World's Oldest Time-Waster? Lunar Lander

by Grant Robertson on July 20, 2009 at 04:00 PM

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It won't win any beauty contests, and it has a pretty weak storyline unless you have a magnificent imagination, but Lunar Lander may well be one of the oldest time-wasters in existence.

High-school student Jim Storer, obsessed with the Apollo missions -- and obviously inspired by what he'd witnessed along with the rest of the world, 40 years ago today -- took his inspiration to class in the fall of 1969. The result was a very simple text-based game for his school's Digital Equipment Corp. PDP-8. "It had 8 Teletypes, a small hard drive, and 12KB of main memory, where 8KB was used by the system and 4KB time shared by the users."

Storer, can lay claim to the first primitive game but, what about the graphical Lunar Lander we've all known and loved on one platform or another? DEC consultant Jack Burness developed the first known graphical Lunar Lander as a demo project for the DEC GT40 console in 1973. It certainly wasn't the first video game, but it definitely holds its place in video game history.

Feel like wasting a little time day-dreaming about the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing? Flash versions of Lunar Lander are easy to find, but I especially love this one -- which is incredibly true to the Atari arcade version I remember as a kid wandering the halls at the Cumberland Science Museum.

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