

# Retrogaming Times Monthly

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### Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

When writing this editorial, I like to bring items to the reader's attention that I think are especially pertinent to the subject of retrogaming, but I am extremely careful not to appear too much like a sales man. Having said that, I wanted to take a moment to extol the virtues of the GP2X. Before I start, I want to point out that raising the subject of the GP2X tends to spark very heated debates which compare the GP2X to the Sony PSP, and even the Nintendo DS. I'm not going to even touch upon those comparisons here, as that is not my intention. There are plenty of message boards where that subject has been, and continues to be, tackled.

My enjoyment of the GP2X stems from my enjoyment of emulation. So if you are the type of retrogamer who only enjoys gaming on original hardware, the GP2X will not be for you. But consider the GP2X's specs: a 200MHz ARM CPU (which can be overclocked to around 266, and even 280), a 200MHz ARM coprocessor, an 8 directional joypad, 11 button inputs, a beautiful crisp LCD screen, AA battery power supply, Linux based OS, SD Card interface, USB port, and one of my favorite features: TV output. All that in a system roughly the size of a Game Boy Advance, and what you get is an open-source handheld programmer's dream.

To date, all of the most popular home systems have seen decent-to-fantastic emulators released for the system, as well as an outstanding version of MAME. A search for GP2X on youtube results in videos showing the system's ability to emulate Neo Geo games at full speed, or even the ability to play Playstation 1 games at a pretty good clip. But naturally, the thing that draws me to it is it's near perfect emulation of Atari 2600, NES, and Genesis games. With the ability to play it anywhere on the go, or to hook it up to a friend's television set, you've basically got a portable retro gaming repository that weighs less than a pound, once you get everything loaded on to a SD card.



While I'm primarily focusing on it's ability to play games, it's capable of a number of other things such as MP3 and AVI playback, and a number of homebrew programs that provide other gameplay

experiences, or playbacks of alternate audio formats. Playing an AVI while using the TV output on a regular (non-highdef) TV set provides as good a quality of picture as any generic DVD player. The only two serious drawbacks are the battery life, and the choice of joystick. The GP2X eats regular Alkaline batteries for breakfast, draining them in roughly two hours, depending on how you use it. You're far better off buying 2500 mAh rechargeable camera batteries, for both their lifetime, and the cost to replace batteries in the long run. The joystick is a topic of much debate among the GP2X community. It's an 8 directional joystick (that is, the diagonals are distinct inputs, not the result of a combination of two others), with it's own button input (you push the entire stick down to press it). Therefore, the standard familiar (and in some cases, more desirable) four direction "D-pad" was not selected. The GP2X has undergone a couple of revisions, and the latest version goes a little way to address the complaints by reorienting the joystick to give it a more favorable bias against diagonals, and an improved joystick cap.

If I've piqued your interest or curiosity in the device, I can recommend no better resource for information than the official GP2X Wiki itself, <http://wiki.gp2x.org/> where you can find more information, and recommendations on where to buy one. Make sure that whoever you buy one from is selling you the latest version (MK2 as of the writing of this article.) If you have one, or proceed to buy one, share some of your experiences using it with us.

### ***Next Month: Retrogaming Times (Monthly) - 10 year Anniversary***

***by Alan Hewston***

Next month marks the completion of the 10th year since Tom Zjaba, in conjunction with his storefront and web site named Tomorrow's Heroes, began this online monthly fanzine for classic era, retro video game fans. We owe Tom quite a lot and hopefully we'll have a nice interview, or at least part one of an interview with him and what he did to get the RT started and his website since.

We also hope to get some feedback from you our readers. Email Alan at [hewston95@spamremoval@stratos.net](mailto:hewston95@spamremoval@stratos.net), or our editor, Scott at [plotor@removespam@ix.netcom.com](mailto:plotor@removespam@ix.netcom.com) if you want to comment or congratulate us or Tom.

Some ideas for you to give us feedback on are:

Direct reader feedback - we'll post what you tell us, or tell us your favorite issue or articles, interviews or coverage of systems or specific games.

What you'd like to see us do or not do in the future?

What systems would you like to see covered more?

How has the RT & RTM helped kept you involved in this past time / hobby?

Ideas for articles or things to do?

Anything else you'd like to ask or to tell us.

Let us know right away and if you'd like yours to be anonymous, or to have your name accompanying your question, feedback or idea, then please let us know.

I'm hoping to find the time to update our site's directory of past articles and links. We're also hoping to get all of the current staff to contribute and maybe do a little bit extra. I'll contact as many of the former writers as possible to get them to submit something, or just say hello.

If we do not put together a superb issue with lots of extras, hundreds of pages in content, oodles of game reviews, dozens of interviews and numerous writers . . . then we're only human, and on a limited - nonexistent budget. We do our best to find time in our daily lives to devote to RTM for your enjoyment. Hopefully we'll give you a little bit more than normal next month. Please keep coming back, and feel free to join our staff and contribute.

Alan Hewston, senior staff writer for the Retrogaming Times Monthly can be reached at [hewston95@spamalot@stratos.net](mailto:hewston95@spamalot@stratos.net) During the day Alan is an engineer, aka rocket scientist at the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland Ohio. We've begun fabrication of hardware for the first test flight vehicle that will ultimately take us back to the Moon, to Mars and to infinity and beyond - or at least to space station. After hours, Alan is a husband to a very understanding (of my crazy videogame hobby) wife Kathy and father to Samantha and Timmy, who love to play video games, and appreciate the classics that Daddy still plays.



## *The Many Faces of... Xevious*

*by Alan Hewston*

We continue to review titles released in 1982, and honor them on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This month we size up the Many Faces of Xevious, one of the earliest vertical scrolling shooters, and one that clearly helped to shape that genre. At the arcade, the enemies and the scrolling background were so highly detailed and colorful, that some gamers may have even been distracted by them, especially compared with other games (or shooters) of the era. Xevious was a sign of where games were going, with much more emphasis on both gameplay elements and graphical attention to the details & realism. The Xevians want to survive and so they attack, defend and retreat in much more realistic formations than say the enemies in Space Invaders, Galaxians and the like. Japanese programmer Masanobu Endoh even added some Artificial Intelligence to the code so that if you were easily defeating an enemy type, then a different or more aggressive enemy type will arrive to contest you. Another nice element in Xevious was that of 2 attack weapons, one fire button for shooting airborne enemies, the other for firing bombs to hit ground targets. The Solvalou fighter's crosshairs had to be lined up to drop bombs onto specific ground targets.

To keep gamers coming back for more, the world of Xevious was big, with 16 different zones to conquer and if that was not enough there were secrets to be discovered - enemy citadels and flags hidden in the game. The game was very successful in Japan, but despite being licensed and released by Atari, it was not quite as popular in the US. Atari was so gung ho, they even released what may have been the first ever TV commercial for an arcade game, saying: "Xevious - the Atari game you cannot play at home."



[Xevious marquee courtesy of KLOV.com](http://KLOV.com)

Below are summaries of the Xevious enemies - first set are the airborne.

Toroid Fleet Ships - most common air enemy, slow  
Torkan Scout Ships - similar to the above but quicker  
Zoshi Death Squads - quick and deadly moving in erratic patterns  
Terazzi Deflector - quick with rapid shots  
Giddo Spario (Energy Blast) - fast, hard to see, white balls of energy  
Zakato Energy Launcher (Black Ball) - or 8-Balls, appear out of nowhere & open fire  
Black Balls also herald the arrival of the Andor Genesis  
Mirrors (Bacura Shields) - annoying, indestructible, rotating, come in waves  
Andor Genesis - the Mother Air Ship. 4 laser cannons, center weak spot  
Unlike most game bosses, this Mother ship does not have an ego or a

"kill or be killed" attitude. Good thing too, so if you stay defensive and avoid its firepower long enough, it will move on and your game will continue safely.

Ground targets - some are optional since most pose far less danger than air targets. Use the targeting computer (projected in front of the ship), to hit these.

Domogram Rovers - the slow moving octagon shaped tanks that stay on the roads.

Grobda Tank - sit motionless until you drop a bomb, which they then avoid.

Logram Sphere Station - common defensive structure fires a quick and accurate bullet.

Boza Logram Dome Network - 4 stations surrounding a highly explosive core.

Derota Defense Station - stations that fire a continuous stream of bullets.

Garu Derota Mega Station - supercharged stations that shoot twice as fast.

Barra Energy Station - harmless, pyramid shaped energy storage stations.

Zolbak Detector Dome - harmless, round shaped structures resemble exhaust ports.

Sol Citadels - hidden, detected by targeting computer, bomb twice for large points.



Xevious arcade map  
courtesy of KLOV.com

For the detailed version of the above lists, see the 5200 port at [www.Atariprotos.com](http://www.Atariprotos.com)

There is a good bit of storyline for the game of Xevious and you in your Solvalou fighter. In a nutshell, the enemies are the GAMP (General Artificial Matrix Producer). They seem to be from the planet Xevious, but are actually returning to their former home world, the Earth, where they have unearthed many supplies and fortresses that they buried before their departure - to avoid the onset of Earth's last ice age. The hidden artifacts that have now come out of the ground are at the Xevians bidding, to provide them much needed supplies and weapons.

Arcade: 1982 by Masanobu Endoh by Namco, distributed in US by Atari

Home versions

Atari 2600 - 1983 by Tod Frye Atari - unreleased prototype

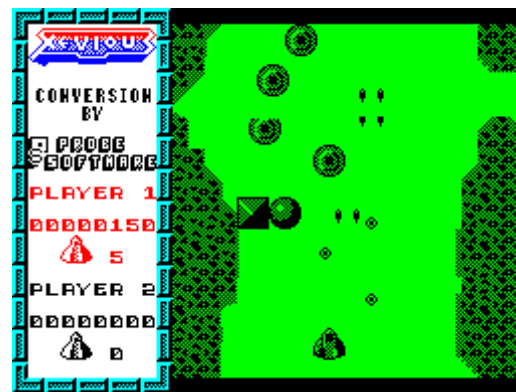
Atari 7800 - 1984 by unknown? for Atari

Apple II - 1984 by Dan Hewitt for Mindscape

Atari 5200 - 1984 by Jim Huether & Alan Murphy (Graphics) for Atari

Commodore 64 - 1986 by unknown? for US Gold / Mindscape

Atari 8 bit computer - 1986 conversion from 5200 code - unreleased



Sinclair Spectrum screenshot courtesy of WorldofSpectrum.org

Not covered here - only because I do not have these games or systems.

MSX - 1988 by unknown? for Namco

Sinclair Spectrum - 1987 by unknown? for Probe Software for US Gold

Note there is extensive info & pics at the [www.WorldofSpectrum.org](http://www.WorldofSpectrum.org)

Arcade Sequels (by Namco): 1984 Super Xevious, 1991 Solvalou, 1996 Xevious 3D/G

To see more screenshots, visit Moby Games at:

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/>



### Disqualified: Apple II (N/A)

My first reaction was how hard this is to find an original disk, and I've still not even found a bootleg copy to play on disc. Maybe we can look forward to a Lost Faces of Xevious review in the next 10 years. Here's an Apple II fans online summary. "Recreating Xevious on the Apple II was a tall order, but the developers actually pulled it off. True, the game is a little slow, weak on color and sparse on sound, but surprisingly the graphics (colors aside) are almost dead ringers for their arcade counterparts, and the gameplay, while not quite as fast paced, is smooth and solid, with plenty to shoot at, and get shot by. Kudos are in order."



Screenshot of the Apple 2 courtesy of Moby Games

### Disqualified: Atari 2600 (N/A)

My first reaction was how impressive this 2600 game-in-work looks - only to find Atari pulled the plug on it. Atari decided to only go with the 7800 release and drop both the 5200 and 2600 conversions - even though both were looking to be among the elite games ever produced on those 2 systems. Dooh!! Although the game is playable, it wouldn't be fair to score it as is. Good news is that it has all the basic elements and you can tell that it is Xevious - so give it a try via emulation or Cuttle Cart. You can enjoy a nice article about this 2600 prototype game and more at: <http://www.atariprotos.com/>



Screenshot of the 2600 courtesy of AtariAge

### Disqualified: Atari 8 bit computer version (N/A)

My first reaction or understanding is that Atari fans (or former programmers) converted the unreleased 5200 code (circa 1986) to play Xevious on the home computers. It was on the Atari home computer master cart list to be produced, but most likely to be converted from the 5200 code directly - as was done by the fans. Whoever it was, they did a fine job of converting the game to diskette versions and ultimately to emulation files so that we can enjoy them today. Unfortunately, I'm going to draw the line here and not count both unreleased versions in the medal hunt. We'll only count the 5200 as it was the one originally planned and coded to be an official release and was fairly close to completion when Atari pulled the plug. The computer port has the exact code as the 5200, save for the obvious change to work the 2600 style (non-analog) controllers. I know that this DQ disappoints our Atari fans, so go ahead and score along at home. First, let's start by giving this "non-analog" version a (10) for Controls, and then give it all the same scores as the 5200 below. OK, you cannot wait until then, so the final score would be (41), which then could have grown as high as (45) . . . had the game been completed to the full capabilities of the machine. Available only via copies on disk or emulation files.

Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions have: a demo; a pause; a choice of 3 or 4 starting difficulties <5200 - (not really)>; good vertical scrolling action; 16 different areas to complete; a large variety (at least 20) different enemies, targets, or hazards to avoid; unlimited supply of ammo; fire up to 3 laser blasters at a time, for taking out air targets; release up to one photon bomber at a time for hitting ground targets; hidden enemy citadels (and flags) can be unearthed and destroyed for loads of points (flown over for an extra life respectfully); your blaster target sight glows when over an enemy, or a hidden citadel or flag; the Andor Genesis Mother Ship, one of the very first video game bosses, was located in areas 4, 9 & 14 at the arcade; a direct hit on the Mothership's central reactor will deactivate it; or survive long enough and the mother ship moves on avoiding you; at the arcade, the extra life flags were hidden in areas 1, 3, 5 & 7; any time you lose a life you start that area over again; and if you complete all 16 sections, you begin the next mission at area 7 - but at

the next higher skill level; bonus lives also earned at different scores (such as 20K & 60K); the enemies can fire off 6 or more shots at a time; with some homing in on you; there are moving hazards and stationary targets; some targets are completely harmless, but all will earn you more points; the enemies seem to change from game to game and there is good randomness <5200 - lacking some>; most enemies are very evasive and fly in varying and effective formations; there seems to be some artificial intelligence, such that if you play well, more difficult enemies arrive sooner; the progression of difficulty begins easy <5200> and gradually increases; the enemies can change speeds, direction, and hover, and even bolt away quickly; some enemy shots may come from behind you and some will even change directions and home in on you; nearly all enemies and objects <5200> are multi-colored; and finally, like the arcade there are two fire buttons <C64 & 7800>.

The three versions covered in detail here each seem to have most (if not all) of the enemies and hazards, but each version seems (to me) to have at least one unique enemy, or one that is behaving uniquely. It would take quite an effort to actually catalog and verify all home version enemies and compare to the arcade. We'll leave that up to a Xevious aficionado to reply or post those details. The 7800 manual helps a lot, but without any pictures. See Atariprotos.com to see all the 5200 enemies. I do not have (nor found any online) documentation for the C64. Finally, I am not much of a Xevious player, and as yet, have not made it to the third Mothership on any version. Feel free to email me to fill in any gaps, or let me know if I made another mistake. I've also skipped this month's game collage, since I only have 1 cart and one manual - total. So much for revealing the "Many" faces.

### **Bronze Medal: Atari 5200 (40)**

My first reaction was that I've only played the multi-cart version, which may not be the most complete, or best version out there. Keep that in mind, and also don't forget that this version went unreleased and could have been made even better. So the scores are a bit lower, but without the 5200 (and since I'm still missing the Apple 2 port) we'd not have had enough players to review the many faces of Xevious. So we thank the 5200 for stepping up to bat, and allowing us to score this not quite finished product.



5200 screenshot courtesy of AtariAge.

So my first reaction (assuming we had a finished product) would be "darn those analog sticks" which are a constant struggle. Fight to keep your fighter from drifting off, and gotta work even harder to keep your ship still - like when passing between the mirrors.

Alas, the Masterplay Interface is not fully compatible, so you have no choice but to play with the drifting analog behavior of the controls. This is truly a frustrating and tiring experience, so I am generous to score the controls a (9). Gameplay is of sufficient quality (8) to play like the arcade. Nearly all the enemies are there and execute their attack orders, but for the most part their forces lack in numbers, variety and combinations of attack and formations. Addictiveness is somewhat enjoyable (8) with a pause <Pause>, and lots of exciting action. But, the beginning level, beginning of the game action starts off too aggressively and does not have room to increase much more. At the hardest setting the game is much easier than the other ports. Furthermore, a change in the difficulty setting does nothing for actual gameplay - there are the same quantities, frequency, intelligence, speed, variety of enemies and their number and frequency of weapons fired. The only thing noticeable is the obvious decrease in the number of starting lives from 5 to 3. There's a possibility that your number of flags is reduced and that bonus lives take longer to earn, but I doubt it. This is clearly an area that could have and would have been improved by play testing and improving the difficulty settings for a final release. A final, fatal blow, which I once again am generously only giving a slap on the wrist is that I have been killed right away and/or the system crashes all 15+ times I've made it to the first Mothership. This frustration (along with the poor joysticks) have resulted in me playing this version

the least. I really want to play more, but my hands hurt and then you are so worn out and despite playing and scoring better, I get no further than the last game. I'm sure that a later release, and of course a completed release would have corrected any glitches, like this kind of system crash. Graphics (8) are also sharp, but lacking some of the polish of the others. The detail and backgrounds are pretty good, but the use of multi-color and good color combinations and variety is a bit lacking. The scrolling is excellent, the animation is adequate and the on-screen action is pretty good. The displays could be sharper, and if anything else, remove one of the lines of the text displays (1/3 of) and add it back to the vertical playfield. The playfield is the shortest on this version. Then, repeating earlier comments, on the hardest setting, there are the fewest and least frequent number of hazards, enemies and their bullets on screen. No doubt if they correcting the difficulty setting, it would yield more numerous and more frequently appearing enemies. Finally, there is a typical element seen in games that are not yet completed, here we see a flat bar (line) that represents your airborne weapons fire. Easily corrected later by the graphics artist, or the main programmer once the game is ready to be completed. Sound is effective (7), with the basic start up music to begin the game but then the really short sequence of background noises during gameplay is quite annoying. A wise choice was made to allow the player to toggle this noise off. There are obvious cut outs in the audio as some simultaneous audio effects occur and only one is heard. The sound effects are all very repetitive, which is the case for the arcade and all conversions actually attempt to match that mediocrity. A few effects, like the mirrors being hit and Motheship are really well done on all releases. I am not sure how much more could be done, but it may be possible to correct and improve the sound somewhat. As I keep saying, the cart was not released, but you can find the ROM for emulation or play it via a multi-cart.

Bottom line is that this port had a little ways to go to be ready, and quite possibly, given time and budget, they could have turned out a high quality product and gained some ground on the above medal winners. We'll never know, but we're very happy to have this port to enjoy.

#### Silver Medal: Commodore 64 (44)

My first reaction was surprise to know that Atarisoft passed this on to US Gold and/or Mindcape. But then again, they bailed out on the 5200, 2600 and maybe more releases as well. The Gameplay is outstanding (9) with pretty much all the action from the arcade. I cannot see any element that is grossly wrong or missing, but Xevious experts can probably find several. If there is much lacking, it more than makes up for it in quantity and frequency of on-screen action. You'll easily see the most bizarre combinations and variations in attacks here. The action really gets going and its white knuckle driving (flying) time. The Addictiveness is (8) very fun with a pause <R/S> a gradual increase in difficulty as you progress and lots of great action and variety to bring you back time and again. But there are two problems which drops this one down to second place. Namely, the bullets all look the same and are hard to see. You must assume everything that you see is an enemy and take evasion action more often than is actually required. Second, the collision detection is a bit off here, which adds salt to the wound as your ship is actually a bigger target than what is shown on screen. Finally, I was also unable to see any signs of hidden items, or the target scanner change colors. It is possible that they are in the game (can anyone verify this?). This affects both the gameplay and addictiveness, but either way, it is not enough to change the raw scores in these categories. Regardless, the 7800 is the best in nearly every category, and is probably more like 2 points better than the C64 overall. As is the case on all medal winning versions, you can still earn a bonus life via points scored and hear that audio confirmation. Graphics (9) are fantastic, with great scrolling, loads of actions, more items on screen than you can count in real-time. The use of multi-color, color variety & graphics variety are nice. Animation is limited but good. The details and backgrounds are adequate. All weapons fire is hard to see and makes for some confusion



C64 screenshot courtesy of [lemon64.com](http://lemon64.com)

(or added difficulty). Sound is pleasant (8), with some music, all the effects and the usual boring background noise. The special audio effects are not quite as good here (Extra life, Mothership & Mirror) but the sound drop outs (from multiple items sharing the same sound channel) are the least here, not as noticeable as the 7800. I think most gamers would agree the C64 has the best overall sound - thanks to Atari being too cheap to include the Pokey sound chip on the 7800 motherboard. Controls are excellent (10), but there is one catch. Your ONE fire button performs the task of firing both of your weapons. The first press always fires your laser blaster for taking out air targets, holding down the fire button, or rapidly firing it a second time then releases a photon bomb at ground targets. The photon bomb must move along the screen (descend) then hit and explode, before the next bomb can be dropped. So, like the arcade, you cannot drop more than one bomb at a time, and there is the delay between bombs. Xevious fans will prefer the preservation of the two fire-button scheme, but since you have an almost unlimited supply (and up to 3) of the airborne shots at once, and it does not harm you in any way to rapidly fire, then the resultant strategy and use of both weapons is maintained, by maneuvering to where you need to be on that second shot fired - just not quite as effective as with 2 buttons. On a finer scoring system, I'd say that the C64 (and the 7800 which does the same thing), would lose some points and the 5200 would not - as it has two separate fire buttons. A non-Xevious fanatic, like myself sees no big deal to scoring them the same. The C64 disk is somewhat hard to find, and I have yet to see one anywhere.

### Gold Medal: Atari 7800 (45)

My first reaction was this one will win the gold medal and it did, barely. Score-wise it wins by one, but on a finer scoring scale it may have won by a bit larger margin maybe 4%. Gameplay is all there (9) with nothing lacking. Still, there are elements or variety of things seen on the other ports that are not here. Addictiveness is the best (9) superb, with the pause <Pause> and good randomness and a gradual increase in difficulty. There are good combinations of enemies to confront, everything is easy to see with no deductions anywhere. You easily play this one the most. Graphics are great (9) with the best details, displays, animation and clarity. At a glance, the 7800 looks the best, but C64 has more on screen enemies, bullets and overall action - which is impressive. So, you could see both systems claiming that they are the best here. Scrolling, multi-color and variety are very good. Sound is pleasant (8) with lots of great effects and some music. The lack of a Pokey chips and the resultant cut outs on sound (one sound replacing another on the channel) is very noticeable and takes away from the otherwise excellent sound effects. There is high degree of repetition, as most effects are repeated, but that unfortunately appears to be done to match the arcade. Controls are perfect (10), but see below there is only one fire button. Despite similar scores to the C64, the 7800 is probably just a wee bit better in every category but sound, and so I'm sure overall, most fans would prefer the 7800. The cart is really easy to find as well.



7800 screenshot courtesy of Atariage.com

For a very detailed 7800 review see Joey Kay's review by the Atari Times at:  
<http://www.ataritimes.com/article.php?showarticle=175>

Joey has played both the arcade and 7800 version quite a bit and noticed only 3 things are different / missing on the 7800: 1) the obvious screen size (proportion), 2) shorter distance from your Solvalou fighter to the target sight (again, due to the shortened screen), and 3) the title screen doesn't "sparkle" the name Xevious [and we know it can].

But wait there's more . . . I read online somewhere that each 7800 fire button works a separate weapon - but the manual says otherwise and the game follows the manual. Thus the 7800 fire buttons are equivalent and work just like having one fire button as done for the C64. Pressing either



button will work both weapons. The first press always fires your laser blaster for taking out air targets, and then holding down the fire button, or rapidly firing a second time then releases a photon bomber for ground targets.

#### Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

Update from last month's review of Pooyan - and a score change for the Atari 8 bit version. Are the Atari computer wolves pink, red or brown? My Atari 8 bit Datasoft copy of Pooyan played on an 800 XL has the dreaded pink wolves. Other online screenshots confirm pink that as well. Aside from the obvious: a poor monitor/TV, computer, or bad setup is making them look pink. This was not the case for me, so I sought more help. I know that there is at least one other possible version, a later release by MCC, but probably that is the same code as the Datasoft original. There's no way they would have changed the wolves to make them pink. Fortunately one of my pseudo-experts, Stephen Knox, can be thanked as he replied "the XL series were missing a 'chroma line' or something like that such that the video output was very 'washed' out". [Also note that] "emulators often lean towards the PAL side" - [possibly a different color as well]. So we can probably assume the color is red, and washed out in some systems to appear "pink". I'm sure that we all prefer the Apple's brown wolves, trees and earth. The real kicker to the scoring is that the animation on the Atari was well done, and I'm not sure how I missed that and said otherwise. My apologies, and so counting for those two adjustments, the Graphics score does warrant an increase +1 to (9) and earns Atari sole possession of the Silver medal (45) and drops the Apple [[ to only the Bronze at (44). Thanks readers for double checking and challenging my scores. I'll update these numbers on the Many Faces Spreadsheet.

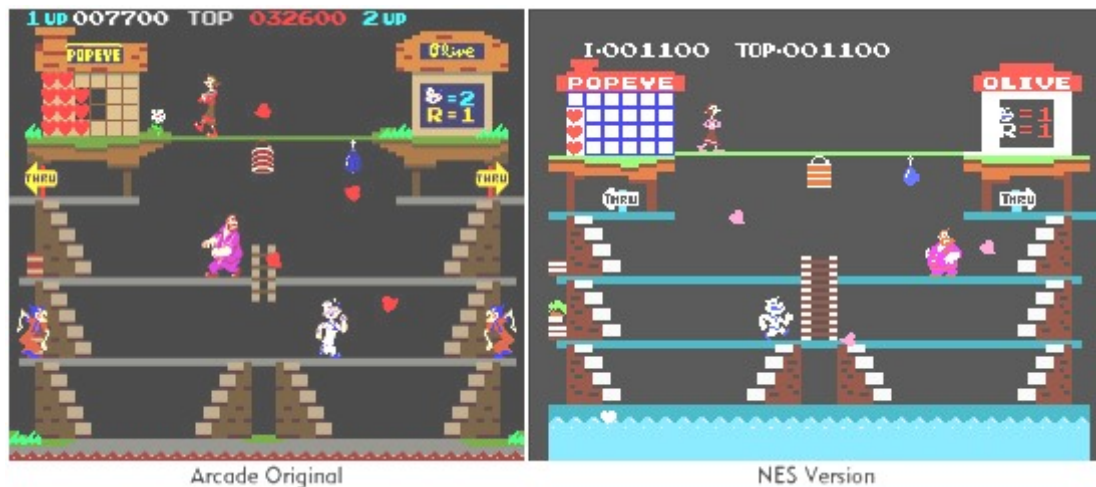
Come back next month for another 1982 review (probably) the Many Faces of Astrochase, released for the Atari 2600, 8 bit, 5200, & C64. Contact Alan at: [Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net](mailto:Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net) or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>



As Scott Jacobi has been documenting in his Nintendo Realm column, Nintendo themselves were the primary software developer for the Famicom in the early days of the platform. When the Famicom first launched in Japan, Nintendo created home counterparts of many of their simple, easy to port, yet very popular arcade games. Since many of these titles make up a good chunk of the arcade to NES catalog in the mind of the average retro gamer, I've decided to take a closer look at them. As usual, I'm going to kick things off with the most obscure of these games - Popeye. We'll get to that Mario character in RTM issues ahead.

While not in the mainstream spotlight for some time now, pretty much everyone knows who Popeye is. For the uninitiated, Popeye is a sailor who gains incredible strength by eating canned spinach. His arch nemesis is Bluto, a gargantuan man who lives only to terrorize Popeye so that he may steal away the affection of Popeye's girlfriend Olive Oyl. If this cycle of events seems never-ending, that's because it is, and things are no different in the game. Popeye offers three different screens of action that all repackage the same basic game play. Olive Oyl stands atop the screen and drops items for Popeye to collect. These are hearts on the first screen, notes from a harp as she attempts to lull Popeye's son Swee'Pea to sleep on the second screen, and finally the letters H-E-L-P on the third screen. Once all items are collected the next stage begins. Bluto is constantly on patrol to stop Popeye dead in his tracks and pummel him off the platforms with either his bare hands or an endless supply of beer bottles which he throws. While Popeye has the ability to punch, he can only use this ability for defense. Punches are primarily used to break incoming bottles but are also used to set off traps and of course to pick up the all powerful can of spinach. Once Popeye consumes his favorite leafy green, Bluto will turn tail and attempt to run away. If Popeye makes contact with Bluto in the

short amount of time granted after eating spinach, Bluto will be knocked off the platforms temporarily before climbing back up. In addition to Bluto, Popeye must also cope with the projectile tossing Sea Hag and her difficult to avoid vulture. After all three screens are cleared they begin again at a higher difficulty.



The concept for this game is pretty simple but the action gets quite frenzied very quickly. An NES version seems like it would be a piece of cake but there are some limiting factors that dampen the fun at home just a little. To begin, the arcade version is absolutely beautiful. Every sprite is detailed and represents the original hand drawn characters perfectly. When the game is in motion it almost looks like a digital cartoon. This is the biggest sacrifice on the NES as while the graphics are nicely detailed, especially considering this is one of the very first games for the system, those high resolution visuals from the arcade are greatly missed. While not as graphically detailed as the original, nearly all the sprite animation and character mannerisms make it onto the NES which is a nice touch. Each of the three screens are created almost exactly with only the most minor differences that neither hinder nor add to game play. Sound design is charming and nicely accurate with the Popeye theme at the title screen and solid sound effects throughout. Control is also quick and smooth which we all know is the most important part of a platforming game.

All in all Popeye on the NES is a nice solid port, until you go back and forth between the NES version and the arcade original and realize one critical difference between them - the NES version is far easier. This is something that would occur with nearly all of the Nintendo ported NES arcade titles. While accurate representations of the originals, for one reason or another they almost all play much easier than in the arcade. In the case of Popeye the action never gets anywhere near as frenzied as it did in the arcade. Sure you have to keep on your toes to stay one step ahead of Bluto and make sure you grab the items Olive Oyl is sending down but in the arcade you barely had time to breathe after the first couple screens. While challenging and entertaining, there's a note of intensity that is missing from the NES version. It's this missing intensity that ultimately makes the game an inferior port. Granted if you haven't played the arcade version in a long time you won't notice this. The NES release is still a fun game but it's not as fun as the original, which is painful since it comes so close to being a perfect conversion. I suppose one has to approach these discrepancies with the notion that Popeye was one of the first Famicom games ever. Taking that into consideration the game is well done and it really demonstrated that the Famicom / NES was going to be the first home platform that could produce near arcade quality graphics. If this was a launch title and was already this close to arcade perfection, then the world was in for some great arcade to NES ports in the future - and we sure were.

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



## **Apple II Incider: The Apple II GS - Part III: The Downfall**

*by Donald Lee*

This month, I'll conclude my discussion of the Apple IIGS computer which was the last major upgrade to the Apple II line.

As noted in the past couple of months, the Apple IIGS was introduced in response to the launch of the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga computers (and to a lesser extent, Apple's own Macintosh computers). The IIGS had advanced capabilities that were comparable to its ST and Amiga counterparts. The IIGS also was backwards compatible as it allowed older Apple II software to run on the system. An upgrade was also made available to existing Apple IIe users as well.

With an established market of millions of Apple II users, the Apple IIGS was primed to be a major hit among current Apple II users who had been clamoring for a more modern machine. With the brand recognition of Apple, the IIGS could have even snagged buyers who had been considering the ST or Amiga. However, this did not occur. Why did this happen?

As noted last month, from a technical perspective, the Apple IIGS's capabilities were slightly inferior to its Amiga and ST counterparts. The IIGS's processor clocked at a measly 2.8 Mhz while both the Amiga and ST were over 7 Mhz. The IIGS's graphics capabilities were a significant upgrade over the 8-bit Apple II computers. However, these capabilities did not quite match up to the ST and Amiga's graphic capabilities and dedicated video processor chips.

One thing the IIGS might have been equal (or even superior) to its competition was its Ensoniq sound chip. The sound chip was a major upgrade over the old Apple II speaker. However, the sound chip was under-utilized throughout much of the IIGS's life. Many developers focused their efforts on developing good looking software without fully exploiting the sound capabilities of the IIGS.

The other factor was the cost of the IIGS. At its introduction, the IIGS CPU was priced at \$999 without a monitor or disk drive. When you put up the cost of a complete IIGS system versus the ST and Amiga, the IIGS was significantly more expensive. While IIe users could upgrade, many chose not to.

The biggest factor for the lack of success with the IIGS was Apple Computer itself. The IIGS was the computer from Apple that had both color graphics and a graphical user interface. The IIGS could have become the bridge that combined the best of both the Apple II and Macintosh worlds. Instead, it would be in 1987 before Apple Computer would introduce the first color Macintosh (the Macintosh II). It would be several years later (in 1990) before Apple introduce the Macintosh LC with an optional Apple II card. The LC finally bridged the gap that had existed between the Apple II and Macintosh.

Because Apple Computer felt that that Macintosh was the future of the company and never significantly promoted the Apple IIGS besides advertisements in Apple II related publications. The Apple IIGS was a relative unknown to those outside the Apple II community.

Also, The IIGS was never significantly beyond its initial introduction in 1986. There were many operating system and hardware upgrades (larger ROM chips, more RAM installed on the motherboard). However, other features such as the graphics and processor remain unchanged. Despite the lack of attention by Apple Computer, the IIGS still managed to sell an estimated one million units before finally being discontinued in 1992.

Despite the relatively short life-span, there was a lot of hardware and software that was introduced for the IIGS. In fact, even today, over 20 years after its introduction, there are still a small group of hobbyists still creating software and hardware.

That's it for my overview of the Apple IIGS. In the future, I will review some Apple IIGS games in my column. Thanks to the power of emulation, many IIGS games are now available to enjoy on the Internet.

See you next month!



## *Nintendo Realm: Late July - Early August 1986*

*by Scott Jacobi*

This month's collection of games has a few very recognizable titles, and a few that are less recognizable. The fact is, they're all pretty good in this month's selection. What can't be played in English can either be translated or researched on the internet, so try to give them all a try.

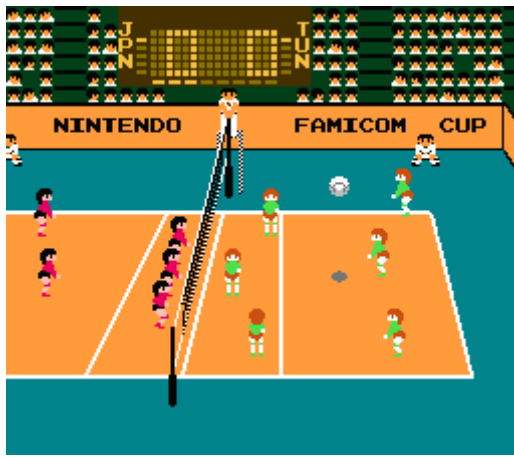
**Volleyball** released by Nintendo for the Famicom Disk System on July 21st, 1986. Released in America on March 1987.

Thanks to the increase in popularity of summer beach volleyball (and as a good excuse to render women in skimpy bathing suits), it's not uncommon to find two or three good volleyball games on a modern day system. Back in 1986, it was virtually unheard of. Though not the first to publish a volleyball game for their own system (Atari, Mattel, and even Magnavox all made a passing attempt at it), Nintendo certainly made the biggest leap by presenting a full six member team playing in an indoor court. The controls allow for a majority of conceivable strategies, such as setting the ball up for another player to spike it over the net. Unfortunately, what happens as a result of the way the game is presented, is that you find yourself playing more to the shadow of the ball, than the ball itself. The shadow is the only indication that you have of where the ball is going to end up, so you focus more on the ground at your players' feet than anything else. And learning the timing for a good spike takes a good deal of practice. By no means the best Volleyball video game out there, but an ambitious start.

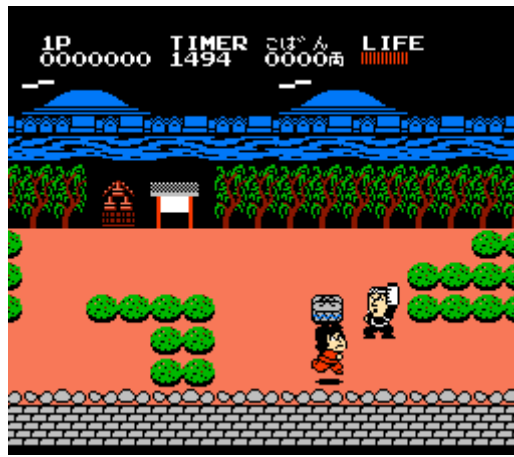
**Ganbare Goemon** released by Konami on June 30th, 1986.

Many American players were only formerly introduced to the wacky ninja Goemon on the Super Nintendo. But Konami started this series way before the SNES arrived. And interestingly, most of the gameplay that could be found in the newer generation of games is just as present and fun in the original game. The Goemon series is one that pokes a little fun at early life in Japan, casting you as a bit of a rogue in Japanese society who must safely make it from one section of Japan to another. In each stage, you must navigate through a maze of towns, portrayed in an isometric format (where you can move up and down as well as left and right) while fending off guards that attempt to capture you, and questioning towns people for information, some of whom are pleasant, some of whom are irritable, and most of whom are a little wacky. Each stage contains an underground maze that is present in first-person perspective, that you must navigate in order to find the item that you need to escape to the next stage. Although this version was never released in America, a ROM translating group known as Dragoon-X did a wonderful job translating all of the text into English. So if you're a fan of this series, definitely check it out.





Volleyball



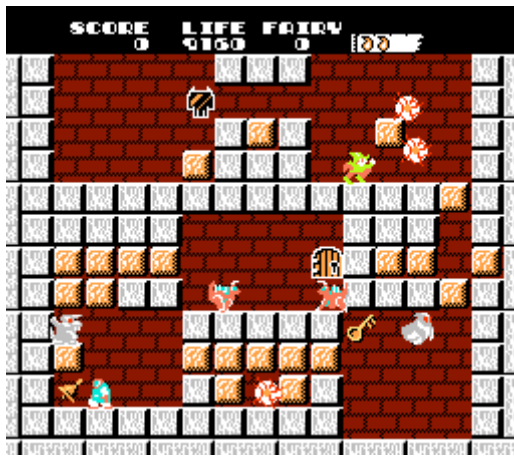
Ganbare Goemon

**Solomon's Key** released by Irem on June 30th, 1986. Released in American in 1987.

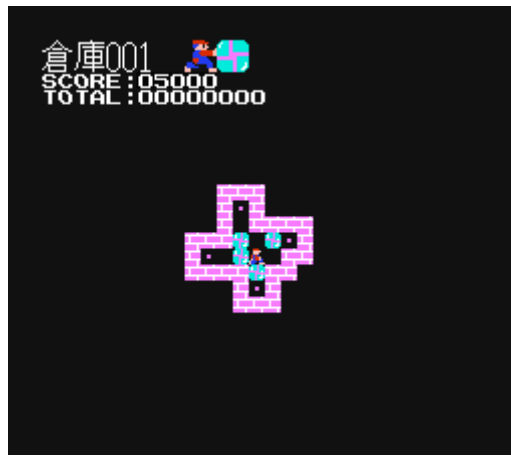
Solomon's Key is a conversion of an arcade game that has always dazzled me a little bit. Every time I look at it, I think about how much fun it is to play, and every time I sit down with it, I get board after only a few levels. I don't think this is a fault of the game's, I think it has something to do with the way that I'm playing it. Solomon's Key, for those who never tried it, is a game where you play through a series single-screen rooms, starting out somewhere on the screen, trying to collect the key that unlocks the door, and then safely escaping the room. The game revolves around your ability to create and destroy brick platforms that allow you a nearly unlimited ability to go anywhere in the room. Of course, enemies of various types are out to stop you and prevent you from achieving your objective. What I get too hung up on are all the little secrets in the game. Objects like power-ups and bonus items can be hidden inside bricks. In some cases, you can even place a brick in some empty space in the room, and remove it, only to reveal a hidden item. There are also the zodiac signs that can be collected. Eventually, I exhaust myself trying to reveal every conceivable secret that I wear myself out on the game instead of just playing and enjoying it. The bottom line is that Solomon's Key is a classic game (and an interesting choice as one of the first available NES games during the Wii's Virtual Console launch) and should be tried out whenever you have the chance.

**Soukoban Special** released by ASCII Entertainment on June 30th, 1986.

Soukoban has had many different names in America. I believe the most common one is Boxxle, as made famous by one of the initial Game Boy titles. In Soukoban, a box boy has to move boxes from their original starting point to destinations that are indicated on screen. The box boy can only push the boxes, and he needs one full box space between the box and anything else in order to push it. This simple concept is turned into 100 fiendishly difficult stages that will test not only your wits, but your patience as well. One wrong move can doom an entire solution, forcing you to start over again. Soukoban was originally developed in 1980, and has been of interest to several researchers of the subject of computational complexity. Ultimately, this game is best suited for fans of slower puzzle games that don't rely so much on dexterity, and more on strategic planning.



Solomon's Key



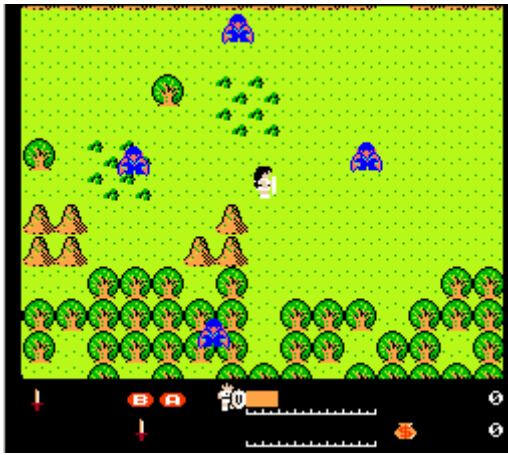
Soukoben Special

### **Legend of the Valkyrie (Valkyrie no Bouken)** released by Namco on August 1st, 1986.

The blonde Valkyrie has been something of a secondary mascot for Namco, having cameos and references in games such as Namco X Capcom, and Soul Calibur II. So it's interesting to note that her original debut on any system portrays her as a brunette. The Legend of Valkyrie casts the player in the warrior's shoes (or sandals) in a four-direction scrolling world where monster spontaneously appear in groups of four to attack her. Fighting leads to increased strength and money which can in turn be used to buy items which increase offensive and defensive power. All in all, your standard action oriented RPG. Since the entire game is in Japanese, it can be difficult for a non-Japanese speaker to understand what's going on or where to go next, and indeed, many of the steps you must take are non-intuitive. However, beneath the complexity, and the primitive graphics employed, even by NES standards, you might find an intriguing game worthy exploration. Patience is advised, and if you're really stuck, run the page: <http://www1.odn.ne.jp/~shimizu/legacy/namco/> through a translation website for some clues.

### **Metroid** released by Nintendo for the Famicom Disk System on August 6th, 1986. Released in America on August 1987

If there is one game in this month's collection of titles that needs no introduction, it's Metroid. Far and away the most popular game in the list, Metroid has spawned a following that continues to this day, with many players anxiously awaiting the release of the third Metroid Prime title, which takes this classic side-scrolling adventure and recasts it, rather successfully, as a first-person shooter. So unique is this series, in fact, that while many 2D sidescrollers have been thrust into the realm of 3D with varying degrees of success, none other have succeeded with this fundamental shift from third person to first person. So what makes Metroid so exceptional? For some it is the unique fantasy approach to the portrayal of alien life forms from the future. For others, it is the graceful control that you are given over the lead female character, Samus Aran. For many, it is the diversity of powerups that you are allowed to collect and wield, and therein lies one of the most compelling aspects of the game. While each Metroid contains a huge world, players only gain access to it in bits and pieces, allowing a player to feel truly rewarded when being granted access to a new area to explore. Metroid was originally released on the Famicom Disk System where it contained a save game system very similar to the Legend of Zelda's. When brought to the states which did not have the FDS, the save system was replaced with the now famous password system. While the first Metroid is obviously the most primitive, it is still just as fun and just as suspenseful as its successors, and absolutely worthy of a try if you are one of the few who haven't experienced it yet.



Legend of the Valkyrie



Metroid



## Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware

by Jonathan H. Davidson

Before getting into the review of the Namco Museum series, I want to respond to a question from a reader, who asked: "Why are games relating to films, such as Raiders of the Lost Ark, nowhere to be found, as well as those from other distributors, such as Parker Brothers and Vidtec."

I've briefly touched upon the issue of un-releasable games before, but I want to say a few words about them here. Basically, where the rights to games partially are owned by another company (e.g. with movie-based games), they cannot easily be re-released. With the Raiders of the Lost Ark game, for example, Infogrames owns the game code itself, but the intellectual property (the title, the Indy-like character, etc.) is still all owned by Lucas Films. If someone wished to re-release the game, it would be necessary to get permission from both companies. The very same argument applies to Star Wars, Ghostbusters, the Disney games, etc. We will probably never see commercial re-releases of those games.

With smaller companies like Parker Brothers, Mattel, Vidtec, Data Age, Coleco, etc., things are even more complicated. Either these companies no longer exist, or they have long since exited the video game industry. The rights to their games are still owned by someone, but determining who that is would be a very long, difficult, and expensive undertaking. Sales of these lesser-known games would never be enough to recoup the investment required, so again we will probably never see commercial re-releases of those games.



Fortunately, virtually all Atari 2600 titles are available for free download from one or another website. See, for example, <http://www.atariage.com/>.

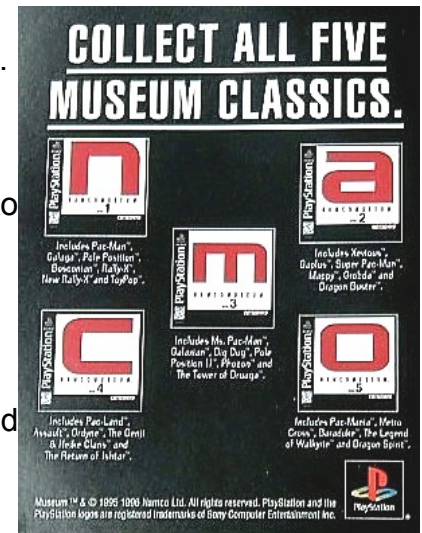
The Namco Museum series of (mostly) classic arcade games was released in five volumes between 1996 and 1997; volumes 1 and 3 were later re-released as "Greatest Hits" titles and so they are relatively easy to find, as compared to the others.

Each volume includes about six titles and is anchored with a Pac-Man title (e.g. Ms. Pan-Man, Super Pan-Man, Pac Land) and includes a mixture of both well-known and "filler" titles, usually arcade games that were never released outside of Japan (e.g. Toy Pop, the Heike Clans, and Dragon Spirit).

The various extras and bonus content include scans of promotional material relating to the games (especially instruction cards distributed to arcades), the original marquees, and similar material. Volume 3 includes some material relating to the history of Namco more generally such as early newsletters. Unfortunately the quality of the scanned images is much lower than the scans presented with the Atari Anniversary Edition Redux. In addition, most of the material is in Japanese, thus making it potentially of less interest to a North American audience.

In my opinion, the best volume in the series is #3, which includes the classics Dig Dug, Galaxian, Ms. Pac-Man, and Pole Position II. Fortunately, this is one of the easiest volumes to find. Hard-core collectors may want to acquire the whole series, but not people who just wish to play the games.

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](mailto:jhd@interbaun.com).



## Mastering Sega

by Craig Morris

It was supposed to be an NES.

I was 14 and had saved up barely enough money to purchase a base NES system - 2 control pads and a console. The Atari was showing its age and I was eager to have an 'arcade quality experience'. On the way to make the purchase I happened to pass the electronics kiosk at my local grocery store. Inside sat a stack of Master Systems for the exact same price of my intended NES purchase. Not simply base systems, these included a light gun and 2 pack-in games (Safari Hunt and Hang-on).



Did I mention it was also the coolest looking console ever?

It was just too good to pass up.

Enough nostalgia, let's get cooking.

The SMS was available in North America from 1986 to 1992. In addition to the "basic" unit (console, 2 controllers, and pack-in game) there were several other configurations. Some included a light gun and 2 games ("Master" package), another included a light gun and electronic 3D glasses ("Segascope")



package). Over the course of its production there were many variations on the SMS bundle. In 1990 Sega introduced the Master System II, a lower budget system that lacked several features of the original, namely the reset button and the card slot. The omission of the card slot prevented use of the 3D glasses with the Master System II.



Some notable points:

- SMS controllers can be used with other consoles of the era (Atari, Commodore) since they use the same 9 pin connector.
- The SMS supported a second media type. A card slot was located on the front of the SMS to accept games released in this format. This slot was also used to connect the 3D glasses to the system.
- Some early models contained a hidden maze game built into the console.
- Most SMS games were released in a hard plastic (a la VHS) re-usable case. Unfortunately the SMS wasn't a big hit in North America. While technically superior to the NES it suffered from poor release timing (many months after the NES) and a limited library of games. This was in great part due to Nintendo's licensing agreements with third party developers, effectively banning them from producing games for both the NES and SMS. Due to the overwhelming success of the NES very few wanted to risk the wrath of Nintendo by developing for Sega. Eventually these third-party restrictions were relaxed due to legal pressure but it was much too late for the SMS.



In the coming months I'll be bringing you reviews of some of the gems of the Master System catalog. First up, **Kenseiden**.

See you in September.

## Game Over

We hope you enjoyed the issue. A big welcome to new writer Craig Morris. And come back next month for our big Anniversary special!

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