Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Attract Mode
by Scott Jacobi

I was talking to an old online buddy of mine the other day. This is a gamer who has stuck with the MMORPG Final Fantasy XI for years, and constantly tries to entice me to fall off the wagon and get addicted to it again. I've manage to stay away since my difficult break from the game. However, on this particular day, we started to reminisce about the good old days... the retrogaming days. And he happened to type one line that got me thinking. He said, "Wouldn't it have been great if things hadn't changed so much so soon?" I didn't ask him what he meant by that. I didn't have to.

What he was referring to with that one question, was the tremendous technological leap that took place over the course of the 90s that changed the landscape of video games forever. When companies were competing to out-bit one another and replace the 16-bit generation with 32 and 64-bit machines. When 2D became passe almost over night, and everything had to be in 3D whether the game would have benefited or not. RPGs became less about tedious grinding battles and more about how many full motion videos could be crammed into an optical disc between events.

As a retrogamer, it's easy to look at all of these evolutions and wonder what it might have been like if the 16-bit generation of video games (SNES, Genesis, etc.) had lasted just a little bit longer, and if the market wasn't so hot to be propelled into the future by every ounce of technology that Nintendo, Sega, and newcomer Sony could produce. But I realized that it's easy to look at that time with rose colored glasses.

In '95 and '96, the market was beginning to stagnate. Nintendo and Sega were actually attempting rather unfortunate experiments. Need I remind anyone of the Virtual Boy and the 32X? The gaming industry wasn't nearly as mature as it is today, and development cycles greater than one year were still unusual. Development teams were still relatively small. But I think the designs that developers were constructing were begging to escape the technical constraints that the current generation of 16-bit systems were imposing on them. That's why things like Virtual Boy and 32X were being created. They weren't made for consumers. They were made for developers. It just so happens that the consumers flat out rejected these stop-gap approaches to overcoming technical limitations. Consumers didn't want temporary solutions, they wanted new full fledged consoles.

Thinking about all of these things made me realize that the answer to my friend's question is no, it wouldn't have been great if things hadn't changed so much so soon. It would have lead to more Virtual Boys, more 32Xs, and perhaps another crash in the market the likes of which have not been seen since 1984. Video games are part of a natural progression, an evolution that occurs whether the technology is there to support it or not. The same can be said of many creative industries, the most obvious of which is the motion picture industry. If the technology isn't there to support that evolution, the entire industry suffers and predictable software begins to bore the market.

Like I said, as a retrogamer, it's easy to look at all of these evolutions and wonder what it might have been like if our favorite period of video game would have lasted a little longer. But after thinking about this for a while, I realized that it's easy to see how bored we would have become if things continued down the same technological track for too long. We wouldn't be left with a warm fuzzy memory of how great that period was from start to finish. Instead, we would be wondering why a period that started so great ended so badly with bland and repetitive games that lacked creativity. Still... maybe just a little longer wouldn't be too bad ;)

The Many Faces of . . . Keystone Kapers
by Alan Hewston

We Kontinue our string of 25th anniversary tributes, moving on with 1983 - and the many faces of "Keystone Kapers. Another Activision Klassic, with bright kolors, fun koncept, simple to learn, easy to kontrol, not too difficult at the beginning, but keeps getting gradually harder every level. You are officer Keystone Kelly, a member of the Southwick's Emporium department store security force. You're former Keystone Kop (Cop - police were nicknamed "coppers" and then "cops" ever since they had copper badges). Your nemesis is the Krook, Harry Hooligan, who in full prison garb, has escaped from jail and has looted Southwick's. You have a fixed amount of time to avoid obstacles and catch Harry before he escapes. I

Activision's badge-shaped "Billy Club" patch courtesy of Atari Age.

guess they could have called him the "Mad Bomber" from Kaboom! - making him a repeat villain.

'Tis a unique combination of a platformer and chase game. It can also be considered a side-scroller, where the screen does not actually scroll, i.e. it works like Pitfall (Garry Kitchen was influenced by David Crane) thus you leave one edge of the screen and begin at the other edge of the screen while the screen changes room. This was the first Atari 2600 game to display multiple colors on a single scan line! And of course, one was able to earn an Activision Patch - and join the "Billy Club" for sending in a photo of your scores of 30,000, 35,000 or 45,000 points on the Colecovision, Atari 2600, or Atari 5200 respectfully.

Many more classic era screenshots can be found at:
www.mobygames.com/game/keystone-kapers/screenshots

Original version: Atari 2600 cart by Garry Kitchen 1983 for Activision, Rarity 1
Atari 8 bit computer cart by Alex DeMeo 1984 for Activision, Rarity 3
Atari 5200 cart by Alex DeMeo 1984 for Activision, Rarity 3
Colecovision cart by Sydney Software Adapters 1984 for Activision, Rarity 3

Rumor Mill: TI-99 prototype by Activision exisits but not the ROM

Classic Era Sequels: Atariprotos.com indicates that a complete but unreleased 2600 sequel took place on a train. Come on Garry release that to us!

Not covered here - as I do not have this system:
MSX 1984 Pony/Cannon/Activision uses the same map and all gameplay elements. Graphics look slightly inferior to the Atari.

Keystone Kapers Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions are very similar and have: no difficulty or starting options other than the levels; begin the action on levels 1 through 16 <2600 & CV (only begin at level 1)>; subsequent levels have a gradual progression (very well done) in difficulty whereby the hazards become more challenging, more numerous and faster moving; levels 17 and up are assumed to be the same as level 16; if you wait for a bit you'll see a thorough demo that can last for several levels of action; every game has the same layout for the store with 4 floors and 8 rooms stretching across; each of the 8 total screens (side view) contains all 4 floors of the store; the elevator is always located in the same (almost) middle room and connects floors 1 to 3, but not the roof; the 3 escalators are always at the end rooms and connect all floors; some rooms always have the bonus items on them and others always have hazards; early on the hazards are always the same, but later levels have some randomness to them,

1920's style newspaper manual for 800, 5200 & CV courtesy of Atari Age

and on some versions the contents can change each time you enter the room; a mini radar screen (like Defender) displays the entire store, and within it the locations of Harry, the Elevator and officer Kelly; begin each game with 4 lives, 3 in reserve; start each level or new life with 50 ticks (approx 2 seconds each) on the countdown timer; if Harry escapes from you (makes it to the far side of the roof), or if the timer reaches 0, then you will lose that life; run out of lives and the game ends; your score and number of remaining lives is displayed on-screen; before each new level, the level number is displayed briefly <2600 & CV>; you begin each life or level on the far right side of the ground floor, whereas Harry starts one floor up at the elevator; you can run faster than Harry walks, but he will always move away from you, moving across each floor and then up to the next floor at the edge of each escalator room; Harry does not actually use the escalator (all of which only go up) he simply appears at the next floor up and moves away in the opposite direction; Harry cannot use the elevator either, but you can use both devices (elevator to go up or down, or the escalators to go up only); if you get ahead of Harry via the elevator, he will avoid you by reversing directions, and don't forget that you cannot go back down the escalators; in your pursuit you must run, duck and jump to avoid all hazards or else lose 9 ticks off the timer if you make contact with any hazard; fortunately, when you hit a hazard, that hazard and sometimes the entire set (2 or 3) hazards on that floor/room will disappear; if you exit and re-enter a room the hazards will re-appear (if they went away) and be reset to their previous positions; re-entering a room may (rarely) result in facing a different <2600 & CV?>, but usually just as hazardous an obstacle; the hazards come alone, or in twos or threes, but always the same item; these items include stationary radios, bouncing balls, shopping carts, and the deadly (lose a life upon contact) bi-plane; while inside the elevator you are safe from all hazards; to use the elevator, step up into it, and then step down to get out.

The combined CV/5200 manual (in photo) incorrectly notes that you'll score 1,000 points for catching Harry, plus the timer multiplier.

Keystone Kapers Home Version Similarities Continued:
Once you catch Harry, you'll earn 100 points for every tick remaining on the timer; this 100 point multiplier increases at level 9 (to 200) and then again at level 17 (to 300); when recovering items along the way, Kelly earns bonus points which are worth more on higher floors and more still on higher levels; you can earn a bonus life at every 10,000 points provided you have fewer than 3 lives remaining; there are good sound effects for almost everything that you do, when you run, jump, collect a prize, touch a hazard, lose a life, catch Harry <800, 5200 & 2600> and tally up those timer points; there is a chime (which can be toggled off/on) every time the elevator door prepares to open <2600 & CV>.

Bronze Medal: Colecovision (39) & Atari 2600 (39)

Despite these versions having the most differences, my scoring resulted in a tie. Depending upon which differences/features you favor, your scoring at home is likely to break this tie. But I'm fairly certain that most of you would agree neither of these is the gold medal winner.

Atari 2600 (39)
My first reaction was the original sets the tone, and so it is fair game for subsequent ports to try to make some improvements upon it. Given a chance today, I'm sure than most of the Atari 800 improved features could be added to the 2600 as well. Even without any enhancements, this version has the highest score relative to the average 2600 score for all of the Many Faces games reviewed to date. So - maybe this is the best one to play. Gameplay is impressive (8) with several good game elements including - a plot, a decent sized setting or play area with multiple rooms/floors and a scanner, several types of obstacles and variations in how they are used, a countdown/bonus timer, a gradual increase in difficulty with every level and much more. All home versions were pretty faithful to the original

Atari 2600 screenshot courtesy of AtariProtos.coms

gameplay and earned the same score. Addictiveness is pretty good (7), with the gradual and creative increase in the difficulty of each level, up to 16 levels. Then there's always the challenge to score the amount required to have earned an Activision Patch back in the day. Too bad there was no break in the action or way to pause the 2600 original. Even so, the difficulty at level 16 will be sufficient to prevent all but a handful of gamers to play more than 30 minutes in one game. The Graphics are very good (7) with several types of hazards, good backgrounds, some amount of detail, good use of multi-color for items and backgrounds, with decent animation and fine displays. The animation for all ports is good for Kelly, Harry, the radios, escalators and bi-plane. I'm disappointed that no version actually says "Game Over", but I think the 2600 is the only one where the timer "00" flashes when the game is over. Sound is effective (7) with all of the previously listed sound effects in place. Other ports added a spot of music to either start and/or end each level and/or added music throughout. Controls are perfect (10).

Colecovision (39)

My first reaction was they added in background graphics but at what cost? Atari 2600 fans may argue that these are distracting. The Graphics are very good (7) but were close to dropping a point lower. Too many key elements in the game such as the hazards, the escalator and prizes are mono-colored, and (typical for the CV) many of those are black. This detracts from the game, probably more than the added details help. There is good animation and displays, more details than the original, and better backgrounds. The color variety is good, but the color mixtures are questionable and there's almost no multi-color. Gameplay (8) is all there, with nothing missing, but with a unique addition that helps both the graphics and the addictiveness is that the elevator is

Colecovision screenshot courtesy of Mobygames

displayed in the radar even when it is partway between floors on the scanner. This is an improvement over not knowing where the elevator is. But, more skilled players could argue that you should always keep an eye on where it was going in the first place. The tempo of the game, including the elevator is noticeably faster than other versions, so you have to control the action at a faster speed. The relative speed of Harry and Kelly are maintained. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with no setbacks, plus the <0> button toggles the pause. Sound is very good (7) with all the effects. This is the only version to add a jingle when you catch Harry, which is then still followed by the tallying of the timer bonus. The Controls (9) just missed being perfect. The standard controller, the Amiga, the Super Action all were pretty fair, but still failed me too many times so I deducted. Granted I can play flawlessly with a 2600 stick, but then one loses the ability to pause. Colecovision fans will likely score it a 10.

Silver Medal: Atari 5200 (42)

My first reaction was this version pretty much uses the same game code as the Atari home computer. Alex DeMeo is credited for programming both ports so it is unlikely that he made any other changes than for the different controls. Gameplay (8) matches the 2600, but does have 2 slight enhancements. First, some hazards (infrequently) come from behind you, which IMHO is refreshing and a creative surprise - or it could be a glitch in the programming - a feature of the software. Second, when you contact one of a set of (multiple) hazards in the same room, the entire set may or may not go away. All of them always go away on the 2600. Again this could be a glitch, but once again is a great

Atari 5200 screenshot courtesy of AtariAge

idea. Keeps you honest and rewards you for being proactive - trying to get past that first hazard in the unbeatable set, instead of a quick sacrifice to the closest hazard. Another thing worth noting, but I did not study this in detail - is the timing of the elevator. If you stay in the elevator room, the elevator seems to be delayed, taunting you - reminding you not to watch that pot trying to boil. If you exit and wait next door it seems fine - or maybe it is only my imagination - I need more time to play test this. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9), with a choice of all 16 start levels so you can always practice the harder levels. Prior to each level, you even see the level number on screen. You also catch a short break prior to the start of each new level. Finally, the pause <Pause> can be used any time - even during the demo mode. Graphics are beautiful (8) with a fair amount of detail, backgrounds, color variety, graphics variety, use of multi-color everywhere and good displays and animation. Sound is enjoyable (8) with a full musical score, nicely modified to play louder at both the beginning and the end of each level. The <*> button will toggle off the music. I scored the Controls a (9). The Masterplay Interface or Wico sticks work pretty well . . . until the other controller plugged in (standard and even the trackball) decides to take over and influence the controls. Once this happens your game is all but over. Once underway, one could unplug (not sure if that would hurt any hardware) the 5200 controller before it takes over, but then you would not be able to pause. Maybe I was too generous and Controls should be dropped to an 8 - regardless it'd still hold onto the Silver medal.

Gold Medal: Atari 8-Bit (43)

My first reaction was since this is essentially the same port as the 5200, the same scores and comments apply here, except as noted below. Controls are (10) perfect here which essentially locks in another gold medal. There is no loss of control ever. The Addictiveness is helped by the pause <Esc> and choice of all 16 starting levels <Select>. <Option> will toggle off the music. <Select> will
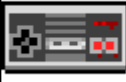
increment the starting level choices.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last
month.
As usual, I am still undecided which titles will come in
subsequent months. There are not a lot of titles left
with "many" faces, which means the task for most
titles is easier for me than it used to be, but then most
of the remaining title are also games which I am not
as familiar with, so each month I may play it by ear if I
run into trouble.

Come back next month for another 1983 review, the
Many Faces of "Robin Hood", our first XONOX title
for the Atari 2600 Commodore 64, Vic 20 and
Colecovision. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site:
http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

Atari 8 bit screenshot courtesy of Atarimania.com

	NES'cade -- Galaga
	by David Lundin, Jr.

When one thinks of the classic arcade shooter a few games come to mind. Asteroids, Space Duel,
and Galaxian all may invoke fond memories of the past of gaming but without a doubt there are few
classic shooters that are as well remembered as the 1981 release of Galaga. The sequel to the
revolutionary Galaxian released two years earlier, Galaga took arcades by storm with its colorful
graphics, memorable soundtrack, and addictive and challenging gameplay. In the same way that one
would be hard pressed to find an arcade without a Pac-Man machine, nearly every arcade had at
least one Galaga machine. In fact many arcades, pizza parlors, and the like have them to this day as
the game was released in a couple special anniversary cabinets in recent years. The continued
popularity allows the game to continue to make solid money on location, nearly everyone plays
Galaga, it's one of those magical games that has a minimum rule set which can be learned and
exploited through refined skill. Of course the game simply being a lot of fun has much to do with that
as well. With Galaga being so popular it has been ported to nearly every video game system capable
of running it, including the NES.

The player takes command of a spaceship in a battle against swarms of alien insects which zoom
onto the screen and eventually move into formation for attack. After the first few stages a couple
enemies will break off each incoming squadron and dive at the player kamikaze style while the rest of
the group settles into formation. Additionally the squadrons begin to take a few shots at the player as
they form up after the first couple stages. After all squadrons report and group into formation at the
top of the screen they will begin to dive at the player, shooting during their descent. Standard
enemies simply make a single dive while bee enemies dive and make a single loop at the bottom of
the screen before continuing downward. All basic enemies wrap around to the top of the screen if
they are not destroyed by the player's fire or a collision with the player's fighter. Without a doubt what
Galaga is most well known for is the Boss Galaga enemy. In addition to taking two hits to destroy, the
Boss Galaga can also capture the player's fighter and carry it back up into the formation. If the
captured fighter is the last of the player's ships, the game is over. However if the player has at least
one ship in reserve the next available ship is put into play. When the Boss Galaga that captured the
previous fighter dives down it can be shot and the captured fighter freed, joining with the current
fighter in play for double firepower. However if the Boss Galaga is shot while still in the formation the
captured fighter will become an enemy, eventually diving down. If the now enemy captured fighter is
allowed to pass by it will return in the next stage and take formation with another Boss Galaga. A few
stages in, a single bee enemy will begin mutating on each stage and split into three. Shooting all of
them will give the player bonus points. If the split enemies get passed the player's fighter two of them
will disappear while the original enemy they split from returns to the top of the screen and the
formation. Every few stages the player is presented with a "Challenging Stage" which is a test of skill
as enemies fly in fancy formations, shooting them all will yield a special bonus.

Bandai handled the development of the Famicom version under license from Namco, the NES version
is exactly the same with the exception of NES specific copyrights. Once the game is powered up
you'll notice one of the few differences between the NES version and the arcade original: a graphical
title screen representative of the text logo that appeared on the arcade marquee, albeit far less
detailed. Aside from that the NES port of Galaga is one of the most direct conversions on the
platform. The left / right joystick of the original maps perfectly to the NES directional pad and both the
B and A buttons are used to replicate the single fire button of the arcade version. While the attract
screen isn't an exact duplicate of the original, there is one present that plays a nice loop showcasing
the basic gameplay. Play control is perfect with the most accurate response this side of a joystick, the

same goes for the fire buttons. The close calls and strategic moves that made the difference between higher scores and game over are captured perfectly.

Arcade Original   NES Version
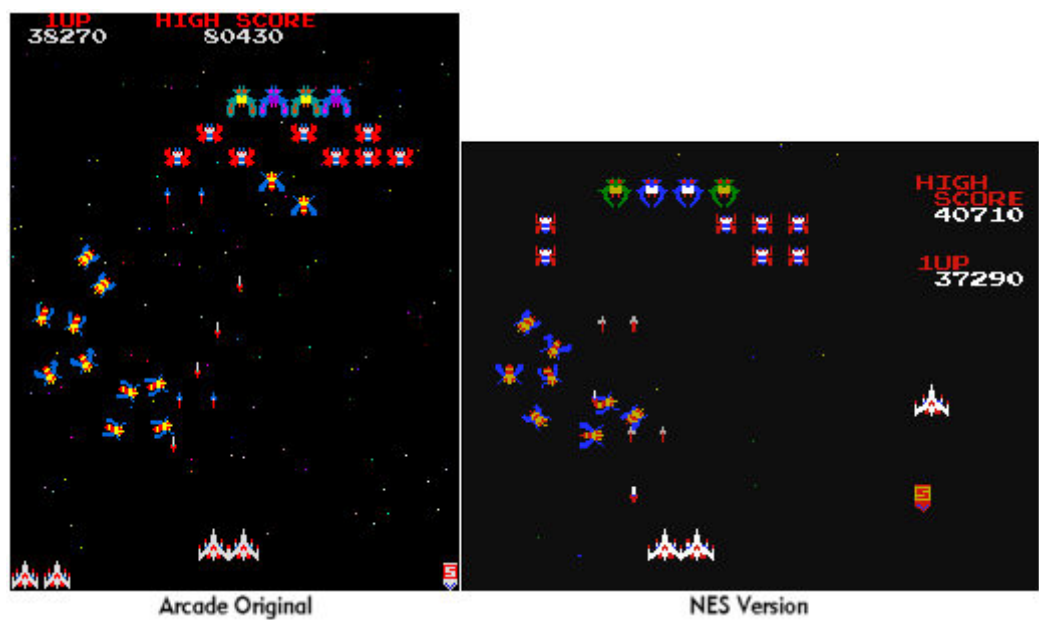
Audio is near perfect with all the sound effects and musical cues that we've become familiar with. The introduction theme at the start of the game is a perfect recreation of the original as are the tunes that play before the challenging stages, when a player's fighter is captured, when extra lives are earned, and everything in between. Since there is no high score name registration, the theme that played during this screen in the arcade plays during the end of game statistics screen on the NES. In this way the entire arcade audio package makes its way onto the NES. Sound effects are also recreated wonderfully although the explosion sound when the player's fighter is destroyed isn't quite as detailed but it's close enough and fits in fine. Core gameplay is pretty much exactly the same with the same enemies, most of the same patterns, and all the same gameplay characteristics. All the mechanics work exactly as they did in the arcade including enemy captured fighters returning on the next stage if allowed to pass by the player's fighter.

There is slightly less detail in each sprite than was present in the arcade but Bandai did a great job at recreating the over all appearance of everything from the enemies down to the stage symbols. As with many arcade games of this era the original used a vertical display which needed to be converted to a horizontal display for the NES. Bandai decided to move the scores, current stage symbol, and remaining fighters to the right side of the screen. In this way the remaining part of the screen used for the playfield is closer in dimension to a vertical display. However to keep the sprites large and detailed even though the playfield is scaled down, the empty vertical space in the playfield of the original is compromised. Although the enemies behave as they did in the arcade, there is much less distance between the player's fighter and the level in which the aliens get into formation. Granted it doesn't change a whole lot about the game but it allows the player to mow through the formation faster as the aliens start closer to the fighter than they did in the arcade. This also makes the challenging stages somewhat different since the enemies are on screen for a shorter amount of time due to the relative loss of space in the middle.

Officially Galaga on the NES was titled "Galaga: Demons of Death" but don't be fooled, it's the classic arcade Galaga we all grew up playing. Galaga is a perfect example of a great game in the arcade that was translated into a great game on the NES. The NES version does the arcade original justice by changing very little to allow the game to perform well on the hardware. It plays exactly like a slightly less detailed version of the arcade game but there's just as much fun to be had as it is a superb conversion. The game is also somewhat common so it's an easy title to find for a few dollars. Chalk this one up as another prime example of how classic arcade games can be properly recreated on the NES if a little attention is given.

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

Apple II Incider: Silencing the Seas (Silent Service)
by Donald Lee

Welcome back to another installment of Apple II Incider.   I was going to write about some more text based games this month. However, I got a little time pressed and decided to write something a little easier. I'll get my focus back next month on some other text based games.

Simulations were a very popular genre in the 1980's. From fighter planes, to helicopters, and finally to submarines, gamers had many choices from which to choose. For submarine simulations, you had a few choices. The two most popular choices were probably Gate by Spectrim Holobyte and Silent Service by Microprose.

Silent Service received many good reviews as I recalled and I was excited to give the game a spin. Considering I was a young teenage in the 1980's, I am surprised I actually had the patience to learn the mechanics of the game. Silent Service was definitely not one of those arcade type games you jump right in and play.

Graphically, Silent Service on the Apple II was good at the time. THe game did a good job of representing the stations most vital to the submarine including the maps, the periscope and being on the lookout on the deck of the submarine. For most gamers money, the best part of the game was probably peering through the periscope and firing torpedoes at passing ships.

As with most Apple II games, there wasn't a lot of sound effects. What sound there was pretty limited. However, the game did support the Mockinboard, an external sound card for the Apple II. I did not have a sound card at the time I purchased Silent Service. However, I did pick up a Mockingboard compatible card some years later, but I do not recall how the sound effects and/or music were improved.

All in all, I spent a great deal of time playing Silent Service. I got past the easier levels fairly quickly but struggled in the higher levels. Interestingly enough, I never did play Gato. I always thought of picking it up to compare against Silent Service, but it never happened. However, with the advent of emulators, I may get my wish.

See you all next month!

	Game Archaeologist
	by Scott Jacobi

This month I was able to get through five particular games: Babel no Tou, Ganbare Goemon 1, Solomon's Key, Valkyrie no Bouken, and Metroid. All five games are rather complex, and surprisingly, all five games have stood the test of time in one way or another so as to be presented once again in the future with some kind of enhanced remake. It occurred to me that last month, I didn't linked to any of the respective guides that I wrote about, so I fixed that this month. Let's take a look.

Babel no Tou, or The Tower of Babel, is a stage based puzzle game created by Namco. Unsurprisingly, it has nothing to do with the biblical tower that it took it's name from. In each stage, you have to find some way to arrange an assortment of L shaped blocks in order to reach the open door and escape. If the door isn't open, you have to find crystals that will unlock the door. Gravity is always in effect, so the blocks fall down to the platforms below when you drop them. However, if you drop them so that they land corner to corner, they stack and create staircases. Most non-Japanese players will have little recollection of this title. It was re-released three times, one of which was unofficial. It found it's way on to the Namco Galleries, a compilation series made for the original Game Boy (with Super Game Boy support). And it was contained in the second Namco Anthology, a PlayStation based compilation of Famicom titles that also included enhanced remakes of the originals. The enhanced Tower of Babel game kept track of which of the multiple exits you successfully made it through, in addition to tracking whether you collected a new item added to each stage. But perhaps the most impressive remake is not the Namco ones, but a fan remake of the game for the Sharp X68000 computer. It recreated all 128 puzzles (64 regular, and 64 pro) exactly, and it enhanced the graphics up to a 16-bit look.
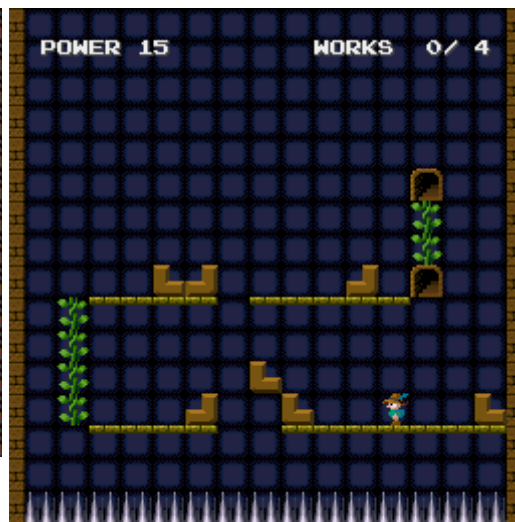
The original Famicom version   The visually enhanced x68000 version

Next is "Ganbare Goemon! Karakuri Douchuu." Many people are only familiar with the Ganbare Goemon series due to the few localized version that were released outside of Japan under the title "The Legend of the Mystical Ninja." Before the series ever made it to the Super Nintendo, there were at least four releases on the original Famicom. The series is known for its wide variety of game plays, mini-games, and wacky humor. The first game is more like a glimpse at the series' humble beginnings. With slightly less gameplay variety, slightly more monotonous stage arrangements, and a near-absense of the humor it became so famous for, the first Ganbare Goemon plays a bit more like an experiment in mixing game presentations. In fact, it's quite long and was one of the biggest releases on the Famicom in terms of memory when it was released. While the game doesn't particular stand out, despite the obvious amount of time and effort that went into it's production, it does set the stage for later games that helped the series grow in popularity. The first game in the series was rereleased in Japan on the Game Boy Advance as part of the Famicom Mini series. Naturally, it wasn't included state-side in the Classic NES series.
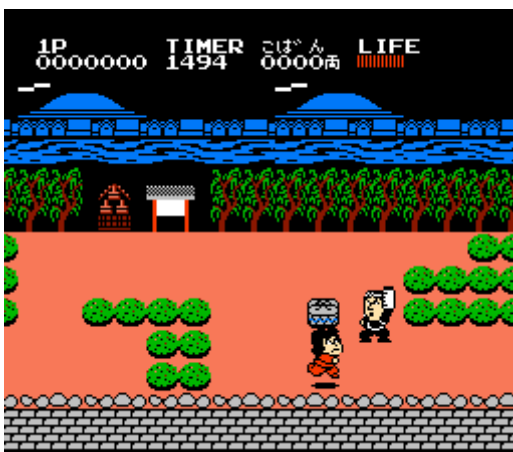

The original Ganbare Goemon   The more familiar Legend of the Mystical Ninja

Solomon's Key is another stage based puzzle game. I learned something about my guide writing style when it came to Solomon's Key (and Tower of Babel for that matter): I'm not very fond of writing stage solutions for puzzle games. Not that I don't enjoy playing them, because I do. But if anyone reading this is a Solomon Key expert, please consider contributing stage walkthroughs for either version of the game. It's hard to say whether most players would be more familiar with it's arcade presentation or it's NES presentation. The interesting fact is that both were developed more or less side by side as opposed to the NES version following on the heels of the arcade version. They were considered "sister projects" by Tecmo, and they share a majority of stages in common. However, their stage arrangement and emphasis differ quite a bit from another. While each version has the same exact micro-goal (Collect the stage key and exit through the door), the over-arching goals are different. The Arcade version has more of an emphasis on score and locating secret stages that can extend playtime and hence score as well. The NES version is arranged in 12 stages of four that correspond to the 12 zodiac symbols, and the emphasis is more on collecting as many hidden objects as possible in order to unlock key stages near the end that will help you obtain the best ending in the game.
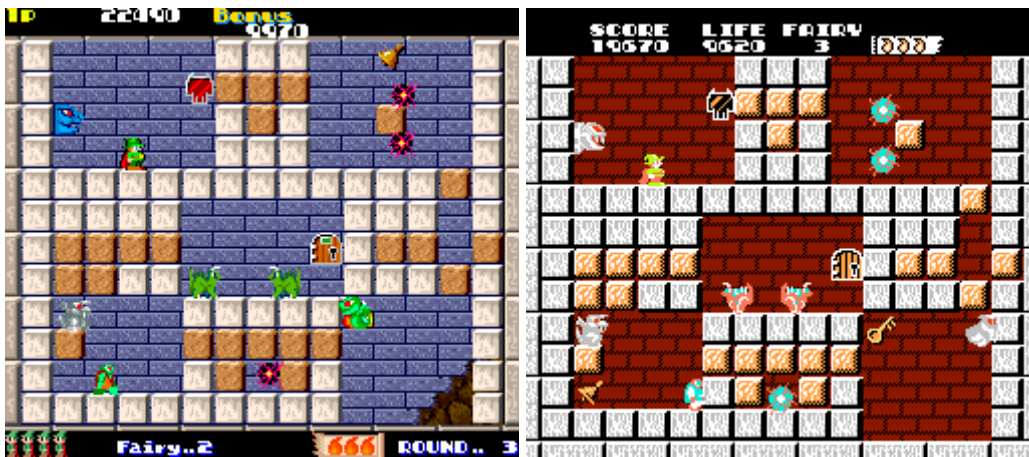
The graphically sophisticated Arcade version   The zodiac stage driven NES version

Valkyrie no Bouken holds a special place in my heart. I can't exactly explain why. It's not an exceptional game, although it's as fondly remembered by many Japanese players as Zelda or Dragon Warrior is, and it came out right around the same time. In fact, it's sort of a mash-up of the two games, featuring the over-world map presentation style of Dragon Warrior, and the real-time combat style of Zelda. It's an insanely obscure game, featuring no text or clues of any kind while you're playing through it, which can lead to people getting stuck or scratching their head in utter confusion due to the lack of any indication given about where to go or what to do next. And there are some very non-intuitive steps in the game (like the how to access the rainbow to reach the third continent.) Nevertheless, there is something oddly appealing about the game that I can't quite put my finger on. Maybe it has something to do with the Valkyrie's place in video history as a minor Namco mascot, never quite reaching the level of fame and popularity that Pac-Man obviously did, but being thought of quite fondly by all those who were aware of her. Two other game have appeared in the Valkyrie series, one of which was in the arcade ad ported to the PC-Engine (TurboGrafx-16), and the other, which was more of a prequel, appeared on the SNES. The original game was also featured on the second Namco Anthology disc, and featured a far more linear remake that was remeniscent of the arcade version. However, the truest recreation of the game can only be found on Japanese cell phones, where the entire game was given a graphical facelift, but otherwise left entirely untouched, featuring the same obscure puzzles and hidden items as the Famicom version (and of course, blond hair for the Valkyrie). While researching this particular title, I found an excellent website concerning the history of the Valkyrie series, and it's sibling series The Tower of Druaga. Take a look at their Valkyrie reveiw over at http://www.devimension.com/dvp_doc_database/dev_docu002.html.

The start of the original Famicom version   The graphically charged cell phone version

Ah, Metroid. What can be said about Metroid that most people don't already know. Metroid is probably one of the top ten most fondly remembered NES games, and with good reason. The series has blossomed from it's 2D origins into one that has simultaneously continued in 2D thanks to Game Boy Advance offerings such as Metroid Fusion and Metroid: Zero Mission, and in 3D thanks to the entire Metroid Prime series, the latest of which has benefited from the original control designs of the Wii. All of this while still keeping the Samus Aran character close to our hearts... and ever present through the Smash Bros. series. Probably the least known aspect of the game (although still fairly well known these days) is the fact that the game started out on the Famicom Disk System, and featured a save system nearly identical to The Legend of Zelda, before it was shipped outside of Japan in a cartridge and featured a password system. Many people are under the impression that the name "JUSTIN BAILEY" which can be entered as a password with all spaces or dashes beneath, holds some special significance, but it does not. The first Metroid is full of mysteries that continue to intrigue players even to this day, like the existance of the fake Mini-Boss Kraid, and the hidden worlds that can be accessed by wall jumping through ceilings and finding odd results on the other side. By the way, if you are a fan of the first Metroid, and haven't played through the Game Boy Advance version of Metroid: Zero Mission, do yourself a big favor and play through it as soon as possible.

The original NES version of Metroid   The enhanced remake on the GBA

Growing up with Games: Part II
by Brian H.

Last we heard, the family was enjoying America's favorite pastime...the Atari 2600. Allowances, birthday money, spare change, everything I had went towards purchasing that "must have" new game that looked so good on the back of the box! Then, reality sets in...after playing this 'wonder' for about 20 minutes, you start to realize that a lot of these games are pretty much the same concept, only with different shapes and colors.

I can remember looking forward to visiting K-Mart and other similar large department stores. While Dad was looking at tools and hardware, Mom was shopping for clothes and household items, and me....I was running to the back towards electronics to get my share of gaming on the Uber-Kiosk!

This was a marvel to behold. All the newest games at your disposal, for free! Pity the younger kid that thought he was going to keep playing Yar's Revenge when I arrived!

1981 - Arriving at a friend of a friend's house, I was looking forward to playing some games with other kids...only to find that they did not possess the most common of items, the 2600. No, on the screen I heard a voice emerge from the little TV speaker. What the $#$!! Major League Baseball....with realistic players, and voice! This was amazing. I had seen the Intellivision at stores, but the price was far too high to consider, especially since we had accumulated a rather large library of 2600 games.

The controller was rather unique in that it had no joystick. A circular disc with a keypad? Colorful overlays that slid in, revealing what keys performed when pressed. I was hooked.

Astrosmash, Space Hawk, MLB, NFL, Auto Race, Utopia, Frog Bog, the list went on......

A couple of years went by and we still played our Sears Telegames VCS. New games from Activision had us coming back for more. Improved graphics and sound kept us feeling jealous of our INTV-owning friends.

I bought the magazines such as Electronic Games and Video Computer Entertainment. The reviews and ads were always fun to look at and wish for the newest game "Coming Soon"!

The arcades were booming and we all wished we could play these games at home. Hi-res graphics, quality sound effects, and a more involved play. Well, it was right around the corner.....

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The Colecovision and the Atari 5200 Supersystem

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Anyone who is old enough to remember these first coming onto store shelves can relate to me here.

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Colecovision - Zaxxon, Donkey Kong, Mouse Trap, Cosmic Avenger, and the list went on.....

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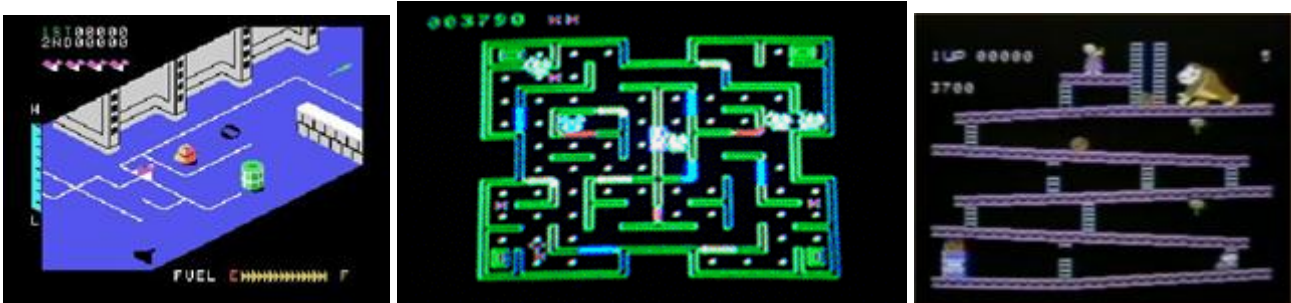
Atari 5200 - Vanguard, Missile Command, Pac-Man, Centipede, Defender, and the list went on....

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What a great time to be a kid who likes video games! The competition was on. Prices were reduced on 2600 games (yeah!), and the weekly ads were filled with pictures, TV commercials on every station advertising their newest technology...to take the arcade experience home. And for the most part....they succeeded.

What happens when you have too many games on the market? Great quality and selection? Nooooo.....

Every company on earth thought that they could make a 'decent' game and profit from it. Customers were confused, disappointed, irritated, and downright pissed. What does this do to the gaming market?

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Crash!!!!

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You know who loved the crash? A young kid from Ohio who loved going through all the dump bins at every department and toy store...picking up games that used to cost 22.99, and now could be had for 3.99, that's who!

My collection grew and grew. So what if they weren't the greatest games, fun for awhile, and at that price! If you didn't like it....sell it to your little cousin for six bucks and make a little profit on the side. See, some people did alright during the great videogame crash of the 80's!

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Game Over

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Once again, I would like to thank all of our readers for their continued support. We do it for you. See you next month.