOVERS GIANT OCTOPUS!

The Retrogaming Times
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Thirty-Ninth Issue - July 2022

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Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

Just a few days ago, June 27th, marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of Atari, Inc. Video games existed before, and they would obviously continue after, but there was no larger driving force in establishing the consumer video game industry as we would come to know it. It also kind of blows my mind to think the original Retrogaming Times was established just a couple months after Atari's 25th anniversary. Totally different impacts upon the world obviously but they're both important to me. Speaking of the latter anniversary, that will be celebrated in September with our next issue, which will also be our final as noted earlier this year. The run up to that issue will be the same as any other, but of course if you've ever thought about contributing to an issue of The Retrogaming Times, now is your last chance to do so.

Our penultimate issue begins with More C64 and Merman taking a look at friendships made and journeys traveled along with fellow Commodore 64 enthusiasts over the years. Donald Lee shares information on new conversions of the Dragon's Lair games and an upcoming demo in the Apple II Incider. In this issue's cover story, Nintendo's island hopping adventure StarTropics is given a full review and retrospective from a longtime fan. Friendships are often made over games but other times games are the reason for a friendship. A story about the latter is recalled by Mateus Fedozzi in SMS Memories. Most home consoles may ship with a great controller but additional accessories can often enhance a gameplay experience. Take a look at a selection of interesting aftermarket controllers in Peripheral Paradise. Although it has gained a reputation in some circles for being an illegitimate Super Mario game, the NES version of Super Mario Bros. 2 was without a doubt an extremely popular game when it was released. Our detailed review aims to answer the question if it still holds up all these years later and more importantly if it deserves a place in the series. With a follow-up to his top ten list from a few issues ago, Dan Pettis is back with eleven more picks for retrogaming characters to be featured in a future Super Smash Bros. This month marks the 40th anniversary of the first film to take the audience inside the world of the computer, Tron. Report to the game grid for both a celebration and review of the landmark film. Then some retrogaming ceramic projects are shared, along with invitation for our readers to do the same. All that and more are ahead in this issue of The Retrogaming Times!

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

Upcoming Events

by David Lundin, Jr.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

California Extreme, the pinball and classic video arcade games show, is gearing up for our 26th annual event! It will be held again at the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California on July 30-31, 2022. Featuring lots of games to play - 22,000 square feet of free play rapture. Play your old favorites like Pac Man, Asteroids, Twilight Zone, and FunHouse. Try rare games that you don't see every day or never saw before like Quantum, Journey, and Fathom. Enjoy the newest games including ones recently released. Each year brings a huge selection of rare, prototype and one-of-a-kind games from across the eras of the arcade. There will also be consoles, speakers, live music, vendors, and tournaments.

For more information, visit http://www.caextreme.org/

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information, visit http://www.sacgamersexpo.com/

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

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

More C64! - Personal Journeys

by Merman

The Commodore 64 has taken me on interesting journeys to many places, from a bedroom in Cambridge to a concert in Copenhagen. Join me in looking back at where I've been since the computer arrived in my life in 1985.

NIGHTCLUBS

The Back In Time Live events have helped launch a series of remix CDs from Chris Abbott at C64 Audio, taking old SID tunes and remaking them with modern equipment and real instruments. A nightclub in London's Soho was my first event in 2002. Press Play On Tape played live on guitars, keyboard, and drums, with a guest violinist and composer Ben Daglish accompanying them on a version of Rob Hubbard's Monty on the Run. I was too nervous to speak to the legendary Jeff Minter that time, but I did chat to Jon Hare of Sensible Software, composer Richard Joseph and programmer Carl Muller. The next year was Brighton (see EXHIBITIONS & MUSEUMS later in this article).

Seth from 8-Bit Weapon after his performance, and organiser Chris Abbott during the 2002 event.

Another nightclub was in Copenhagen, close to the famous statue of the Little Mermaid. 2005 was the Copenhagen Retro Concert organised by Press Play On Tape. Support came from Finnish band Axes Denied (playing NES and other chiptune remixes) and Visa Röster (see A CONVERTED CHURCH below), who even unveiled a scrolling message during one song via the medium of a long roll of wallpaper. Rob Hubbard, Mark Knight, and Reyn Ouwehand all performed live. The best moment was the rendition of Cannon Fodder by Press Play On Tape - all performed on game controllers, including the congas from Donkey Konga and a dance mat. Jeroen Tel from the Maniacs of Noise rounded off the night with a DJ set, mixing dance rhythms and retro tunes.

It was back to London and the Spitz nightclub in 2006 for another in the Back In Time Live series, dedicated to the memory of Paul "DJ Skitz" Hadrill who had been a key part of the events. 8-Bit Weapon and Danceaway got the crowd dancing, while the headline act was Reyn Ouwehand (of the Maniacs of Noise) performing and remixing songs live before Jeroen Tel's DJ set. A solo performance from MJ Hibbett was also welcome for his hit Hey Hey 16K.

Stockholm in 2007 was another live concert, by coincidence marking 20 years since I had first visited the country on an exchange visit. Highlights here included new band 6581 playing with composer Fred Gray and another live set from Jeroen Tel. Sadly I missed the most recent Back in Time, which went back to a different venue in Brighton.

I visited Stockholm Town Hall for the second time before the concert and enjoyed watching Fred Gray perform live.

A CONVERTED CHURCH

LSO St Luke's is a former church in London, converted into a rehearsal and performance space for the London Symphony Orchestra. 2004's Back In Time Live concert at this unusual was bigger and better than previous events. The highlights were Stuck In D'80s, Press Play On Tape and a new group called Visa Röster. Pex Tuvefsson (Mahoney in the demo scene) had produced some amazing vocal remixes of C64 tunes, and put together a vocal group (four ladies, two gentlemen including Pex) to sing a capella and with backing tracks.

PUBS

The Great British pub (from public house, a place licensed to sell drinks) is a traditional place to meet friends. The Retrovision series of events organised by Mark Rayson would take over a pub for a weekend, setting up computers and consoles and bringing together fans of Jeff Minter. (Mark would often cosplay as Ming the Merciless at these events, donning green face paint). My first Retrovision was in 2005, taking place in Frome, Somerset. There was a memorable semi-acoustic performance from Stuck In D'80s as well as Jeff Minter demonstrating the Neon visualiser built into the Xbox 360. Later events took place in Oxford, with a special extra event to commemorate Mark Rayson's 40th birthday. For one weekend I traveled down on the Thursday, helped set up and then stayed until the Sunday, only traveling home on the Monday.

I am playing Jeff's amazing Jaguar game Tempest 2000, and organiser Mark Rayson (in green) presents Jeff with a cake.

The Retrofaire in 2007 took place in a Scunthorpe pub, organised by a friend of mine. I won the Guitar Hero competition and Trivia Quiz that weekend, walking away with two nice trophies. A pub in Manchester was the venue for 2010's Console Combat. Here there was a combination of games competitions across multiple formats, a trivia quiz, and a meeting/summit of homebrew programmers. I won the overall gaming competition and was part of the team that won the pub quiz held during the evening. And when the gaming was finished for the evening, it was on to a karaoke bar in Central Manchester...

Computers and consoles set up for the Retrofaire and winning the quiz at Console Combat.

RUGBY CLUBS & WORKING MEN'S CLUBS

The working men's club is a very British institution, with a licensed bar and a stage to provide entertainment. The Avenue in Failsworth, Manchester played host to Back In Time Lite in September 2005, with gaming provided by Retrovision organiser Mark Rayson and live music organised by C64 Audio's Chris Abbott (who was launching the Back in Time Live DVD). Stuck In D'80s were the headliners, along with MJ Hibbett and the Validators (playing their viral hit Hey Hey 16K, based on the ZX Spectrum). Stuck In D'80s returned the following year (as did I and some friends) for a charity gig run by one of the other organisers.

My brother Chris enjoying the twin Xbox setup for Outrun 2, and Rob Hubbard's solo performance at Back In Time Lite.

The Retro Ball in December 2005 was hosted at the Kenilworth Rugby Club in central England, raising money for a testicular cancer charity. That weekend I won the big charity raffle, the prize being a JAMMA arcade cabinet! The next year the same venue hosted the Fusion Weekend of Gaming. In 2008, the nearby Leamington Spa Rugby Club hosted FUSION - a much larger weekend of gaming, with live panels and lots of gaming across systems. That weekend was particularly memorable for a seller bringing hundreds of sealed and unsold cassettes from a former software distributor.

Winning the JAMMA cabinet at the Retro Ball in 2005 and talking with two of the editors of Retro Gamer (Martyn Carroll and Darran Jones) in 2006.

Another club in Stoke hosted the 2009 Byte Back event over two days. This had an amazing Ocean Reunited panel, with several former Ocean staff being interviewed by the event's organiser Mat Corne. I interviewed the amazing Jon Hare of Sensible Software too, talking about some of his amazing games including Wizball and Cannon Fodder. The first day of the event was also enlivened by the presence of a squad of Imperial Stormtroopers (cosplayers who raise money by attending events).

Stormtroopers relaxing with a game of pinball at Byte Back, and Kenz (Jason Mackenzie) demonstrating Shredz64 - interfacing a Guitar Hero peripheral with the C64.

HOTELS

The Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool is a faded seaside hotel with a grim reputation among retro gaming fans in the UK, but it has been home to the fabulous PLAY Expos. These mixed retro and modern gaming, and later added cosplay competitions and board games. The Play events would move to other venues, notably in Manchester, in following years. Blackpool itself is memorable for its Illuminations during the autumn; to attract off-season visitors, the seafront is lined with masses of lights and light displays. The PLAY Expos often coincided with the Illuminations. For one of the PLAY events, I did a BAFTA-sponsored interview with Roger Kean and Oli Frey of Newsfield (responsible for classic gaming magazines including ZZAP! and CRASH). Another hotel - this time in Huddersfield, Yorkshire - hosted the 2008 Retro Reunited event, again mixing retro and modern with live talks (I interviewed the legendary Archer Maclean and Jon Ritman).

Hosting the Ocean panel in 2010's Play Expo, and TV present Iain Lee opening the event.

FOOTBALL STADIUM

Villa Park in Birmingham is home to the football (soccer) club Aston Villa. The Holte Suite function room played host to the UK Pinball Expo 2006. More than one hundred pinball machines were brought to the venue by collectors and owners, available on free play for the day. There were also competitions and sellers.

The view outside and inside the Holte Suite.

EXHIBITIONS & MUSEUMS

That first Back in Time event I attended in 2002 happened to coincide with the GAME ON exhibition at London's Barbican Centre. This was a whole series of displays and machines telling the history of gaming, from the Computer Space arcade cabinet up to Guitar Hero. Some of the artwork and memorabilia on display was particularly memorable. The exhibition went on to tour the world and returned to London in 2006. That time it was much larger and took place at the Science Museum in London. (That weekend I combined it with a trip to Hammersmith Apollo for the Video Games Live concert organised by Tommy Tallarico - where an orchestra plays video game music).

A classic Computer Space cabinet from the 2002 exhibition, and a display of gaming magazines from 2006.

Back in Time Brighton in 2003 took place in a massive conference centre on the seafront. During the day there were machines to play and merchandise to buy, as well as an incredible photoshoot with former C64 composers and remixers. The evening performance included Press Play On Tape, the newly formed Stuck In D'80s supergroup and Rob Hubbard. (Stuck In D'80s have had a changing line-up over the years, with the core being the late Ben Daglish and violin player Mark Knight. Others that joined include Jon Hare, Reyn Ouwehand, and Jeremy Longley.) A fun breakdance competition happened too.

The Commodore Scene stand at Brighton, and the photoshoot featuring many famous composers and remixers.

The Console Combat weekend in 2010 coincided with the PLAY exhibition in Manchester, another hands-on gaming exhibition with plenty of historic material (including design documents for Ocean's Platoon).

The PLAY exhibition in Manchester featured lots of great exhibits.

There are several dedicated gaming museums in the UK now. The Centre for Computing History in Cambridge played host to the Pixels weekend in 2015, and I hosted two panel discussions - one dedicated to the C64, the other to Amiga. The National Videogame Museum originally opened in Nottingham before moving to its new permanent home in Sheffield. I decided to hold my bachelor party there in 2019, inviting some gaming friends and my two brothers.

Hosting the Pixels C64 panel at the Centre for Computing History, and my younger brother Mark playing the SNES at the National Videogame Museum.

The Micro Mart fairs took place in 2002 and 2003 at the NEC (National Exhibition Centre) in Birmingham. At the first Commodore Scene had a stand and that was where I spent most of the time. The highlight was the Bomb Mania four-player set-up on a special display stand. The second fair is memorable for the attendance of Martyn Carroll, who was then getting ready to launch a new magazine called Retro Gamer.

There were also two Classic Gaming Expo UK events, held in 2004 and 2005. The location was the Fairfield Halls in Croydon, London. The legendary Spectrum programmer Matthew Smith appeared at the first, with the most surreal moment being when he drove a Sinclair C5 electric vehicle around the lobby. Alongside the discussion panels with Matthew and the Oliver Twins, there was also the chance to see classic gaming-inspired films - including Tron - on a large screen. In 2005 there was a greater emphasis on the sellers, but there was still classic arcade action overseen by Twin Galaxies and a musical performance from Mark Knight and Ben Daglish.

The Bomb Mania setup from the 2002 Micro Mart Fair, and arcade action moderated by Twin Galaxies at CGE UK 2005.

Nottingham is home to several software companies and has become an important development hub, with the university collaborating closely with them. This has led to the regular Game City events, taking place at venues across the city. Among the highlights have been Tetris creator Alexei Pajitnov and Katamari designer Keita Takahashi speaking, alongside previewing new games and documentaries. Press Play On Tape have also played two gigs at Game City. Nottingham also played host to a weekend celebrating video game music in 2019 - the All Your Bass event, with guest speakers including Rob Hubbard and Masaya Matsuura (who performed a live set).

Alexei Pajitnov's talk at Game City in 2007, and Press Play On Tape performing in 2008.

CONCERT HALL

In 2019, Chris Abbott achieved a long-held dream - a symphony orchestra playing live C64 music. Just a week after my wedding, I went with my wife Alison to Hull City Hall in the north of England for this incredible performance. It was special to meet Rob Hubbard and so many other friends there, and the music itself was outstanding. Since that performance, Chris and Rob have traveled to Prague twice to record these symphonic arrangements with the Prague Symphony Orchestra. You can find out more at https://c64audio.com and buy the CDs.

So, I hope you enjoyed this bit of nostalgia and some of my photos.

For more C64-based nostalgia, German rock group Schüchtern have released an English version of their hit song 64K. The members of the band are teleported into classic C64 games including Bruce Lee, Barbarian, Little Computer People and more. Check out the English version here and the original German video here.

Apple II Incider - Super Mario Bros. and Dragon's Lair

by Donald Lee

Happy Summer everyone! Hope everyone is doing well. Its been a busy last few weeks as I have been doing a lot of basketball officiating training in preparation for the upcoming high school season. It's technically still several months away but putting in

some work in to be ready. In any case, I didn't really have a lot to write about initially this issue but our editor David Lundin shared a email with me that got me started on this month's topics:

I happened to stumble across your post on comp.say.apple2 from 2017 regarding GTE and the Super Mario IIgs demo.

It might be interesting for you to know that I've picked the project back up last year and am working toward releasing a beta for KansasFest next month.

All of the current work is available on GitHub: https://github.com/lscharen/iigs-game-engine

Thanks,
-Lucas

The context is I had posted about Lucas's projects on comp.sys.apple2 and Lucas apparently just came across it years later. In fact, looking back at the post, someone said they could have put me in touch with Lucas. However, as I don't frequent the comp.sys.apple2 usenet group that much anymore, I missed the message. For Apple IIGS's users, there is good news that there may be a **Super Mario Bros.** beta coming soon and likely to be demoed at the popular Apple II Convention KansasFest in July of 2022.

Thanks to David's email, I dropped into the comp.sys.apple2 group again and noticed a couple of announcements made a few weeks ago. Long time Apple II / Apple IIGS developers Brutal Deluxe converted arcade games **Dragon's Lair**, **Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle**, and **Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp** to the Apple IIGS.

Links to more info and direct downloads at Brutal Deluxe:

Dragon's Lair
https://brutaldeluxe.fr/products/apple2gs/dragonslair/index.html

Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle
https://brutaldeluxe.fr/products/apple2gs/dragonslair1/index.html

Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp
https://brutaldeluxe.fr/products/apple2gs/dragonslair2/index.html

Now as I don't have an Apple IIGS, I won't be able to play these conversions. Watching the videos, the graphics seemed pretty impressive. I took a quick look at the arcade version of Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp and the IIGS version of the game and you could see the details on the IIGS weren't quite as sharp. The Apple IIGS had solid graphic capabilities when compared to the older Apple II's but was not a graphical powerhouse like the Commodore Amiga and had some limitations. But Brutal Deluxe always found a way to push the IIGS to its limits and these conversions are impressive.

Lastly, I will comment on the Dragon's Lair arcade games. I only recall playing the original Dragon's Lair at the arcade. Dragon's Lair seemed like a "Choose Your Own Adventure" type game which required fast decisions and lots of quarters. Also there wasn't a lot of action as I recall so perhaps that is why I never took a great interest in the game. It was cool looking and all but frustrating to play. Perhaps it would be a better game for home users as they wouldn't have to dump a lot of quarters to play. In any case, that's it for this time. See you all next issue.

StarTropics (NES) - See the Southern Cross for the First Time

by David Lundin, Jr.

What if Nintendo were to develop a first-party NES game specifically for the American market? Not a part of any other series or a spin-off of an established property, but an entirely unique new adventure built upon their history of game development. A game that would be a contemporary take on The Legend of Zelda and action RPGs, with a bigger focus on story and platforming puzzles. Instead of some fantasy world, set the game on a string of islands in the tropics. Rather than using some magical divine being as the hero, have the player take on the role of an teenager on summer vacation. Released in 1990, StarTropics was just that, a test of island courage and adventure beneath the Southern Cross. If the premise of the game sounds a little different than most other NES adventure titles of the day, it should, as that was the intention.

StarTropics puts the player in the sneakers of Mike Jones, an average American teenager on summer vacation. Mike's uncle, Dr. Steve Jones, is a gifted archaeologist who resides in a research lab on C-Island and has invited Mike to join him. A summer of fishing, sun, and relaxation are what Mike looks forward to as he steps off the helicopter and into the tropics. Once entering the village of Coralcola however, Mike realizes that all is not well and that he won't be seeing his uncle Dr. J any time soon. The village chief informs Mike that Dr. J has been abducted, in addition to the tunnel between Coralcola and Dr. J's laboratory becoming filled with swarms of monsters, preventing safe travel by any of the islanders. The village chief grants Mike access to the tunnel under the condition that he keeps Dr. J's abduction a secret and gets to the bottom of the mystery and the surge of monster activity. The village chief also gives Mike an island yo-yo, more than just a toy, it is a powerful weapon. Being an ace baseball pitcher back at school in Seattle, Mike wields the yo-yo with a confidence and skill that give him a fighting chance in the tunnel. Eventually Mike will take command of his uncle's research vessel, Sub-C, along with its navigational robot Nav-Com and depart to search the tropics for Dr. J's whereabouts.

Right from the start it's easy to see why StarTropics stands out from other games in terms of setting, weaponry, and humor. Mike's primary weapon being a yo-yo is a different take on the mainstream adventure genre, as while some other games feature a yo-yo as well, no where else is it used as the base weapon. No sword, no axe, no gun, no fists - just a yo-yo. Contrary to what many who have yet to play the game may think, the yo-yo as a weapon works out wonderfully as it has believable movement and range. Limited-use secondary weapons can be picked up throughout the game, many are chapter specific and can only be used in the area in which they are acquired. Some of these include flaming torches, baseball bats, spiked shoes, horsehide (baseballs), bolas, and eventually ray guns. In addition magical items can be found that offer special powers such as the ability to restore health or reveal ghosts. As with secondary weapons, magical items can only be used in the area in which they are acquired. Eventually Mike's island yo-yo will be upgraded twice, each time adding more range and power but maintaining the same usage motion. Once acquired, the yo-yo power ups can only be used when a specific number of energy hearts are filled - six for the first upgrade and eleven for the second. As with The Legend of Zelda, additional hearts can be added to the life meter by picking up containers for them, called "big hearts" in StarTropics. These are hidden throughout the overworld, sometimes accessible through hidden passages. While picking up the big hearts as they are found is very important, regardless of how many have been found the life meter is maxed out at the very end of the game for the final stage.

Pulling a little from many genres, the game takes place across three modes. Map mode is used for overland exploration, traveling within villages and buildings, and for navigating in Sub-C. The map mode is comparable to most role playing games of the era, as it is displayed from a bird's eye perspective with small character sprites. There are no enemy encounters while in this mode, it's only used for traveling and exploration. Next is dialogue mode, where the perspective changes to that of Mike's as he converses with important characters such as village chiefs. These dialogues are primarily used to move the story along and to gain information of what the objective of each chapter is. Finally, action mode is where the bulk of the game takes place. The perspective changes and Mike and his surroundings become larger and much more detailed. This is where enemy encounters and puzzles become the name of the game. Displayed in a two-thirds overhead perspective, the visual style provides a good amount of depth and detail. It is also the mode where all the boss battles take place at the end of certain areas.

Mike jumps aside from the fiery breath of the C-Serpent (left), jumping from block to block while fighting enemies (center), exploring a village (right)

A game set on tropical islands better have some beautiful graphics and StarTropics doesn't disappoint. Tropical areas are lush and colorful with plenty of detail that makes them stand out from other games of the era. Villages are uniquely detailed and populated with may different character sprites, some only being used once throughout the game. Although the same handful of tiles and characters are used in each village, there are enough of them to keep some variety present and no two areas look alike. From walking around villages to exploring ancient ruins or navigating the high seas at the helm of Sub-C, the maps never feel like a separate part of the game the way they do in some RPGs that use a similar perspective. When entering covered buildings, the terrain around disappears as the building's ceiling is peeled back, revealing what is inside. Close up dialogues present very nicely detailed renditions of important characters and help to make the overhead maps feel more integrated into the rest of the game. For instance, many times when you step aboard Sub-C you are greeted by Nav-Com and the interior of the submersible. Transitions such as these lend themselves to the notion that you have entered Sub-C and now will be navigating a ship, rather than your sprite has changed from Mike to Sub-C and now you can move on water. While not always present, I enjoy extra little touches like these that add some character and completeness to the overall game experience.

Down in the tunnels during action sequences things get even more detailed. As stated before, these areas are presented in a two-thirds perspective, which does a wonderful job of presenting scale and substance. Mike is no longer a little square on a map, he's a person with some real physical depth. Every enemy is drawn like this as well, detailed with good perspective. Small enemies appear to be small, large enemies feel gargantuan, and flying enemies seem to sail through the air and home-in on Mike. This goes a step further with bosses, who seem massive and truly threatening. Nothing is more disappointing in a game than getting to a boss and then having it look and feel weak. This doesn't happen with StarTropics and each enemy, from the very easy to the incredibly difficult, have detail, depth, and presence.

There are actually quite a few bosses in the game, however on the other side of the coin StarTropics also bucks adventure game expectation and will have areas, and even full chapters, that end without a boss encounter. Chapter 3 is a good example as it features an invulnerable mid-chapter boss, Magma the Fierce, that must be defeated by knocking out the platforms under him with switches. The area he inhabits is rich with special weapons that are essentially presented to misdirect the player into thinking Magma can be attacked directly. Shortly after, Mike will encounter my favorite boss in the game, Maxie, at the end of Ghost Village. As with the other ghosts throughout the stage, Maxie cannot be seen without using a Rod of Sight magical item. The fight against Maxie can become very intense, as it spouts smaller ghosts and the room has a battery of lava cannons that fire at Mike constantly. However the final area of the chapter has no boss, instead it is built around a multi-room access puzzle that ends in a leap of faith, following a clue given by a poet encountered on the road. Bucking convention and expectation once again, the next chapter features zero enemy encounters and is instead used for story exposition. Even though there's all this massive detail and scope, the game never loses sight of who the hero is, a high school student from Seattle on his summer vacation. No matter how grand and detailed things become, it still always looks and feels possible. If you happen to expire on your journey, the shaman of Coralcola will revive you so that you may continue on your adventure. Island mysticism is simply par for the course in this unique adventure.

None of these special weapons are any use against Magma (left), fighting Maxie deep within Ghost Village (center), having a conversation with Bellcola's chief (right)

If there is one part of StarTropics that almost always divides opinion on the game it is play control. StarTropics was designed so that every space either Mike or an enemy occupies is laid out on an invisible grid. This allows Mike to turn in different directions without walking forward, as movement requires pointing Mike in the desired direction and then holding that direction to move. An advantage of this control method is that allows Mike to make strafing attacks when jumping between platforms, and to strike multiple enemies that are charging him from multiple directions without having to walk. Additionally Mike's movement method plays perfectly into the tile puzzles that are a staple of the game. In almost every room of StarTropics there are tiles. Usually one or more of these tiles will reveal a footprint by jumping on it. A footprint tile reveals a switch tile, which when jumped on will either open a passage or unlock a chest. Additionally specific tiles are used to illuminate darkened rooms. There are also tiles which submerge themselves in a pattern and some that sink once Mike steps on them. To mix things up even more there are tiles that only reveal themselves once Mike is about to land on them, requiring a leap of faith. While Mike can jump over water, he can only

clear the space of one tile unless equipped with a special power up found toward the end of the game, which doubles this capacity on the screen in which it is obtained. There are many, many, many parts of the game where this "one tile jumping" mechanic and the "look before moving" mechanic are used to solve puzzles of sequence. I honestly love this dynamic of the game and feel it is one of the reasons that StarTropics stands out from the hundreds of NES titles and thousands of other games before or since, including its sequel. It also allows control to be razor sharp and precise. Mike will generally attack as fast as the button can be tapped, with each special weapon having slightly different advantages and attack range.

Music plays a big part of the over all feel of StarTropics from title screen to ending credits. The tropical title theme gets things off to a great start and the overworld theme follows suit. Amazingly, this music doesn't repetitive even though it's used in nearly every map screen and in every village. It's just a light, mellow, smooth sounding tune that gently plays in the background. My favorite piece of music in the game is the action theme that plays while adventuring down in the tunnels and is a slight rework and expansion of the title screen song. Boss battles use their own theme that has a very intense and frantic pace, pumping up the excitement during boss encounters. Even bonus rooms have their own music that lets you know that you're in a safe place - for the most part. The final stages rework the music from earlier in the game to fit their contrasting mood and environment. Sound effects are very unique and honestly sound like nothing else from any other NES game. The sounds doors make when they open, walls when passages blast out, enemies are destroyed, the squeaks bosses make as they take damage - all of it is excellent. Even the low life chirp is pleasant, again something the sequel would botch. I'd go as far to say that in the sound effects department, StarTropics is one of the best you'll find on the NES. It's all fresh and new and blends in perfectly with the rest of the game. Music and sound for this game work together to provide the perfect audio atmosphere.

Although it wasn't infamous for it at the time, in hindsight something StarTropics has become known for is a letter included from Mike's uncle Steve. This is a physical piece of paper stuck to the back of the instruction booklet. At one point in the game Mike is told to "put Dr. J's letter in water" to reveal a special message and Dr. J's homing frequency for Sub-C. The game will not allow the player to continue past this point without the correct three-digit frequency being entered. Not a big deal right? Stuff like a special piece of parchment was common with American computer games, generally referred to as "feelies" and often serving a double purpose to deter piracy. Well I purchased my copy of StarTropics during the summer of its release year, at the local county fair where there was a video game vendor in an exhibition hall. They were selling both new games as well as used ones and made sure to say that all used games came with a 1:1 photocopied instruction booklet. I opted to save a bit of money and get the used copy (thinking back, the concept of buying a used game from a vendor was kind of odd for the time) and packed it away for the couple weeks until *my* summer vacation ended and I was back home.

Dear Mike,

I am sorry I did not write you sooner, but I just returned from a long voyage in the islands in search of lost ruins and artifacts. I was very pleased to find your letter upon my return. Boy, time sure is flying by! Last time I saw you, you were just starting school... and now, 15 years old, an honor student, and captain of your high school baseball team!

I think it's a great idea that you visit me during your vacation. I'm sure that you'll enjoy the tropical islands, the blue water, and the friendly people you'll find living under the Southern Cross. You can even take a cruise in my super submarine, Sub-C.

I have enclosed some pictures and a map of C-Island for you. Hope to see you soon, and give my regards to your family.

Sincerely,

Uncle Steve

Uncle Steve

CAUTION: DO NOT TASTE, EAT OR OTHERWISE CONSUME THIS PAPER.
Note: This letter is very important so please hold onto it till the end of the game.

NES-DC-USA

The infamous letter printed on special water-reactive paper, included with the game

I played the game non-stop until reaching the part where I was told put the letter in water. Now a copy of the letter wasn't included with the photocopied instruction booklet but there is a section a couple of pages in where a letter from Dr. J is shown. I knew it was just regular white paper, I knew it was just a copy, but I remember actually getting that page wet to see if anything would happen - of course nothing did, other than the photocopy getting ruined. So I basically mastered the first four chapters inside out, playing them over and over again, right up until I could progress no further. No one else I knew had the game, so there was no help there, until a year or so later when I was talking with a friend about it at school. He said he knew about that and saw the code frequency printed in Nintendo Power, saying it was 747 MHz. I scribbled that down immediately and was finally able to unlock the second half of the game. Why Nintendo included such an odd thing in an NES game is up for debate, with some saying it was to push sales over rentals, as instruction booklets were generally not included with rented games.

It may not be The Legend of Zelda or considered one of the greatest games to grace the platform but after all these years StarTropics is still my favorite NES game. It intrigued me from the first time I read about it in the pages of Nintendo Power, saw the very short television commercial, and finally had that used copy with the useless photocopied instructions in my hands. To me it combines new concepts and stories yet feels like an old classic right from the beginning. The length and challenge are just right and it tells a very satisfying story presented as a series of vignettes that Mike encounters as he searches for his uncle. Although it is very linear and story-driven, StarTropics can be very difficult in spots, both in maze navigation and action platforming. After each chapter is completed it can be replayed via "review mode" on the file screen. This is a cool feature that allows one to play a

specific chapter that has already been completed, without losing their save data or having to start a new game completely. There's also a really cool photo snapshot sequence at the very end of the game after the credits, that displays some of the most detailed imagery that the NES has ever produced.

Anyone that likes adventure games should pick up StarTropics for an NES experience unlike anything else. Contrary to what some may believe, the game did sell well enough to warrant a sequel, which was released in 1994 and was the second to last licensed NES game. In many ways the sequel is a much larger game but suffers from a different sound effects package and movement tweaks that can make it a pain to play. While not a bad game at all, in terms of play enjoyment the sequel is inferior to the original. Our long time readers know I play a lot of NES and Famicom games, it's one of my favorite platforms. For StarTropics to be my all time favorite game on said platform - that's saying quite a bit.

SMS Memories: Mastering Friendship

by Mateus Fedozzi

Games are expensive. I mean, games as physical things are expensive. You know, those that come in a box, with its data burnt on a DVD, a CD or a cartridge. Master System games were terribly expensive back when they were sold brand new in stores (actually, games are still terribly expensive in my country - even the digital releases are). That's one of the very few reasons a nerdy kid would try to make some friends, to have access to more Sega games.

So, I had this classmate who was the only boy who also owned an SMS in my classroom. I can't remember exactly how I discovered that but as soon as I did, there I was, trying my best to build a long-lasting friendship. It turned out the boy only had a single loose cart: OutRun Europa, which is, as the name suggests, a European-made spin-off from the legendary racing series by Yu Suzuki.

Published by British giant U.S. Gold for computers like the ZX Spectrum, the Commodore 64 and the Amiga, which were successful machines in England, OutRun Europa has some elements of Chase H.Q. In the game, you must prove your innocence by chasing down the real criminals and avoiding the police - it's a racing game mixed with some vehicular violence, just like Taito's arcade classic. Sega and U.S. Gold had a great relationship, so much that Sega not only allowed them the use of the OutRun brand but also allowed them to port the game back to a Sega machine.

The Master System version, programmed by Probe who also did the original computer versions, came soon after. It's a terrific port with amazing pseudo-3D visuals that really shine on a CRT television. The music is frantic, making you wish to keep moving - as the scaling sprites also do. The thing that gets more criticized is the use of UP to accelerate your machines (you drive more than one type of vehicle in this OutRun). But this criticism comes mainly from people who are not used to European racing games, which usually had this type of controller setup. Yes, such setup was uncommon on consoles, and Probe should know better, but this isn't a game breaker. It has never been a problem for me.

Another criticism is that this game isn't OutRun enough. I also disagree with this one. Although it's a car chase game more than a pure driving game, OutRun Europa still has branching paths, beautiful European sights, a Ferrari, good music and skill-based timed racing, all trademarks of the franchise. Besides, it wasn't even the first OutRun with combat because the Master System itself had already received Battle OutRun, which is much more of a Chase H.Q. clone than Europa is, even if it's made in Japan and designed by Sega people.

I had lots of fun with this one. Couldn't beat it, I kinda sucked as a gamer when I was a kid, but still played it for months. Until my new friend came to my house reclaim his possession, that is. So long, Europa. So long, friendship. Since the guy didn't have any other games, and he wouldn't let me play OutRun for another whole month, the friendship ended right there. But the memories stayed with me. Not the memories of our friendship, mind you; the memories I keep are those of myself driving fast across England, Spain, France and Germany with the cops hot on my chase. Those were the days.

Peripheral Paradise

by David Lundin, Jr.

While some may consider specialized controllers and aftermarket peripherals a part of retrogaming that the industry is better for moving away from, they're one of my favorite aspects of video gaming. The creativity that once went into attempting to bring enhanced or unique gameplay experiences into people's homes is just awesome in my opinion. Granted there was a lot of junk out there but there were also well-engineered products that continue to hold up to this day. Let's take a look at a few of my favorites that have remained in regular service and heavy use.

ASCII Stick Engine
PC Engine / TurboDuo / TurboGrafx-16 (with plug adapter)

Once video game consoles moved away from using joysticks as the primary control device, players looking for an arcade control experience would have to purchase an additional accessory. This lead to a wave of both consumer and professional grade joysticks that ran the full spectrum from absolute garbage to small batch customs made with real arcade components. It may seem strange now but from the rise of the NES to the introduction of PlayStation, it seemed most gamers owned at least one consumer grade joystick, even in an era when most consoles were still including two controllers in the box. One of the most popular joysticks was the NES Advantage, a joystick controller for the NES that also featured fully adjustable turbo modes for the action buttons. Although considered to be a first-party accessory, the NES Advantage was actually designed and manufactured by ASCII Corporation, which in turn released similar joysticks for the other popular systems of the day.

My ASCII Stick Engine has held up amazingly well after years of use.

Stick Engine is just that, a refinement on the design of the NES Advantage, repackaged for what was the next most popular platform in Japan - the PC Engine. Clad in textured black with mint green buttons and turbo knobs, it certainly stands out from other home joysticks and is a stark contrast to the white and red colors of the PC Engine itself. It features a comfortable and responsive joystick, large fire buttons for Button II and Button I, and smaller pill-shaped buttons for Select and Run. It features the same slow motion function as the Advantage, where it rapidly inputs Run (the PC Engine's equivalent to Start) to pause and un-pause most games to create faux slow motion. Novel at the time but not very useful in practice. The refinement over the Advantage comes in how turbo speed is adjusted for the fire buttons. Rather than having on / off toggles in addition to the rate adjustment knobs both functions have been integrated into the knobs outright. There is an audible on / off click when turning a knob beyond its lowest rate and the adjustment knobs also have a reasonably premium tactile feel for consume grade stick of of the era. The location of the knobs and other function buttons at the top of the joystick, leaving the action button area clean and

unobstructed, is also something I consider an improvement over the Advantage. A red LED illuminates to represent the rate of turbo fire for both Button II and Button I, and the entire package feels great to use. It's a little small and a little lightweight but my Stick Engine has held up to years of use. It uses the standard PC Engine controller socket, which works with a USA TurboDuo no problem but you will need a plug adapter to connect to the larger TurboGrafx-16 controller socket. As with most PC Engine controllers the cord is pretty short so I suggest using an extension cable.

Konami Dance Dance Revolution Hand Controller
PlayStation / PlayStation 2 (as a PS1 controller)

I have no shame in admitting that I was hugely into Dance Dance Revolution from 1999 to around 2005 or so and still really enjoy the games, although I am massively out of practice. It may surprise some people but those games truly were a very large part of my life at the time, with a great deal of my social life, friendships, and relationships revolving around DDR. I always shock my wife a bit when I find an older machine (the legendary 4thMIX Plus for instance) and throw down like I'm in my late teens... for a couple of songs anyway. During the Bemani boom of the early 2000's there was a wash of DDR dance pads and assorted accessories, some licensed but many from third-party distributors. Vinyl and foam dance mats were by far the most popular and provided a reasonable way to play the games at home, with varying levels of responsiveness depending on design and manufacturer. For those wanting more arcade authenticity, both plastic and metal dance platforms were sold by a few companies at a premium, but again quality and responsiveness varied wildly. On the other end of the spectrum were finger controllers, tiny little scaled down hand-held DDR platforms, where one's fingers were used to hit the directions rather than their feet. While a novel approach, the finger pads often felt horrible and featured hard to press buttons, becoming a collectible for the shelf rather than a practical controller.

While not a perfect compromise for playing DDR at home, the Hand Controller is at least pretty unique.

While Konami didn't release a professional grade dance platform, they did in fact give the finger pad a try, with a unique controller that attempted to address the needs of those who lived upstairs. The Dance Dance Revolution Hand Controller features a flat top that replicates the full double pad platform of an arcade DDR setup. In addition to a Start Button, each side is populated with buttons for the four cardinal directions as well as upper diagonals that were used in the DDR Solo series. The buttons have a light weight and are easy to press, feeling a but mushy but still quite responsive and comfortable - a total contrast to the other finger pads. What's also comfortable is the way in which the controller sits in the hand, as it features very large grips that are thicker than may appear in pictures and rest perfectly in the palms. The DDR Hand Controller actually works really well and feels better than playing with a standard PlayStation controller, especially for double play. Of course there's no substitute for a good quality dance platform but this controller shows you can still have a good time playing DDR with a handheld controller.

Namco Arcade Stick
PlayStation / PlayStation 2 (as a PS1 controller)

An arcade style joystick may have been a popular secondary controller for many years but by the mid 1990's the new generation of consoles, with their increasingly complex controllers, began to make the joystick market a little more niche. While the rise of console-based fighting game tournaments would create a garage industry for high quality arcade nightsticks, compromises would have to be made for a mainstream counterpart. This is primarily to keep costs down and appeal to a wider demographic of gamers, not just those who may play competitive fighting games. In addition to fighting games, the original PlayStation was host to many arcade compilations, arcade shooters, traditional action games, and other genres that would mate perfectly to an arcade style control setup. PlayStation was also host to a ton of joystick controllers to ride this new wave, however to this day my absolute favorite is still Namco's take on the arcade experience at home.

Few PlayStation accessories are as legendary as the Namco Arcade Stick.

The Namco Arcade Stick is a thing of beauty and shows that affordability and quality can go hand in hand. It features a slim plastic housing with a gentle downward slope and a metal base. Action buttons are positioned in a standard 3 x 2 configuration with just enough of a staggered arc to fall comfortably under the fingers, mirroring a layout seen on many Japanese arcade panels. The top row contains Square, Triangle, and R1 while the bottom row contains X, Circle, and R2. L1 and L2 as well as Select and Start are small buttons located at the very top of the panel. The clean layout means that there is plenty of room to rest one's wrist and hands with no interference from buttons, switches, or design gimmicks. The joystick and buttons are very responsive and just a tad bit under the quality of competition level professional components. The weight and size of the housing make the stick very stable on a tabletop but it also plays pretty well sat on one's lap. The Namco Arcade Stick has maintained a solid reputation for decades, with enthusiasts continuing to use and modify them after over twenty-five years. Even if left totally stock, this is a superb joystick and with the wide availability of PS1 to USB adapters it is also my preferred controller for use with MAME.

NEC Avenue Pad 3
PC Engine / TurboDuo / TurboGrafx-16 (with plug adapter)

Not all great accessories attempt to completely reinvent the controller included with a system. Sometimes a slight enhancement is made to increase functionality without making the resulting controller feel too alien compared to stock. Examples of this are the six button controller for Sega Genesis or the PlayStation Dual Analog controller, both of which went on to influence future controller design for their respective companies. The Avenue Pad 3 takes a half step in a similar direction while at the same time doing its own thing. The Avenue Pad 3 follows the design cues of the standard PC Engine control pad, which itself went through a few design revisions. The earliest PC Engine control pads did not feature turbo switches, those were added later on, and would eventually become the standard design included with most versions of the console.

My main pad for playing PC Engine and TG-16, it has had hard use on both sides of the Pacific.

If one were to take a standard PC Engine control pad and stretch it out a bit horizontally they'd have the footprint of an Avenue Pad 3. The increased real estate allows for a third action button, labeled Button III, to be placed just down and to the left of Button II. Although the addition of a third button gave the controller its name, it technically doesn't add any new game input. Instead Button III can be selected via a switch to function as either Select or Run, essentially acting as a second button for either of those inputs. This may seem like a rather useless feature but many games on the platform use Select for in-game options or as an action toggle. For instance quite a few shooting games use Select to adjust ship speed and having it be on a large button right next to the primary action buttons is very convenient. For games that use Select to bring up item or inventory management this is also very nice, in addition to games that use Select or Run to activate special moves. Button III also has a unique turbo switch that can either be set to "Hi" for turbo fire or "Hold" for auto fire. Auto fire for Select or Run seems like an odd choice but if Run is used to pause a game, this option can be used to function as a faux slow motion setting, same as noted with the ASCII Stick Engine. Everything else on the controller is almost exactly as it is on a standard PC Engine control pad, including button sizes and feel, although the Avenue Pad 3 has very subtle ridges on the directional pad. The Avenue Pad 3 is my default controller for playing PC Engine / TurboGrafx-16 games and I have a couple of them. Eagle-eyed readers may notice a cigarette burn on the right side of the controller pictured, no doubt from an enthralled Japanese PC Engine gamer many decades ago.

The Unsung Brilliance of Super Mario Bros. 2 (USA)

by David Lundin, Jr.

Most long-running game series tend to have have at least one title that is considered to be the odd one out. I have a tendency to gravitate toward these games, not because they are different but because they're often simply the game I enjoy most in the series. Such is the case with the NES release of Super Mario Bros. 2. As chronicled in detail by George "mecha" Spanos in our last issue, the game released as Super Mario Bros. 2 outside of Japan was in fact a rework of a completely different title. In 1987 Fuji TV hosted a large summer festival and exposition in both Tokyo and Osaka, Communication Carnival Yume Kojo '87, a celebration of emerging technology and the seemingly endless possibilities ahead during the Japanese bubble economy. The mascots of the festival were a young boy named Imajin, along with his girlfriend Lina, parents Mama and Papa, twin younger siblings Poki and Piki, and their pet monkey Rusa. The mascot family was used to promote the festival in advertising and merchandise, with the upcoming event becoming nationally recognized and highly anticipated. Fuji TV was then, as it is now, one of the largest media conglomerates in the world and wanted to cap off the marketing blitz with a home video game. Nintendo would co-produce the tie-in, titled Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic, released just a week before the festival was to open. Roughly translated as Dream Factory: Heart-racing Panic, the game was a high quality action platformer for the Famicom Disk System, showcasing the best of what Nintendo was designing at the time.

Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic for Famicom Disk System (left), Super Mario Bros. 2 for NES (center), Super Mario USA for Famicom (right)

Of course the Yume Kojo branding wouldn't be relevant outside of Japan, so for the international release a year later the game was enhanced and converted into an alternate Super Mario Bros. 2, becoming the official sequel in all other regions. The reason for this has been long debated but the question I've always posed is why would Nintendo use their top staff to craft a very well-designed and expensive to produce game, to have it only be used to promote a Japan-centric media event? To me it seems that very early on the intent was to refine Doki Doki Panic into a proper Super Mario sequel, as the official Japanese Super Mario Bros. 2 was simply a hastily released expansion of the original. When the North American Super Mario Bros. 2 was released in 1988 it quickly became one of the most popular games on the NES. Although it was very different from the game that came before, it was part and parcel for what was expected of most sequels on the hardware.

I received my NES during Christmas of 1988 and Super Mario Bros. 2 was an Easter gift shortly after in 1989. I was instantly

taken back by how colorful the game was and how the characters had more of a cartoon look than any other game. It's one of the few games from that time where I can remember reading the instruction booklet and learning all the enemy character names and their descriptions. Granted I wasn't all that spectacular at the game, I was seven-years-old after all, but I enjoyed learning the techniques and secrets and stumbling forward. However what would cement my love of the game was a pair of strategy guides that were included in Nintendo Power volumes 7 and 8 called "Super Mario Bros. 2 Inside Out." These were deluxe 36 page pull-out books that not only contained tips and tricks but also featured complete maps and a full walkthrough of every section of every world. Such a complete and unabridged guide for a game was unheard of in the United States at the time, especially an official one being given away free within the pages of a magazine. Being able to use that guide to learn a game so thoroughly, a game that I thought was great even before then, made a pretty big impression on me. I thought it was the coolest thing when I figured out a big shortcut in World 4-3 that the guide specifically said wouldn't work. Yet it it isn't just childhood experiences and nostalgia. As time went on, even in the wake of all the amazing Super Mario games that would follow it, Super Mario Bros. 2 remained my absolute favorite game in the series. It still is today - over thirty years later - and I thought it was time to sit down and figure out why.

Super Mario Bros. 2 makes a habit of introducing new mechanics constantly and then bringing them back later in the adventure. This begins right at the start, as it is a single-player game that not only offers character selection at the beginning of the game, but at the beginning of every stage of each world. Additionally the playable roster is made up of four characters - Mario, Luigi, Toad, and Princess Toadstool - each with their own strengths, weaknesses, and special abilities. Mario is well-rounded in all respects and represents a middle-of-the-road approach to jump height and lifting speed. Luigi can jump higher and farther than anyone else, at the expense of being drifty in the air and slower to run when carrying an object. Toad has the shortest jump but can lift objects the fastest and responds to input quickly, being unaffected by the weight of carrying an item. Princess Toadstool lifts and runs with objects very slowly but can float briefly in the air by holding down the A Button during a jump, allowing her to hover over dangers. Every character can also perform a power squat jump by holding Down on the directional pad to charge up power, then jumping for an extra boost in height. Use of the power squat jump quickly becomes an important tool to navigate the platforming challenges of the game, and if you're primarily a Toad player such as myself, mastering it is a requirement.

Luigi approaches a jumping cobrat (left), Mario setting bombs to clear a passage (center), Princess hovers over enemies to grab a POW block (right)

Someone unfamiliar with the game may find all the talk about lifting and carrying a bit strange but that too is a mechanic introduced here and is critical part of the gameplay. Super Mario Bros. 2 doesn't take place in the Mushroom Kingdom but instead introduces the world of Subcon, the land of dreams. Subcon has been cursed by Wart, who has used the Dream Machine to place the people and land under an evil spell. The terrain of Subcon is rich with swaying grasses which can be pulled from the ground to reveal items that can then be thrown to defeat enemies. Additionally most enemies in the game can be jumped on top of and then hoisted overhead in the same manner. This means not only can enemies be ridden over hazards and to cross vast areas, they can also be thrown at one another as weapons. It has often been said that Shigeru Miyamoto always wanted Mario to be able to ride some kind of creature from the earliest days of Super Mario Bros., but couldn't figure out how to implement it until Super Mario World - yet Mario and company can ride all kinds of creatures right here. Object throwing physics are controlled by directional momentum and jump height and feel very natural and predictable. Special items aren't the only things buried, as vegetables, extra lives, vehicles, and even enemies can all be pulled from the ground wherever swaying grass is seen. The most valuable item is a potion, which when thrown will create a door. The door leads to "sub-space," a mirrored area devoid of enemies where the player can find power-up mushrooms in specific areas, which add to the life meter similar to a heart container in The Legend of Zelda. Additionally any grass pulled up while in sub-space will reveal a coin, used as a credit in a Bonus Chance slot machine, played to earn extra lives in between worlds. As long as the player can find a potion, sub-space can be entered, however coins can only be pulled on two entries per stage.

Game design is a huge step forward from either of the Super Mario games that came before, as not only can the screen scroll both to the right and left, but up and down as well. So much of the game is vertical, and not just one or two screens, but huge areas that move as far up or down as they do left or right. The scale of some of the worlds, with the different approaches that can be taken and areas that can be entered, are still quite impressive. There are multiple paths to complete many areas, some cleverly hidden or requiring advanced techniques, which can skip large distances quickly. Many stages are long and complex with interconnected passages and power-ups that reward exploration, something that is actually fun to do as there is no time limit. Doors can be walked through to enter structures, rooms, or passageways and can always be walked back through again to the other side. A few areas have screen wrapping mechanics, like in the original arcade Mario Bros., which can either be a help or hindrance to the player depending on how they are approached. This all combines to make the game's world feel much more persistent and grounded, rather than "you've scrolled the screen beyond that that, it's gone now."

The openness in movement also creates more flexibility in how situations are worked through compared to most other platform games, which even with multiple pathways would often simply require running through them from left to right. Mushroom Blocks are movable persistent objects that can be picked up and thrown, retaining the position of where they are dropped. They can be stacked to make vertical platforms, pulled up to gain access to blocked off areas, used as walls to deflect some enemy projectiles, and thrown to defeat enemies like any other object. The multiple ways to complete many levels sometimes require use of a specific character's abilities, which further rewards platforming experimentation and builds replay value. This is how that aforementioned shortcut in World 4-3 came to be discovered, as the Inside Out guide said, "not even the Princess, the hottest jumper of them all, can leap across here." Well, from experimentation playing the game I knew Princess Toadstool wasn't the

"hottest jumper" - that was Luigi, and sure enough Luigi could easily make the leap.

My original and very well-worn Super Mario Bros. 2 Inside Out strategy guides from 1989, included in Nintendo Power

Individual level design is also spectacular in just how many new things the game is constantly throwing at the player, allowing a skill set to be built that is then pushed for more refinement as the adventure proceeds. There are ice stages that actually have appropriate and predictable physics, very tricky, but predictable. One spot at the beginning of World 4-2 is a series of enemy avoidance puzzles while running and sliding forward across a shelf of ice, testing the reflexes of even the most skilled player. Areas with quicksand can be tricky as well, as there are two different rates at which the sand sinks, with the faster of the two very challenging to get out of - especially when a power-up mushroom drops into it under the darkness of sub-space. Platforming puzzles make up a surprising amount of the game right from the start and show that Super Mario Bros. 2 doesn't waste a stage with a simple area. These include building structures to climb higher, using weak enemies to take out stronger ones blocking the path, riding enemies across or over hazards, vine climbing and switchback puzzles, and plucking and throwing bombs in a specific order to open up passages. Some of those wall bombing puzzles can be surprisingly complex and require advance planning, perfect timing and precise control. Areas where deep pits of sand must be dug through are also something new and require special strategy to avoid enemies, as they follow the path the player excavates. Although Toad is the fastest at lifting objects, I've always found that Luigi is the best suited for digging but perhaps that's just because his digging rhythm is smoother. Warp zones are reasonably well hidden or challenging to reach, requiring specific vases to be entered while in sub-space. Speaking of sub-space, uncovering the locations of power-up mushrooms in sub-space can be very difficult in some areas as they aren't always hidden where one may expect. Additionally figuring out which areas in sub-space are best for maximizing the amount of coins that can be pulled from the ground is an advanced strategy, as extra lives are so hard to come by.

Visually this is still one of the nicest looking games on the NES or Famicom in my opinion, featuring the best looking Mario character sprites on the hardware. Virtually every modern design cue for Mario, Luigi, the Toads, and Peach began here, including Luigi being thinner and taller than Mario for the first time. The Super Mario Bros. 3 sprites for Mario, Princess Toadstool, and the Toads are extremely similar to their Super Mario Bros. 2 designs. This makes sense, as Doki Doki Panic was being overhauled into the international Super Mario Bros. 2 at the same time Super Mario Bros. 3 was being developed for the Famicom. Super Mario Bros. 3 was actually released in Japan on the same month as Super Mario Bros. 2 in North America, both in October of 1988. Unfortunately Luigi would lose his unique design and abilities in Super Mario Bros. 3 but they would eventually return in future games. The environments are lush and colorful with multiple sky and terrain colors, giving a bit of a "time of day" feel throughout the adventure. Interior areas also have some diversity and help to make each underground or interior area feel different. Although the theme of some worlds is reused throughout the game, each has unique architecture, platform designs, environmental hazards, as well as flora and fauna.

Even with the amazing level design, deep play mechanics, and outstanding graphics the real stars of Super Mario Bros. 2 are the enemies. Not only is the sprite work top notch, they feature some of the most creative designs seen in an NES platformer. Enemy characters feature excellent animation, tons of personality and movement, and different behaviors denoted by what color they are. Due to the ability to stand on enemies, there is also far more direct enemy interaction than other games. The main reoccurring sub-boss, Birdo, requires the player to jump on and pick up the eggs she spits and throw them back at her. Another early example of this introduced right at the start of World 1-2 where a Pidgit, a flightless bird who rides a magic carpet, patrols the sky. The Pidgit must be jumped on, then picked up, allowing the player to gain control of its magic carpet for a short time to fly across the chasm ahead. The technique of handling Pidgit comes back up a few more times, including some very long flights both horizontally and vertically. Enemies can also act as platforms and be used to gain height, including jumping on flying enemies that can be baited to approach at a specific height and then used for a boost. Enemies as a whole are smarter than in most similar games, as some appear to home in on the player and follow them. Phanto for instance, is a floating mask that comes to life once a key is picked up. As long as the player is holding the key, Phanto will give chase, temporarily leaving if the key is dropped. Thing is Phanto doesn't just pursue the player but almost seems to predict movement depending on input - something that terrified me as a kid. There are also areas with small vases that constantly spawn a steady flow of enemies that can be corked with Mushroom Blocks.

Mario tosses bombs back at Mouser (left), Toad waits to attack Fryguy from above (center), Luigi uses a Mushroom Block wall for defense against Tryclyde (right)

Boss designs are also very cool and a breath of fresh air compared to the Bowser / Koopa fights seen in Super Mario Bros. Mouser is encountered twice throughout the game and throws bombs at the player, which must be caught or picked up and thrown back at him. Tryclyde is a three-headed snake that is also encountered twice, who breathes fireballs and must be defeated with Mushroom Blocks or a stray enemy. Fryguy is the only flying boss in the game, a ball of fire that spits fireballs. Once attacked with Mushroom Blocks, Fryguy splits into four smaller Fryguys that must also be extinguished with Mushroom Blocks. Clawgrip is a boss that was specifically added to Super Mario Bros. 2 and did not appear in Doki Doki Panic. He is a giant crab that hurls large boulders, which must be picked up and tossed back at him. The final boss, Wart, has a lot of visual personality as well. He spits a chain of bubbles at the player and can only be damaged by throwing a vegetable in his mouth while it is open. Vegetables are produced by the Dream Machine in his chamber and must be caught in the air, although Wart's bubbles will destroy them, making the final battle reasonably challenging.

Some of my favorite tunes in the entire Mario series made their debut in Super Mario Bros. 2. Nintendo composition legend Koji Kondo wrote not only the music for Doki Doki Panic but the Super Mario Bros. 2 conversion as well, which has some very slight differences. Although there is an Arabian flair to some of the music, the majority of the soundtrack takes more of a ragtime approach that seems to perfectly complement the fast paced and smooth gameplay. Sound effects also have interesting weight and variation with item pulls, throws, enemy collisions, and everything else featuring unique sounds. The deep, quiet rumble of an explosion is pretty cool and the jumping and climbing sounds would go on to be instantly recognizable. Music and sound design pair together perfectly here and still sound unique and advanced compared many other NES games. I also greatly prefer the NES version of the soundtrack over the Famicom Disk System version as heard in Doki Doki Panic.

Toad hops between whales in a world of ice (left), sometimes the only way forward is down (center), Luigi navigates a vine maze high in the clouds (right)

So at the end of the day, at the end of the decades since first playing it, I suppose the reason Super Mario Bros. 2 is my favorite Super Mario game is because it's a great game with very unique visual design and gameplay mechanics. Of course the debate that continues to this day is whether or not it's a "real" Mario game due to its origins as a promotional tie-in for the Yume Kojo festival. The answer, quite simply, is "yes it is." Not only was the game developed by many of the same people who created Super Mario Bros., its design roots are based upon ideas formed from prototyping out possible sequels to that game. It received an unheard of amount of polish and refinement during the conversion process from Doki Doki Panic, which itself sold very well. Design and personality characteristics for the main Super Mario cast that continue to this day began with Super Mario Bros. 2. Then there are all the enemies that would become staples of the Mario series outside of this specific game and its remakes: Shyguy, Snifit, Ninji, Spark (which technically first appeared in Donkey Kong Junior), Pokey, Beezo, Birdo, and my personal favorite, Bob-omb. The North American version of Super Mario Bros. 2 would eventually be released in Japan on the Famicom under the title Super Mario USA in 1992, becoming an official Mario game in all regions. In addition to being included in all regional variations of Super Mario All-Stars, a further enhanced remake was released as Nintendo's primary launch title for Game Boy Advance in 2001 as Super Mario Advance. I will admit, Super Mario Advance is what got me to buy a Game Boy Advance on launch day - not too often a game you love that people site as "that obscure one" gets a flagship release for a new platform. With all those enhancements and re-releases, it's still the original NES version that I enjoy most. If you haven't played it in a long time or skipped it due to its false notoriety, I recommend giving Super Mario Bros. 2 another or first try. Explore, mess around with the mechanics, and unlock what remains one of the most unique platforming games ever created.

Eleven More Retro Characters for the Next Super Smash Bros.

by Dan Pettis

Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, the latest game in the long running fighting franchise, had arguably the greatest roster of characters

in any fighting game ever. With a finally tally of eighty-nine playable fighters, there is a main for everyone with challengers from all corners of the gaming universe. We've come a long, long way from the measly twelve characters featured in the classic Nintendo 64 original.

After the last game it feels like the sky is just about the limit for new fighters. A metric ton of fighters came from all corners of the gaming universe, from even rival consoles and developers, that never seemed to have a hope of appearing on a Nintendo console. After the mind blowing addition of Disney and Square's Sora from Kingdom Hearts, I wouldn't rule just about any one out. In this countdown, I'm going to focus mainly on characters who I think have a legit shot at making the roster, no matter how long the shot may seem. I'm also giving bonus points went to characters who have fighting game history or have appeared in a previous Smash Bros. game in some capacity, be it as a trophy, or an assist character in some way. So sorry to all you Goku fans out there, you'll just have to keep modding the Super Sayain into the games yourself. Here are eleven more characters with an old school appeal, that Nintendo needs to add into the next game.

11. Excitebike Racer

As I had mentioned in my last set of ten old-school picks for the next Smash Bros. game, Nintendo seemingly loves to dig up at least one obscure character from the video game graveyard in each new game. So let's kick off the list with another character who may seem like a long shot at first, but would still be a worthy addition to the roster: the Excitebike Racer. Born in 1984, the Excitebike racer first appeared on the Famicom, then followed that up with an appearance in arcades, and then a hugely popular launch game for the NES. To date there have been plenty of followups, including Excitebike 64, and the Wii-quels Excite Truck and Excitebots, but there has not been a proper sequel since 2009.

The Excitebike Racer's play style could function quite similarly to Wario's trademark motorcycle. Zooming around the stage, the racer could deal loads of damage, but maybe the player should be careful, as that Excitebike has a strange tendency to overheat. There are also lots of other vehicle themed items the Racer could use in battle, including making oil slicks, throwing spare tires, or using tools like a wrench to deal extra damage. Also giving this character his own stage would be a wise move, as the Excitebike stage in Mario Kart 8 was one of the most frantic and fun courses in that entire game. I'm not sure how likely it is to happen, but the Excitebike Racer would be another unexpected and quirky way for Nintendo to honor one of their longest running franchises.

The Excitebike Racer's classic design and as he appeared in the NES version of Excitebike.

10. Pauline

Going all the way back to the early eighties, Pauline is Nintendo's original damsel in distress. Before Mario had a name, and DK even owned a tie, Mario was forced to rescue Pauline from the clutches of this evil king of Kongs. Climbing all manners of railing and girders, Mario's quest to rescue his boo helped Nintendo climb on top of the video game industry. After a long time spent toiling away in the cult classic Mario vs. Donkey Kong series, Nintendo thrust Pauline back into the spotlight in the incredible Switch sensation Super Mario Odyssey. Giving her a sultry makeover in a red dress, Pauline reigned as the mayor of New Donk City, the most iconic new area in the game. She also was the front lady for the swingin' band that gave the game its signature theme song, Jump Up Superstar. Since then she's gone on to play sports with Mario and the gang in their most recent tennis and golf outings on the Nintendo Switch.

As far as her potential attacks go, Nintendo could really embrace her newfound inner artistry with a wide range of musical themed attacks. She could borrow some instruments from the boys in her band and smack people around with a guitar, brass instruments, and some drumsticks. For a Smash Move, she could whack people with an upcycled steel girder from one of DK's games. Now that's gonna hurt! It's time for Pauline to finally get some real revenge on her former captor Donkey Kong, and beat the crap out of him in the next Super Smash Bros. installment.

9. Baby Mario

My next pick may be a bit triggering for those who are sensitive to loud noises and the sounds of crying babies. I'm talking of course about the child version of Nintendo's main mascot Mario. In my last Smash Bros. additions article, I suggested Paper Mario and now I'm suggesting diaper Mario. To me the more Mario the merrier! First appearing in the criminally underrated late-period SNES classic Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island, this tiny version of the character has appeared in plenty of Mario Kart

and sports outings since. This version of the character could stand alone or could be paired with Yoshi for some more old school fun. Riding on the back of his trusty dino steed would unlock all kinds of egg throwing goodness, as well as that version of Yoshi's ability to transform into all kinds of crazy stuff like helicopters and trains. Baby Mario's ability to use a cape and run around in nothing but his diaper would be a funny and fun addition to the game as well. To me, more Mario is missing from Smash Bros. so it's time for a Multiverse of Mario Madness... but Nintendo will have to find a way to make the crying cuter, or risk pissing off a whole new generation of gamers...

8. Bandanna Waddle Dee

The next character has a long and rich history in the long-running and still beloved Kirby series. Waddle Dee has been with the franchise since the beginning in Kirby's Dreamland for the original Game Boy and has appeared in over twenty Kirby related games! These guys are kind of like Kirby's version of the Goombas, but they somehow pose even less of a threat than the Goomba to the god-like suction powered vacuum that is Kirby. A somewhat recent variation on the character armed with a spear, Bandanna Waddle Dee, has grown largely in popularity, even becoming a playable ally in recent Switch hit Kirby And The Forgotten Land. BWD has even recently received a fan created, and unfortunately fake Smash Bros. trailer, so there are very passionate fans who would love nothing more than to see their dreams of this Dreamland character making Smash Bros. come true.

It's the bandanna-ed version of the character that should be playable in the next version of the smashing series. With his trademark spear, Bandanna Waddle Dee could engage in some Meta-Knight style swordplay. It would probably be a little less frantic than the hyper active sword wielding of that character. He could also potentially have a floating multiple jump similar to Kirby, making him a great character for new comers and the younger set of Smash Bros. players. I'm sure that longtime Smash series director and creator of Kirby Masahiro Sakurai would love to get more Kirby characters into Smash Waddle Dee is a fantastic opportunity for the next game.

7. Mega Man Zero

The original model of Mega Man has been a part of Smash Bros. since the Wii U incarnation of the game. With Ultimate featuring multiple characters from the Street Fighter franchise, and Ryu's frenemy Ken joining the series, I think it's only fair that Megaman X's android wingman, Zero join the battle. After debuting in the stone cold classic Mega Man X on the Super Nintendo, the red and white armored pony tail enthusiast has become a fan favorite. Zero's mission is to destroy renegade evil robots known as Mavericks and the ultra big bad of these even more futuristic games: Sigma. Zero has gone on to have a fighting game history of his own, appearing as a playable character in the Marvel vs. Capcom series and has gotten close to appearing as a playable character, as an Assist Trophy ally character in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate.

One of the biggest differences in playing as Zero instead of Mega Man is that Zero bad-assedly wields his signature laser sword known as the Z-Saber. A much cooler weapon than the standard red Super Smash Bros. lightsaber, this weapon allows for all sorts of fun, futuristic looking sword play. This glowing sword would make playing as Zero a blast, and a completely different experience from playing as the blue bomber. It would open up the door for all manner of attacks, and combos and could turn into a brutal up special attack. Zero has even been given tons of his own starring solo games, so for a final smash move, he could call on help from all of his similar looking robo-bros to help him end the battle for good. Zero is the hero Nintendo should call on for their next futuristic fighting robot.

Mega Man Zero with his Z-Saber as seen in the instruction booklet for Mega Man X3 and slashing through his first playable appearance.

6. Eevee

If Nintendo and the Pokémon company choose Eevee, they have the opportunity to do something with the next game that has never been done in a Smash Bros. game: nine different playable versions of a character in one fighter. Each match could be completely different for Eevee fans and stans. As you are not doubt aware, Pokémon can only typically evolve one way, but Eevee can evolve into eight different types of Pokémon typically with a new Eevee-loution in each game. Each version comes with a wildly different set of powers and looks. Pocket monster number one hundred thirty-three, is the next cuddly companion who needs to join the Bros. battle.

Eevee is certainly popular enough to make the cut. Especially since being featured as one of the two title Pokémon along with

Pikachu, for the recent Let's Go games, on Nintendo Switch. Eevee even finished in the top ten of a recent Reddit survey of favorite characters from the entire series. Eevee is pretty cute in default form, but it's the Eevee-loutions that make it one of a kind. A new way to help the player choose which upgraded version to turn in to maybe needed. It could work with a system similar to the way Shulk from Xenoblade switches his fighting style with icons above the player to cycle through. A very specific way would be needed to help Eevee transform, because once transformed it would have to stay that way for the rest of the match. But perhaps a Final Smash move calling in on all forms of Eevee could be used to reset Eevee back to it's original form. Mastering all eight evolutions of Eevee would also be huge bragging rights for any pro Smash Bros. gamer. It would take a lot of development work but hopefully Nintendo will pack my pick of Pokémon for the next Smash party.

5. Cranky Kong

My next pick puts the old in old school. Cranky Kong was first seen famously spinning a vintage gramophone record player in the startup cut-scene of the first Donkey Kong Country. He is also probably the original DK, the star of the 1981 arcade original, but Nintendo and original developer Rare have been a little unclear on if this is true or not. Cranky is typically seen aiding the Kongs with some helpful, and some not so helpful cantankerous advice. He finally made the leap to fully playable character in the fantastic 2014 game Donkey Kong Tropical Freeze which was later ported to the Nintendo Switch. The playable version of the oldest Kong took a page out of the NES DuckTales playbook, making Cranky's cane a big part of his arsenal. His cane could be used for pogo-ing ala Scrooge McDuck in that one, and it would give him a unique feel compared to other fighters. This old Kong could also swing the cane around for heavy attacks. It would allow him to more than hold his own against the rest of the roster. Just like Yoda, his stick is better than bacon. In another surprising attack move, maybe he could pull a Jigglypuff and bore the other fighters to sleep with his repetitive advice. In my previous Smash article, I pushed for more Kongs and I think there's plenty of space for a barrel full of monkeys to come to the next Smash Bros. fight fest.

4. Fullgore

Smash Bros. Ultimate honored the overall history of fighting games with characters like Kazuya from Tekken, Ken from Street Fighter, and Terry from Fatal Fury added to the fray. For my next pick, I'm going to go with a character from another legendary fighting franchise, Killer Instinct. I'm going with the coolest cyborg this side of Darth Vader, the orange pony tail sporting slasher Fullgore. Made by Rare using the same graphical style as their revolutionary Donkey Kong Country Games, Killer Instinct wowed gamers in the arcades and on the Super Nintendo in 1994. Fullgore was prominently featured on the box art and killer cool black cartridge. His move-set would be an easy translation to the series, thanks in great part to his blue Wolverine style claws. He comes complete with a pronounced uppercut, perfect for an air special, a sliding attack, an eye laser, and a punishing projectile attack with extra guns added to his shoulders. Since Nintendo and Rare's divorce in 2002 the franchise and character has rare-ly been seen on Nintendo consoles, not once actually. But the series continues with another installment released on Microsoft Xbox consoles and the recent release of an Arcade 1-Up home replica of the original cabinet. This pick would require Microsoft and Nintendo to play nice again, but with them loaning Banjo-Kazooie and Minecraft characters to Nintendo for the last game, anything is possible.

3. Crash Bandicoot

Back in the early days of the first PlayStation, Sony was on its way towards dominating the video game industry, they just needed a mascot. Developer Naughty Dog gave them just what they needed, an orange marsupial with a penchant for spin moves, eating fruit, and wearing jorts: Crash Bandicoot. An infamous commercial debuted the character, which featured a live action Crash crashing Nintendo HQ. Armed with a megaphone at their actual headquarters and throwning some disses at Mario, the company seemed to be going even edgier than Sega did with their Genesis commercials and "Nintendon't" campaign. It definitely seemed like the Bandicoot would never swirl over to Nintendo consoles, but just like Sonic before him, he began his career on other systems starting on the GameCube. He still appears on their systems to this day with new games and compilations appearing on the go on the Nintendo Switch. For Crash's potential fighting moves, besides the obvious previously mentioned spin move, there are lots of things to draw from in the Crash series. For starters the tribal mask ally and power up Aku Aku, has got to be featured and paired with the character somehow. Since Aku added a shielding bit of health in those games, he could easily do the same in Smash or Crash could use the mask differently, perhaps as a battering ram. Crash also has a history of riding vehicles like hover craft, motorcycles and most interestingly a jet pack, that could make this bandicoot a fun pick to play as for nostalgic PlayStation fans.

Chun-Li's classic introductory design as seen on arcade promotional flyers and fighting Ken in a Street Fighter II match.

2. Chun-Li

When Ryu was added to the Super Smash Bros. For Wii U roster, many minds, including my own were blown. Finally we could match up the most iconic fighter and protagonist from Street Fighter II against many of our childhood favorites. When his rival Ken was added to Ultimate... it was just a little puzzling. The two make a perfect yin and yang style pairing in those games, but I think they should've bypassed the bland blond fighter and instead went straight to China and recruited the badass in the blue dress, Chun-Li to hop on board a plane and fly on over join the party.

As the first female fighter in the long running series, Chun-Li broke video game ground and made history. She has received a realistic redesign for the upcoming Street Fighter 6 game and has been a prominent part of the marketing. Also she quite literally kicks ass. Her variety of leg and kicking based attacks made her an instant smash, and a go to character for anyone looking for a springy character to bounce around SF II's many stages. Just as with Ryu and Ken, Nintendo would basically be able to rip her move-set straight out of those games. The Lightning Kick and Spinning Kick would be a blast to pull off, and the addition of the fireball given to her later in the series would make Chun-Li the perfect next World Warrior to add to roster.

1. Tails

My number one choice to add to the next Smash Bros. game is Sonic's number one fan and partner, the multi-tailed flying fox, Miles Prower, better known by his nickname Tails. Ever since his introduction in Sonic 2, he's been an invaluable aide to the Blue Blur. In the time spent time by Sonic's side, he's aided him with his inventions, his knack for collecting rings, and his ability to fly vintage red bi-planes. For his potential Smash Bros. appearance he should be one of the faster characters, since he manages to nearly match Sonic stride for stride whenever they're paired. He should also have a very strong air game since his tails make him able to fly in most Sonic games. He could have flying powers similar to Pit's from the Kid Icarus games. Attack wise, he would probably use a similar set of spin dashes just like Sonic's. Tails has been legendarily rumored to appear in the Smash Bros. since the GameCube days of Melee. Finally adding Tails to Smash would finally satiate the needs of the many fans who have wanted him so badly. Also since he was given a featured supporting role in the latest hit Sonic movie, Sonic 2, now is the perfect time for this orange fox to fly into battle.

Caught On Film - Tron (1982)
Forty Years of Fighting For the User

by David Lundin, Jr.

July 9th of this year, just a few days after this issue goes to publication, will mark the 40th anniversary of the science-fiction film Tron. Tron has been my favorite film since first encountering it on television about twenty-five years ago. Although the film wasn't very popular at the time, someone at one of the small local television stations must have thought they had gotten hold of something hot, as they promoted it constantly in the two week run-up to the air date. On the night it was finally shown they even had their advertising voiceover guy introduce it over the opening, "...and now, Tron." It all hyped me up enough to make sure I had a blank tape in the VCR that night and for many years I watched that television recording over and over again. Something about the film simply clicked with my early teenage self and I just about wore that tape out. It wouldn't be until the 20th anniversary DVD release that I was able to finally watch the film in its entirely, without the usual broadcast edits for time. It was also the first time I ever encountered any other fans of the film, realizing that a few of my co-workers also enjoyed the movie. Now here we are, twenty years after even that milestone, to take a look back at a film that is every bit as unique now as it was the day it first hit theaters in 1982.

Tron opens with a common sight of the early 1980's, a packed video arcade. A patron coins up a game titled Lightcycle, in which the player directs creation of a continuous line in an attempt to block their opponent in, and begins a game versus the computer. The camera then pans down to show the other side of the screen, where it is revealed the the lines are in fact energy walls left behind in the wake of virtual motorcycles, hence the game's name. In the digital world the player is shown as an electronic avatar operating his lightcycle against a program operating the other. The player is ruthlessly destroyed by the computer opponent, exploding in a blast of energy as he releases the joystick in frustration on the other side of the screen. Later that night former ENCOM employee and programmer Kevin Flynn, played by Jeff Bridges, is hacking into the mainframe of his former employer. The program he is utilizing to execute the hack is Clu, who in the digital world is a representation of Flynn. Clu is caught and detached from contact with Flynn, then taken before the Master Control Program, an artificial intelligence that controls the ENCOM mainframe. The MCP believes that Clu was written by Flynn and contacts Ed Dillinger, Senior VP of ENCOM played by David Warner, to alert him of the attempted incursion. Dillinger is fearful that Flynn may find evidence buried in the mainframe to prove that a series of popular video games, that Dillinger presented as his own, were in fact created by Flynn. The success of the games in question, including Lightcycle and Space Paranoids, were instrumental in Dillinger's rise to the top of ENCOM. Access for Flynn's former mainframe access group is locked down, preventing access for another ENCOM programmer, Alan Bradley, played by Bruce Boxleitner. Alan has nearly completed writing a security program, Tron, which will monitor all traffic on the mainframe including that of the MCP.

Alan and Lora meet up with Flynn at his arcade

After talking with his girlfriend Lora Baines, who is also a programmer at ENCOM played by Cindy Morgan, it is assumed that Flynn is more than likely the cause for the system lockdown and they head to his arcade to question him. Flynn admits that he has been attempting to find evidence of Dillinger's plagiarism ever since he was fired by Dillinger in an attempt to hide the theft, believing that such is still buried somewhere in the mainframe. Alan muses that if his Tron program was running it would shut the system down and disable the MCP, to which Flynn hatches a plan to forge an alternate access pathway from within ENCOM. This would allow Alan to activate Tron and clear the way for Flynn to recover the evidence. Using a direct terminal in the pathway of an experimental digitizing laser that Lora is working on, Flynn encounters the MCP as he begins his hack. To stop Flynn, the MCP activates the laser and digitizes Flynn, drawing him into the ENCOM mainframe. Within the mainframe is a digital world in which programs exist in the as avatars of their Users, the humans in the real world that program and operate them. Users are revered by their programs with nearly religious significance, representing a mysticism beyond them that they are able to interact with through input/output portals. The digital world is ruled by the MCP, who forces captured programs to compete in gladiatorial

combat utilizing the game programs that Flynn originally created. The conscripted programs compete in the deadly games until they die, known in the digital world as derezzing, or renounce their belief in the Users and serve the MCP. Carrying out the MCP's orders is Sark, a command program that is an avatar of Dillinger, who was also seen in the lightcycle battle that opened the film. It is in the games Flynn meets Tron, who himself is an avatar of Alan. Along with another captured program called Ram, Flynn and Tron break out of a Lightcycle game and the trio sets off for an input/output tower, where Tron can communicate with Alan to get the data needed to overthrow the MCP.

Tron prepares to interface with Alan in the outside world, presenting his disc to establish a connection

While on the surface this sounds like little more than a high-tech triller, what sets Tron apart from every other film is that the majority of its runtime takes place within the digital world. Most of the sets, scenes, and visual effects were filmed traditionally on soundstages utilizing a technique called backlit animation. Essentially backlit animation is a process in which traditional film is shot in black and white on a black set. Then the individual frames of the film negative are converted to film cels, which are backlit with different color filters and photographed as if they were animation frames. The process is much more complex than my rough explanation and was so labor intensive and expensive to produce, that to this day Tron is the only feature film to utilize the technique. It gives the entire film a wholly unique look and feel anything else that has ever come before or since. Environments have a soft vibrating glow, colors cast gradients of light into darkness, and circuits shine as if they are liquid glass. All the production techniques, both traditional and state of the art, work in harmony to create wholly believable and alien digital world.

Every program carries an identity disc, which is imprinted with everything the program does or learns. The disc is also used to transfer data back and forth when communicating with a User. Additionally they are used as weapons, being thrown like a frisbee or used to shield a program by deflecting other discs away. A program hit by an identity disc will be subjected to dresolution upon impact, making flying discs extremely dangerous. What's incredible about the disc antics in the film, is that most of them were actually performed with real frisbees under the direction of a flying disc champion, who filled the role that a fencing master would on a sword fighting film. This gives a weight and fluid motion to disc combat, resembling something akin to a digital ballet, which does wonders to make it appear real because for the most part it is. Disc combat is a huge part of the visual style of the film and another aspect that is uniquely special about Tron.

The lightcycle sequences are the most well-known part of the film and still look unlike anything else

Of course one can't talk about Tron without mentioning its pioneering use of computer animation. Although they make up only a very short amount of the total film, the scenes that utilize computer animation exclusively tend to be those most remembered by the mainstream. Primarily these are used for creating vehicles and digital environments in which the vehicles travel. The game tanks, incursion programs that Flynn created for hacking into the ENCOM mainframe, are computer animated from the outside but use extremely complex backlight animation for their interior scenes. The lightcycle sequences are almost entirely computer animation with scenes of the actors composited into them through traditional animation and rotoscoping. Admittedly the lightcycle battle with Flynn, Tron, and Ram is one of the most striking scenes in the film but its impact also has a lot to do with how it sounds. The lightcycles have a high-pitched whine as they zip around the arena, making distinct sounds each time they make a 90 degree turn, with just enough of a "video game" sound when one is destroyed. Sound design throughout is simply incredible, with the sounds of disc combat and programs derezzing instantly recognizable and extremely unique. Not be outdone by the visuals or sound design, the soundtrack is equally as memorable and unique, composed by Wendy Carlos. The music is almost a character itself in Tron and enhances the tone and mood of virtually every scene, while still allowing the cold, echoing silence of

the digital world to breathe when necessary.

Also of note is that nearly the entire cast plays a double role, that of their User in the real world and program in the digital world, which are completely different characters. David Warner actually has a triple role, as in addition to Dillinger and Sark he also provides the menacing voice of the MCP. There is some really great acting in the film, there has to be, otherwise the film simply would not hold up. When you think about it, the actors were basically on black and white empty sets, playing off one another to carry dialogue about digital interfaces and electronic spirituality... and it actually works. They all pull it off, every performance is exceptional and feels natural. There is real emotion in this film, particularly in a scene where a main character dies in Flynn's arms, realizing that Flynn is a User and that he is seeing what amounts to a god before he ceases to function. There's a lot more here than its reputation as being a visual effects film may lead you to believe.

Sark monitoring the search for the escaped programs from on board his command ship

Forty years on there is still nothing like Tron. It still looks, sounds, and feels like no other film, which makes it pretty much timeless. After many years of speculation a sequel titled Tron: Legacy was finally released in 2010. It too has a very unique look, sound, and feel that is unlike any other film - including the original Tron. I know the reception of Legacy was a bit mixed, even among other Tron diehards, but I really enjoy the film and find it to be a solid follow up. I would have liked the religion and superstition in belief of the Users to factor into it more, but I was quite satisfied with the story it presented and saw it many times during its theatrical run. It's a shame that a third film has slotted right into the speculation zone where the sequel sat for decades. Getting back to the original, I think one of the coolest things right now during its forty year anniversary is that Tron is so easy to watch. It's currently available on the Disney+ streaming service in addition to having many releases on physical media, a far cry from scouring video rental stores or watching a worn-out television recording. If you've never seen it, give it a watch, and if it has been a while then there's no better time to check it out again.

Retrogaming Ceramics

by David Lundin, Jr.

Over the years both my wife and I have created a number of retrogaming themed ceramic pieces at a local ceramic painting lounge. While we don't craft the actual base objects ourselves, they begin as completely blank pieces, which after painting are then glazed and fired. The process can be very time consuming, with most painted areas requiring a build up of at least three coats for solid color results. Dozens of hours across months of visits can be spent to finish a piece. It's also always a bit of a stab in the dark as paint accuracy and adhesion really isn't known until after the glazing and firing process, which itself can sometimes lead to damage in the process. Additionally the ceramics lounge is not a professional studio but rather a local retail chain where anyone can select a piece to paint. I thought I'd share a few of these pieces with our readers.

Ghosts 'n Goblins large fruit bowl (left), Ghouls 'n Ghosts companion large fruit bowl (right), these are each about two feet across from edge to edge

A pair of rather large projects that my wife painted began with seeing a massive fruit bowl on display at one location. She wanted to do a larger piece and we brainstormed something that would utilize the space and shape of the bowl. Thankfully the lounge allows a purchased piece to be painted over multiple sessions without charging additional studio sitting fees, so a multi-month project is a little less daunting. We worked out the idea to theme the bowl after Ghosts 'n Goblins, with Astaroth and Prin-Prin at the center to represent the end of the game, and then Arthur working his way through the individual stages around the inside. A number of screenshots were made and printed to use as illustration and color reference. The outside of the bowl shows the opening scene of Prin-Prin being carried away.

Close up detail showing the bowl shape with Astaroth and Prin-Prin (left), and golden armor Arthur and Prin-Prin (right)

Many years later she got the desire to do a companion piece, having moved on from the unpredictable quality of the house brushes at the lounge to her own painting tools. We planned out a Ghouls 'n Ghosts follow-up but the bowl appeared to have been discontinued. Fortunately we found the last one the chain had ordered on display at one of the smaller lounges and picked it up. The idea this time was the reverse, with Arthur and Prin-Prin at the center and key enemies surrounding them on a quest for revenge, which is the opening narrative of the game. Better brushes and and techniques meant that everything was much more detailed, based upon the updated art from the sequel game in addition to official artwork for Arthur and Prin-Prin. The outside of the bowl features the opening with the townspeople fleeing the burning castle, while Arthur rides toward it on his horse.

As Bosconian is a game with a never-ending playfield, one continuous scene wraps around the entire jar

Next was a Christmas gift my wife painted for me, a large sealing cookie jar themed to the Namco arcade game Bosconian, one of my lesser-known arcade favorites. The game plays on a single infinitely scrolling map that wraps around in any direction, as the player attempts to destroy enemy bases and attack craft. The idea was to wrap a continuous stage around the outside of the jar, portraying a full on battle as seen in the game. The lid has the opening line of the game "BLAST OFF" written in the font of the arcade marquee and colored the same as well. While important to arcade development, the game is pretty niche and the finish product isn't one of her favorites but I love it and it is a permanent fixture on our dining room table.

After accompanying her to the ceramics lounge a few times, she encouraged me to paint a piece myself. I had done some ceramics work in my teenage years and really didn't care for it, especially layering multiple coats of paint and the results not being known until beyond the point of being changed. However they had a bulbous jar that I came up with an idea for and figured I'd give it a shot. Rotating the jar just off center, I decided to paint it as a pooka from Dig Dug being inflated and popping. The lid and opening would be where the harpoon had skewered it and then where it burst. The result was alright but my layering wasn't the cleanest and my pencil lines were a bit too heavy, causing some adhesion problems. The raw ceramics can be drawn on with a regular pencil, which usually simply burns off in the kiln, but excessive build up sometimes causes the paint to shrink away. It was a good piece to learn that lesson on as it still doesn't detract too much since it's an organic shape. On the lid I painted a 200 point value in pixel art, which really appealed to me both in terms of how clean the result was and how precise it allowed me to be with layering and scraping.

Seeing the shape of this jar sitting on the shelf instantly made me think of a bursting pooka from Dig Dug

After seeing that pixel work was a way I could get cleaner results with the ceramic paints, and because my wife flat out hated the assembly line precision required in panting such, I decided I'd attempt something again. I settled into painting a series of dinner plates themed on classic and reasonably obscure Konami arcade games. Games from before they became massively established, before games like Contra and Castlevania cemented their reputation. I planned on four plates, each representing a game from a year from 1981 to 1984. First up was Jungler, a game I've written about more than once in The Retrogaming Times. I built up a game screenshot to base the artwork off of and got to work drawing and painting. A technique with ceramic paint is to use a toothpick to scrape away dry paint to allow for clean edges and this was the first piece I approached as such. I was reasonably pleased with the finished result, although I was a little light with my outer color and had some paint adhesion issues due to overhandling. My technique was much better on the second of the series, based on 1982's Loco-Motion, another game

I've written about here in the past. Everything this time was much bolder and totally accurate to the color differences in the game, right down to the different curve tiles being slightly different shades of blue. My text was a lot cleaner as well since I had a better idea of what I was doing. The only trade off is I paint very slowly, with this plate taking 84 hours of total painting time across many sessions. After that I decided I needed to take a break before moving on to 1983 and 1984, which while I have designs figured out, I have yet to begin on.

Konami classic arcade plates featuring 1981's Jungler (left), and 1982's Loco-Motion (right)

My favorite of all the video game themed ceramics that my wife painted is a very large serving tray that features StarTropics. My love for the NES game StarTropics is covered in this very issue and this piece is a perfect example of why the game is so appealing. The idea behind the plate was to have it appear as if it were a table top after main character Mike Jones returns from his adventure. The background is taken from the official maps included with an issue of Nintendo Power, as if they were a map that Mike used to chart his journey. Atop that are four photographs taken from the ending sequence of the game, which revisit key events Mike experiences and always seemed like they were intended to invoke feelings of vacation photos. These include Mike battling Octo the Huge, revealing Maxie at Ghost Village with a Rod of Sight, getting information from Peter with a worm, and Mike sticking bananas in his ears - the ending shot of the game and a line used throughout. Atop that is his Island Yo-yo, the primary weapon he uses in the game, shown as an original design we came up with featuring the Southern Cross constellation, which also factors greatly into the game's story. The back side of it is the color of parchment, along with the secret 747 MHz code that is presented when Mike's uncle's letter is dipped into water.

This StarTropics large serving plate was quite an undertaking, incorporating designs from printed illustrations, game screens, and original ideas

My wife also created a couple smaller pieces, including the first that began the idea of "hey, we can do video game themed ceramics." That would be a small bowl styled after Gottlieb's 1981 Black Hole pinball table. For the many years I owned a Galaxian cocktail table, the bowl sat atop it and was used to hold quarters for play. Another small piece was another gift she painted for me, a BurgerTime spoon rest featuring the enemy characters Mr. Hot Dog, Mr. Egg, and Mr. Pickle. That one probably gets the most use and has been in our kitchen ever since she completed it.

A spaceman disappearing into the Black Hole (left and center), and a spoon rest themed after BurgerTime (right)

She also completed a couple other pretty interesting retrogame themed ceramics projects that I may feature in the next issue. While I still have two Konami plates planned, both of us moved to painting more anime inspired stuff to take a bit of a break. However that too got stalled out due to temporary closures as a result of the pandemic. Things have been picking back up though and I hope to get going again myself soon. Have you created any retrogame themed physical craft or art projects? Let me know about them and maybe we'll feature them in the next issue!

Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap

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:

04/29/2022 - WEEK 260
Question: Theft of the bioweapon "Cassandra-G" is the catalyst for the events of what game?

05/06/2022 - WEEK 261
Question: The game that became Ms. Pac-Man was originally developed under what name?

05/13/2022 - WEEK 262
Question: What three game mech combat series began on Atari Jaguar?

05/20/2022 - WEEK 263
Question: What game series is known for generating in-game creatures from swapping out the game disc?

05/27/2022 - WEEK 264
Question: In The 7th Guest, what is the name of the seventh guest?

06/03/2022 - WEEK 265
Question: Ex-SOLDIER is the starting name for what popular RPG character?

06/10/2022 - WEEK 266
Question: Akuma first appeared in what Street Fighter game?

06/17/2022 - WEEK 267
Question: What was the first game designed by Sega legend Yu Suzuki?

06/24/2022 - WEEK 268
Question: Huckle and Lowly's Busiest Day Ever was a pack-in title with what game system?

Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode was filled with adult content but the Japanese box better portrays the game (left) Iron Soldier launched a mech combat series (right)

Answers:
Week 260 Answer: Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode (NES).
Week 261 Answer: Crazy Otto.
Week 262 Answer: Iron Soldier.
Week 263 Answer: Monster Rancher.
Week 264 Answer: Tad.
Week 265 Answer: Cloud Strife (Final Fantasy VII).
Week 266 Answer: Super Street Fighter II Turbo / Super Street Fighter II X: Grand Master Challenge.
Week 267 Answer: Champion Boxing for Sega SG-1000 (1984).
Week 268 Answer: Sega Pico.

All careers have to start somewhere and Yu Suzuki's began with Champion Boxing (left), Huckle and Lowly were the most common pack-in with Pico systems (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.

I think it's pretty cool to see many conventions, shows, and events starting to rebound from the current pandemic. Of course

many were discontinued outright and those that have returned have often done so with some concessions in place. Still, the ability for so many shows to return and continue to be solvent is excellent. This goes doubly for vendors and artists who make their livings traveling from show to show, including a few whom I know personally were in dire straits there for awhile. I plan on attending the California Extreme arcade and pinball show next month for the first time since 2019. They held a smaller interim show in 2021 at a different venue but I wasn't feeling up for it. This also means that my long-running California Extreme show report will return next issue and that's something I've really missed writing. If you are returning to the convention circuit I ask that you please be extra respectful of all attendees and convention staff, and be sure to support the vendors and artists who have been able to continue on.

The one constant of course is change, even if only in the margins. Things here are changing, with our next issue closing us out, but many components of the newsletter will remain in place. Regardless if it is completed by September or not, the conversion of the remaining non-standard Retrogaming Times Monthly issues into unified .PDF files will continue until the entire archive is uniform. If this occurs after September it will be announced via our social media channels, which will be maintained after we wrap here. The full and uniform .PDF archive is extremely important to my vision of maintaining a continuing record of the newsletter, that will always be available going forward. Another important thing I want to mention relating to our next issue is that it will be released on the 9th of September, rather than our usual date of the 1st. This is to allow additional editing time in the event that we get a larger than usual amount of article submissions. We may go to publication a little earlier than that but I'd rather prepare in advance over missing an expected release date.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on September 9th with our next issue, which will also be our final! 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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