## Attract Mode
### by Scott Jacobi

Feedback is a wonderful thing.  And this months editorial is in response to feedback that I got from last month's issue.  I was posed with one very simple question: "How can I become a retrogamer."  At first, I almost laughed at the question.  I mean, it's ridiculous, right?  It's kind of like, either you are a retrogamer or you aren't.  And that's how I almost responded to the question.  But then I decided to think about it.  Why did I think the question was so funny in the first place?

People everywhere around the world are fans of music and movies.  And eventually, they become sophisticated enough fans that they realize a whole treasure trove of hits that they missed can be found in the past, from a previous era.  Music fans can download old songs, or find an album in a used music shop.  Movie fans can go to Blockbuster or Netflicks and enjoy any classic recommendation with ease.  But say you want to recommend to a friend that they try out Yars' Revenge on the Atari 2600, or Miner 2049er on the Commodore 64.  It simply isn't as easy for modern day players to go out there and try these games out unless they've managed to wind up on some poorly marketed classic compilation that is nearly impossible to find.

I soon realized that the question, "how does one become a retrogamer?" was a fairly legitimate question.  Because unlike music fans, or movie fans, or even comic book fans, our hobby requires a bit of education in order to lower the barriers to entry.  If you listen to modern music, you have all the skills necessary to enjoy "retro" music.  But if you're a newcomer to the world of video games, and don't know how to set up an emulator properly, or how to find a system that an older game ran on, or even know which system it is you're trying to run, it can be a bit daunting to people.

I imagine that most readers of RTM would find the notion that our hobby is particularly difficult to get in to, to be a little funny.  But to be fair, most of us have all grown up with video games, old and new.  We've followed the trends, adapted our approach, and have been slowly educating ourselves about our favorite hobby for years.  It's one thing to pick up those bits of knowledge slowly and absorb them over the years.  It's entirely different to approach the hobby with no prior knowledge.

Fortunately, the knowledge is out there, and available thanks to the internet.  We can point people to FAQs, communicate with them on forums, and begin the process of imparting that essential knowledge to whoever requests it.  Unfortunately, there's no central starting point, but I'm proud to say that the majority of the retrogaming community that I've belonged to tends to be very helpful and supportive when encountering inquisitive new members.  But perhaps we can make it easier still.  Perhaps one day there will be a definitive site solely dedicated to the creation of new retrogamers.  And hopefully they will link to us, right here, at Retrogaming Times Monthly.

## The Lost (Many) Face(s) of  . . .  H.E.R.O.
### by Alan Hewston

We take an unscheduled break from 1982 to cover one of our Lost Faces, that of "H.E.R.O." for the Apple 2. We call it a "Lost" face as I did not have an Apple ][ system for my original review from the Retrogaming Times Issue #38.  As I've done before, we might as well call this as a Many Faces review because my original review was a bit lean (no need for you to go back and see).  We'll not only cover the lost face of the Apple ][, but all the other versions again, and in more detail.  So throw out my old scores and notes and start over.  I really did not justify my scores back then, and after 400+ reviews, have gradually changed how I score some game elements in the various categories.

This 1984 Activision title, H.E.R.O. is short for Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation.
You play the Hero who has a limited time (air supply) to find and rescue a trapped miner inside each level of the mine.  You will walk about and fly around the mine with your helicopter like backpack - or heli-pack.  You also have a limited supply of 6 dynamite sticks for each level which will quickly destroy the walls that are destructible.  Your only defense is your visor mounted micro-laser.  It has unlimited power, but can only be aimed to the left or right, not any other direction. Hitting any cavern denizens with your laser eliminates them permanently.  If you run out of dynamite, you can still vaporize those walls, but it will cost you a lot more or your limited air supply time.  All bodies of liquid are deadly as are the walls made of molten lava.  Each miner you save will wave his hand in thanks which ends the level.  You'll then earn bonus points for your air supply and dynamite sticks remaining and move on to the next harder level maze.

Many screenshots can be found at: www.mobygames.com/game/hero/screenshots

Arcade:  None.  First seen on the Atari 2600 1984 by John Van Ryzin of Activision
All others released by Activision in 1984 as adapted by the Softworks
Apple 2 diskette relatively hard to find
Atari 2600 - cart rarity uncommon
Atari 8 bit computer - cart rarity uncommon
Atari 5200 - cart rarity uncommon
Colecovision - cart rarity uncommon
Commodore 64 - cart common & disk/cassette by Firebird

Other classic ports not covered in detail this review:  Amstrad CPC, MSX & Sinclair Spectrum.  Feel free to review these versions for us and we'll post your review.  I do not have these overseas systems or games, but here a quick summary.

Amstrad CPC 1984 by Activision.  The screens do not show the level number but there is good color variety and multi-color, looks to be a winner.

MSX 1984 Activision & Pony Cannon.  As expected, it is very similar to the Colecovision and may have been adapted from that code.  Looks fantastic.

Sinclair Spectrum 1984 Activision UK by David Aubrey Jones of Software Conversions.  I checked several screen shots and it looks like the color variety was not as good as it could be.  Not much detail and no multi-colored graphics.  But, like the 2600, easy to see everything and Spectrum reviewers enjoyed it.



Amstrad CPC screenshot courtesy of Genesis8

MSX screenshot courtesy of Generation MSX
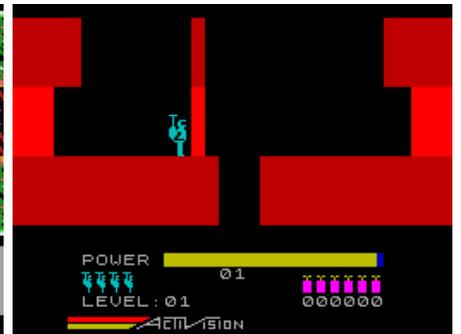
Sinclair Spectrum screenshot courtesy of World of Spectrum

Rumor Mill:  None AFAIK, but one would think it'd be easy to do the TI-99, after writing code for the similar hardware found on the CV and MSX.

Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions are very similar and have: a silent demo mode that shows several different levels/mazes; you play the same sequence of mazes (same layout) every game you play, on every version with the same hazards and enemies up through the PRO level; the PRO levels are randomized and the sequence you see them is unique for every game;  the set of PRO mazes appears to be the same set (8? mazes which I did not document) used on all versions, and once completed, they will repeat, but in a random order each time; to practice the various level, you have a choice of starting each game at level 1, 5, 9, 13 & PRO (17) giving you a decent chance to make it through most if not all of the 24+ mazes; on most versions press keys (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectfully for start levels 1, 5, 9, 13 & 17; the large number of unique mazes, rooms and hazards really helps the gameplay and graphics scores on all versions; each new level or new life begins with an unlimited pause in the action until you move your Hero; there is also a chance to pause the action at any time <AP2, 2600 & 5200>; you'll lose a life if you are too close to your exploding dynamite or touch any enemy, the lava walls or any liquid surface; after a life is lost, the enemy or moving hazard present (if it caused your death or is nearby) will be removed so that you can continue your progress; if the game is going badly, simply do a quick reset and start again; begin each life in the same chamber with all progress for that level in tact but also the same depleted supplies; begin each life in the same L/R location (safe spot U/D) of that chamber; begin each new level with 6 sticks of dynamite and a full air supply; light a stick of dynamite (moving joystick down when on ground, or press the second fire button) to destroy enemies or walls; dynamite explodes within a couple seconds, so you had better move away; there is an end of round bonus in scoring for each tick remaining on the air supply meter and each stick of unused dynamite; tunnel areas are lit by lights, which if bumped into or shot - go out and leave you in near darkness - only lava walls and enemies are then visible; tunnel passages in darkness are partially lit up when dynamite explodes; always use the raft (when present) to move across liquid surfaces; your heli-pack can move you in any direction, but if you do not move or hold the stick upwards, then gravity will bring you down;  precisely timed taps upwards will allow you to hover in place at the same height; getting off the ground always takes some time (delay) holding the stick upwards (not as much time needed on 5200) so you need to plan that ahead of time, especially when lifting off from a raft; the on-screen display shows your number of lives, unused sticks of dynamite, your incremental air supply meter (timer) and the current level, <AP2 & 2600 (level shown between levels then replaced with your score)>; points scored for eliminating enemies and walls are displayed on-screen; (a bit disappointing that) on all versions there are never more than 2 enemies on the screen at a time; when firing your laser at a (breakable) wall, after a few seconds you'll see it crumble/thin (half-way there); upon completion, the wall will completely vaporize; bonus lives are typically earned every 20K; there is no musical score or significant jingle of any sort in the game, but several good sound effects are heard; sound effects are well done for flying or hovering, firing your laser, the sound of the dynamite fuse burning and the dynamite exploding; there are no sound effects when you stand still, land, walk, ride the raft, earn a bonus life or when an enemy is vanquished; you will clearly hear of your own demise; your favorite graphics and sound effects will easily be the sight and sound when bonus points are tallied for your remaining air supply (meter quickly runs down) and unused sticks of dynamite.

If you are doing really well, and have saved many miners, you'll eventually make it to a level with a screen that has a pair of moving molten lava walls - these come together in/out - and you must pass between them.  If you do not time it perfectly, you'll get squished.  The only good news about this, the most severe hazard, is that your sacrifice is not in vein, as the hazard then disappears (sigh of relief).  Personally my success rate is about 10%. There's less margin here than jumping a scorpion in Pitfall!  Obviously the graphics were enhanced on the computer and newer consoles

(compared with the 2600 original), but for some reason no music was added.  The only new effects are that of the walls being partially and then completely vaporized <2600, 800 & 5200>.  Also forgot to clarify that on most versions the dynamite fuse is lit by pressing down on the joystick when on a surface.  The CV & 5200 use their second fire button for this function.

### Have Nots:  Apple ][ (39)

My first reaction was the analog joysticks make this game difficult to play, and no fun for me.  Should be no problem via emulation.  Addictiveness (9) is exciting, but loses ground with poor collision detection and a lack of a pause.  The Softworks disabled the <Esc> from being a standard Apple ][ pause.  <Esc> actually resets the game - so you've been warned.  The Gameplay is all there and well done (9) here and on all home versions.  Graphics are super (9) with excellent details, graphic variety and color variety.  There are good backgrounds and animation but limited use of multi-color for objects.  The displays are OK, but could be better if the score and level were shown simultaneously.  The continuous degradation of the wall when fired upon by your laser is really well done - only seen on this version.  Sound is very good (7) with all the effects present.  Controls were nearly a nightmare (5).  If it were not for the multiple start levels, I may have scored other categories even


Apple ][ screen shot courtesy of MobyGames.

worse, not being able to evaluate the entire game.  I've not had this much of a problem with the Apple ][ analog sticks before, but one huge factor is that a direction of movement (down) on the stick is used to activate the dynamite.  This has dire consequences, such as repeatedly blowing yourself up.  You can overcome most joystick mistakes when moving left or right, but not downwards - the dynamite is spent.  Another possible reason could be that most AP2 games were programmed to allow more of a dead band in the motion.  That is, you move the stick a bit further off the center position before the game actually treats the stick as having moved.  This is clearly not the case here, as any stick motion (or even when you do nothing) will move your Hero.  This is so bad that I cannot find a null or center spot - so there is never a break in the action between levels the game is always playing.  I tried playing a couple other games and my joystick still seems to work fine there - it seems to be the code is the problem.

### Have Nots:  Atari 5200 (43)

My first reaction was the cart graphics on such a large cart are really cool. The Gameplay is all there and well done (9) here and on all home versions.  Addictiveness is great (9), but drops from a possible "10" since the Softworks actually took away the built in 5200 <Pause> - duh!  There is still a reset of any game via <Reset> or pressing any number on the keypad.  Graphics are super (9) with excellent details, graphic variety, multi-color and color variety.  There are good backgrounds, displays and animation.  Sound is very good (7) with all the original effects.  Most notably missing (but I did not round down the score since the 5200 mimicked the 2600 original) are the sound effects of the walls being partially and then completely vaporized.  Controls score a (9) as the analog controls still leave too much error in the action.  The Masterplay Interface is not compatible, so the Wico controllers worked the best for me.  The choice if two fire buttons (second for dynamite) will take time to get used to, but works well using the 5200 Wico - much better than the CV controls.


Atari 5200 screen shot courtesy of Atarimania.

### Have Nots:  Atari 2600 (43)

My first reaction was that 7 years and 400+ reviews ago I scored this one higher, but it really deserves fewer points.  Most gamers will probably concur that the simpler graphics and lack of pause deserve some penalty.  The Gameplay is all there and well done (9) here and on all home versions.  Addictiveness is (9) fantastic, but the lack of a pause and some questionable collision detection warrant a lesser score.  Graphics are sharp (8) and detailed enough to enjoy and prevent any confusion in the action.  The color variety and multi-color are excellent and the graphics variety, backgrounds and animation are all good.  The Sound is very good (7) - like the 5200 missing the effects for the walls being partially and fully vaporized.  Controls are perfect (10).


Atari 2600 screen shot courtesy of AtariAge.

### Bronze Medal:  Colecovision (44)

My first reaction was the controls scheme of two fire buttons should be better than the 2600, but end up worse.  I know I'm not the only one who thinks that symmetrically opposite fire buttons (standard INTY, 5200, 7800 & CV) are only effective if they perform the same function.  I cannot hold these controllers with three fingers and my palm and then use the thumb and index finger as unique fire buttons.  It is difficult to hold the stick so that you can sometimes fire them simultaneously, and sometimes firing just slightly one prior to the other, and of course, never to accidentally press one when you do not want to - like dynamite.  Two or more fire buttons work best like the 7800 pad controllers or the 5200 Wico.  The Super Action Controller would be great but is not compatible.  Trying all CV controllers, I had my best success (but still problems with the dynamite) using the Amiga Power stick for Control


Colecovision screen shot courtesy of Moby Games.

(9).  Note that in all cases the CV's second controller's keypad does work for resetting the game, the pause and more.  This feature is nice but was not useful here.  The Gameplay is all there and well done (9) here and on all home versions.  Addictiveness is awesome (10) with the <*> is the Pause and almost no setbacks to enjoying this one for many long sessions.  The only thing slightly afoul, which is the worst on the CV, but one could say this about every version, is that hitting any number key, (plus the <#> on the CV) will reset the game - yikes.  Be careful to hit that <*> and not anything else.  Graphics are super (9) with excellent graphic variety, color

variety, and probably the best backgrounds. But then again, the backgrounds are so busy and cluttered that it seems to take away from being able to see what you are doing. There are good backgrounds, displays, multi-color and animation. Sound is very good (7) with all the effects present.


**Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit computer & Commodore 64 (45)**
Well, we still have a tie, but no longer a 3 way.

**Atari 8 bit computer (45)**
My first reaction was that most of the 5200 scores and all comments apply here as well. The only difference is that the controls do allow a pause <Space bar>, making the Addictiveness awesome (10), and the digital controls are perfect (10). If I were to pick one of these over the other, it'd be the C64 by a nose.

**Commodore 64 (45)**
My first reaction was this version had only one penalty - only one of the enemies is multi-colored. The Graphics are still super (9), with excellent details, graphic variety and color variety. There are good backgrounds, displays and animation. The Gameplay is all there and well done (9) here and on all home versions. Addictiveness is awesome (10) with the pause via <R/S>. <Restore> resets the game. Sound is very good (7) with all the effects present. Controls are perfect (10).



Atari 8 bit computer screen shot courtesy of Atarimania.com.        Commodore 64 screen shot courtesy of Lemon64.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.
Scoring 70,000 or 75,000 on a US cartridge made you eligible for an Activision Patch - the Order of the H.E.R.O. One thing that I failed to find time for this month was to completely diagnose all the PRO levels. Why would the Softworks make them any different? I did not consider this would be significant in any scoring. Errata from last month's review: none.

Come back next month for a return to 1982 reviews, hopefully the Many Faces of "Tutankham" for the Atari 8 bit, 2600, CV, Vic 20 & maybe the Intellivision. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site:   http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm


| | *NEScade -- Mario Bros.* |
|---|---|
| | by *David Lundin, Jr.* |

After defeating Donkey Kong yet before moonlighting in the Mushroom Kingdom, Mario found what would be his most famous line of work. Mario Bros., released in 1983, marked a number of milestones for one of video gamings most honored characters. For the first time Mario was portrayed as a plumber, working in the underground depths of a city. Additionally Mario Bros. marks the first time that coins were featured for bonus points, something that would continue in one form or another for nearly every Mario game, including his kart racing escapades. Of course the most important addition is that of Mario's brother, Luigi, who would go on to be 2P to quite possibly the biggest video game icon of all time. Only after viewing the competitive / cooperative gameplay of another arcade classic, Joust, did Donkey Kong creator Shigeru Miyamoto envision a second character and make this a two player game.

The Mario Bros. must clear the waterworks of various sewer going pests including shellcreepers, sidesteppers, and fighterflies. Each pest is introduced during an intermission sequence which explains their weaknesses and strengths. Hit a pest from below by jumping up and hitting the floor beneath them. If contacted properly the pest will become stunned with the exception of sidesteppers which require two hits to stun, the first causing them to become angry and move faster. Once stunned, jump up onto the same platform as the stunned pest and kick them into the water below. Be careful however as hitting the floor below a stunned pest will remobilize them and even an undisturbed pest will regain locomotion after a short amount of time. Touching a moving pest will cause either Mario or Luigi to fall into the water and lose a life. For each pest defeated other than the final pest in a phase a coin will pop out of the pipes, collecting it rewards extra points. In addition to the pests that stream from the pipes, fireballs bounce through the sewers, causing instant death to either plumber that they may come in contact with. While they may seem invincible, fireballs abide by the same rules as any other enemy, they can be destroyed from below when in contact with a platform. In addition each phase set features a POW block at the bottom center. Hitting it causes all pests currently in contact with a platform to react as if being hit from below once. After three hits the POW block will disappear until the next set of phases begins after the next bonus phase.

Arcade Original                    NES Version

In an obvious move Mario Bros. was ported to the Nintendo Entertainment System as part of Nintendo's Arcade Classics Series along side the Donkey Kong games and Popeye. No surprise to anyone, Nintendo did an awesome job with the conversion. The visual style of the arcade game is alive and well in its home console cousin. While not exactly perfect to the arcade visuals, you'd have a hard time discerning between the two unless you had a Mario Bros. arcade cabinet in your living room. All of the pests are faithfully recreated in visual appeal and motion with only a slight decrease in detail over their originals. Mario and Luigi look great as well, both still sporting the Donkey Kong era appearance as was in the arcade version. Platforms react accurately with a little bend when hit from below and the over all look of the base playfield is near spot on. Take a look at the comparison picture above and one can clearly see that the home release is almost a perfect mirror of the original. Control is smooth and accurate yet maintains the slightly drifty feel of the original. Left and right on the directional pad controls either Mario or Luigi and the A button is used for jumping. Audio is excellent as well, containing all the familiar tunes and sound effects, furthering the arcade experience. The only things missing are the enemy introduction sequences but they don't detract from the over all package.

Consider this yet another excellent home conversion by Nintendo. They knew the importance of bringing their arcade titles home and doing them with attention to accuracy. Not only does it look like the arcade game but it plays like it as well and having the overall feel of the arcade original is very important when it comes to these ports. The only thing that keeps this game from being an absolute perfect conversion is the lack in frequency and dynamic of fireballs. They just don't seem as big a factor in the NES version as they did in the original but the rest of the game is perfect. Sadly the cost of playing this NES classic might hurt its appeal most. Expect to pay between ten and fifteen dollars for a loose copy and considerably more for one complete. Not a lot of money for a great game but costly when compared to what the bulk of the rest of the NES library can be had for. Just the same, anyone that enjoyed Mario Bros. in the arcade should take a serious look at the NES release, you'll be impressed. As someone who grew up playing the Atari VCS port of Mario Bros., seeing it on the NES was like the contrast between day and night - and it still looks and plays great today.

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


**Apple II Incider: EA Sports - Blast from the Past**
*by Donald Lee*

Welcome back to Retrogaming Times Monthly! After celebrating RTM's 40th issue/10th Anniversary special last month, we return to a look at some oldies but goodies from the Apple II's past.

Before there was a EA Sports, there was just Electronic Arts. As many know, Electronic Arts was one of the biggest game publishers during the 1980's heyday of the Apple II. Some of the notable hits during the 80's that was published from Electronic Arts included:

Pinball Construction Set
Archon
M.U.L.E
Seven Cities of Gold
The Bard's Tale (and several sequels)

However, Electronic Arts wasn't just known for their action/strategy games. Electronics Arts also released two notable sports games for the Apple II. Let's take a brief walk down memory lane with my experiences with the two games:

**Dr. J and Larry Bird Go One-on-One**

I am a huge basketball fan these days. Besides being a spectator fan, I still play in adult leagues, referee youth/adult basketball, and just stay involved in the game in general.



However, in the 80's, I can't say I was a huge fan of basketball. I remember watching the game a little bit in my youth, but I did not play basketball all that much. So, it is interesting that I had my parents pick up One-on-One for me to play.

In my early experiences with the game, I struggled to play well. I remember struggling with the controls and losing a lot to the computer, even at the lowest levels. I recall not playing the game for a few years before picking it back up again.

WHen I picked up the game again, I finally learned how to control the players properly and I started beating the computer regularly at the highest levels. It was here that I learned the various nuances of the game. If I played with Dr. J, I would attack the basket more since he was faster than Larry Bird. If I played with Bird, I had to shoot outside a little more and play smarter since Dr. J was a more athletic player.

All In all, One-on-One was a fun game and I had a good time with it over the years. The game is definitely a little primitive these days but it was remarkable when it was released back in the 80's.

**John Madden Football**

I'm a homegrown San Franciscan. I was born, raised and have lived my whole life in San Francisco. That meant I lived though the football dynasty that the San Francisco 49ers created through the 1980's into the 1990's. I watched all of their Super Bowl victories and enjoyed watching football many times over the years.

But that's getting a little ahead of myself. It was around 1987 or 1988 when I was reading A+ Magzine (an Apple II oriented magazine). I read in the games section that Electronic Arts was releasing a new game called "John Madden Football".



My experiences with football games up to this point was with the Realsports Football with the Atari 5200. Realsports Football was an interesting game at the time but obviously not like real football. For example, There was only 6 players and there were no extra points kicked after touchdowns.

John Madden Football promised to play more like real football. I got a copy of the game and immediately dove in. Alas, like One-on-One, it took me a while to get the hang of the game. There's a big difference between watching football and actually playing a video game simulation. Even if you're just playing a video game simulation, some intimate knowledge of the sport is required. I knew some of the basics of football, but as a teenager in the 1980's, I wasn't exactly versed in the terminology associated with football (4-3 defense, 3-4 defense, blitz).

I eventually did get the hang of the game and was able to play the game relatively well. I chose to be a coach rather than a player. That meant letting the computer control the action while I called the plays.

As far as the overall game presentation went, John Madden Football did as well as it could on Apple II hardware. The game featured 11 players on each side. You could diagram plays and ask John Madden for coaching tips. The graphics and sound are obviously primitive compared to the Madden series that exists today. In fact, one feature from John Madden football that still exists in today's Madden series is the switch from the overhead view to the the passing screen so the QB can see the wide receivers. The passing screen isn't a little muddled and I didn't find it particular useful personally.

All in all, the game was a good attempt to re-create real football. I think it was a good idea but the hardware didn't quite exist at the time to make the game 100% accurate.

**Conclusion**

As noted, these two games are pretty primitive compared to the games of today. But they did form the basis for future games. One-on-One spawned a sequel (Micheal Jordan and Larry Bird go One-on-One) and EA later released The Lakers and Celtics in the NBA playoffs team basketball game. The Apple II was already slowly dying by the time John Madden Football was released so there were no more releases for the Apple II. Later sequels appeared on PC's and consoles. Electronic Arts also released Earl Weaver Baseball, which I believe originated on the Amiga and was later ported to the Apple II.

Hope you enjoyed the historical visit. See you next month.

| | *Nintendo Realm: Early August - Early September 1986* |
|---|---|
| | *by Scott Jacobi* |

We're back to the next bunch of chronological Famicom reviews.  After finishing with Metroid last month, we have an incredibly mixed bag of hits and duds.  Lets dive in.

**Musashi no Ken** released by Taito on August 8th, 1986
With little understanding of Japanese, and no other source to go by, all that I can surmise is that this game is about a young samurai who must race across an obstacle course collecting weapons and defeating odd little creatures.  But rather than having a clock that you must race against in order to finish the level on time, pressure is provided to you in the form of a dog (an akita) who races against you.  You can see his position on the screen as he runs toward the goal, but you can also see your progress on a little meter at the top of the screen.  As you run along, weapons hang in mid-air that you can jump and collect, but weapons can also be found by striking objects.  In addition to weapons, you may also find power-ups like the sneakers that increase your speed tremendously.  As neat as the concept is, the game is rather difficult to play.  Your character has a hard time overcoming momentum, and can only suffer two hits from an enemy before dying.  It's also a little difficult not to suffer from the greed of striking every object to make more weapons appear.  Collecting the weapons only seems to serve as bonus points, but to be honest with you, I did not play the game beyond the second level.

**Hokuto no Ken** released by Toei Animation on August 10th, 1986.
The name of this game might be better recognized by Americans as "Fist of the North Star," a popular, and rather violent, manga and anime about a post-Apocolyptic world where gangs practice a destructive form of martial arts that can cause opponents to literally explode.  And true to form, the Famicom game captures this premise about as well as can be expected.  Kenshiro must wander across a desolate environment, bumping into similarly dressed members of a mohawk wearing gang.  They will attack him,

throw boomerangs and bottles at him, and generally make his life miserable.  It plays a little bit like Kung-Fu, but far less realisticly.  Either you kick opponents far off the screen, or you punch them and make their head snap off of their neck before exploding into pieces.  Power-ups come in the form of words that escape from the exploding torso of one particular gang member, the pink ones of all colors.  But even after you can jump higher, attack multiple times, and run faster; even after you get so strong that your shirt rips off... the game is still incredibly difficult as bottle, arrows, and other various objects rain down, almost unavoidably, from the sky.  Unless you're a big fan of the anime, you can probably skip this one.



Musashi no Ken                                              Hokuto no Ken

**Jajamaru no Daibouken** released by Jaleco on August 22nd, 1986.
Jaleco must have found a winning formula with the Ninja-kun series and decided to stick with it.  The first game, Ninja-kun, was a port of a Taito arcade game.  The second game, Ninja Jajamaru kun, was first a Famicom game, and later turned into an arcade game.  While the original game went on to spawn its own sequel in the arcade, this is Jaleco's third use of the character in a Famicom game, and it's not distined to be his last.  This game takes the Ninja-kun formula and applies it to the growing popularity of the side-scroller.  The Ninja-kun formula is primarily taking a little red ninja, and pitting him against a series of deadly enemies who stun you by bumping into you and only kill you by shooting you.  They leave spirits behind when they are killed that can be collected for bonus points.  Power ups are hidden inside of differently colored blocks, and when you collect enough varieties of ninja arts, you gain access to the secret giant frog summoning tecnique.  I've always enjoyed the Ninja-kun games, so I recommend this one.

**Sky Kid** released by Namco on August 22nd, 1986. Released in the U.S. by SunSoft in late 1986
Sky Kid may not be one of Namco's more revered classics, but it's still a surprisingly good game.  It is among the minority of side scrolling games that opt to scroll to the left as opposed to the right.  In Sky Kid, you are the pilot of a little fighter plane (a bird pilot at that), and you are on a mission to bomb several of the enemies key military targets.  Who is the enemy is is unknown, and unimportant.  All that matters is that you succeed in your missions and don't let anyone stop you.  You can fire your guns, and you can perform loop-de-loops.  As you fly along, you will encounter several aerial and ground enemies, and the game keeps a tally of how many of each you destroy for a bonus at the end.  If you get hit, you won't necessarily die.  Rather, you'll go into a tailspin, and you'll need to rapidly pound on the loop button with the hopes of correcting your flight. Mid-way through the level, you'll need to swoop down and pick up a bomb.  Then you need to hang onto it until you reach the target, where you must press the loop button to drop the bomb with the hopes of nailing it in the center for the maximum bonus.  While the NES version doesn't look quite as pretty as the arcade version, it plays nearly identical.  The NES version was even turned into an arcade version using the Nintendo VS. arcade hardware.



Jajamaru no Daibouken                                              Sky Kid

**Kidou Senshi Z-Gundam: Hot Scramble** released by Bandai on August 28th, 1986.
To any anime fan out there, Mobile Suit Z-Gundam usually needs no introduction.  But just in case, Gundam is one of your typical large giant pilotec mecha-robot animes.  Great, but typical.   I'm impressed with this game though.  Not because it's a great game, but for what they attempted to accomplish.  The first section plays a bit like a first-person-shooter on rails.  You continuously advance across the surface of a planet (Earth, I presume), as you shoot enemy ships out of the air.  At some point (I think it's when you shoot down enough planes), you launch into space.  Out there, you have the same basic play control as before, only you move around a bit more freely in space.  It doesn't matter because enemies will zoom in front of your ship, only to zoom back out of view almost as quickly.  You will have to shoot down other mechas in space until you gain access to the ship whose core you must destroy.  At this point, the view of the game switches to a side-scrolling view, and the gameplay becomes very reminiscent of Thexder.  You can run left or right, and jump, or you can transform into a jet and fly around the maze.  Ultmately, you must locate and destroy the core, which you can typically only do as a jet.  Every shot to the core creates a big explosion that you must avoid, so you can't simply rapid fire at the core and expect to live.  Once you finish, it starts over again at a higher degree of difficulty.  I would recommend trying it out, but your milage may vary.

**ASO** released by SNK on September 3rd, 1986.  Released in America as **Alpha Mission** in 1987
We finish off the month with a pretty decent vertical scrolling shooter.  The game was originally released in Japan as ASO, which stood for Armored Scrum Object.  When the game was brought to the United States, the name was changed to Alpha Mission.  In the game, you pilot a ship with air-to-air bullets, and air-to-ground missiles, just like

Xevious. In Alpha Mission, however, a lot of the ground targets that you shoot down contain power-ups. Some power-ups increase your speed, your fire power, or your missiles, and some merely increase your energy. Energy is used for when you choose an alternate powered-up configuration for your ship. As you collect little ship silhouettes, you can pause the game an enable any of the configurations you have collected. Energy begins to tick down, and you lose more if you get hit, but you won't die. When the energy reaches 0, you go back to your original, vulnerable ship. The bosses at the end of the stages are quite challenging, and really require effective use of power-ups to defeat. It's probably better to stick to the arcade version for this game, but if you have no alternative, this version is pretty good as well.



Mobile Suit Z-Gundam: Hot Scramble          ASO / Alpha Mission

## Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware
### by Jonathan H. Davidson

Once again, the retrogaming item of the month is a hardware product: **Activision TV Games** (released by Jakks Pacific in 2004; originally released by Toymax in 2001). I should make it clear that this is not an emulator, *per se*, rather the original games have been (more or less accurately) remade using what is basically NES-based hardware.



The **Activision TV Games** system includes ten games: Atlantis, Boxing, Crackpots, Freeway, Grand Prix, Ice Hockey, Pitfall!, River Raid, Spider Fighter, and Tennis. Astute readers will notice that Atlantis was originally an Inmagic game and that it was also included in the **Activision Classic Games** collection for the PlayStation (see RTM 34 for a review).

Most of the games could be best described as an homage to Atari rather than an accurate reproduction - with most of the games, the amount of detail in the sprites is way beyond what the 2600 could display.

The selection of games could have used a bit more consideration. Pitfall and River Raid are obvious choices, and the frenetic energy of Spider Fighter compares well with arcade games such as Galaxian, but the primitive sports games lose interest very quickly. Given the size of the Activision library, better games could have been selected.

The hardware is generally similar in design to the **Namco TV Games**, but it does not feel as solid or as well manufactured - especially the joystick which feels very loose.



As with the other TV Games systems released by Jakks Pacific, this is also aimed at the casual game who wishes to play some old favourites. Readers of *Retrogaming Times Monthly* will do better to stick to playing the original games via Stella or another Atari 2600 emulator.

Next month, we will review another example of modern retrogaming hardware. Feedback on this column is most welcome; special thanks to everyone who have their sent comments and question. Please send e-mail to jhd@interbaun.com.

## Mastering Sega - Kenseiden
### by Craig Morris

Released in 1988 by Sega, Kenseiden is one of the little known gems of the Master System catalog. Crudely translated from the Japanese as 'Summoning of the Sacred Sword', Kenseiden puts you in the role of the samurai Hayato. It's your duty to retrieve the 5 secret scrolls and recover the sword of the Dragon King. The scrolls are scattered among the 16 provinces of old Japan.

Along the way you will battle 5 evil Warlocks who guard the scrolls. Each scroll you collect will impart its secret ability, assisting you in your quest to find the remaining scrolls.
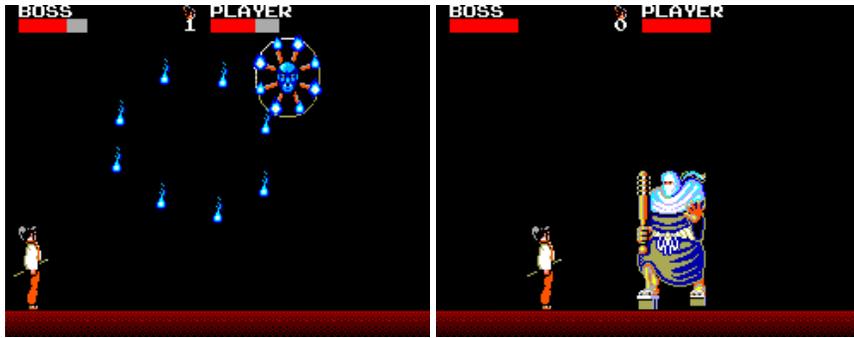


On the surface Kenseiden appears to be another platformer/side-scroller from an era rife with variations on a single theme: grind some levels, beat the level-boss, and eventually fight the head boss at the end of the game. In this, Kenseiden offers up few surprises. Where Kenseiden shines is in the details.

Graphically it's one of the most impressive SMS games you'll find; great pains were taken to use 'authentic' Japanese elements. From flickering garden lanterns to tiled roofs the attention to detail is apparent. While many games in the Martial Arts genre get 'Westernized', Kenseiden sticks to its Japanese setting. No black-robed ninjas, bombs, or throwing stars, its a lone samurai in traditional garb with his trusted katana at his side. Liberal use of kanji is found throughout the game.



Game play is as expected, a lot of jumping and slashing. A few elements are added to enrich the experience such as the 'block' or defense position. This can be used as both a defensive and offensive move. By pressing down on the D-pad and holding button 1 you crouch, holding the sword in front of you. This will effectively block incoming projectiles and enemies. Some enemies (e.g. skeletons) will throw themselves at your blade, effectively destroying themselves after several attempts. You can also fight while climbing stairs, a feature sorely lacking in other games of the period. Another interesting feature of the game is the non-linear play. After the initial two provinces you have a choice as to your next destination.

Occasionally you will encounter a training round as you enter some of the 16 provinces. These rounds allow you to hone your skills in addition to gaining some extremely helpful bonuses, such as increasing your life meter or decreasing enemy damage. These become critical when you're up against a Boss Warlock.



That concludes this month's SMS review. Feel free to send comments/suggestions/request to retro@amalgam.ca

Next Month - F-16 Fighting Falcon

**_Game Over_**

Thanks for all of the wonderful feedback about the anniversary issue. A big congrats to Craig Morris on his new bundle of joy! And a little self-promotion: if you liked the article I wrote about translating The Tower of Druaga, check out my four-page feature article in the October issue of Hardcore Gamer Magazine, on sale now!