

Prez Says: A Message from Boss Josh

rere we are again! It's time for the second Lissue of the Limited Run Games newsletter. This time, our newsletter is focused on one of my avorite types of games: The metroidvania!

Over the last (nearly) five years, we've released a ton of these games, and I have loved every one of them. One game, in particular, stands out to me: Shadow Complex. Shadow Complex came out the week before my mom died from leukemia. It helped me cope with her death, and without it. I'm not sure how much

the NES game, Zero can claim to be that

rarest of remakes: It captures the design and

Director Satoru Nishizawa says

essence of the original while sanding down

Blaster Master's core strength has always

been present; Zero simply reduces the barri-

ers to entry. "The most appealing thing about

Blaster Master is the ability to ride an all-ter-

rain battle tank, SOPHIA-III," Nishizawa says.

"Discovering dungeons as you explore areas

in the side-view maps, defeating the bosses that lurk within to obtain new power-ups for

you can explore thanks to those power-ups

the older release's rough edges.

more difficult the weeks after her death would have been. It was, and still is, an honor that we had the opportunity to release what is such an

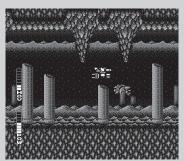
I hope that we have been able to release games that are important to you, too. If we haven't already, maybe we will in the future! Thank you for being a fan and supporter. Don't forget: Physical is forever!

CEO & Co-Founder, Limited Run Games

Refining a Classic with Blaster Master Zero

ater this year, Limited Run Games will ship Blaster Master Zero, Inti Creates's update to SunSoft's NES classic Blaster Master. It's a great game—and a fortuitous one. According to Inti Creates president/producer Takuya Aizu, Zero almost didn't happen.

"Around 2015, SunSoft inquired with us about developing a game that would be a reboot of *Blaster Master*," he says. "At the time, we were in the thick of the development cycle for Azure Striker Gunvolt 2." Despite this initial complication, things changed when Aizu happened upon a conversation between representatives from Nintendo and SOPHIA-III, then enjoying all the new places SunSoft at E3. Inti Creates's potential role in





Old and new. Left: The NES version. Right: Blaster Master Zero.

a Blaster Master reboot came up in conversation and "really piqued the Nintendo rep's interest," Aizu says. "They said that, given Inti Creates's track record with the Gunvolt games, if Inti were to develop and publish the game, it would turn out well."

Zero debuted as a Switch launch title, where it offered a bite-sized diversion for players who needed a break from the 100-hour-plus odyssey that was *The Legend* of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. With upgraded visuals, improved play mechanics, and countless quality-of-life improvements over

you just got." He also says the game's fundamental loop of progression, combat, and exploration embodies the appeal of the metroidvania format as a whole.

"More than simply 'defeat enemies and progress', what makes exploratory action games so appealing is the fact that you have to overcome obstacles and find ways out of increasingly difficult situations," he says. "It feels like the character and the players are growing and getting better together, which gives you the power and motivation to face even tougher challenges." LR

Ah, the exploratory action platformer, Is any genre finer? Your lovable editor (who has been falsely accused of creating the word "metroidvania") would argue there is not. Whatever your feelings, one thing is certain: Limited Run Games has published a bunch of the things. and they've all been incredible. This issue of Limited Run Club O' Fun is all about these addictive, nonlinear adventures. So sit back, grab a snack of tasty wall meat, and enjoy! Text/layout: Jeremy Parish

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Profiles in *Limited* Greatness: Joe Modzeleski



What's your role at Limited Run?

m a developer, I work on internet develpment and ports, and I assist our partners vith digital-to-physical conversions and oth er odds and ends of console engineering. How did you get your start here? partnered with Limited Run to release Super GunWorld 2 on PlayStation 4, and

Any non-gaming hobbies?

Music: I play drums well, guitar and piano badly. I like skateboarding, and paintball What's your all-time favorite game? f I just get one choice? Tetris.

What's your dream Limited Run release? A collector's edition bundle for *Mega Man* Legacy Collection 1 and 2.

Limited Run Games Community Spotlight: Skul

imited Run Games would be nothing without its communi- Switch collector, I've done my best to keep up with all their ty, and beginning this issue, we're turning the spotlight on Switch releases. It isn't easy, but I try! YOU by highlighting some of our amazing fans. Follow @LimitedRunGames on Twitter for your chance to shine!

LR: Hello! Please introduce yourself. SKUL: My name is Skul. I'm a YouTuber with around 250,000 subscribers (youtube.com/user/SkulShurtugalTCG). I've been playing video games as long as I can remember; I grew up when the GameBoy and Nintendo 64 were in their prime.

LR: What's your very first video game memory?

SKUL: My very first video game was a *Snoopy* game for MS-DOS. My dad bought the game for me to play when I was two. (I still have it!) My favorite gaming memory is my first time attending the 2015 Pokémon World Championships in Boston. Being surrounded by so many other Pokémon fans, and witnessing the best players in the world battling each other, filled me with energy and excitement.

LR: How did you start your Limited Run collection?

SKUL: The first Limited Run Game I bought was Drive! Drive! Drive! for PS4. I happened upon a YouTube documentary by My Life in Gaming that talked about the origins and early history of Limited Run, and I remained a LRG fan when the company began releasing Nintendo Switch games. As a

LR: What's your favorite Limited Run release?

SKUL: I love the *Shantae* series, and since it's so important for me to own physical copies of games whenever I can, I'm thrilled LRG was able to release the Shantae games. I wish it were possible for Limited Run to do another run of them so more people could experience the series.

LR: What is it you like about Shantae?

SKUL: I like the character herself. She's cute, she's strong, and her ability to transform into different animals by dancing is a unique gameplay mechanic that enhances the platforming. It feels like every time I pick up one of the Shantae games, I can't put it down, because I'm too addicted.

SKUL: Limited Run Games has always focused on quality titles. It seems every time a new game is announced, it's a

game that I've heard of, and more often than not a game with lots of positive buzz. I'd love to see more of that, for every platform possible. Heck, if releases for the upcoming Atari VCS were possible, I'd be happy to see that, too! LR

Right: Skul's Limited Run Games Switch collection (above and Limited Run Games PlayStation 4 collection (below





LizardCube on Wonder Boy's Gorgeous Revival

⚠ Ithough many gamers associate the term "metroidvania" with Nintendo consoles (after all, the word comes from *Metroid* and Castlevania, which both got their start on Nintendo Entertainment System), the genre has a long and storied history on many other platforms. Consider Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap, which debuted back in

ite ever since. In 2017, it finally received its due when LizardCube and Dotemu graced the 8-bit classic with a top-to-bottom overhaul under the supervision of director Omar Cornutt.

Cornutt, a lifelong Sega fan who helped launch definitive Sega resource smspower.org back in 1997, felt privileged to remake Wonder Boy III; the original game was a

childhood favorite. "In *The Dragon's Trap*, the adventure felt very elaboengine design, which is still running on an emulated, enhanced Master rate," he says. "We spent months exploring that world."

While the relatively limited reach of the Master System means Wonder Boy III never received the same unviersal acclaim as many of its NES-based contemporaries, Cornutt says the game holds timeless status among the Sega faithful. "The same way a generation of people would return to NES Zelda or Mario every once in a while, we Sega players returned to *The Dragon's Trap*. Because the game has so many weird secrets, it always feels like a bit of a mystery.

2017's *The Dragon's Trap* lays modernized visuals and music atop a recreation so faithful that players can switch between the remake and the original 8-bit game at any time—and even use old passwords to restore progress. Not only is the world layout the same, so is the combat system, as well as the curse that allows Wonder Boy

to transform into animals to perform certain tasks. Cornut admits that sprucing up the visuals while preserving the underlying game was a difficult, trial-and-error process. "Sometimes the initial draft of [a new] animation would compromise playability," he says. "That's where I would suggest adjustments, sometimes tweaking the animation timings 1988 on Sega's Master System console and has lived on as a fan-favor- myself. We made dozens of subtle tweaks to ensure the gameplay felt right while not compromising animations."

Despite these hurdles, the fluid, hand-drawn animation wasn't the most challenging improvement seen in The Dragon's Trap. Cornut says the widescreen view proved to be the significant technical undertaking: "We had to modify the original game to support a 16:9 screen ratio, which had lots of knockon effects on the level design and the original game

System. We spent months staring at and hacking Z80 assembly code to make all the little changes necessary for widescreen and 60Hz play."

One thing that didn't cause any headaches for Cornut and his team was approvals from Wonder Boy's creators. "Once [Ryuichi] Nishizawa agreed on the direction we were taking on the project, he pretty much let us do our own thing." That isn't to say LizardCube had carte blanche, however. "We asked if we could add Asha from Monster World IV as the female character for the game," says Cornut. "His answer was that the world from *Dragon's Trap* and *MW4* didn't overlap, so she shouldn't be in the game." In her place, the team came up with Wonder Girl, who plays exactly like her male counterpart—one of the many little improvements that make Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap one of the finest video game remakes of all time. LR

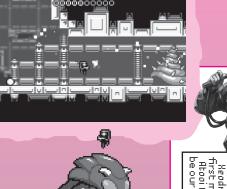


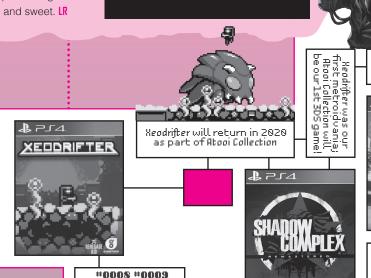
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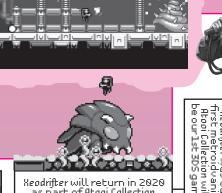
peleased in July 2016, Limited Run Games's very first metroidvania release helped kick off our nonlinear journey through game publishing with a fittingly simple take on the genre. Not only does Xeodrifter draw from the 8-bit aesthetics of developer Renegade Kid's earlier hit *Mutant Mudds*, it also has a similarly

straightforward design. Xeodrifter's map is broken into four different worlds, and players bounce back and forth between them as they acquire new gear. Sin ple and sweet. LR







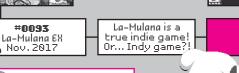














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A COMPLEX QUEST

Toundational indie metroidvania. Shadov Complex was also a foundational release for Limited Run Games: Our first title to hail from a major publisher like Epic. Clever

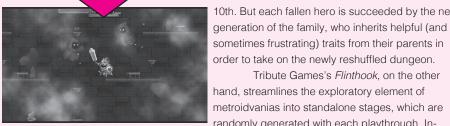


modernizing the structure and power-up sequence of Nintendo's Super Metroid with a cover-based combat system (think Gears of War), Shadow Complex single-handedly jump-started the modern-day metroidvania trend. Set inside a near-future military base, the game's premise justifies its power-up progression chain (the whole place is stuffed with experimental weapons like jet packs and foam rifles, after all) while also setting it apart from other metroidvanias, which tend to take place in advanced sci-fi worlds or mystical fantasy realms. LR

EVER-CHANGING JOURNEYS

Indie developers love to dabble in a few genres besides the metroidvania, and the roquelike ranks right up at the top. Named for 1980 PC classic Rogue, these games revolve around randomness and unpredictability. Sounds like the polar opposite of the metroidvania, right? That hasn't stopped a few intrepid developers from mashing up the two formats, though, and the results are often great.

Cellar Door Games's Rogue Legacy mak its intentions clear right there in its title: It's a platforn action game seemingly patterned after Castlevania, but it also places heavy emphasis on failure in the tradition of all roguelikes. That's where the "legacy" comes into the picture. Players aren't likely to get too far in their first outing... or their second... or the

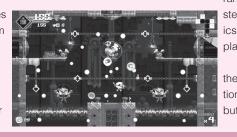


order to take on the newly reshuffled dungeon. Tribute Games's Flinthook, on the other nand, streamlines the exploratory element of etroidvanias into standalone stages, which are andomly generated with each playthrough. Instead, it places its emphasis on grappling mechancs, turning out levels that are as much acrobatic

th. But each fallen hero is succeeded by the next

What these two games have in common is he way they demonstrate the importance of innovation. Everyone may know how metroidvanias work, t the genres still has the potential to surprise. LR

ygrounds as they are labyrinths.



DANCING TO SHANTAE'S BEAT

ack in 2002, before the word "metroidvania" Deven existed—back when you could count new exploratory platform action game releases on one hand—our friends at WayForward Technologies kept the free-roaming home fires burning with a charming little adventure called Shantae. It took a while for the rest of the world to notice... probably because if shipped for Game Boy Color a year after everyone

had shifted their attention to Game Boy Advance. D'oh! Once Shantae returned with 2010's Risky's Revenge for Nintendo DS, though, she was back to stay—just like the genre.

Limited Run Games has published two *Shantae* titles to date: The Director's Cut of Risky's Revenge for PlayStation 4, and its sequel The Pirate's Curse for PS4 and Switch. Both games look a lot alike on the surface, as heroine Shantae runs, jumps, and uses her ponytail as a deadly weapon against monsters while exploring the world of Sequin Land. Both feature gorgeous artwork, peppy music by Jake Kaufman,

narky humor, and a definite, playful hint of naughtiess. Yet look beyond these broad strokes and the o adventures work quite differently.

In Risky's Revenge, Shantae is a half-genie ero sworn to protect Scuttle Town, meaning she can transform into different forms ranging from a nermaid to an elephant in order to access otherwise unreachable parts of the game world. The Pi-

rate's Curse, however, sees her disempowered. Stripped of her magical skills, Shantae is forced to rely on pirate gear to extend her capabilities instead. It all works out more or less the same either way (there's lots of combat and lots of hunting around for handy secrets and skill upgrades) but the differences give each game its own distinct flavor. The Shantae games neatly embody everything that makes metroidvanias so appealing: Action, skill growth, discovery, unique weapons, and interesting worlds to explore, all playing out in a variety of different ways. Shantae's one of the originals. Here's to many more years of adventures. LR

A DASH OF ADVENTURE

Nov. 2018

flint Hook was our first Switch

y far one of the most popular metroidvania Preleases in Limited Run Games history, Salt and Sanctuary brings a little bit of the Dark Souls vibe to the genre without leaning too heavily on that (or any other) franchise. Created by Ska Studios—which is to say, designer James Silva and artist Michelle Juett Silva—this is the definition of a passion project. Salt and Sanctuary builds off Ska's earlier, combat-heavy

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works (most notably 2009 brawler *The Dishwasher*) while expanding the action out into the larger, more ambitious metroidvania format.

Area II:

In keeping with the traditions of the genre, Salt and Sanctuary is set in an enigmatic realm defined by extensive lore and backstory that unfolds slowly as players unlock more of the world. As with other games in this style, the addictive nature of opening up more areas to explore and new powers to bring to bear against the malevolent forces that lurk within those spaces is a major motivating factor for players. But, much as in the best Souls-inspired works, unraveling the enigmatic story behind



the game's world proves to be just as intruiging as exploring the realm itself. While the player's mission at the outset is simply to locate a missing princess, the eerie island they end up trapped on holds far more significance than the political maneuverings of the outside world. As you explore the island, you discover how it came to be created, what it means in the grand scheme of things, and how the player's

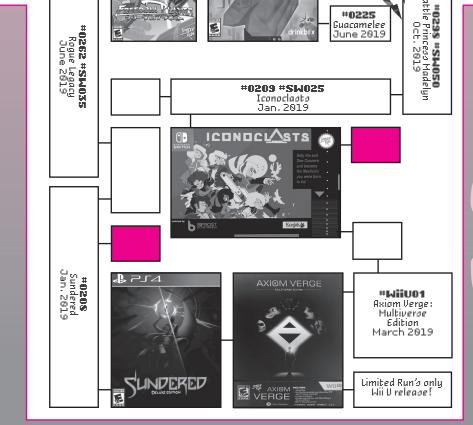
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own quest factors into the otherworldly saga at hand.

Of course, none of this would really matter if the game weren't any fun to play. Salt and Sanctuary isn't a casual pick-up-and-play experience; it poses a steep challenge to players more or less from the outset. It's the kind of game that demands a real investment from players—not just of time, but also of effort. But in return, it also offers all the tools players need to succeed, including expansive customization options and responsive controls. It's a rare work that fires on all cylinders, and it absolutely deserves a place among the all-time metroidvania greats. LR



You'll have to join up for the journey ahead to complete this release

map yourself!

EXPLORE THESE RUMORS

• Following on from last issue, it sounds like more Star Wars games are in the works—including some beloved classics, and new options for playing old favorites!

Area IV: 2019

- Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World drama continues! After we erased the game from history, is it possible that our timeline meddling may have changed the past by causing it to be reborn as an exploratory platformer?
- Roguelikes and metroidvania have proven to be a surprisingly compatible combo, and we have it on good authority that Limited Run fans will have the chance to see another great genre mash-up for themselves this year.
- GunWorld is back, baby! Maybe? We hear GunWorld 3 is on the way... and this time, it sounds like President Eagle has decreed it must be a metroidvania. Amazing if true!
- Shantae for Game Boy Color was the original indie metroidvania. Too bad the game costs so much these days. Sure would be nice if someone could change that.