

Retrogaming Times

Monthly

Issue #43 - December 2007

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Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Think of this months editorial as less of a retrogaming article and more of a personal blog about RTM. The fact is, there have been some concerns over the quality of our recent issues (generally in terms of layout and display within browsers) that I would like to address. As chief editor of RTM, checking the quality of each issue is one of my responsibilities, and I have not been doing as good of a job as I could be, something which I wish to remedy starting with this issue.

I offer as an excuse the fact that I use Mozilla Firefox exclusively. I tend to be under the somewhat mistaken belief that everyone has abandoned Internet Explorer and uses an alternate browser, be it Firefox, or Opera, or anything that doesn't start with Microsoft. As a result, I have only spot checked my work in Firefox, and things always appear correct, so I pass the issue. Of course I realize that my belief is unrealistic, and when people started talking about how the sentences in my last editorial ran off the side of the screen, I thought they were crazy. Sure enough, when I viewed the page through Internet Explorer, I saw exactly what they were talking about, and I was ashamed. I vowed at that moment to correct the problem, and get a revised version of the issue online, but I never got around to it. Other real life priorities interfered, and time passed until this very moment when I needed to put this issue together.

The fact is, I enjoy working on RTM very much, and I'm proud of the position that I hold on its staff. But in contrast to my other roles in life; husband, employee, pet owner, etc. (not a father yet...) editor of RTM is relatively low on the priority scale. It's easy for me to think of it as a "once a week(end)" job. The time commitment is small, and the onus is largely on everyone else to submit their articles to me. I really only have to check them, compile them into an issue, and send it on for publishing. But that type of attitude is what allowed me to send along a version of the last issue that would appear broken to a large number of user, whose number I could not begin to guess, who use Internet Explorer. And that's really not acceptable.

So I will be taking it upon myself to raise the bar a little bit, and ensure better quality all around on each issue. I can't guarantee perfection, but I will try to come as close as possible. As online 'zines go, we're already rather low-tech and simple in presentation, but that is in-part intentional to keep with the retro theme. But that just means there should be very few hiccups, and I will redouble my efforts to ensure that there are none. I hope you continue to enjoy reading RTM, no matter which browser you view it with, be it on your PC, Wii, or iPhone.



The Many Faces of . . . Miner 2049er

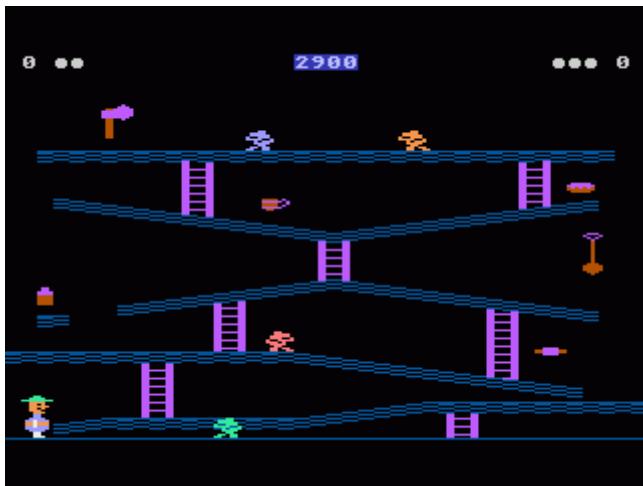
by Alan Hewston

We continue our 25 year tribute to titles from 1982 and visit the Many Faces of Miner 2049er. If you've not familiar with Miner, one could say it is one part Donkey Kong, one part puzzler, and one part Pac-Man. If the "Many Faces" had a poster game, Miner would be on it. Back in 1982, the goal was to port this game to all home systems. Bill Hogue and Big Five Software did a decent job of doing so by an innovative use of licensing. Bill coded the original game on the Atari 8 bit computers & 5200 which showed how good it was, then coordinated licensing with the International Computer Group (ICG). ICG then sold specific platform rights to other publishers and companies. Prior to this, most games were developed and ported by one company, and sometimes later re-licensed to other companies (such as for overseas distribution). Miner did not quite make it out on all systems of that era, but nabbed Big Five nice profits on the 15+ system licenses sold by ICG. That was a record in the video/computer game marketplace back then, and it may still hold that record today. In my time and space available for this review I cannot do this multi-award winning game enough justice - such as what happens in each version if you complete stage 10. Does it go to level two, or end? So be sure to catch more details at some sites I listed here and later on in this review.

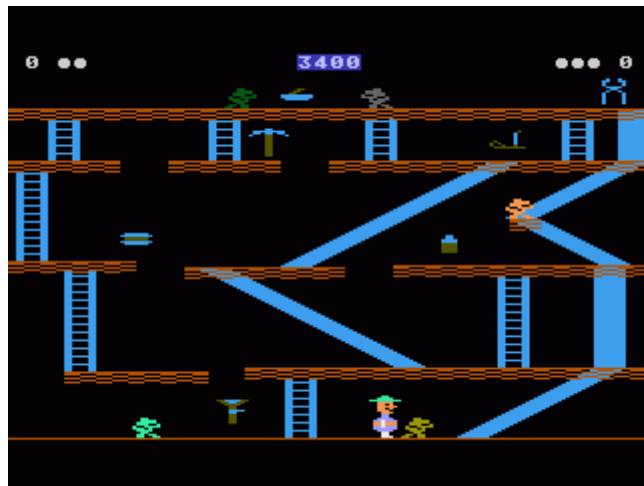
Be sure to visit: <http://www.bigfivesoftware.com/>

The Miner 2049er Info Page has details on each stage, several links and great interviews, such as of programmer Mike Livesay, VG journalist Bill Kunkel, Graphic artist Scott Ross, and ICG's Barry Friedman at: <http://miner2049er.classicgaming.gamespy.com/>

There are 10 stages or stations or screens to conquer. I call them stages, because some versions have a harder difficulty "level" (zone) that can be selected as well. There is not a user friendly way to see and play each stage other than (as the manual says) by completing the previous stage. OK, some cheat modes exist - such as for the 800 and Apple][. Here are the titles and screenshots of each of the 10 stages courtesy of the Miner 2049er Info Page.



Stage 1: Mine Shafts



Stage 2: Slides



Stage 3: Teleporters



Stage 4: Lillipads



Stage 5: Advanced Lillipads



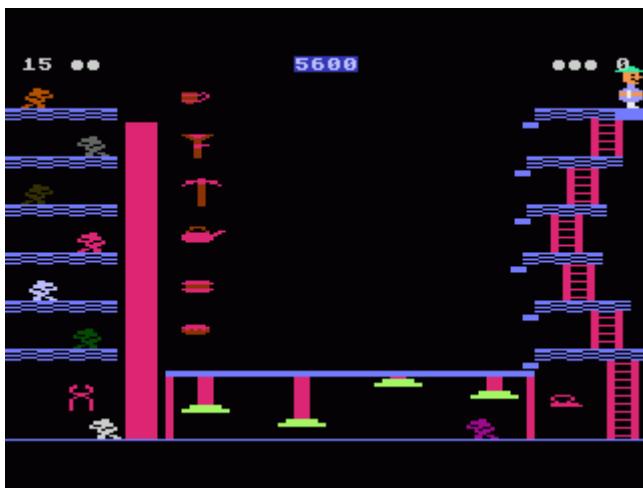
Stage 6: Radioactive Waste



Stage 7: Advanced Teleporters



Stage 8: The Lift



Stage 9: Pulverizer



Stage 10: Cannon

See many more screenshots of several systems:

www.mobygames.com/game/miner-2049er/screenshots

Atari 8 bit Original version by Bill Hogue for Big Five software 1982 cart (R 2/10)

Apple][Mike Livesay for Micro Fun 1982 disk (Rarity ?/10)

Atari 2600 by unknown for Tigervision on two 1983 carts (3 stages each) (R 4/10)

Atari 5200 Bill Hogue Big Five 1982 cart (R 3/10)

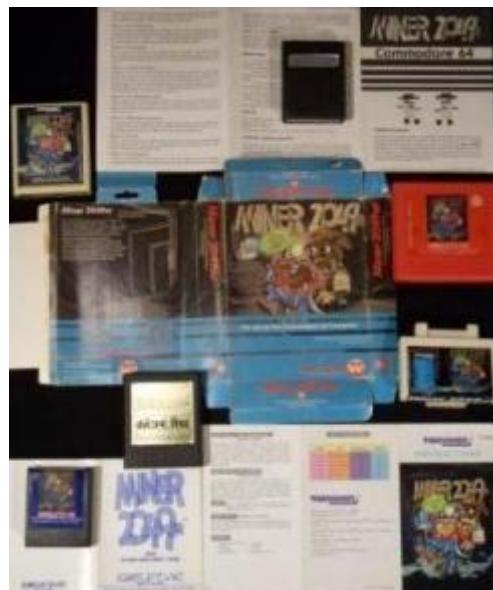
Colecovision Mike Livesay for Micro Fun 1983 cart (R 3/10)

Vic 20 Jerry Brecher for Reston 1984 cart (R 5/10)

C64 Frank G. by Reston 1983 cart (R 6/10)

TI-99 by unknown for Tigervision 1983 cart (R 4/10)

Most of the other systems from that era did have a license but not all were released. Some not covered here are: Amstrad CPC, MSX, IBM ('83 Micro Fun), and Sinclair Spectrum.



Several, but not all 15 licenses became home versions.

Sequels:

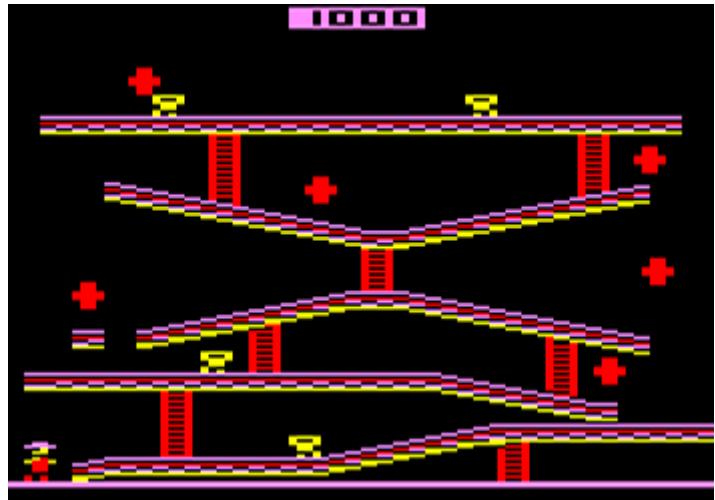
The official sequel, "Miner 2049er II, Bounty Bob Strikes Back" was released in 1985 Big Five for the Atari 5200 & 8 bit computer, C64 and maybe more. Several versions were planned but not all were released. Tigervision and others had already paid rights to make a sequel and did not wait for the official release before cashing in. In 1983 Tigervision released a second Atari 2600 cart, "Miner 2049er Volume 2" which again had 3 of the stages from the original. That same year, Micro Fun released the Apple 2 "Miner 2049er 2" with 10 completely new stages.

Home Version Similarities - except those in <> all home versions are very similar and have: an animated introduction by Bob and/or a demo and/or a sequential preview of all stages <CV (has none of those)>; pause at any time <2600, TI & C64>; you must complete each stage before the countdown timer reaches zero, or lose a life; to complete each stage, you must fill in all floor segments; that is, while moving along the platforms the floor will fill in solid showing your progress; when the stage is completed, any time/points remaining will be transferred to your score, tallying down on the timer and up on your score <2600>; before the next stage begins, there is a brief warning/announcement screen <2600 & C64> that flashes text telling you to get ready for station (i.e. stage number) X and zone (i.e. difficulty level) Y; unfortunately there is not a name displayed for the next stage, those only appear in

the manual; the next stage immediately begins <AP2 (brief loading delay)>; you can walk, jump and climb your way around each stage avoiding the enemies; if you make contact with an enemy, or if you fall or jump down "too far" (learn how far is too far) you will lose a life; if you lose a life and have none remaining you'll see text displaying "Game over" <2600>; lose a life with at least one in reserve and the game continues at that stage, but the stage is completely reset including a full timer; when restarting a stage, the platform & ladder colors may change <probably to prevent monitor burn in - regardless no penalty> but it is the same stage otherwise; there are as many as 8 enemies <2600 (6)> and 8 prizes <2600 (3)> on the various stages; after collecting a prize, the enemies change color and appear friendly for a short time during which touching them eliminates them and adds to your score; collecting a friendly or a prize results in an on-screen display of the bonus points earned <TI & 2600>; be careful as each friendly will flash as they are about to change back into an enemy <C64>; the manual tells you to avoid the "Martini" <2600 & AP]> as it will take Bob's life (start of stage 5); the difficulty of the stages starts out easy and builds more creativity or complexity into subsequent puzzles; there are slides, ladders, isolated islands, places with no way out, teleports (or elevators), pulverizers, moving platforms, a lift, and a cannon; on the home versions having teleports - the platforms will change colors to let you know when you can teleport again; teleport operation varies from system to system, either use the fire button and stick, or a numeric keypad (1-4); the lift and cannon use the joystick, fire button and/or the <Space bar>.

More Home Version similarities:

You'll see Bob animated when he walks, jumps, climbs and dies; the enemies and friendlies have little animated feet as well; there is not much music in any version other than the Atari 8 bit original (& 5200); but there are plenty of sound effects for most everything that Bob does; there are sounds effects when the round starts up <AP][, 2600 & C64>, when Bob - walks, climbs <C64, AP][& 2600>, slides, dies, teleports <AP][>, when a prize is collected, a friendly is collected, timer running out warning <TI & AP][> , when the timer bonus points are tallied up <2600 & TI> and when the game is over <CV, 2600, TI & AP][>; none of the versions seem random - rather the enemies always start out at the same place and move the same speed and patterns every time - use this to your advantage if making a pattern. The Atari 800 version reportedly has 255 zones (difficulty levels).



Vic 20 screenshot courtesy of miner 2049er info page

Lost Faces Candidate: Vic 20 (TBD)

Until I am lucky enough to find or get access to the Vic 20 cart, this one missed it this time, but hopefully will return as a Lost Faces some day. The Vic 20 has a nice built-in pause (press the fire button) to begin each stage. It is assumed that the Vic memory limits it to only 7 stages.

Have Notes: Atari 2600 (36)

My first reaction was this cart only has 3 stages, and then Miner 2049er Volume 2 cart has 3 more stages. Overall, these 6 stages are probably the best as they completely capture ALL of the complex gameplay elements of the Atari 800 original.

So yes, Gameplay is nearly all there (7), [half in each cart] but it is limited with fewer stages, fewer enemies and fewer prizes. I had no choice but to penalize the gameplay score (maybe not enough) when considering just the content of the first cart release. 2600 fans know that without the programmers time restrictions and the RAM limits of a 4k cart, today's homebrew creations could support all the stages and probably have the full set of enemies and prizes as well. Maybe someone will take on that challenge by the

year 2049. The Addictiveness is good enough (6) to play for a while, but scores the lowest. There is no pause, the collision detection is a bit off and Bob may touch a friendly, one that is the correct color and then still lose a life. There are some places along the slides that look like but are not on the slide, there are no on-screen bonus points displayed and no tallying of timer points to your score. Graphics are good (6) for the 2600, but are blocky and score the lowest. The layout of the stages pretty much matches the original version and employ good color variety, have sufficient character and background animation, use of multi-color and good clarity. Sound is effective (7) with nearly all the effects in place. Missing are the climbing effects, game over and a few other features. Controls are perfect (10).



Atari 2600 Miner 2049er cart 2, Pulverizer screenshot courtesy of AtariAge.com

Have Notes: Apple][(41)

My first reaction was I cannot get my original version to load, and was going to skip this review until . . . I realized that the Apple][sequel Miner 2049er 2, which I do have working, has the same programmer as the original. Upon further review, the sequel has all the same gameplay as the Atari. The obvious difference is that of 10 unique stages not found elsewhere, but the rest of my review can be determined from screen shots of the AP2 Miner 2049er I. The Gameplay is well done (9), with everything from the Atari 800, save for a use of elevators instead of teleporters. The Radioactive Waste stage looks a bit different too. Addictiveness is outstanding (9) with a pause <Esc> and a high score page, but one small setback, the disk drive access slows the game down a few seconds waiting for each stage to load. Graphics are (8) impressive with good details, use of multi-color, animation, sufficient color variety, and good clarity. One nit is that all the prizes are Apples, but Mike corrected that in the sequel. Sound is good (6), with most effects in place, but there is not much music and the internal speakers take away a bit from the effects. Missing (in the sequel) are effects for the teleport, climbing and Game Over. Since I did not hear the original, it could have more deductions, but would still be a solid (6). The analog Controls were a bit of a problem, so I scored them a (9). Another problem, which may be specific to my controller, and so I did not deduct, is that I can only select the top fire button to work, not the more desirable buttons on the base. If this is actually the game's fault and not my controller, then lower the score to an 8. Some Apple 2 fans tell me that my stick is not the best, so I want to give it the benefit of doubt. Note that to use the teleporters, move the stick down.



Apple][screenshot courtesy of the Geocities walk through.

Online sources indicate the AP2 port was the most successful or most popular and led to the demand

for a sequel, Miner 2049er II. Bill Hogue's officially planned sequel was delayed until '85. Microfun had already paid for the rights for a sequel, so knowing they had a hit, they did not wait around and commissioned Mike Livesay to create 10 more stages, and the rest is history. This screenshot shown is actually from Miner 2049er 2, stage 9. It is so creative that I had to show you - the water rises and you must hurry to beat it. To see all 20 Apple 2 screens, visit these walkthroughs:

www.geocities.com/SoHo/Exhibit/2762/2049er/miner.htm
www.geocities.com/SoHo/Exhibit/2762/2049er/miner2.htm

Have Notes: Commodore 64 (41)

My first reaction was to disagree with other reviewers, who feel the superior graphics rank this port second overall to the Atari. I was also disappointed that there was no pause but there is plenty of frustration in trying to reach all areas on the slides. 'Tis easily the worst at falling into slides unintentionally. Gameplay is superb (9) matching the original in most everything but with no choice for any start level or difficulty. Addictiveness is worth while (7), but it only beats out the 2600 here. There is no pause, no high score page, and the awful collision detection problem around the slides. Not to mention there is no flashing of the enemies after grabbing a prize. Graphics are beautiful (8), but still only outscoring the 2600. The details are the best, with good use of color variety and multi-color. The animations are fine and the clarity good. Sound is pretty good (7) with most of the effects in place, but not much music. It has no intro music or start of stage alert, and most noticeable - has silent climbing. Controls are perfect (10). There may have also been a disk or cassette releases, but in North America the C64 cart is the rarest of all those reviewed here.



C64 Screenshot courtesy of Lemon 64

Bronze Medal: Atari 5200 & TI 99 (42)

TI-99: (42)

My first reaction was this cartridge looks to be one of the coolest of all time. In appearance, it is my personal favorite out of my entire 2000+ cartridge collection. To avoid the limitations of having 8K ROM without the TI GROM chip in the standard cart slot, this cart plugs into the expansion port where the added foot on the cart rests on your desktop. Gameplay is super (9) with everything in place but a slight deduction for having only 8 stages. Not much lost by skipping the introductory "Mine Shaft", but the clever stage called "The Lift" is missed. It is assumed that memory limits are the reason for only 8 stages. Addictiveness is very fun (8) with everything fine and no problems, other than having no pause. Of course, for every version, we'd love to see a built-in way to start at any of the 10+ stages. Graphics are beautiful (8), with very good details and clarity, nice color variety, decent animation and good use of multi-color. The Sound is very good (7), with most of the effects in place - but missing the tallying of timer points, no timer warning and no end of game reminder. But, it seemed to have the best music (still very limited) next to the original. Controls are perfect (10) - but only when using the Atari adapter.



TI-99 screenshot courtesy of VideogameHouse

Atari 5200: (42)

My first reaction was (of course) this version is the same game as the 800. Besides the controllers, I could not find any differences and I'm pretty sure the web sites confirm that. So, except for the controls problems, all the same scores and details given below form the Atari 8 bit computer version will apply here as well. The 5200 Controls I scored an (8). The Masterplay Interface does not work and even with a Wico stick the analog nature will foil you. There will eventually be one or more directions that are biased and so you'll end up going in two directions at once, which at some point will be the wrong one and cost you time or your life. You may be able to compensate for a while, but are more likely to fail and even repeat the same death over and over again due to a bias.



Atari 5200 screenshot courtesy of Atarimania.com

Silver Medal: Colecovision (43)

My first reaction was this is the version that I have played the most, but only because of a tournament that I was in. This easily wins the Silver as it finishes second to the original in nearly every category. The Gameplay is impressive (9) with everything as good as the original, save for no demo or attract mode. The Addictiveness is outstanding (9) with no setbacks at all and a choice of 10 starting difficulties. I did not play test enough to know how much these level settings really work. Use the <#> button to pause at any time. A new, unique 11th stage was added by Mike Livesay. <I ran out of time and did not verify if this was the same as one of his Apple][sequel stages>. Graphics are crisp (8) with excellent



Colecovision screenshot courtesy of miner 2049er info page

details, use of multi-color, good clarity, nice color variety, OK animation and of course having one more stage is very cool. Sound is very good (7) missing only the Game Over reminder. The <*> button toggles the sound. Controls are not quite perfect, but I scored them a (10) when using the Super Action Controllers. Playing with the knobby standard controllers lowers my score to a (9). The second controller can select a start level, but IMHO is useless as one cannot use an Atari stick on one side and then pause using the other controller.

Gold Medal: Atari 8-Bit (44)

My first reaction was this is the original and easily wins being the best in every category. Gameplay is remarkable (9) with a choice of 10 start levels and tempted me to score it a "10". Now if there were a level editor . . . The Addictiveness is superb (9) with the <Esc> to pause the action any time. Now if there was a planned way to select any or different starting stages, and/or more stages then this one would get a "10" as well. Look on the internet for how to dial Big Five's phone number to start at any stage - I could not get this cheat mode to work. The AP2 is the only

other version with a high scores page. The Graphics are beautiful (8), the best, but I could not push it to a "9". as there is just not enough action and details to do so. Still, it has the best details, best color variety, probably the best multi-color as well. There's good animation, good clarity, and all the extra screens (intro, high scores) and all special effects. The Sound is of high quality (8), and scores the best, having all the effects and the most music. But still, there is room for more music (soundtrack) and effects that could have been added. Controls are perfect (10).

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

Here are some Many Faces disks/carts that I could use if you have them to trade or sell, please let me know.

Atari 8 bit - Bruce Lee, Shamus, Jawbreaker 2, Blueprint, Crossbow, Gremlins.

CV - Fathom

Vic 20 - Necromancer, Chuck Norris

AP2 & C64 - Crossbow & Kung Fu Master



Atari 8 bit computer intro screen courtesy of Atarimania

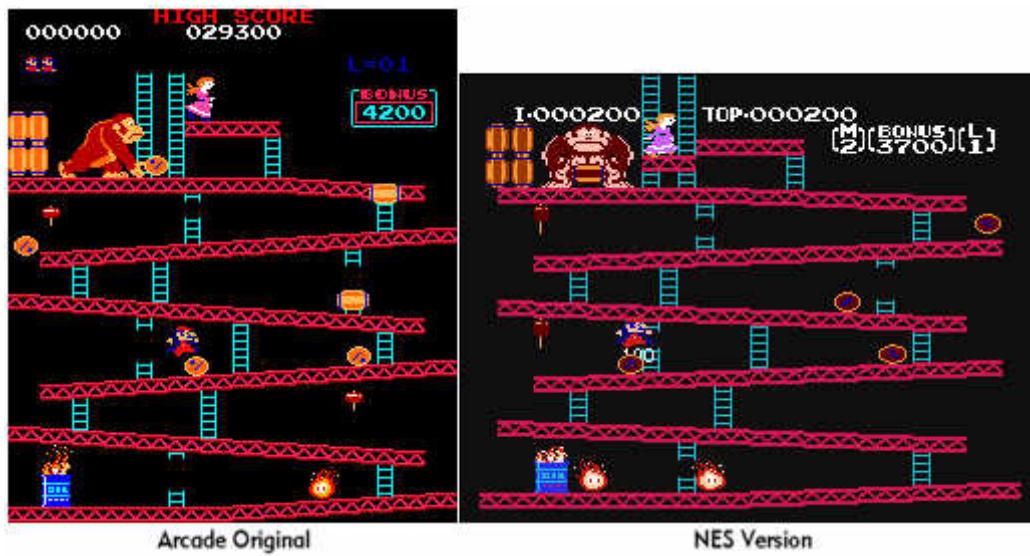
I began reviewing Lode Runner this past month, until I realized the official release was not until 1983, not '82. I'm so late this month, plus I need time off over the holidays, so we'll come back in two months and then jump into 1983 reviews - hopefully the Many Faces of "Lode Runner" for the Atari 8 bit, C64, Apple][and Vic 20. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>

	NES'cade -- Donkey Kong
	by David Lundin, Jr.

It's hard to think of Nintendo without the world's most famous plumber Mario coming to mind. However the super plumber began life as a humble carpenter known as Jumpman. The giant ape Donkey Kong as kidnapped Mario's girlfriend Pauline and climbed a large structure of girders. It's up to Mario to rescue Pauline by giving Donkey Kong chase, scaling any structure and clearing any obstacle that may come between him and his girl. Donkey Kong was unique in that it was one of the first games that had a unified objective across all stages yet constantly threw something different at the player, requiring the player to refine and adapt their skill set to progress. The arcades of 1981 were filled mainly with shooting, driving, and maze games. Although there were some real gems released prior to this era, the majority of the arcade scene started to look the same. When Donkey Kong appeared it introduced something different - personality. Instead of squares, circles, or shapes Donkey Kong featured real characters portrayed in a detailed cartoony style. The colors were bright and the animation was smooth and beautiful. At the time it was unlike anything else before seen or played. The game itself was challenging yet fair with just enough randomness to keep the most skilled players on their toes. It was Nintendo's first big video hit and an obvious choice for their Famicom console, as noted two years ago by Scott Jacobi back in RTM issue #19. So two years after its arcade debut Donkey Kong appeared on the Famicom and a couple years after that on the NES.

Donkey Kong was one of the first NES games and part of the short lived Arcade Classics Series along with Popeye, Mario Bros. and the other two Donkey Kong games. It's no surprise that Nintendo handled the conversion on their own both since it was one of their premier titles and also one of the

very first games developed for the Famicom platform. The NES release is a direct duplicate of the Famicom title with no graphic or gameplay changes between the two releases. The first and most obvious issue to tackle is screen orientation. Arcade Donkey Kong used a vertical display and of course home televisions use a horizontal display. To compensate for this all the graphics are compressed down and stretched out. Donkey Kong, Mario and Pauline are all shorter and fatter but maintain their basic design and detail. Barrels, fireballs, springs and the like are all compressed down in this same fashion as well, including the level graphics and platform spacing. However nothing is compromised graphically because of this and unless you just came from the arcade you wouldn't know any better. This is the same with the audio package which features a solid mix of the sound effects and music from the arcade game. Play control is spot on with the directional pad controlling movement and the A button being used to jump.



While it may seem like a perfect conversion, it's important to note the differences between the arcade original and the NES port - and there are quite a few of them. The core gameplay mechanics are exactly the same and any differences in perspective and distance are adjusted in the abilities of Mario, which allows the game to play tight and smooth as it should. The trade off here is that the game moves at a different pace from the arcade. While smooth, the game seems to play slower than it did originally. This is nowhere more apparent than in the elevator stage which is far easier to complete in the NES version with slower moving elevators and springs. The fireballs in all stages move slower than they originally did as well, which makes the rivet stage much easier. Of course then there's also the notoriously missing conveyor stage. There were four different boards in the original Donkey Kong: girders, elevators, conveyors, and rivets. Its never quite been explained why Nintendo omitted the conveyor stage but it's nowhere to be found. Also the order of the stages is completely different. In the NES version the three included stages loop in order. Originally a stage would be added after each completion of the rivet stage, starting with just the girders and rivets. The introduction sequence with Donkey Kong climbing up the girders with Pauline and then demolishing them below, creating the first stage in the process, is also missing. The last minor presentation change is that after completing a level your bonus is added and then the next screen appears. The arcade version concluded each screen with Donkey Kong grabbing Pauline and progressing offscreen to the next stage, breaking your heart in the process.

Any gripes about presentation differences are minor ones and outside of the arcade original this is still my favorite port of Donkey Kong to play. The drop in difficulty may make it different from the original however it makes the game over all more accessible. A lot less craziness happens on the screen, even on the higher levels, than one would originally encounter in the arcade. Personally I consider the NES version of Donkey Kong somewhat of a "Donkey Kong light." It's less featured, requires less concentration to play, is far more forgiving than the original yet is still fun to play and a great time killer. Regardless of the differences this game is still Donkey Kong and is the home version to get

outside of arcade emulation or an original cabinet. Every NES collection needs a copy of this game, if you haven't played the arcade version in years it will be a more than adequate substitute. Pick up in the Donkey Kong Classics compilation which features both Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr., it can be found cheaply and easily.

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



Apple II Incider: Giving Thanks

by Donald Lee

Happy POST-Thanksgiving everyone. Hope everyone had a good holiday weekend. I had a busy few days running around. From eating turkey, to shopping, to playing basketball, to a party, it was an all and all hectic weekend. Unfortunately, I also got a little sick during the holidays and have been battling a cold this whole week.

In any case, this article may be for the December issue of RTM, but since Thanksgiving just passed, I will keep the theme on giving thanks this month.

Most of my columns in RTM have been about (what else?) playing games. That is for good reason. All of us have had great memories of our youth spent playing games. For me personally, it was a combination of playing games in the arcades, on my Atari 5200 and of course the Apple II. I give thanks to the arcades, the Atari 5200 and the Apple II for providing me many years of fun and games. Let's not forget to thank my parents who have to provide the ever important DOLLARS to play the games at the arcades and to pay for the Atart 5200/Apple II sytems and games.

Jumping off the subject of games for a moment, I also give thanks to my Apple IIe for my interest in technology and my career. Early on, the Apple II was purely a game machine. I later learned a little (VERY LITTLE) about programming through Apple Logo II and Applesoft Basic. I learned some creativity through the Print Shop and Print Magic (Epyx).

However, it was two other big things that have made a big difference. First, I learned about word processing, spreadsheets and basic database management on the Apple II through the use of Appleworks. Appleworks was one of the first three-in-one productivity applications and was extremely popular. Spreadsheets were one of my favorite applications and I created a spreadsheet that automatically calculated statistics for my basketball team. That was one of my proudest moments.

Secondly, through the use of 2400 baud modem, my school Unix shell account, a telecomm program and my Apple IIe, I got online from home for the first time. Yes, my Apple IIe was not directly connected to the Internet like most PC's today. But through the use of Lynx, Pine and Tin, I got my first home exposure to the world we now know as the Internet.

These days, I continue the trend at home and work. I'm not a huge techie, but I just find hardware and software that fits a practical purpose and I use it. I've developed a love for many freeware application such as Editpad Lite and Filezilla. At work, I have learned to use Iperf and Ethereal/Wireshark for packet analyzing.

Have a Great Christmas. See you next month.



[by Scott Jacobi](#)

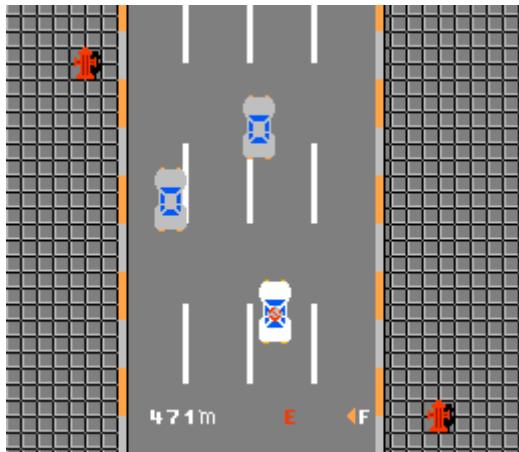
Ghostbuster released by Tokuma Shoten on September 22nd, 1986. Released in the United States by Activision in 1988

For you retro fans, yes, this is a conversion of the original Activision game that was released on several popular home computers such as the Atari 800, Apple II, Commodore 64, and even the MSX.

I grew up playing the Atari 800 version, if only to sing along with the bouncing ball that followed the lyrics of the Ghostbuster theme song. Like many games that appeared on the NES, some have a tendency to get Nintendo-ized. That is, they pick up many extra features that weren't present in the original. In some cases that's a good thing, like in the case of Double Dragon. In other cases it turns out to be a not so great thing. Tokuma Shoten added one tiny thing that wasn't present in the original, perhaps to make it more realistic, or more compelling... They added gas. Actually, they generally expanded the entire otherwise uneventful driving portion, adding oncoming traffic, and the ghosts are harder to vaccuum, but it's the gas that really takes the fun out of this game. You constantly have to make trips to the gas pump, and you really have no way of knowing how your trips around the neighborhood are going to affect your gas tank. The micromanaging of that issue, the drain that gas has on your bank account, and the relative difficulty of this version makes me stick to the original computer versions for this game.

Space Hunter released by Victor Interactive Software on September 25th, 1986.

Here comes one of those reviews where I try to tell you everything that I can about the game, but utterly fail to communicate anything meaningful due to the game's obscurity and vagueness. Space Hunter is a game about some little space girl who flies around from planet to planet looking for stuff. Her only means of offense (that I have been able to find at least) are these bombs that explode along an entire row as soon as she leaves the row she planted it in. Enemies caught in the explosion suffer some kind of death and leave behind space icons that the girl can collect for power-ups. Honestly, the game is as weird as it sounds, and the controls are even weirder, with the ability to float effortless left and right, as long as she uses her rocket pack to thrust her off of the ground. If you want to find out more about the game, you're going to have to play it for yourself, because honestly, after playing it for about five minutes, I couldn't find many redeeming qualities about it, and I kind of gave up on it. I come across these types every now and then, and I do my best to glorify as much as I can about the title, but really, there's not much here that an English speaker is going to be able to dig into.



Ghostbusters



Space Hunter

Castlevania released by Konami on September 26nd, 1986. Released in the United States in May 1987

If you pick one game from this month's selection of games to play, this is the one. Castlevania is a

classic series of legendary status, and this is the game that started it all off. It is Simon Belmont's first appearance, and first assignment as a member of the Belmont family, whose bloodline is fated to do battle with Dracula whenever and wherever he manages to resurrect himself. While later Castlevania's would evolve into non-linear traversals throughout Count Dracula's palace, the first adventure is a one way tour through each section of the castle, culminating in a final stage boss battle of increasing difficulty. This game was immensely hard. Players take for granted all of the power-ups and abilities that they gain in the more recent Castlevanias. But Simon gains no more power from start to finish, save for his whip power-ups, what sub-weapons he finds, and whether he can get the double or triple throw power-ups for them. Food is scarce, and it takes fewer and fewer hits to kill Simon as he gets closer to his target. Even if you manage to reach Dracula, killing both of his forms is quite a feat. This is one of the earlier games developed by Treasure, and should definitely be picked up for the Wii Virtual Console if you have no other access to it.

Senjou no Ookami released by Squaresoft on September 27th, 1986. Released in the United States as **Commando** in November 1986

If you were a big fan of arcades in the mid-80s, then there's very little chance that you didn't play Commando. Capcom's one-man-army game was as exciting as it was challenging, and its distinct musical score would get stuck in your head for days. This Capcom game went head to head for best overhead shooter against SNK's Ikari Warriors (long before there was a Capcom vs. SNK). In the arcade, Commando seems to have won, while on the NES, it was a different story. And probably with good reason. Capcom's conversion of Commando to the NES wasn't bad, but it contained a fair number of glitches that rendered the game slightly less accurate. Certain complexities were added to the NES version, such as the ability to climb down ladders and enter underground bunkers where hostages could be rescued and extra ammo could be found. But moving in and out of these spaces caused sprites to jump around on the screen, and when you left, the game would sometimes place you at a disadvantage where enemies surrounded you and killed you before you could respond. All in all, it's not a bad game, but also not a faithful representation of the balanced arcade game which it is based upon.



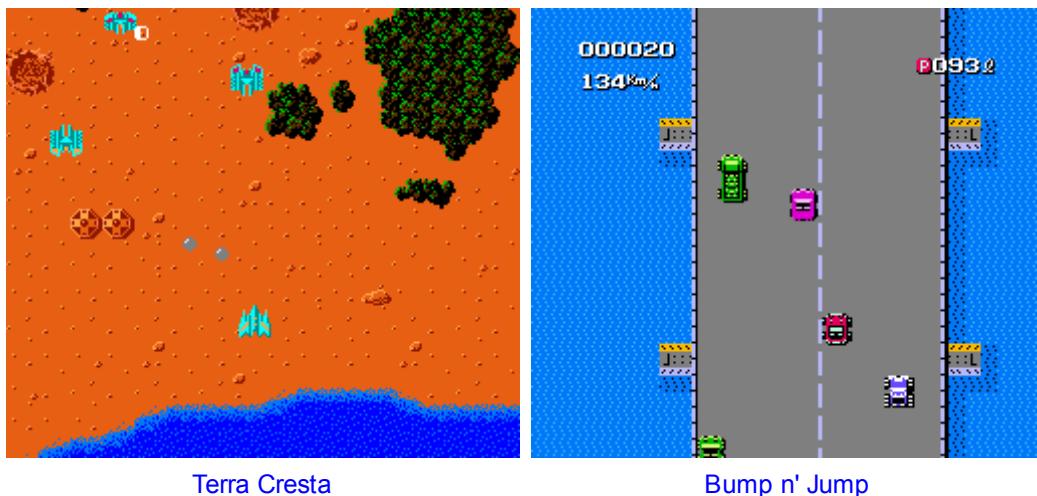
Terra Cresta released by Nihon Bussan on September 27th, 1986. Released in the United States by Vic Tokai in March 1990

After Xevious proved how popular vertical shooters could become in Japan, companies began designing many vertical shooters of their own to cash in on the successful concept. But as a result of the sheer number of them, they had to distinguish themselves from one another, or risk being ignored as another clone. Terra Cresta does this, somewhat successfully, by blending a sci-fi environment with a prehistoric dinosaur environment. They also provide the player with parts that power up the original ship and continue to expand the existing fire power, assuming the player can last long enough without being destroyed and losing the parts that he or she has collected so far. The ship parts can be separated to create new forms of attacks, based on the number of parts available, and they return

to the player after a period of time. In general, Terra Cresta is above average looking, but rather difficult to play. Enemies swoop on to the screen rather fast, giving you only a limited amount of time to react to them. You may find yourself dying while risking a ship part collection until you get good enough to memorize the attack patterns which remain the same from game to game.

Bump 'n Jump released by Namco on September 19th, 1986.

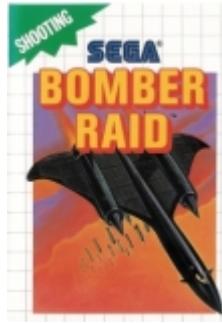
Bump 'n Jump didn't make a huge impression in the arcades when it was released, but it did have a small following of fans. The idea was that you raced along a straight shot course, driving down the road while avoiding obstacles like the roadsides and boulders, and getting bounced around by the rest of the traffic. You could fight back by bouncing into the other cars, or better yet, you could jump up and land on top of them, crushing them and taking them out for points. Jumping wasn't just for fun, it was a necessity in order to clear large sections of water that rapidly approached as you sped down the lane. In its conversion to the NES, it was Nintendo-ized somewhat, but not tremendously. The four season scenarios are replaced with a variety of landscapes. It also adds a story element, through the opening cinematic which sees your sweetheart (presumably) being stolen away in some gang member's car, as she screams for help. And finally, we come full circle, because just like Ghostbusters, this game adds gas. (It's ok, gas was only like \$1.00 per gallon in the United States in 1986. Can you believe that?) Only in this game, the gas is not really much of a deterrent to play. The game controls are actually somewhat improved over the original 1982 arcade game as collisions are a little more forgiving and you gain control over your car quicker. To be honest, this game is simply fun to play, so I recommend it.



Mastering Sega - Bomber Raid

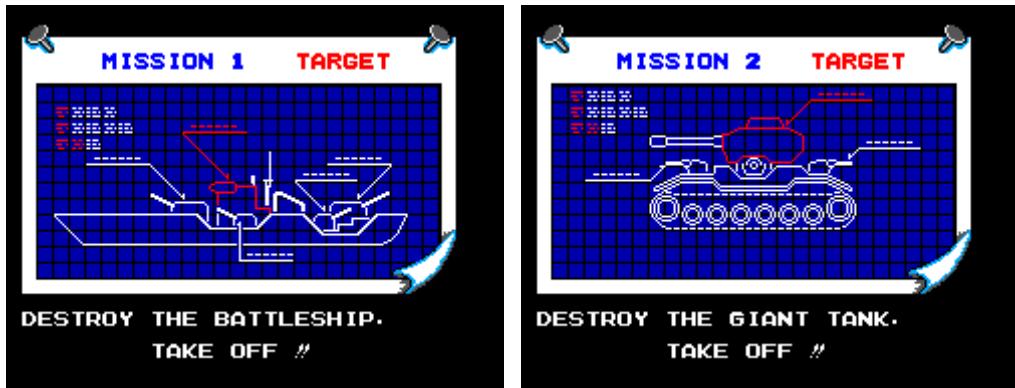
by Craig Morris

During the 8-bit era console ports of arcade games were almost epidemic. It was a simple formula: take a known arcade hit and port it to a console. In many cases it was a shorter development cycle than an original concept game and a guaranteed formula for success (Space Invaders anyone?). An offshoot of this thinking was to 'borrow' a concept from a hit arcade or console game and re-work it. Enter the North American release of Bomber Raid in 1988.



Now Bomber Raid was not the only Sega release to borrow an idea from the Arcade (1942). Action Fighter (Spy Hunter) and Columns (Tetris) are just a few examples. It's often said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. While there are many similarities between Bomber Raid and 1942, it's a fun shooter in its own right.

The game is divided into 5 missions. You get a short mission briefing screen before each defining the objective. While mildly interesting the only real benefit is that you know what enemy signals the end of the round. The only real bit of information you need for any level is 'if it moves, shoot it'. If it's not hostile, your weapons won't hurt it.



You begin the game with 2 extra bombers and gain an additional life every 100,000 points. You also get 3 cluster bombs with each bomber.

Each round is very similar; fight waves of enemy planes, ships, tanks, etc... until you hit the main objective (or Boss) at the end of the mission. It's not about surviving to face the Boss, but having sufficient firepower when you get there. This is the key to success in Bomber Raid - gathering sufficient power-ups (firepower and speed) through Power Pods. Power Pods are glowing balls that randomly appear on-screen. When shot they become usable items, typically firepower (P), speed (S), or wingmen (1-4). We'll talk more about wingmen in a bit.



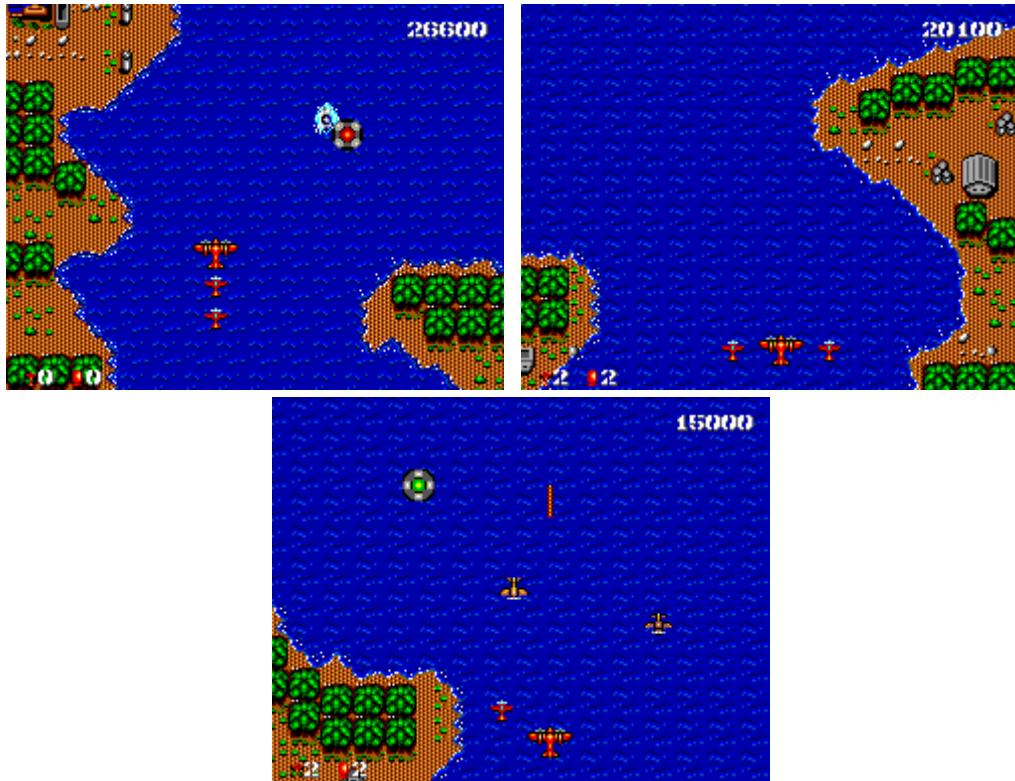
The power-ups are cumulative in nature, the more firepower and speed power-ups you acquire the

more damage you can inflict and the faster you can maneuver. However, as soon as you are destroyed all the increased firepower and speed return to their original levels. The true pain of death isn't the loss of the extra bomber, it's the sudden and drastic drop in firepower and maneuverability. While grabbing all the firepower power-ups possible is a smart tactic, too many speed power-ups can overwhelm you, making the plane somewhat 'twitchy'.



In addition to the firepower and speed power-ups there is the wingman (maximum of 2). When a Power Pod is shot it can release a number from 1-4. The number indicates the position the wingman will take. Formation #1 is 3 or 9 o'clock, Formation #2 is 2 or 10 o'clock, Formation #3 is 7 or 5 o'clock. Formation #4 is both planes in the 6 o'clock position, one behind the other. If the numbers are shot before they're caught the number will increment. If you're fast enough you can effectively determine your own formations. Optimal formations vary from mission to mission although I tend to favour #2 in most situations.

An addition to the firepower provided by wingmen is the affect they have on the cluster bomb spread. They increase the range of a cluster and depending on the formation, the behaviour of the spread.



If you're looking for a solid, old-school shooter, Bomber Raid is tough to beat. It's fast paced without being overwhelming and if you're like me you'll find yourself returning to it again and again.



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



What if... Atari released the Famicom in the West (Part 1)

by Eric Noss

What If...Atari released the Famicom in the West (Part 1)

Many times we often look back on the history of classic gaming and wondered how things would have been done differently. The biggest "regret" would have to be why Atari never took up on Nintendo's offer to release the NES instead of their own 7800 system, and wonder if Atari would still even be around today as it was.

First some background history on this incident... In 1983 Nintendo released the Famicom game console in Japan. They wanted to sell the system in North America and the rest of the world but Atari was the dominate video game company at the time, in spite of the shakedown of the industry that was going on. So Nintendo approach Atari to distribute the Famicom as the Nintendo Advance Video System (AVS) and made a deal which Nintendo would provide the custom chips and four game titles for Christmas of that year. And also Nintendo would give Atari first rights to all conversions of Nintendo's arcade titles instead of just for home computers (Coleco had only the video game rights). Several things had prevented the agreement from happening. First Atari was set to make an announcement for the new game system co-designed with Nintendo at the Summer CES, however Ray Kassar saw the Coleco exhibit where they were showing Super Donkey Kong on the Adam computer. Ray was furious thinking Nintendo had done a double deal behind his back and Hiroshi Yamauchi got even more so with Coleco for ruining the deal. Plus shortly after that, Ray Kassar was replaced by James Morgan who made plans for the 7800 as the replacement for the aging 2600. With Atari bleeding so much money due to the Crash, Warner sold off the company to Jack Tramiel who quickly canceled all video game development to concentrate on making home computers. Needless to say Nintendo decided to go at it along and fill the huge vacuum that the video game industry had become. Everybody knows how the rest of it goes...

But what if Atari had accepted Nintendo's offer and made it an iron clad contract? Would it had been any better instead of trying to go at it alone with the 7800? The best way to answer that question to see what sort of games Atari would had released for the Nintendo AVS and how it would compare to the 7800. In this article we'll take a look at some possible launch titles to see how the run on the NES hardware versus on the 7800's MARIA chip. You need to remember this one thing, that on the Famicom/NES games the graphics are tile-based to make up the backgrounds in addition to the sprites using the PPU chip. On the 7800, the MARIA can render many sprites on the screen but

usually slows down when there are a lot of graphics filling up the screen. And with that, here are the types of games that would have made for good launch titles.



Atari Ports:

In the agreement Nintendo was to do four game titles for Atari. So far only three of them were made as prototypes which now exist as ROM files. The title screens are bland, intro music is generic and there are four game types for either one or two players and a choice of GAME A or GAME B. In other words, a typical NES launch title. On the intro screen is the line that says "COPYRIGHT 1983 ATARI" and without a single mention of Nintendo anywhere unlike for the early NES games. The games that were released were Joust, Millipede and Star Gate (Defender II). Those games were quite decent at duplicating the arcade experience, although there were some missing features (Star Gate had no hyperspace and Joust was missing the Survival Waves). On the 7800 though, Atari (through GCE) did versions that were much closer to the arcade games and ran much smoother due to the MARIA chip. On the Nintendo versions however you can clearly see that they were done by programmers who only had specs to go on instead of the coin op games themselves. But since the Atari/Nintendo deal fell through, they were not released until years later by HAL Laboratories who added new title screens and updated graphics along with a sub license from the Post-Crash Atari Corp.

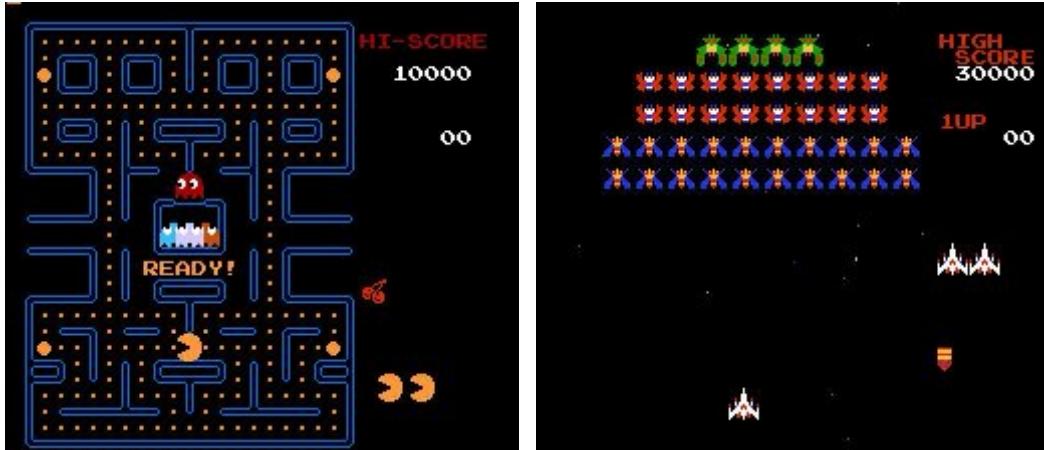
(Note: Defender II used the same music as Mike Tyson's Punchout, but was actually made before Punchout was.)



Nintendo Ports:

As according to the agreement, Nintendo was to give Atari the rights to do home versions of their arcade titles. The games are Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Junior and Mario Bros. Since Nintendo did the games themselves, you know they are going to be top notch conversions. The only things that kept the DK games from being exactly like the coin-op counterparts was that they repeated the same

screens over and over, including on the first go around. While the Nintendo system can handle these games (pictured on the left), the 7800 struggled to fill the screen up with not only the sprites but also the platforms that took up most of the screen (pictured on the right). When you play the 7800 versions, you'll note that the order of the screens played are the exact same order as on the NES. Not to mention that the sprites also look a bit like the Nintendo cousins, even the scoreboards are the same! Makes you wonder why Atari kept delaying on the Nintendo deal while working on their own 7800 games...



Namco Ports:

Since Atari had the home rights to the top Namco based arcade games, it would be a sure bet they would want those titles for the AVS. And what luck as Namco already did the games for the Famicom under the Namcot label. It would not have been much of a stretch for Atari to bring over those games with Nintendo as a go-between. Games like Pac-Man, Galaga, Dig Dug and Xevious nearly looked like the coin op versions that they blew away the 2600/5200 games. In fact, Atari would have finally had an arcade perfect version of Pac-Man to wash away the shame of the VCS debacle. On the same games the 7800 just chugs along while drawing a whole screen of everything happening all at once. And all that slow down affects game play and response time. The only exception would be Ms. Pac-Man. The 7800 version of it was done by GCE who also did the arcade original for Bally-Midway while Namco never even done a port since they never made the game. (They eventually would after granting Tengen the rights many years later, and their version was nothing like Tengen's.)

Conclusion:

So what was the result from what we looked at? While the American games were better done by Atari for the 7800 as opposed to the Nintendo ports, the Japanese ones clearly have the home field advantage. Plus the Nintendo console was made for those games while the 7800 was made for the simpler style of games Atari and other Western companies made. Truly in hindsight it was easy to see that through Nintendo, Atari would have had an easy advantage of a system and launch titles already available for the Holiday season of 1983. That alone might have helped them recover from the nasty effects of the Shakedown caused by the glut of 2600 games.

But would that have saved Atari from the Crash the following year, especially with the lack of 2600 compatibility? In the next article, we'll speculate on what might have happened to Atari's fortunes had they released the Nintendo AVS. Can Nintendo help save Atari from the Video Game Crash, or would the Japanese and Americans still go there separate ways? Find out next time!

{For more inside information on the Atari/Nintendo deal, check out the memo hosted on the Atari Historical Society web site: <http://www.atarimuseum.com/articles/atari-nintendo-deal.htm>}

Game Over

Thanks again for coming by. A special welcome aboard to new author Eric Noss. Happy holidays everyone! Here's a tip: Box up your old console, wrap it up in gift wrapping as a present to yourself, and pretend it the 80s all over again!

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