

Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #36 - May 2007

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Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Another month, and another dose of retrogaming goodness. Many of you have been notified about our latest issues for a long time by the site <http://www.atariage.com/>, whose support we have always been, and will continue to be grateful for. If you've been with RTM for a long time, and have never visited AtariAge, someone really ought to introduce you to a little site known as Google. But just this past month, we were contacted by another webmaster, who goes by the handle Saint. He operates and maintains the wonderful site <http://www.arcadecontrols.com/>. Saint asked if we would mind if he mentioned our latest issues on his page, to which I immediately responded, "Yes, PLEASE!" Saint didn't realize it at the time, but I happen to be a long-time member of his site, which is also known as BYOAC, or Build Your Own Arcade Controls.

I was trying to decide if I should dedicate a separate article to BYOAC or not, but I can't think of a better subject for this opening editorial than Saint's evolutionary efforts. When I began trolling his site in its early years, I was only just becoming fascinated with MAME, and the ability to emulate all of my favorite classic arcade games right on my computer. There was only one problem with MAME: playing with a keyboard, or even a SNES or PSX style gamepad just wasn't as satisfying as gripping a real arcade style joystick. Apparently Saint and a lot of other people that formed his community felt the same way. And thus, BYOAC was born. But these guys (and gals) weren't just setting up glorified arcade controllers... they were doing the unthinkable: building or gutting real arcade cabinets and sticking their MAME powered computers inside of them!

The idea blew me away. So simple, and so obvious, yet so mystifying. What formed out of the collaborative spirit of the site was a community of people, some of whom had technical know-how, some of whom had carpentry experience, and the rest who simply had a will to make it happen. When I finally signed up to join the message boards in 2002, I was mainly signing on to pick people's brains about the best ways to connect my computer to my TV, feeling that the construction aspect of the site was simply beyond my ability to enjoy. But after seeing a few Showcase 33 cabinets (the kind where the joystick appears to be raised on a pedestal, detached from the screen about a foot away), I thought perhaps building such a pedestal that I could place in front of my new widescreen TV was feasible.

Had it not been for Saint's site, and the community that grew there, I would not have thought the idea was possible, much less think that I could accomplish it. But with the aid of my then-girlfriend/today-wife, we set off on a trip to Home Depot with a crudely drawn design in my hands for some pieces of wood. Several visits to the message boards and roughly three weeks later, [this was the result](#) which I still use to this day (I'm especially proud of the button layout) That page, by the way, is another one of Saint's outstanding accomplishments, having built a Wiki site around the concept of building emulation machines and arcade cabinets, that anyone with constructive advice and knowledge can contribute to. All that on the heels of the book that he published on the subject that can be purchased from [amazon.com](#).

Saint is an example of someone who not only cherishes the love that you all have for the memories and enjoyment that retrogaming brings, he is a true supporter of the hobby and one of the largest contributors that has helped raise retrogaming from an erstwhile pastime to a bonified industry with companies riding the wave that he helped create to commercial success. So it is with true admiration that I say, yes Saint, I think it would be wonderful if you mentioned our issues on your site. And we here at RTM extend an invitation to all of our readers to check out BYOAC at least once if you've never been there before. I think you'll be quite amazed at what you find there.



The Many Faces of... Fast Eddie

by [Alan Hewston](#)

As promised, we continue our string of honoring titles that are now 25 years old - in the Many Faces of Fast Eddie. This is a home system game that was never released at the arcade, and should not be confused in any way with the arcade game "Fast Freddie". Perhaps this game should be called "Fast Eddies", since our hero gets liquidated when his sneaky enemies get him, thus another Eddie (clone) shows up to continue playing. The instruction manual inaccurately describes a loss of life as Eddie getting "tripped" up. You'll get to see quite a lot of Eddies in each game, so maybe this is where that TV show "Ed, Edd & Eddie" got its naming idea

from. It is purely coincidence that I am covering this game this month . . . considering I heard (my children watch a lot of Nickelodeon) that they recently aired the final "Ed, Edd & Eddie" episode.

Fast Eddie was first made for the Atari 2600, so the graphics on all versions ended up somewhat lacking, where the enemies look like large cockroaches that tap-dance about the screen, but in reality, they are animated Sneakers (i.e. athletic shoes). Eddie must avoid contact (getting tripped up) with the Sneakers by climbing ladders and walking and jumping about the 5 floors of an unfinished building - all while trying to collect 10 prizes and a Key. When you move up/down a ladder, you are safe from collisions with the Sneakers and automatically moved all the way to the next floor and are no longer considered on the floor you left. You cannot go part way on a ladder and stop - there is no place to hide. For your convenience (but be careful not to over do it), once you begin moving on a ladder, you can move/hold the stick the other direction and then as soon as you reach the next floor, you'll immediately begin heading back the other way. In doing so, you have not stopped moving and thus are never technically on any floor - you're still on the ladder. About 95% of the time one can do this over and over again and have the Sneakers run safely overlapping you.

Starting anew on each screen, the prizes begin with a value of 10 points and increase by 10 points per prize up to a maximum of 90 points. After you collect 9 prizes you can then collect the Key, or get that 10th prize and then collect the Key. The Key cannot be seen initially as it is protected by "High-Tops" the tallest of all sneakers. High Tops is initially too tall to jump over, but he decreases in height each time you collect a prize. After 9 prizes are collected, the Key appears over his head and follows his movement. Simply jump over him and touch the Key to end that round. The game play is easy to learn and begins at a very easy skill setting. But don't be fooled, the action gradually picks up and the difficulty on level 8 is more than most Eddies can handle. Special thanks to Martha Koppin's very detailed review - read it online from a 1980's issue of Creative Computing Video & Arcade Games at: <http://www.atarimagazines.com/cva/v1n2/fasteddie.php>

Martha describes in detail the sneaker layout, size and some strategy.

Arcade: none

All home versions from 1982 by Sirius Software & 20th Century Fox

Atari 2600 - Mark Turmell

Atari 8 bit computers - Tom McWilliams

C64 - Kathy Bradley

Vic 20 - Kathy Bradley

Moby Games only has screenshots for the Atari 2600.

Someone needs to send them some from other

systems. www.mobygames.com/game/fast-eddie/screenshots

Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions have: a silent attract mode (showing all the Sneaker action on the level most recently selected); 8 starting levels of action to select; begin each game with three (and you can never accumulate more than three) reserve Eddies; if you do not have 3 Eddies in reserve, then any time you capture the Key you automatically earn another reserve Eddie; the Key is held by High Tops at the end of each round; you'll also earn points for collecting the Key (points will tally up rapidly), and then the next round/screen will begin; there are always 5 rounds to each level; aside from when selecting the starting level, in the attract mode, the level and round numbers are never shown; you'll know that the level has changed when the layout of the Sneakers changes; the number and arrangement of the sneakers is always the same to begin each round within the same level of play; likewise the Sneakers never change their speed or numbers at any time; all the action takes place on just one screen; each screen has 5 floors, with High Tops on the top floor and Eddie beginning on the bottom; the Sneaker on the bottom floor will wait 5 seconds before becoming active; each floor has 2 ladders connecting it to the floors above and/or below, for a total of 8 ladders per screen; the 4 ladders on the left half of the screen can take place in any one of 4 random <C64 & Vic> positions from the left edge to the middle; the corresponding ladder on the right half (i.e. on that same floor) is always in the same position (from L to R from the middle to the right edge) as the one on the left hand side on that same floor; the layout of the ladders is unique <C64 & Vic 20> and randomly changes every time you start a game or begin a new screen; thus you can start the game over and over to get a ladder setup you like, but only for that one screen <C64 & Vic 20>; each floor has at least one Sneaker; Sneakers move only horizontally and all Sneakers move at the same speed always; floors will have a different sized Sneaker (small, medium or large) or more than one small Sneaker, which can be next to each other or spaced apart; when more than one, the Sneakers will act as a set and move together in harmony and either reversing at the walls, or wrapping around and reversing at a fixed location; each level has a fixed (unique) <Vic 20 (is similar)> setup (number, spacing and wrapping around capability of the Sneakers) and is always the same on every screen and every life on that level; Eddie begins each screen/round and life at the middle position of the bottom floor; when Eddie begins a new life, the prizes and motions of the sneakers continue <Vic 20 resets locations> except for the bottom Sneaker, which always resets to the left edge and waits 5 seconds before moving; there is not much of a break in the action between screens or lives; there is a pause that can be used at any time; after completing 5 rounds on each level, Eddie begins the next higher level, up to level 8, at which point the game continues indefinitely (I assume); the game number selected and



There are not that many Yellow carts out there.

the level selected are one in the same; as the difficulty level increase the enemies remain at the same speed, but increase in number, size and/or spacing to become a little bit harder to avoid; there are always 2 prizes available to collect at any one time; they can be fixed or moving along at different speeds; neither is ever on the top floor as that floor is reserved for the Key and protected by the special Sneaker called "High Tops"; once you collect a prize, the points earned for it will briefly be displayed in its place (on-screen), and then another prize will show up, but never on the same floor <C64 & Vic 20> as Eddie; Eddie cannot move off the screen and does not even bounce off the screen edge; Eddie and the Sneakers can move right up to the edge of the floor / screen <2600 & 800 (there is a gap to get used to)>; when the game ends the screen flashes dramatically <Vic 20>; your current score and the high score then alternate.

The Sneakers are arranged on the floors for the Atari versions in each level as follows:

S = Small, SS = 2 Small next to each other, SSS = 3 Small next to each other, M = Medium, L = Large, T = Stationary, + = medium sized gap between, ++ = Large sized gap between, W = wraparound, H = High Tops

Level: Floors from L to R from (Floor 1) . to . (Floor 5)

Level 1: (S)(ST)(S)(ST)(H)

Level 2: (S)(S)(S)(SS)(H)

Level 3: (S)(S++SW)(M)(S++SW)(H)

Level 4: (S)(S+S)(SS)(S++SW)(H)

Level 5: (S)(M)(L)(S++SW)(H)

Level 6: (S)(SSS)(M)(S++SW)(H)

Level 7: (S)(S+S)(M)(S++SW)(H)

Level 8: (M)(S+S)(SSS)(S+S+SW)(H)

The C64 uses the same pattern, but none are Stationary, unless you lose a life.

The Vic 20 has the same pattern through level 5 but then uses:

Level 6: (S)(S+S)(M)(S++SW)(H)

Level 7: (S)(S+S)(M)(S++SW)(H)

Level 8: (S)(S+S)(S+S)(S+SW)(H)

The Vic 20 apparently was not coded to handle all the necessary Sneakers.

Scoring the Key.

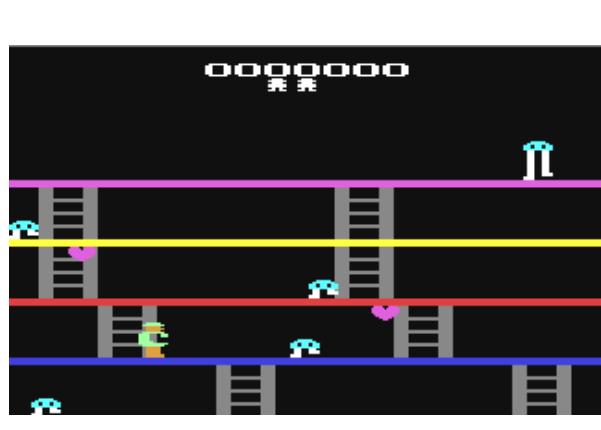
The scoring for the Key is not listed in any of the manuals, but appears to be similar to the Prizes in that it does not matter what level you begin at. The more Keys collected, the more they will be worth and the Atari versions score the Key the same. Both Commodore versions score the Key the same, but different than Atari. Atari scores the first & second Key as worth 310, the third & fourth Key 930, the fifth & sixth Key 1550 . . . seventh 2170 . . ninth 2790 and so on, increasing by 620 every odd numbered Key. Commodore scores the first set (level) of five Keys all worth 750, the second set of five keys worth 1000, the third set of five keys worth 1250 . . . and so on increasing by 250 each level.

Have Notes: Vic 20 (36)

My first reaction was: You can see above that the Vic 20 is the most different - which does hurt its scores. Gameplay is good (6) but there is not a lot of meat or extras in this game - not much strategy. Just stay alive. Although having the same score, the Gameplay is the worst version due to fewer Sneakers seen in levels 6 to 8. Addictiveness is very fun (8) with plenty of fast action and ability to challenge each of the 8 levels. There is no where to hide and no break in the action so the ability to pause the action, toggled by <R/S> is great. There are no other glitches or drawbacks to the game that will turn you off, other than it is not easy but is repetitive. All versions have an attract mode where the current level's screen and Sneakers are in motion with Eddie silently jumping the bottom Sneaker ad infinitum. There is sufficient effort in all the key graphic areas - details, background colors, color variety, animation, fast action, multiple enemies, multi-colored Eddie and Sneakers - so Graphics are decent (6). But most of the Vic's drawbacks are here in Graphics, separating the men form the boys. Overall 1 point is lost because of fewer Sneakers; the melting animation of Eddie being liquidated is replaced by Eddie simply vanishing; the floors and ladders always change to be the same color; and the game speed is slowed down. AFAIK, the ladders follow the same limited layout as the C64 (see below) save for one ladder sequence was skipped here by Kathy Bradley. Sound is fine (6) with just enough effects but no music in any version. Nothing is missing, but not much added either. Controls are perfect (10). <F7> is a screen refresh. <F5> selects the starting level. <Restore> returns the game to attract mode. This cartridge is a fairly hard to find, but it may have been released by Sirius onto cassette or diskette.



Vic 20 screenshot courtesy of Boris.



C64 screenshot courtesy of Gamebase 64.

Gold Medal: Atari 2600, Atari 8 bit computer & Commodore 64 (37)

My first reaction is - a three way tie for the gold is well deserved as there are not that many differences. This is easy to understand when a simple 2600 game was pretty much copied and not enhanced at all for the home computers. You'd think a musical score or more effects could have been added. All versions have some differences in the scoring categories, as noted at the end, but none are significant enough to reduce the score. Thus the same scores and basic descriptions work for all Gold medal winners.

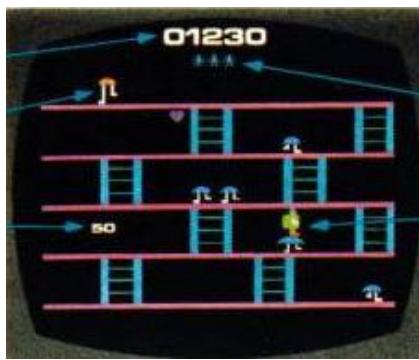
Gameplay is respectable (6), but there's not too much strategy or meat here. The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with a pause on all versions and as many as 256 different ladder (position) combinations to make every game very unique. And then, with each new screen, and sometimes when the action resumes from a pause, the ladders and floors can both change to one of 8 different colors - for up to 64 color combinations. Graphics are pretty good (7) in all ways: details, animation, action, multiple enemies, multi-color and color variety; but nothing really stands out either. The computer versions could have been graphically enhanced, or musically enhanced but were not. The Sound is OK (6), and nothing needed is missing, but I could have given them a (5) since there are not that many sound effects and no music. The best audio effect is that of the Key points tallying up at the end of each round. There are audio effects for jumping, climbing, collecting Prizes, death, and the end of the game. Controls (10) perfect control for all versions.

Commodore 64

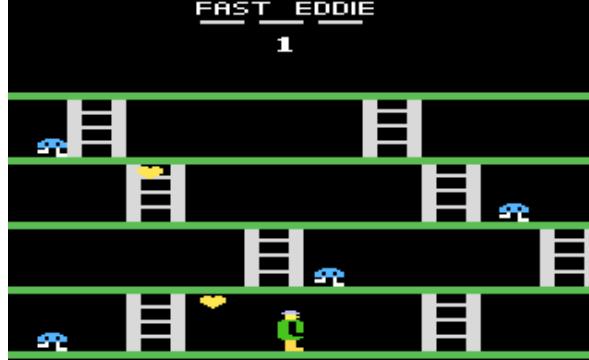
This version has both the most shortfalls and the most improvements. There is both a non-silent demo mode and an attract mode which cycle back and forth. Unlike the Atari versions, When Eddie or the Sneakers move all the way to the edge of the floor, they actually are at the edge. The randomness of the 4 ladder positions (screen layout) is lost here. Instead of 256 different combinations, there are probably only 40, as every game begins with the same ladder arrangement and each succeeding screen follows the same predetermined layout of all 8 ladders. The first round has ladders at positions 4,2,1,1, the next round 3,2,3,4 and 1,1,3,2 then 3,4,2,1, and 1,3,2,1 etc. You can go on for a while checking the patterns and every game is exactly the same. Fortunately, the floor and ladder colors are still varied. This is the only version with an audio effect to signify the start of a game. A drawback to the gameplay, making it easier - is that the next prize will sometimes arrive on the same level, and can even arrive at the same spot where the previous prize was just at. C64 is only found on diskette/cassette. <R/S> is the pause. <Restore> returns the game to demo mode. <F5> selects the starting level.

Atari 8 bit

<Select> selects the starting level. The pause is toggled by the <Option>, plus the ultimate in controls, fire button more safely resumes the action from a pause. Eddie and the Sneakers cannot make it all the way to the edge of the floor, so there is some added difficulty or frustration to learning where the limit of their movement is. Available on cart (uncommon) and (rare) diskette.



Atari 8 bit computer screenshot courtesy of Atarimania.



Atari 2600 screenshot courtesy of AtariAge.com

Atari 2600

This version is the original so it is quite impressive that the <Black/White> was used to add a pause feature. The edge of the floor problem is not quite as bad as the Atari computer version. The displays for lives remaining is simply 1 to 3 bars, not a graphic depiction of 1 to 3 more Eddies. This version is obviously only available on cart, and is the easiest to find. This version is the best, relative to the system it was programmed for.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

Nothing new to report. On Ebay I keep falling well short of securing the elusive Vic 20 Lode Runner - I guess everybody wants that game. Might be my own fault for asking for so long to get one for my reviews here. Isn't it supposed to be the other way around - I write a review and tell how great a game is and then everyone goes looking to add it to their collection. Oh well.

Announcement / Shameless Plug

Those living near North East Ohio do not forget to come to the CCAGShow.com 2007, on Saturday May 26th. We'll have AtariAge.com , Treyonicscontrols.com , VideoGameConnection.com and other great vendors as well. I'll be there with my Pitfall Harry costume and hopefully my one-of-a-kind, always unique Pac-Man and Dig Dug Murals. Put yourself into the game.

Come back next month: for another 1982 release, currently planning the Many Faces of "Front Line" on the Atari 2600, Colecovision & Commodore 64. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site:
www.my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm



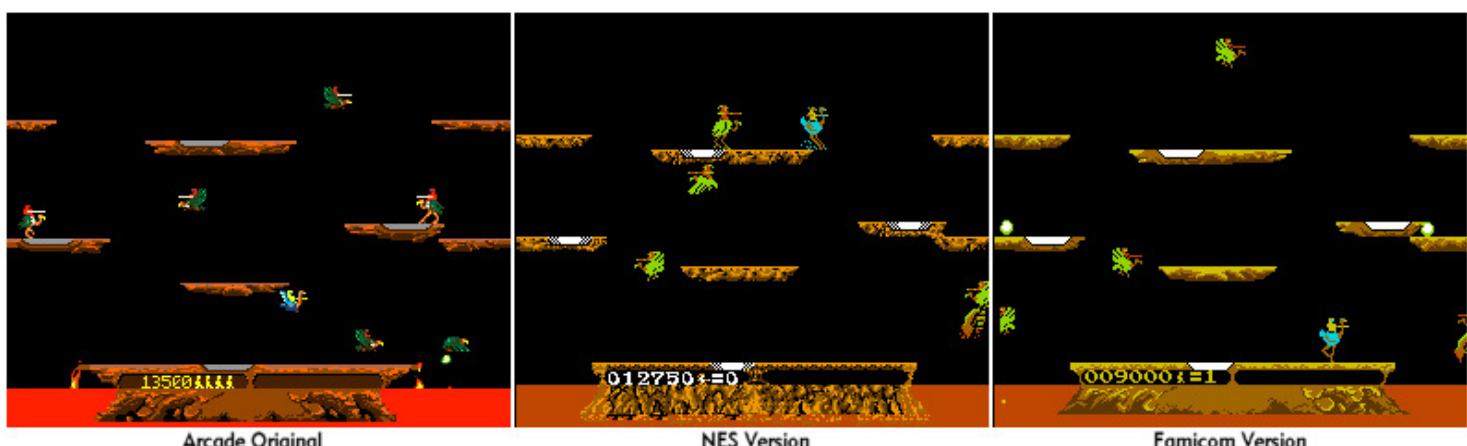
NEScade -- Joust

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Unique yet simple concepts have been the heart and soul of the video game industry since its birth. Although things have become increasingly complex in the modern era, the games that continue to be regarded as favorites are those that take an easy to understand concept and put a new twist on it. Such is the case with Joust, medieval mounted combat with something different. Instead of traditional riders on horseback, the knights in Joust take to the skies atop giant flying birds in an all out battle to the death. Player one rides an ostrich while player two rides a stork and the enemy knights come mounted atop buzzards. Although the mounts may be surreal, the core game play mechanic couldn't be simpler, "highest lance wins." As long as your lance is higher than that of your foe when you run into him, you will win the joust and he will be tossed off his mount. Colliding with an enemy at equal elevation will cause both knights and mounts to be turned away in the opposite direction, no one dies, and the joust is a draw. If an enemy's lance is higher than yours during a collision you will be destroyed and your mount will fly off. Knocking your foes off their mounts is just the beginning however, as once dismounted they turn into eggs. Eventually these eggs will hatch if not captured, becoming the next most powerful enemy knight, and a fresh mount will swoop down so that they can return to battle.

Things start off slow but quickly become more hectic as the screen is filled with enemy knights of varying skill. As waves of enemy knights are defeated the landscape changes, platforms disappear and lava pools rise. Within the lava pool lurks the deadly Lava Troll, a powerful enemy that reaches up with its burning grip, pulling any knight not swift enough to escape to a fiery death. Yet the most deadly enemy in the game is the pterodactyl which appears if the player takes too long to clear a wave. Only a direct joust to the pterodactyl's mouth will kill him, any other contact results in death for the player. With its unique concept, detailed graphics, simple play control, and frantic pace Joust became a favorite of the arcade patron for many years to come. As with many games of this level of popularity, it was ported to the home game systems of the era and beyond.

An NES version of this game seems like a simple enough project but things have to be executed properly to pay any respect to the arcade smash it set out to recreate. Thankfully things go off without a hitch. Graphically the game is very nicely presented with the level detail recreated pretty much verbatim. Platforms disappear on the later levels and the bridges slowly burn away to free the Lava Troll just as they did in the arcade. The player sprites are nicely detailed as are the enemy knights and their mounts and all are animated fluidly and accurately to their original counterparts. Play control is spot on with the directional pad controlling horizontal movement. Varying degrees of walking speed are easy to work out which perfectly recreates the movement in the arcade original. Holding the B button down causes your mount to flap consecutively to gain lift while you get one flap for each press of the A button. Flight and game physics are nicely recreated and feel fluid and accurate, including the egg physics. To round out the package an admirable job has been done to incorporate as much of the original sound effects as possible.



It is also worth mentioning that there were actually two similar, although slightly different, versions of this game developed for the NES hardware. In Japan the Famicom version of Joust featured sprites more closely designed after the arcade originals but over all the graphics came out looking plain. The NES version featured some slight enhancements such as the knights having feathers atop their helmets and a full rework of the rock design of the platforms. While this strays from the original presentation just a bit, it gives the game much better contrast on the eight bit hardware. Additional graphic tweaks such as the buzzard's beaks and the knight's lances having more color are a nice touch that make the NES version an all around better game than the Famicom release.

Joust stands one of the true arcade classics from the golden area of the arcade industry. While I've never been that great at it I've still played it for years and will continue to do so for one reason - it's fun. After all, that's the mark of an excellent game, challenging yet extremely entertaining. Those looking for one of the best home ports of this arcade legend for a bit age console need look no further than the NES. It's still a ton of fun to throw hours away in two player mode and the NES version has stood the test of time, just as much as the arcade original of which it is based. Yet another must have title for anyone's NES library.

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



I've been meaning to write some articles on one of the lesser known members of the Apple II family of computers. However, due to various circumstances, the RTM deadline was suddenly upon me and I wasn't quite ready. However, as it turned out, the 30th Anniversary/Birthday of the introduction of the Apple II at the West Coast Computer Faire just passed on April 16th. Yes, it has been 30 years since the original Apple II computer was introduced to the world.

What good timing! This gives me an opportunity to talk about my experiences over the years with the Apple II and how it has affected my life over the years. Plus, I can fulfill my obligation to RTM this month as well (hahahaha).



I recall my parents picking up our Apple II computer (the Apple IIe) sometime in 1983. Harking back to the 80's, where you could pick up computers at department stores, the Apple IIe was purchased at a Macy's department store. Interestingly enough, that was where my family picked up our Atari 5200 as well.

As I noted in one of my earlier columns, Apple Panic was my first game. I also loved playing with the introductory disk that came with the IIe: "Apple Presents.....Apple IIe". It was a cute little program showing the various features of the Apple IIe with some mini games that I thought were quite fun.

As it turned out, my grammar school (I was in 3rd/4th grade around 1983) also used Apple IIe's. So I got a chance to play around with the IIe a lot. I was mainly a software guy so I got a chance to play with various games and other programs including one well known application: "The Print Shop".

I can't claim to have any type of artistic ability or inclination to create anything artistic. However, I fell in love with the Print Shop. I convinced my parents to buy me a copy and for the next few years I was printing all sorts of cards and other things with my trusty (and still around) Epson MX-80 Dot Matrix printer.

The mid 80's to the early 90's were a blur to me. Those were my teenage years and like most teenagers, it seemed to fly by quickly. Despite the introduction of many technologically advanced computers during those years (Atari ST, Commodore Amiga, etc), I kept using the Apple II through my middle school and high school years.

I don't have any stand out memories of the Apple II during those years. However, I was an avid gamer and looked forward to any games that were released for the Apple II.

It was when I entered college (1992) that my love for the Apple II was re-kindled. I went to a community college initially and was exchange written letters (yes, hand written) with a high school friend of mine who had gone to Massachusetts. Through my friend, it was the first time I had heard of email and the Internet. I tried to find out more from my community college, but I didn't know where to look and what to ask for. Despite this, my trusty Apple II was an important part of my college life. I used it to write papers and also started learning how to use word processing, databases and spreadsheets. Despite the fact that the community college used old DOS mainstays such as Word Perfect and Lotus 1-2-3, I used an old Apple II standby, AppleWorks.

It wasn't until 1995 when I transferred to a 4 year university that I finally discovered the joys of email and the Internet. I signed up for my free dial up account at the university and began to spend hours at the computer lab reading/sending email, surfing the web with Mosaic, and reading Usenet groups.

Thanks to a friend (another computer geek), I also finally discovered the joys of telecommunications. In all the years of using the Apple IIe, I had never used any online services like Compuserve or Delphi. My friend and I went on a shopping trip to some computer clearance shops and I picked up a 2400 baud modem (!!!) and a serial card for the Apple IIe. After picking up some cheap telecommunications software, I soon find my way onto the Internet from home.

My Apple IIe would still be used up until the late 90's. However, I had to join the world of Windows when a programming class required I used a compiler that only ran on a Windows machine. I soon discovered what a modern operating system (Windows 95) was like and began to slowly move away from my IIe. However, I was happy that my IIe, despite its age, could be part of the Internet generation even if it was just through the use of dial up account and text based applications (Lynx, Pine, Tin, etc).

Now, it is 2007 and my IIe is all boxed up and unused (the video chips failed). Yet, it is hard to believe, it was 24 years ago that I first got my IIe. Though the IIe is a machine, I almost think of it as a friend that has been with me through many parts of my life.

Happy 30th Birthday to the Apple II family of computers. Here's to many more!



Most of the regular readers know this as the section of RTM where I review the next six or so Famicom games on my chronological release list. But I recently completed a project that I wanted to share with you. Part of retrogaming is keeping older titles alive by playing them and sharing them with others. Another part, for me, is discovering games that I never knew about, or couldn't play before, and finding out how to play them. This usually happens when I discover a translation of a Japanese ROM into English. (And if you're not familiar with this trend, and have a look at <http://www.romhacking.net/> to learn more.) And just last month, I increased the number of these translated ROMs by one. So I thought I would describe what the was like.

It all started because I was doing a lot a research about the Tower of Druaga. This is the game that I spoke of in my editorial last month that did phenomenally well in Japan, and was a complete failure in the United States. I was interested in what platforms that game was ported to, and I discovered that it was converted for the TurboGrafx-16 (otherwise known as the PC Engine in Japan). At first I figured it would just be highly accurate conversion of the arcade game, but it turned out that it was much more of a makeover and improvement. While the arcade featured random solutions that revealed the (often necessary) treasure chests on each floor with no clues to help you discover them, the PC Engine version gave you hints to help you along. Obviously, due to the game's unpopularity in the states, it was never translated into English. Without an ability to understand Japanese, I was just as helpless as when I played the arcade game.

I lamented this fact, and wondered if anyone would ever take up the mantle for me and translate the game. Having never translated a game myself, I figured that I would be an unlikely candidate. However, I've been a programmer for a long time, and have navigated my way through assembly, so I was no stranger to hexadecimal (base 16) which is what ROMs look like when viewed in a hex editor. I decided to take a look at it just to see what I could see. And at one point, I noticed the word "NAMCO". Then it occurred to me: the text is probably neither compressed nor encrypted, two aspects that would have immediately disqualified me as a translator. Figuring out the compression or encryption algorithm would have consumed more time than I was willing to dedicate to the project, much less knew how to even start. But I had to find out for sure.

So I took the space in the ROM where "NAMCO" was, and I replaced it with every number from 0 to 255 (or "00" to "FF"). I did this to see what the results would look like, and in a small matter of time, I had a complete ASCII chart of what letters mapped to what numbers. Now I had to see if I was right. I started the game, and copied the first hint that the game provided. I translated it according to my ASCII table and searched for that sequence of numbers, and... viola. There they were. Interestingly, they were preceded by a series of numbers that I didn't yet understand. Some were spaces, and some were little symbols that change the sound that a letter makes. (For a very simplified example, in Japanese, two little dashes over a letter that normally has a T sound becomes a D sound. A little circle over an H letter makes it a P letter.) Eventually it occurred to me that every line of text was actually written across two lines. The first time was for the dashes or the circle, while the bottom line was the actual text. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Here's why.

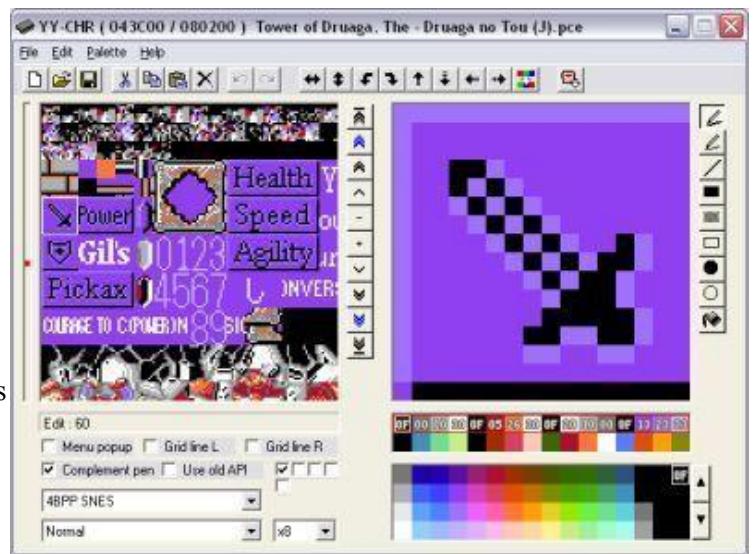
You need fewer Japanese characters to express things than you do in English. This meant that since I had to fit all of my translations in the same sized block of text that the game used for Japanese, I could not express nearly as much and would have to "shrink ideas to make fit good." That last sentence shows the dilemma. However, since I discovered that every line was made from two lines of text, I actually gained a lot more room in the ROM for the translations. At this time I felt the hard part was over, now the more difficult part: doing the translation. What I needed was a partner. And I found such a partner at work, a woman named Keiko who was originally from Japan. While she wasn't a gamer by any means, she could translate every block of text I could find. Over four lunch hours we translated every screen that I could find. Once I had all of the literal translations, I still had to truncate many of the ideas in order to make them fit. That was a long, slightly boring, process but the effort was well worth it.



| Tower of Druaga, The - Druaga no Tou (J).pce | |
|--|---|
| 011730 | 42 6C 75 65 20 48 65 6C 6D 65 74 DF 20 DE 48 79 |
| 011740 | 70 65 72 20 48 65 6C 6D 65 74 DF 20 DE 45 76 69 |
| 011750 | 6C 20 48 65 6C 6D 65 74 DF 20 DE 52 65 64 AC 6E |
| 011760 | 65 20 41 72 6D 6F 72 DF 20 DE 42 6C 61 63 6B 20 |
| 011770 | 41 72 6D 6F 72 DE 20 DE 48 6F 6C 79 20 41 72 6D |
| 011780 | 6F 72 DE 20 DE 48 79 70 65 72 20 41 72 6D 6F 72 |
| 011790 | DF 20 DE 45 76 69 6C 20 41 72 6D 6F 72 DF 20 DE |
| 0117a0 | 52 68 69 74 65 20 47 61 75 6E AE 65 74 DF 20 DE 45 76 |
| 0117b0 | 75 65 75 20 47 61 75 6E AE 65 74 DF 20 DE 45 76 |
| 0117c0 | 69 6C 20 47 61 75 6E AE AF DF 20 DE 57 68 69 74 |
| 0117d0 | 65 20 53 77 6F 72 64 DF 20 DE 44 72 61 67 6F 6E |
| 0117e0 | 20 53 AD 79 65 72 DF 20 DE 53 70 65 6C 6C 20 43 |
| 0117f0 | 61 6E 63 65 6C DF 20 DE 53 70 65 61 72 20 53 77 |
| 011800 | 6F 72 64 DF 20 DE 45 78 63 61 6C 69 62 75 72 DF |
| 011810 | 20 DE 45 78 69 6C 20 53 77 6F 72 64 DF 20 DE 44 |
| 011820 | 65 74 20 42 6F 6F 74 73 DF 20 DE 46 6C 6F 61 74 |
| 011830 | 20 42 6F 6F 74 73 DF 20 DE 4D 6F 6F 6E 20 57 61 |
| 011840 | 6C 6B 65 72 20 DE 52 6F 63 6B 65 74 20 42 6F |
| 011850 | 6F 74 73 DE 20 DE 54 75 72 74 6C 65 20 42 6F 6F |
| 011860 | 74 73 DE 20 DE 52 65 64 AC 6E 65 20 53 68 AA AB |
| 011870 | DF 20 DE 52 65 66 6C 65 63 74 20 53 68 AA AB DF |
| 011880 | 20 DE 46 69 72 65 20 53 68 69 65 6C 64 DF 20 DE |
| 011890 | 48 79 70 65 72 20 53 68 69 65 6C 64 DF 20 DE 45 |
| 0118a0 | 76 69 6C 20 53 68 69 65 6C 64 DF 20 DE 43 6F 70 |
| 0118b0 | 70 65 72 20 50 69 63 6B DF 20 DE 53 69 6C 76 65 |
| 0118c0 | 72 20 50 69 63 6B DF 20 DE 47 6F 6C 64 20 50 69 |
| 0118d0 | 63 6B 61 78 DF 20 DE 52 61 69 6B 62 6F 77 20 50 |
| 0118e0 | 65 63 6B DF 20 DE 42 61 6C 61 6F 63 65 DF 20 DE |
| 0118f0 | 47 2E 43 72 79 73 74 61 6C 52 6F 64 DF 20 DE 42 2E |
| 011900 | 2E 43 72 79 73 74 61 6C 52 6F 64 DF 20 DE 4D 61 74 |
| 011910 | 43 72 79 73 74 61 6C 52 6F 64 DF 20 DE 4D 61 74 |

I ended up translating about 95% of the game, omitting a few things that I was unaware of or did not know how to find. There was only one major thing that I knew was untranslated. This happened to be a status screen that was written in Japanese, not in ASCII, but directly through graphic tiles. You can't translate graphic tiles, all you can do is redraw them. The problem was, I had no idea a) where those tiles were and b) how I would ever find them. I submitted my 95% translated patch, believing I was done with the project, but it turns out that I would get a little bit of help, in the form of RomHacking's message boards.

Using a tool known only as YY-CHR, a board member was able to look at the ROM in the proper format (it happened to be four bits per pixel, just like the SNES) and locate the precise point where the tiles were stored. Now that I knew how to find them, all I had to was edit them, and this wonderful tool YY-CHR helped me do that. It wasn't easy because some tiles were utilized more than once, so I wasn't free to rededicate each tile's functions, and had to stick to their original purpose. But I was able to complete the translation.



Even I thought I was done now, but I searched around the ROM a little more, and I discovered the location in the ROM where the glyphs (letters) were stored. After a moment of inspiration, I decided to add a lower case set of English letters to the game (all of my translations were in upper case.) That meant I would have to rewrite most of my translations, but it was worth it, as it made the translations look more polished. Again I thought I was done, but I remembered that I had to abbreviate certain words, like gauntlet. I only had 12 letters for every item name, so the white gauntlet was translated as "WHITE GAUNT." which was less than ideal. I had a few tiles left over and I borrowed a trick from many terrific translators before me: I made a tile composed of two letters. I made one tile for "tl" and one for "et". Thanks to this technique, I was able to construct the name of the item as "White Gaun(tl)(et)", 12 tiles exactly. That was the final touch and I felt like the patch was *finally* complete. And if you would like to see and download it for yourself, you can find it at: <http://www.romhacking.net/trans/1104/>. You'll need the original ROM and an IPS file patcher and if you need assistance with file patching, romhacking is an excellent resource. If you try it out, please let me know what you think, I would love to know.



Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware

by Jonathan H. Davidson

Probably because of the widespread distribution of Stella and similar free emulators, there have only been a very few commercial releases of Atari 2600 emulators for the PC. Indeed, I am only aware of two examples: **Atari: the 80 Classic Games** and the **Activision Action Packs**.

The Atari collection was originally released in 2003. After its initial commercial run, it was later re-launched (in Canada, possibly also elsewhere) as a free bonus with purchase with certain types of General Mills cereal. (I got mine with a box Cheerios!)

The title is somewhat misleading as the collection actually includes only 62 Atari 2600 games. The balance of the 80 titles consists of 18 Atari arcade games. This review will focus on the 2600 games only; I plan to cover the arcade games in a future article.

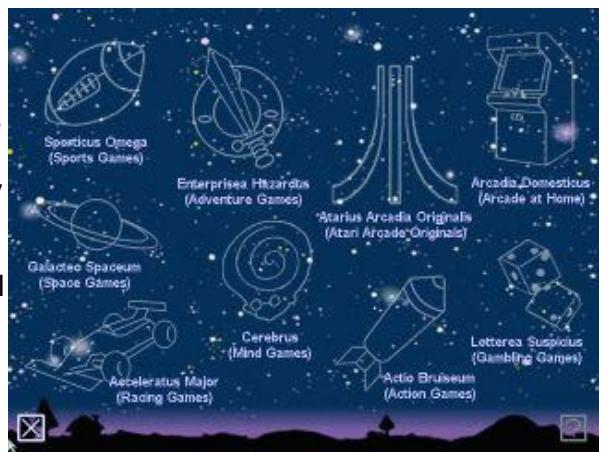


The range of games is nothing short of comprehensive! It includes about three-quarters of the original Atari-made games. Obviously excluded are ports of (non-Atari) arcade games and games that used licensed content (e.g. the Disney children's games). Titles included range from very early releases such as Star Ship, Space War through games released at the very end of the system's lifespan such as Quadrun, Motoredo, and even Swordquest Waterworld. Many of these games are so very rare that a typical collector will never otherwise get to play them.

Some of the game choices are a bit odd (e.g. Video Chess, Fun with Numbers). There is also some redundancy with different versions or editions of games. For example the collection includes three different baseball games: Home Run (1978), Realsports Baseball (1982), and Super Baseball (1988). It almost seems like the producers were trying to pad-out the size of the collection.

The main interface screen is very well designed. The games are grouped into various categories and clicking on the game launches the emulator. Each game includes a mini-manual that explains the objectives and controls. It also has a quick-reference guide to the switch settings and a list of the levels/options. Some of the colours appear to be very slightly off. Otherwise, the quality of the emulation is excellent.

In terms of control, there are options for keyboard controls as well as joystick. The keypad game controls are mapped to the PC keyboard in an intuitive way. Unfortunately, the paddle games are stupidly mapped to the keyboard, using the **Z** and **C** keys, rather than the arrow keys. *Indy 500*, which used a unique driving controller, is not included.



The extras and bonus content are also very comprehensive. There are full-colour scans of all of the original game manuals, cartridges, and boxes. Sometimes there are even multiple scans of variations, such as Japanese and/or European releases.

Next month, we will look at another PC collection of 2600 games: the **Activision Action Packs**.

Feedback on this column is most welcome; special thanks to everyone who has sent positive comments so far. Please send e-mail to jhd@interbaun.com.

Game Over

Short, but different. We mixed it up quite a bit this time, but they say variety is the spice of life. We hope you enjoyed it, and keep the feedback coming.

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