

VGHF opens free online access to 1,500 classic game mags, 30K historic files

In the intro video, Salvador talks about looking through their archives and stumbling on the existence of *Pretzel Pete*, a little-remembered early 3D driving/platform game. Despite its extreme obscurity, the game is nonetheless mentioned in the 1999 E3 catalog and an old issue of PC Gamer, both of which are now memorialized forever in the VGHF digital archives.

Getting this kind of obscure information into a digitized, easily searchable form was “a lot harder than it sounds,” Salvador said. Beyond getting archival-quality scans of the magazines themselves (a process aided by community efforts like RetroMags and Out of Print Archive), extracting the text from those pages proved difficult for OCR software designed for the high-contrast, black-text-on-white-background world of business documents. “If you’ve ever read a ’90s video game magazine, you know how crazy those magazine layouts get,” Salvador said.

[embedded content]

VGHF Head Librarian Phil Salvador talks about the digital library launch.

To get around that problem, Salvador said VGHF Director of Technology Travis Brown spent months developing a specially designed text-recognition tool that “handles even the toughest magazine pages with no problem” and represents “a significant leap in quality over what we had before.” That means it’s easier than ever to find 81 separate mentions of *Clu Clu Land*

from across dozens of different issues with a single search.

Unfortunately, the vast wealth of video game information on offer here does not include direct, playable access to retail video games, which libraries can't share digitally due to the limitations of the DMCA. But the VGHF and other organizations "continue to challenge those copyright rules every three years," leaving some hope that digital libraries like this may soon include access to the source material being discussed.

<https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2025/01/vghf-opens-free-online-access-to-1500-classic-game-mags-30k-historic-files/>