

PAX Prime 2015: Day Zero

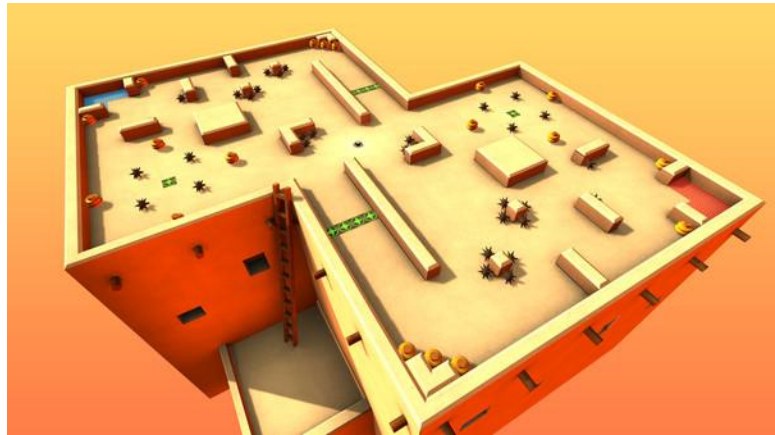
(I did a lot of stuff before PAX even officially started)

By: Frankie Godoy

This year's PAX Prime started especially early. Lots of events sprung up a day before the convention even started, and great events they were, from Microsoft to Nintendo. Prepare yourself for an article somewhere between a travel blog and actual news coverage.

After checking into my hotel, I only had a few minutes to leave my belongings before running off for a bus at the Washington State Convention Center. Microsoft had complimentary buses to their campus to check out some of the games coming to their console in the next year. Lots of enthusiasts crowded in the visitor center just waiting to get their hands on what surprises Microsoft had in store. Once the convention staff opened the initial floodgates, we were still closed off to the games but welcome to divulge in a conference room filled with pizza and free soda while we waited. After eating and talking games with some people there, I walked into the large room lined with televisions in colorful frames, showcasing the playable indie game within.

The first game I played was *Clusterpuck '99*, described by the developer as “a combination of soccer, hockey, and pinball.” You play as a round paddle from a top-down perspective, coordinating with your teammates to get the puck into your opponent's goal. The game can be played with up to eight people on the same console, a perk of the Xbox One few

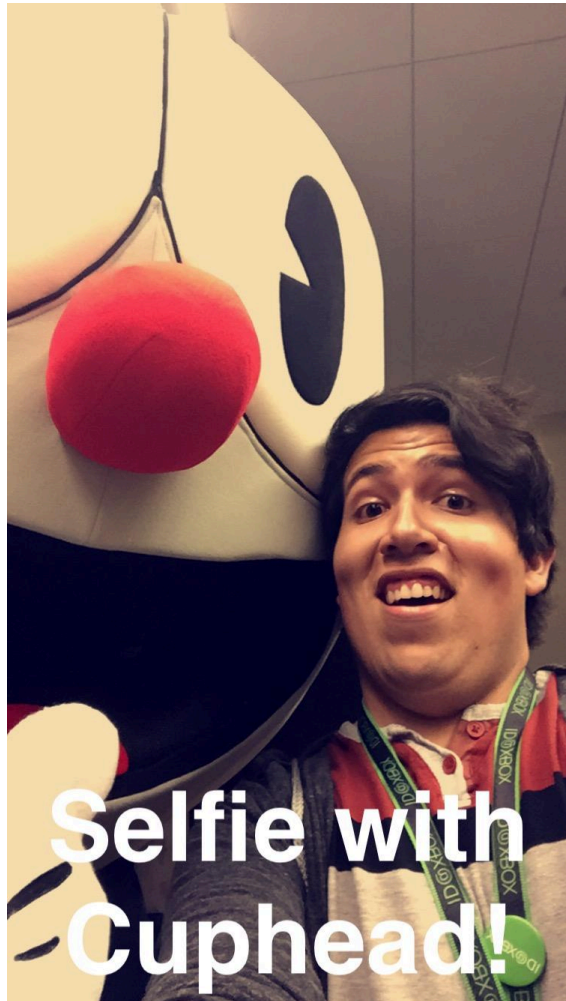


developers have taken advantage of. Playfields were divided into two sections: serious and arcadey. The serious maps were designed in simple symmetrical forms for even play amongst both teams. The arcadey maps had different designs as well as other elements thrown in the mix, including bumpers, spikes, and speed boosts. While the paddles moved like tanks, a speed boost triggered with the A button lead to a nimble launch in any direction. Movement speed could have been increased slightly, but otherwise the game was good pure fun. You can find *Clusterpuck '99* on Steam now and on an Xbox One near you September 9th.

Next up is a 3D physics-based brawler *Swordy* by the studio Frogshark based out of New Zealand. The game pits together up to eight brawlers in a fantasy arena. Players spawn on a pedestal in the center of the demo arena which also displays how many lives each brawler has left. Scattered around the battlefield are various weapons and shields, giving oneself a better chance to be the last fighter standing. The game controls as a sort of hybrid between *Gang Beasts* and *Octodad*, for comparison. You need to swing around the limbs of your fighter to attack others, creating physics-based calamity and hilarity with each death and showdown. As long as additional arenas are available in the full release, you can look forward to another fun brawler on your console soon.

Taking cues from *Lethal League*, the upcoming *Gunsport* is a 2D cyberpunk shooter-esque version of volleyball. The game plays purposely tank-like with very obtuse controls. Aiming is controlled via the triggers, while jumping and shooting are on the A and X buttons respectively. Though the developer claimed players will adjust to the controls in the long run, they didn't help during my time with the demo. I still had an enjoyable time with the game, but be warned that the strange controls will take some getting used to once the game launches next year.

Also available for play was the next game by *Sword & Sorcery* and *Super Time Force's* developer Capy Games, named *Below*. The game is a beautiful rogue-like action-adventure; like *Zelda* with permadeath. The main adventure involves the player adventuring further and further down a cavern finding different supplies to craft into items that assist you along your adventure. The room I played in was very loud, which was a shame because this is a game that deserves to be played with a great sound system or headphones to listen to the wonderful atmospheric soundtrack. Every sound has a very characteristic echo behind it to make the player feel that they really are in a large cavern. The game clearly took some influences from the twin-stick shooter genre, being able to move independently from the direction with which you are facing for more strategic and involved combat with the enemies in the cavern. During the demo I had run out of bandages to prevent my character from bleeding out, leading to me constantly eat healing items to stay alive. As I walked around, drops of blood outlined the path I had taken through several rooms. My character's adventure ended while descending an icy cliff. After my death, I awoke at a camp fire I had lit during my journey down, leading me to think that this rogue-like definitely has an ending, but one that will be a difficult adventure to conclude. *Below* is set tentatively to launch sometime in what remains of 2015.



Selfie with Cuphead!

Now for the game I'm sure everyone is looking forward to: *Cuphead*! This game is undoubtedly one of the most difficult games I've played in a long time, reminding me of the first time I played *Contra* or *Mega Man*. The game controls flawlessly, something necessary for the precision needed to excel with this 2D shoot 'em up. Though I'm unsure if this was only for the demo build, each world is separated by an overworld where the player guides around the titular Cuphead to the different boss battles. The demo was played entirely cooperatively with Cuphead's friend--or brother, or something--Mugman. The co-op gameplay adds in some depth to each scenario. Players can revive their downed partner with a well timed jump on their ghost before it floats away off-screen. Fighting bosses takes a couple tries as each one plays out in various phases that have their own patterns and attacks to memorize if you want to stand any chance at defeating them. The art is amazing, appearing as if you are playing a cartoon from out of the twenties and thirties. While the developer says there will be some more platforming levels in the game (he was on-hand to speak about the game) the game will

mostly consist of boss levels. One platforming level was available in the demo where the players could face off against bees inside their hive, jumping on platforms to defeat them. I also encountered a comical bug--a broken aspect of the game--in my playthrough involving Cuphead freezing in an animation when both players activate their super attacks at the same time. Once I was stuck firing my finger gun in the opposite direction as the boss, the other stuck in a jump. Some bugs are to be expected in a demo, but otherwise the game ran perfectly. You can expect *Cuphead* on Xbox One and Windows 10 sometime in the future.

(Full disclosure: I backed the following game on Kickstarter because I liked the ex-Irrational dev's behind the game, as well as thinking that this project is something worthwhile of playing. So you can take my perception about the game with the smallest grain of salt.)

The Flame in the Flood is the first game from The Molasses Flood, a team of six ex-developers at Irrational Games. In the game you play a girl trying to survive as she makes her way down-river to...something. She is accompanied by her dog as they ride a raft to different islands

along the way. The game can be described as a Southern-fried survival game with permadeath. You have to find supplies to craft items to assist in your survival, as well as find shelter in your battle against the primary enemy in the game: nature. Your ailments and statuses are gauged simply in your trek. Fall into the water? +1 wet. Stay in the rain too long without drying off? +1 sick. Accidentally walk into that fire that was supposed to keep you warm? +1 on fire (this actually happened to the player just before me. The developer at the booth got a good laugh.) This crowdfunded game is shaping up to be a great game when it launches on Steam and Xbox One early access later this year.

Other games of note at the event were *We Happy Few*, the first-person roguelike adventure; *Afro Samurai 2*, sequel to the 2009 action game and the anime series; *Pit People*, the fourth game by the creators of *Castle Crashers* and *Battleblock Theater*; *The Behemoth*; and *Halo 5* (more on that later.)

Once the event started wrapping up, Microsoft had several buses lined up ready to take people back to the convention center; however, catering to the enthusiast gamers, there was one bus that took people (including me) to Nintendo's "Nindies at Night" event at the EMP in Seattle. At the event, lines prevented me from playing too many games, such as the newly announced *F-Zero*



spiritual successor *FAST: Racing Neo*. I did manage to get up close and personal through a thick plexiglass case with the new *Shovel Knight* amiibo announced at the event (pictured left). The amiibo is for the new Plague Knight update to *Shovel Knight* coming soon to all platforms where the game is available, enabling an exclusive co-op mode for the WiiU version of the game. Also available at the showcase was the platforming racer *Runbow*, a game that focuses on it's use of color to mix up it's fast-paced gameplay. Other games at the event include *The Binding of Isaac: Rebirth*, *Kerbal Space Program*, *Hive Jump*, and *Super Mario Maker*.

Thus, this concludes my adventures during Day Zero (or Zed, depending on where you're from) of PAX Prime 2015. I'll continue posting about the rest of the event through the week about other things I played and events I went to!

Oh, and if you made it this far, I'll be giving away **Rainbow Six: Siege beta codes** on Twitter periodically until the beta goes live, so feel free to follow me @FrankieGodoy and keep a lookout!

Frankie is one half of the podcast "Word on the Street" that you can listen to weekly for a dose of video games, nerdy shenanigans, and occasional in-depth conversation on the meaning of life.