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Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, and welcome back to Retorgaming Times Monthly. I apologize for the lateness of this issue, but with the holidays and everything going on in my life, I barely had time to work on the newsletter. But here it is. Better late (and good) than never, right? Hopefully this won't happen too many times in the future.

Anyway, hopefully you've recovered from eating Thanksgiving leftovers enough to enjoy what we have for you in this special holiday issue.

Retro Collection Review: Taito Legends

by Adam King

This month we have another collection of classic arcade games, this time courtesy of Taito. The title *Taito Legends* is more than appropriate; Taito has created many legendary arcade games, such as *Space Invaders*, *Phoenix*, *Bubble Bobble*, and many others that helped shape the arcade industry. *Taito Legends* was released in Europe by Empire Interactive, and was brought over to the U.S. by Sega, so we can once again enjoy more classic games on our new consoles. This review covers the PlayStation 2 version, but *Taito Legends* is also available on the XBox and PC formats.

First I need to point something out; unlike most of the other classicgaming collections, this disc is actually comes as a CD-Rom instead of a DVD-Rom. My guess is Taito didn't feel like they needed the DVD format for this collection. However some of you PS2 owners may have trouble getting this loaded. It usuall works after a few tries, though, so keep trying.

Now in this collection we get 29 games, which are a mixture of classic and obscure titles. Naturally *Space Invaders* is front and center, as well as its two sequels, *Space Invaders Part 2* and *Return of the Invaders*. The rest of the games are: *Battle Shark*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Colony 7*, *Continential Circus*, *Electric Yo-Yo* (basically like the 2600 homebrew *Elk Attack*), *Elevator Action*, *Exzisis*, *Gladiator*, *Great Swordsman*, *Jungle Hunt* (sorry, no *Jungle King* here), *The New Zealand Story* (you NES gamers know this game as *Kiwi Kraze*), *The Ninja Kids*, *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Operation Wolf*, *Phoneix*, *Plotting* (aka *Flipull*), *Plump Pop*, *Rainbow Islands*, *Rastan*, *Space Gun*, *Super Qix*, *Thunderfox*, *Tokio*, *Tube It*, *Volified*, and *Zoo Keeper*.

The first thing you'll notice when you boot up the disc is the interface. The menu screens aren't cluttered up like other discs; the menus are clean and clear. You get a simple white-on-green color scheme which works pretty well. The main menu has small thumbnails of the title screens of each game. When yourest the cursor on one of the titles, you get a shot of the original arcade cabinet, a short description, and it even displays the top score of each game as well as the initials (if available). A nice tune plays in the background as well. Once you select a game you can set several options, including difficulty, lives, and more. Once you set your options the game loads up in a few seconds. The loading screen simply shows a space invader moving its arms and it's fun to watch.

The games themselves play very well and match up to the arcade originals almost perfectly, visual-wise and audio-wise. Most of the games play very well with the PS2 controller. However the shooting games (*Operation Wolf*, *Operation Thunderbolt*, and *Space Gun*) are another story. The arcade coin-

ops originally used light guns for controllers. Here you get a cursor and you move it around with the D-pad or the analog sticks. It works okay but not very well. Also to start each game you must first push SELECT to "drop in a coin" then push L1 to start the game. I'll admit it does replicate the arcade, but it's a feature I could have done without. Also many of the games have unlimited continues, which cuts down on the challenge, but usually your score resets in most of them, which helps offset that.

As far as bonus features go, there isn't too much, but what's there is decent. You can look at the original sales flyers, and you can even watch videos of interviews with some of the creators of the games. Also you can save your high-scores automatically when you exit a game, and there's a separate scoretable for each difficulty setting to keep the playing field even. Please note that you can't save scores in a Custom setting.

As for the game library itself, the games range from fantastic to forgettable. Space Invaders, Bubble Bobble, Elevator Action, Jungle Hunt and others are still fun and addicting as ever. Zookeeper is a blast, and it's great to finally play this on a home system. Other games like Gladiator and Rastan also offer good playthroughs. Also there are a few omissions that should have been included. One title that comes to mind is the original Qix. Why Taito included the silly sequel and not the original is beyond me. Other titles like Arkanoid would have rounded out the package nicely. But what's there is good enough.

So *Taito Legends* proves to be another great classicgaming collection. While the shooter games could have been done better, overall there's a lot of old school fun to be had. And the \$20 budget price tag can't be beat; that's less than \$1 a game. So if you're up for zapping invaders and bursting bubbles once again, don't hesitate to pick this disc up.

ColecoNation

by [Nathan Kozlowski](#)

Astro Invader

- programmer:** Scott Huggins
- publisher:** AtariAge
- developer:** Stern
- packaging:** Joe Kollar
- release:** 06.2005
- rom size:** 32k
- players:** 1-2
- controller:** Joystick



Making its debut at the Oklahoma Video Game Expo in 2005, Astro Invader is a translation of the Stern arcade game. It was originally released in Japan in 1979 with the title "Kamikaze." The Leijac Corporation (later know as Konami) licensed it to Stern in 1980 and Astro Invader became the company's first release. The Arcadia 2001 is the only other console known to have a version of the game and had a non-U.S. release in 1982. Brian Miller set the official arcade world record at 39,880 in 1983.

In Astro Invader, Earth has gotten in trouble and once again your its only hope (that crazy planet). This time around you've got to deal with suicidal aliens who attack you by killing themselves. Plus, there's the saucers that menacingly descend downwards and the mother ship that you never fight. However, if you're thinking that this is going to be a cakewalk then you'd be very wrong. Those crazy invaders are going to give you a couple of migraines before it's all said and done.

The game is set in some kind of galactic arena where the top half of the screen is a network of columns that the alien invaders fill up before they attack. The Stern mother ship (an indirect clue of Stern's desire for world domination?) sends out the aliens at a progressively faster pace the longer the battle lasts. When the aliens fall, they use their patented "splat" attack to destroy you. While they prove deadly if you're near them when they make impact, the real threat are the saucers. Regardless of where you are on the screen, if the saucer reaches the bottom then you're done.

You may be wondering right about know if those pansy invaders are ever going to fight like a man and try and shoot you. Well, the answer's "no." They must have left their lasers at home, because all they do is fall to their deaths (hence the original title, Kamikaze). Due to the invader's characteristics, the game has a very different feel than most space shooters like Space Invaders and Galaxian. Strategy and timing is more essential in Astro Invader than a quick trigger figure. In fact, frustrating as it may seem, you'll never even get to shoot the majority of the alien invaders. Most of the time you'll be dodging them as you attempt to take out the descending saucers.

Astro Invader proves to be a tough challenge and very difficult to master. A sure sign of a tough game is a low arcade high score and this has one of the lowest around. Consider yourself a pro if you can

cade graphics for the game's
spect of AtariAge produced
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strategic twist, then get Astro
something with an outer space
re for babies, then go play
s put together a fine product

tion.com for all your

The Many Faces of . . . Mountain King

by Alan Hewston

vic 20 port. 'Twould have been targeted for late 2005 - which places of Reviews where there none found me recently, cart - and cheap on ebay. Good out - he didn't have the cart 2005 - just in time before the time to review this text - hope

h so many choices of which
s promising, but you only have
n to remind you not to wander
to find the Crown (not really
ect 1,000 points in diamonds,
llect diamonds by jumping into
onds are worth 10 or 25
treasure chests are worth 250
l. After collecting 1,000 pts,
ited time (unlimited in level 1)
ver by collecting another
ke the FS to the Crown
ovides you entrance into the
flames. You also only have so
You kneel down to get the
to the top as you try to reach
aster and if you make it, the
ompletes the level and you start
ats and the Spider.

a few obstacles on the way. nests or are out patrolling the be very annoying and will contact you, they take the FS you have nothing of value, but only see them with the tting off the diamonds. Along next meal. First time he runs ve and eat you on the next e is rather dark, you do have a nests, Skull Spirit, FS, Black own a wee bit as you cannot

collect diamonds while the light is on. The light only shines in the direction (L/R) you are facing. But you can do this while climbing, falling, leaping etc. If you do not find the FS in time (and later when time is running out), perpetual flames will spring up where the FS was located (and probably filling all the locations where the FS hides). This adds insult to injury as it makes it near impossible to get to the top in time. The map of the cave is the same each level, which helps in some ways, but make it more of a memory game as well. I think I'd prefer an option to have random maps - then have maybe 6 different maps.

Arcade: None

Home versions - Concept by Robert W. Matson. First programmed & licensed by E.F. Dreyer

- Atari 2600 (1983 CBS - by Ed Salvo) - 1983 CBS
- Commodore 64 (1983 Beyond - by Douglas D. Dragin)
- Atari 8 bit (1982 CBS - by E.F. Dreyer)
- Atari 5200 (1982 CBS - by E.F. Dreyer)
- Commodore Vic 20 (1983 Beyond - by Jim Stolzenfeld)
- Colecovision (1984 Sunrise)

Many screenshots for Mountain King can be found at:

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/mountain-king/screenshots>

To learn about exploring the hidden areas of Mountain King on the 2600 visit:

<http://www.angelfire.com/mt/mountkingatari2600/>

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a choice of starting at any of the first 8 difficulty levels; a pause <2600> and then to continue, simply press the fire button; the same map for all levels <varies slightly with each version>; the height of each mine is about 32 floors, whereas the width is about 64 (diamond) spaces wide <2600 only half as detailed 32 spaces, 16 diamonds>; the map/floors wraparound from left to right; 10 randomly hidden treasure chests; thieving gray bats who can come out of the treasure chests <2600 & maybe Vic 20? >; harmless black bats <2600> that are visible only by the flashlight, but can be seen blocking reflections from the diamonds; random locations for the FS each time; falling to a lower height temporarily stuns you, and you cannot move until you stand erect again; while you collect diamonds, the amount required for the FS is displayed <2600> which decreases until you have collected your 1,000 points - whereupon a dancing flame icon <2600> appears at the screen bottom to alert you that you are worthy to find the FS; then that display shows the bonus points available for finding the FS will be displayed <2600>, which decrease until they reach the lower limit; you'll hear the FS song play louder (a very unique and clever game play element) as you get closer to it from any direction; use your flashlight or look for a brief flame flicker which reveals the actual location of the FS; once acquired it engulfs you in the spirit, and you gain one minute of time to your air supply; this FS aura only lasts so long before you had better have offered it to the Skull Spirit, or you must acquire the FS again; if you found the FS or run out of time looking for it, you immediately begin collecting diamonds toward the next 1,000 points; offer the FS to the Skull spirit to gain entrance (ladder) to the Crown chamber; kneel to put the crown on your head and exit the chamber, whereupon the music will begin again as you race to the top of the mountain; the music plays faster each time it cycles through, and then it ends and you must start over again; if you do not make it, or the crown is stolen by the Gray Bats, it will vanish and return to its chamber for you to try again; earn bonus points when you get the FS and Crown; if you reach the top of the mountain the screen flashes honoring your triumph; you continue to hear the music play out until completion <2600 quick jingle>, all the while your score increases relative to the time left in the music; when there are only 59 seconds of air left, your timer turns red; if you are standing atop the mountain when time expires, you'll gain a one time (per level) bonus of 1 additional minute of action; making contact with a perpetual flame, being eaten by the spider or running out of time ends the game; treasure chests are replaced (re-hidden) provided that the FS is not available; FS is hidden in a new location each time; the Spider & web are invisible on levels 7+; the end of the game screen changes <2600> to provide a tally of the number of times you collected the FS and Crown and your score, and any time remaining; If you really want a challenge playing this game, try the option <2600> to make the floors invisible - although still partially visible via the flash light; besides the flickering flames, excellent animation of you getting up after falling down, the spider walking and some details inside the crown chamber, there are trees <2600> on the top levels of the mountain. Coming out just before "the crash", no version is very common, which is too bad as this is quite a treat and different than most games.



Just in time I acquired 3 more carts - otherwise these faces would NOT have been that MANY.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (40)

My first reaction was frustration at the slow speed of jumping and falling as well as the uncertainty of (where you need to be to make) each jump and even worse, the killer spots that LOOK like you can jump and yet you can NOT make it - BONK! Jumping here is so completely different than the other versions, but you will just have to get used to it - or you'll quit playing right away. And then with no pause, the Addictiveness would be Pretty Good (7). However, all of these penalties get washed away with the intriguing concept of exploring the secret areas. If you, like me, want to come back and play the game for what more lies hidden inside, then Addictiveness is enjoyable (8).



Minor note that the collision detection with the bats seems inconsistent. Gameplay is nearly the same as other versions, and overall very good (7). The biggest difference is in the size and number of diamonds relative to the mountain. There are only about one half a many spaces in the mountain and only half of those have diamonds. The bats are never a risk to come out of the treasure chests, there is not a 1 minute bonus time added if the timer hits zero when you are at the top of the mountain, and every game ends suddenly without warning or a recount of your achievements. Now, there are other changes due to the limitations of the 2600 - but they all work well and I did not penalize them. Once you collect 1,000 pts, the diamonds are then quiet when collected. This was because the music replaces the diamond sound effects. In some ways this might be an improvement as you now have the missing audio cue to alert you that you are now worthy to search for the FS. Then, even better, if you run out of time looking for the FS, you'll suddenly start hearing those diamonds cha-ching again. I think that this additional audio cue or lack thereof actually helps. Next, once the FS is found, all the diamonds (& Treasure Chests) disappear - boo hiss - right? This probably makes room in memory (bank switching?) for the bats to become active on the screen. Sure you cannot collect diamonds for points, but the bulk of the points in this game are earned from the FS and Crown bonus, and the primary purpose of the diamonds is to earn the FS and the primary purpose of the bats is to try to steal the FS or Crown. So missing the diamonds, when you no longer need them is a fine compromise to activate your only enemies, the bats. Note: Thus there are no bats inside the Treasure chests either. Graphics are pretty good (7) with fine color variety, graphic variety, decent detail and very good animation. There is no multi-color. Sound is pleasant (8) with the great music but lacking any introductory or demo music, or indication when the game is over. The range of the FS music is among the shortest, also a slight drawback. Controls are perfect (10) but lots of practice is required to learn where you need to be to successfully complete a jump. Overall a pretty darn good 2600 game - just no medal here.

Have Nots: Colecovision (41)

My first reaction was frustration that there is not enough time to reach the top of the mountain. Even on level 1, an experienced player has very little margin for success. This was a heavy penalty taking it right out of the medal race. Add some nasty bats and play level 8 and you'll probably never make it. Gameplay has all the options and mostly complete (8). Similar to the 260, there is no bonus time awarded at the top of the mountain and no achievements shown when the game is over. Addictiveness is very fun (8) with the pause <*>. As mentioned this is the hardest version and so adding more difficulty is wasted. Thus it is probably appropriate they did not



provide the invisible floors option here. There seem to be fewer chests and less random FS locations, but I did not deduct - even if this is a correct observation. There are a lot of traps and cutout that are obviously impossible jumps, but just not needed, unless they were an added, harder option to choose. Graphics are of good quality (8) with good color variety and more graphic details and animation than the 2600, plus some twinkle of the diamonds. Sound is very nice (8) but short of the medal winners in no sound for the FS grabbed, no demo or intro music, getting stunned by the spider, and a little limited range of the FS music. Controls score (9). If both controllers were active then I'd score this a 10 as you'd then be able to start, pause and control effectively (i.e. with an Atari stick). The CV stick alone does not cut it here as is usually the case when more than 4 (6) precise directions are required. So too the point away here instead of in addictiveness. My best solution is to start, pause, then swap joysticks and then press the fire button to continue.

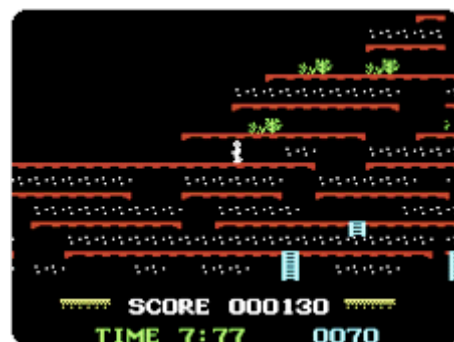
Bronze Medal: Atari 5200 & Vic 20 (42)

Atari 5200

My first reaction was besides the controls, this is the same game as the Atari 8 bit, so see all the details and scoring below. I neither saw nor heard any differences, but there could be minor ones. I really did not play this much as the Controls were lousy - I scored them a (7) without really try hard enough. I could not make it be precise in 6 directions even with the Wico stick. Then, the Masterplay Interface was corrupted by some other signal (noise) - unless my MI is going bad - but it works OK on other 5200 games. The pause is the and to skip the demo, hit a second time.

Vic 20

My first reaction was overwhelmed by the incredible high speed of this game, whereas we're already impressed that this game was even released on the Vic. But then this speed is the drawback as well. Just like the 2600 is too darn slow, this hyperactive version will take some getting use to - like playing Lode Runner at the top speed and you make tons of mistakes and are constantly running out of control - else you plod along slowly constantly re-centering the joystick so as to not overshoot your destination, ladder, walk-way etc. Too bad there is no way to slow it down - my guess is hurried out the door, or no play testing. The bats are extremely aggressive in this version, coupled along with the difficulty of control prevents the Addictiveness from being even more enjoyable (8). Collision detection is either off, or that speed factor fools you into seeing your guy go right through the floors some times. The Gameplay is complete (8) with the only possible element missing are bats coming out of chests - I probably did not play enough to be certain of this. One good or bad thing is that if you fake while on the ladders, the bats will sometime just disappear at that point and not cross the remainder of the screen. And, besides just turning red, the timer, when under 1 minute, flashes as well - excellent! Graphics are beautiful (8) almost as good as the gold medal winners, but lacking the twinkling diamonds, some details and as much animation. Sound is impressive (8) with all elements but that of an intro or demo music. The range of the FS music is limited and some effects sound a little weak. Controls are perfect (10). This cart is the rarest, about \$20 US, but might be worth it as it is among the best Vic games I've ever reviewed.



Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit & Commodore 64 (45)

A tie. Both sets of scores and most of the details are the same, so let me group these together first. Gameplay is complete (8) with nothing missing. Addictiveness is remarkable (9) with fewer drawbacks. Graphics are wonderful (9) with the most color, details, variety and animation. Sound is superb (9) with the best range of FS music. Controls are perfect (10).



Mountain King on Atari 5200 & 8-Bit



Mountain King on Commodore 64

Commodore 64

My first reaction was this was different and better than the 2600, but not sure how it would stack up against the others until I played them all. The addictiveness is the best here where the pause is the <space bar> and there is only one collision detection problem. But this is a noticeable one as the crown is hard to grab and often you'll jump into the fires until you figure it out. The crown often ends up crooked on your head as well. The countdown timer does not flash as the Atari does. I'm not sure if I missed this - but I saw fewer "impossible" jumps on this version. You hero is multi-colored here but not on any other version. There are no added sound when you are webbed by the spider, nor when the FS is grabbed. A well done game, with only a few negative remarks.

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was despite this being the original version made, some web sites do not acknowledge it. Jumping is a bit off, a little like the 2600 where you need to jump earlier (farther away) than you think, but no where nearly as bad as the 2600. It will not take much to get use to this but still does detract for the addictiveness. The <space bar> or <option> will activate the pause. Once again, like the 2600 there are a few nasty impossible jumps as well. Some humor was added as one can grab the flames and run about on fire for a few centons before you finally die. This flame out death, along with the best halo effect (having the FS) make the Graphics the best here. They've even included opening and closing of the treasure chests for an added effect. Likewise the Sound is a wee bit better than the 64 with the best Mountain King music - which really gets playing fast near the end. But a drawback is there is no death sound when time runs out. Overall better scores than the C64, but not enough to make much difference. Overall, I'd guess that a slight majority would agree and prefer the Atari version. Regardless, both deserve a share of the Gold. If you really dislike games that repeat too much, then you'll probably want to knock a point off all the addictiveness scores - for the maps being the same every level.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata from last month.

Thanks this month to a few dealers at the VGXPO for helping me to add to 2 MK carts to my many faces of collection. Specifically, some plugs for great service and willing to trade go to Mike from <http://www.collectorscardsandgames.com/> And Jason from <http://http://www.tradengames.com> With their help, just in time, I added the Mountain King carts for the 5200 & 8 bit to my MF collage.

Otherwise I only had these on disk & 5200 Multi-cart. Oh yes and thanks also to Smitty - who had a boxed XE Mario Bros. cart for me. Finally a lost faces review - maybe this spring.

Note from Editor:

In case you were interested, the name of the song that plays throughout the game is "In the Hall of the Mountain King", which kind of explains the name of the title.

Next Month: Come back and see if I can cover all 6,765 versions of the long awaited Many Faces of Frogger . . . well actually just 13 or 14 versions. With the holidays coming & CCAG 2005, and me still recovering from Halloween and the VGXPO I plan to split this into two issues. Half next month, the other half later. Too much time and space required for an article covering "Frogger" for the Apple II, Atari 2600 (Parker Brothers and Sega/StarPath, 5200, 8 bit (Parker Brothers & Sierra??), C64 (Parker Brothers & Sierra), CV, Intellivision, Odyssey 2, TI-99 and the Vic 20 (Parker Brothers & Sierra??). Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>

New Intellivision Cartridges

If you gamers out there are still plugging away on your Intellivision systems, get ready for some big news. The folks at Intellivision Lives are about to release two new cartridges for the Intellivision, both of which made their debut last August at the Classic Gaming Expo.

- First up is **Deep Pockets: Super Pro Pool & Billiards**. This pool simulation was one of the last Intellivision games completed by INTV, but the company shot down before it could be released. You may have played the game on the free Intellivision packs and the *Intellivision Lives* collection. This will be the first time the game is released in cartridge form.
- The second game is **Illusions**. This game was created in 1984 by Mattel's offices in France. While the Colecovision version was released, the INTV version never surfaced until now.

The best news is the Blue Sky Rangers have announced that these two games are the first in a planned *series* of cartridge releases for the Intellivision. They promise to have more information soon in their newsletter, including prices and release dates. You can find out how to subscribe to the newsletter at the Intellivision website at: <http://www.intellivisionlives.com/>.

Stardate 7800
by Adam King

This month in *Stardate 7800*, I'd though I'd look at a short-lived magazine Atari put out for members of its Atari club. By 1989, it was obvious that Atari was playing catch up to Nintendo. The Nintendo Entertainment System was ruling the videogame waters, and Atari's systems were barely getting a mention. So Atari began patterning themselves after Nintendo, hoping to get something going their way. They figured that since Nintendo had their *Nintendo Power* magazine, they'd have their own magazine as well to hype their products. Thus in mid-1989 Atari introduced the world to *Atarian* magazine. While a nice concept, *Atarian* became nothing more than a footnote in gaming history.

First published by David Ahl in May 1989, *Atarian* was a bi-monthly publication that covered the 2600, 7800, and XE game systems. It featured many of the stuff you'd find in other magazines: reviews, previews, game tips, strategy guides, and even a puzzle or two to fill out. The issues also had interviews with gaming names like Nolan Bushnell and Garry Kitchen.



Cover of *Atarian* #1 (pic taken from [Atari Age](#))

Atarian also had an interesting feature that was common in gaming magazines: their own comics page. In this case it was "The Adventures of Atari". This comics page detailed the exploits of Atari troubleshooter Miles Mender, who had the ability to transform into a superhero simply named "Atari", and he fought against the plans of an evil Japanese video game company named "Ninja-Endo." Three guesses who they're talking about. The comic strip took the *GamePro* route, putting Atari in video game situations; at point he's battling creatures from *Dark Caverns*, and in another he and his friend are piloting the submarine from *Tower Toppler*.

So while *Atarian* may not be much more than a *Nintendo Power* wannabe, and its comic a blantant example of anti-Nintendo propaganda, it was still a decent mag for Atari fans, since coverage of Atari games at the time was very scarce in most of the other gaming magazines. However the magazine only lasted three issues before it disappeared, with the last issue coming out in October '89.

So naturally with such a short life, the three *Atarian* issues are very hard to find today. Occasionally the

magazines do pop up on eBay, but they usually go for a high price. Luckily there is an alternative; you can view the scanned pages of all three issues on the Atari Age website (www.atariage.com).

The Titles of Tengen - Alien Syndrome

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

As with games such as Shinobi and After Burner, Alien Syndrome marks another Sega arcade game that Tengen ported over to the NES. Originally released in 1987 and running parallels with the film "Alien," Alien Syndrome drops one or two players into the role of a space marine aboard an alien spacecraft. In the year 2089 a race of aliens imprisons an entire space colony aboard its seven space ships. Each ship is swarming with alien creatures as well as an alien commander. Your mission is to board each of the seven ships, rescue your captured comrades, defeat the alien boss on each ship, and get out of there before the whole thing goes critical. Alien Syndrome keeps the pressure on as the moment each stage begins you have just set the time bomb that will destroy the ship. Map kiosks throughout the ships will display where your comrades are being held but it's still a race to get in and out before the bomb goes off.



Although the basic layout of the game is simple there are still a lot of fine details graphically such as pipes overhead, flickering displays, smoothly moving enemies and so forth. While the very basics of the game's design make the transition to the NES, the conversion is barebones at best. A genuine effort was made to have the graphics look somewhat like they did in the arcade but honestly everything looks really flat and plain. Thankfully the boss aliens make the transition onto the NES better than the standard enemies, they're all fairly detailed and look like low resolution counterparts of their arcade originals. Scrolling is jittery and no where near as smooth as it was in the arcade version but it's still passable as it doesn't hinder over all gameplay all that much. However the whole game seems to play a lot slower than it did in the arcade, almost like the game is in jell-o slow. Is the game still playable? Yes. Does it make the game fun to play? Not really.

Control is how it was in the arcade, a single button to fire and the directional pad is used for player control. Right there lies my biggest problem with Alien Syndrome both at home and in the arcade. You shoot in the direction you are facing but if you change direction you also run in that direction. In other words if an enemy creeps up behind you and you turn around to fire, you'll end up walking into the enemy before getting a shot off. This game always screamed out for a dual control set up (one stick for player movement, one stick for direction of fire) or a rotating joystick. This issue was addressed in the recently released SegaAges remake of Alien Syndrome on the PlayStation 2 and it makes the game a whole lot more fun to play, only took almost 20 years. The NES port has decent audio but the sparse voice clips from the arcade are gone. Additionally not all the powerups from the arcade version made it onto the NES, most notably the little option robots that could be picked up to provide cover fire.

Since the port was at the best decent and no one was really crying out for a home version of Alien Syndrome, this is one of the overlooked Tengen NES releases. Even with the shortcomings, the basic mechanics of the arcade original carry over for the most part and the soul of the game remains. Just the same if you liked Alien Syndrome in the arcade you'll be unimpressed with the NES version. It's a mediocre game released in an era of horrible unlicensed mediocre games. To me this is the most disappointing of all the Tengen NES ports, it just feels like such a rush job and the more I play it the more I dislike the conversion. If you're looking for a good NES game look elsewhere. I can only recommend Alien Syndrome on the NES to those collecting Tengen or NES games. It definitely doesn't have much player appeal.

"InsaneDavid" also runs a slowly growing gaming site at <http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi>.

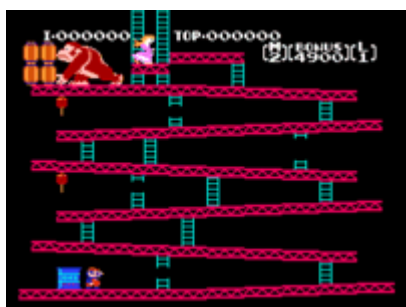
Nintendo Realm - Mid July to Late August 1983

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Syntax Era is over for now. I pretty much ran out of material. When I started Syntax Era a year ago, I wasn't sure if I'd still be writing articles by now. And at the time, vintage video game literature was near and dear to my heart. It still is today, only less so. These days however, I've been preoccupied with something else. Well, something else besides my daily dose of Final Fantasy XI (no WoW for me, thanks.) I've made it a personal goal to play, at least once, every game that ever came out for a Nintendo system, in chronological order, and possibly other systems as well. Naturally, I've started with the NES. So starting with this issue of RGTM, I present to you Nintendo Realm, my new column devoted to reviewing the games that I have tried out and played.

Why might this interest you? Well, you might be reminded of a great game that you've since forgotten, you might get the low down on a game you always wondered about only to find out that it sucks, but most importantly, you might discover a hidden or unknown jewel that you weren't even aware of. I have found quite a few so far. I know there's still some contention as to whether any Nintendo system should be considered classic. To the naysayers, I submit to you that the NES celebrated its 20th anniversary this year, the as did Famicom a couple of years ago.

Since I'm starting from the very beginning, many of the games are going to be rather simple, and most will already be familiar to you, although one or two surprises may show up. I will cover at least 5 games each month. So without Further ado:



Donkey Kong, published by Nintendo and released on July 15, 1983

When Nintendo launched the Famicom in Japan, they did so with an initial line that consisted of their most successful arcade games to date. Donkey Kong was an obvious choice. This version is the most pixel accurate version of it's time, surpassing even the mighty Colecovision version. For all its faithfulness, it is crippled like so many other versions with the omission of the 4th conveyer belt stage. I still wonder why this board was cut, while all four stages made it in to Donkey Kong Jr., and they are the same size. If you're a regular MAME player, you don't need this version, but no NES collection is complete without the very first appearance of Mario in a video game, or the repackaged version in Donkey Kong Classics.



Donkey Kong Jr., published by Nintendo and released on July 15, 1983

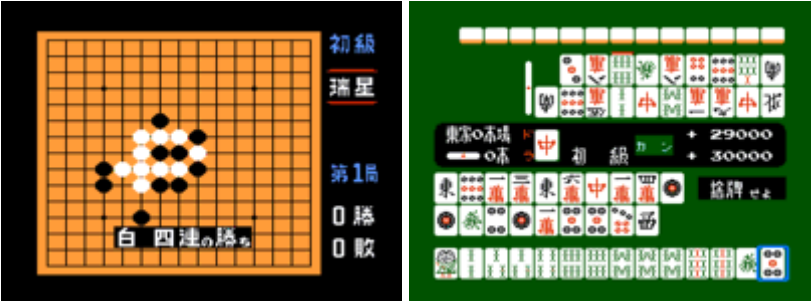
This classic compliments Donkey Kong very well, portraying the ongoing saga of the rivalry between Mario and Donkey Kong, and the introduction of DK's son coming to the rescue. Another very pixel accurate version, although the snapper graphics have been shrunk a little bit to fit the NES's size for sprite characters. All four stages make it in to the game, and about the only thing omitted was the cartoon that takes place before Mario's Hideout. Also repackaged in Donkey Kong Classics, this version of the game can be found very cheaply on eBay.



Popeye, published by Nintendo and released on July 15, 1983

Out of the three Famicom launch games, this is my least favorite, but it's still not a terrible game. It's not as if Popeye is a particular cool or iconic character these days, so the subject isn't very inspiring. Nevertheless, it keeps its place in history as a Shigeru Miyamoto designed game, and one of Nintendo's first successful license games. (Popeye went on to star in a couple of Game & Watch LCD games as well.) Popeye doesn't make the transfer to the NES as cleanly as the Donkey Kong games did, due mostly to the high resolution mode used by the arcade hardware. But all three stages of

game play make it in tact. And for an arcade game of it's time, the game play can become quite challenging, especially when you're forced to choose between running away from Bluto, or standing your ground and punching the bottles being thrown at your head by the sea hag. Personally, I could pass this one by.



Gomoku Narabe, published by Nintendo and released on August 27, 1983

Mahjong, published by Nintendo and released on August 27, 1983

Only four games in to the list and we hit the first two games that were released only on the Famicom and not the NES. Unfortunately, they are two Japanese board games. I know even less about Mahjong than I do about Go, which is what Gomoku Narabe is based on. What I do know is that as far as Mahjong and Go are concerned, these are the two most basic forms of the game you will find for the NES. They are almost an obligatory offering made by Nintendo until someone else will come along and make a better version of the two games, which occurred multiple times by other companies. So it's a safe bet that you'll want to steer clear of these two even if you are a fan of the games.

National Games Week

by Alan Hewston

If you are into more than just video games, heres a few links for you to see. First off we have National Games week (November 20 - 26), which was taking place the week we were submitting these articles. My club at work had our usual monthly party to celebrate.

<http://www.nationalgamesweek.com/>



Here's a picture I recently coordinated - with over 150 games - and some friends and my immediate family. Included are some classic 80's electronic board games like Electronic D&D, Stop Thief and Dark Tower.

If you want to see the above picture in detail - it'll take about 5 minutes to load up at:
http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/GETGO/GETGO_100+.JPG

Finally, a great place to look up lots of board games is at Game Board Geek dot com.
(<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/>)

Game on!

Happy Holidays from the RTM

by Alan Hewston

As you prepare for the holiday hustle and bustle we hope that you find time to play some games. Or decorate for the season as in this picture. Well OK, you're probably too busy looking to buy more games or at least buy gifts for friends. But once the gift giving time is over, make sure to snuggle up with your favorite game systems and game on. While you're waiting in those traffic jams and shopping lines - hum or sing along - maybe make up your own lyrics.

Deck the halls with carts and joysticks,
Fa la la la la, la la la la,
'Tis the season to be gaming,
Fa la la la la, la la la la,
Don we now our virtual boy head gear,
Fa la la la la, la la la la, la la la la,
Hope you all are high score making,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.



Happy Holidays!

Game Over

And with that we bring another issue to a close. Before we go I just want to say that while video games are fun, don't forget what's most important in life, and that's your family and friends. I hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday season!

Next month is our 20th issue. It may not be as grand as a 100th issue celebration, but it's still a huge milestone for us. Hope to see you there!

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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