

Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

We have a tad smaller of an issue than usual, but this was to be expected. It was known by me that several of our authors had many obligations to attend to over the holiday season, but we decided to carry on with our monthly tradition with whatever we could publish. I like to think that we're more about quality than quantity anyway :)

Having said that, this would probably be a good time to bring up the issue of contributions. The more people that we have involved in our publication, the more you get to read about each month. So we're always happy to take on new authors, regardless of experience. The only qualifications for writing for us is that you read us fairly regularly, and you have some passion for a past era of gaming. Remember, this newsletter is not just written for the community, it's also written *by* the community. I'd like to clear up a few misconceptions that I think some people have about writing for us.

- Qualifications: You don't have to be a published author or work for an established publication to write for us.
- Content: We don't regulate topics or assign them to authors. You are free to write about whatever game, system, or period that interests you most.
- Quality: You don't have to be a master wordsmith and your writing doesn't have to meet professional standards. All we ask is that you write in everyday English, as opposed to internet 733t speak.
- Quantity: You don't have to write an epic volume each month, or even at all. You can write as much or as little as you like. I want to emphasize that last point the most. I think a lot of people see the work of our very own Alan Hewston, and think that you need to be able to produce as much as he does. Alan is in a class by himself. Of course you're welcome to write that much if you have it in you, but you are by no means required to. I certainly don't write as much in my articles each month, and Donald Lee and Craig Morris also do a very good job of writing high quality, concise articles. You don't even have to stick to the same subject every month. As of this issue, I will be switching to a third new column.

With all of that said, I hope that some reader out there will take the opportunity in 2008 to try out their writing skills and contribute to our online publication. No, it won't get you famous, or earn you any money, but your thoughts and ideas will be read by thousands of readers each month, and that's certainly nothing to sneeze at. Happy New Year everyone!



NES'cade -- Donkey Kong Jr.

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

After rescuing his girlfriend Pauline from the grasp of Donkey Kong, Mario decides to get his revenge on the giant ape. Mario has caged Pauline's former kidnapper and is holding him hostage. It's up to Donkey Kong's son, Donkey Kong Junior to save his papa in this sequel to one of the most popular arcade games of all time. Released in 1982, one year after the original arcade blockbuster, Donkey Kong Junior was and would continue to be unique for a number of reasons. This time the roles were reversed with the player controlling the younger member of the Kong family, Junior. Mario was portrayed in a negative light as the villain of the game for the first time ever, something that would never be repeated to this day. It was also one of the first games that continued the story of a previous title by reusing known characters as well as introducing new ones. Additionally although the game play retained the same "get to the top of the level" objective, the mechanics and levels were completely reworked to match the change in player character size, ability, and species. Donkey Kong Junior joined the original Donkey Kong as one of the original Famicom launch titles and was also released as one of the first NES games in the Arcade Classics Series.

As with the previous title Nintendo converted the game on their own and the NES release is a direct duplicate of the Famicom version. Just as with Donkey Kong, arcade Donkey Kong Junior used a vertical monitor which lends itself to the usual rework to fit on horizontal televisions on the NES. The graphics are compressed down and stretched out but since the stages in Donkey Kong Junior have more to do with moving horizontally than vertically, the change in perspective doesn't seem as drastic as it did with Donkey Kong. Changes in platform spacing are negligible and the basics of each stage are recreated pretty much verbatim. Player and enemy characters are squished and stretched as well but again not as heavily as in the previous game's NES recreation. In this writer's opinion the sound is actually better on the NES than it was in the arcade with clearer sound effects and cleaner music. Over all the sound package just seems tighter and more refined on the NES hardware as opposed to the original hardware. Directional control is mapped to the directional pad and the A button is used for jump, perfect controls as with the previous game.

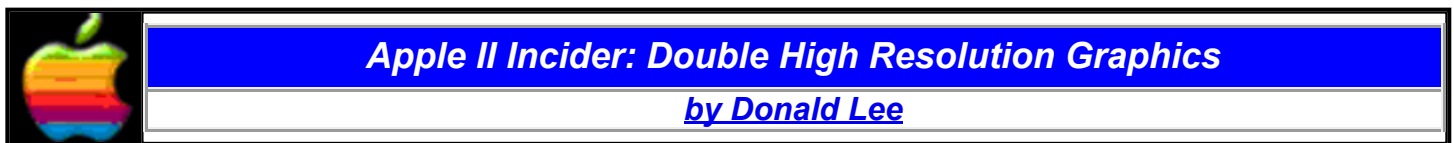


While the graphics are good and the audio is superb there are some tradeoffs when it comes to the core gameplay. Where the NES port of the original Donkey Kong felt like it played slower than the original, Donkey Kong Junior feels like it plays faster than its arcade counterpart. Junior's movements seem faster and more precise on the NES than they did in the arcade with quicker reactions when moving between vines and making jumps. On the flip side enemies and platforms seem to move slower on the NES version than on the original arcade game. Faster movements from Junior and

slower movements from hazards mean the NES version is far easier to progress in than the arcade original. In a vast improvement over the previous game all four boards are included: vines, jumpboard, hideout, and chains. However the order of the stages between the original and home conversion are completely different as before. In the NES version all four stages loop in order where in the arcade a stage is added to the sequence after each completion of the chain stage, starting with just vines and chains. The little intermission sequences are missing in the NES version, these include the introduction of Donkey Kong being pulled up in his cage and Mario pushing Donkey Kong away upon completion of each area, with the exception of the chains stage. The ending sequence that plays after the completion of each chain stage has been compressed and is shorter on the NES than it originally was in the arcade. The chain stage is also slightly different on the NES as Donkey Kong doesn't progressively break free of his binds as each key is pushed up the chains into a lock as in the arcade.

Personally I've always felt that the original arcade Donkey Kong Junior was one of the most difficult classic arcade platformers ever created. The reduction in the speed of enemies and increase in the speed and responsiveness of Junior makes the NES game far easier for newcomers to pick up and play. Even on the more difficult "Game B" mode the NES version still plays smoother and easier than the original, granted the second game mode does a lot to close the gap between the arcade and home difficulty. The solid gameplay, great sound, beautifully detailed graphics and familiar characters go a long way to make this one of the premier arcade to NES conversions out there. As I noted in the previous issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly, this game is included along with the original Donkey Kong in the Donkey Kong Classics compilation cartridge. The dual game Donkey Kong Classics cartridge is a must have for any NES library.

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



Happy Holidays All. By the time you read this, it will be 2008. Hope everyone enjoyed their holidays. Once again, due to the holidays, this column will be a little compressed.

In trying to think about what to write this month, I remembered the first time I was introduced to the concept of Double-High Resolution graphics on Apple IIe (with 128K RAM) and Apple IIc computers. I won't get into all the technical details but Double-High Resolution graphics offered 560x192 resolution with 16 colors versus the standard 280x192 resolution with 6 colors that had been offered on all Apple II computers since it's introduction in the late 1970's.

I recall that after King's Quest I had been released for the Apple II sometime in 1984 that I asked my mom to purchase the game at a store in a local mall. I don't 100% recall if I knew about Double High Resolution graphics when I asked my mom to purchase the game. But safe to say, after opening the game at home and trying to play it, I learned my lesson quickly.



For some reason, the graphics seemed off and the game was very much unplayable. I remember being a little surprised and probably disappointed. I recall trying to figure out why my Apple IIe couldn't play the game. My Apple IIe had the required 128K of RAM to play the game but something else was wrong. I actually recall finding the answer but didn't UNDERSTAND it that well.

[King's Quest I screenshot](#), reduced in size

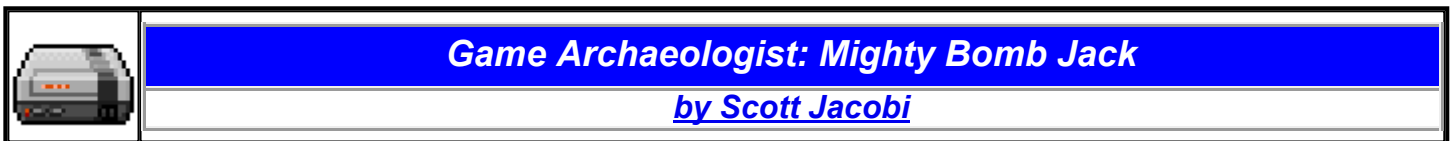
It turns out there were two issues at hand, one of which affected me. The first was that there were early revision of the Apple IIe that had what was called "Revision A" motherboards. The Revision A IIe's did not support Double High Resolution graphics so you needed to swap for a "Revision B" motherboard. I thought that was the problem for the longest time but it turned out I had a Revision B motherboard all the time.

Eventually, it took my cousin to figure out my issue. To get 128K of RAM in my Apple IIe, it had to have what was called the "extended 80-column card". The card allowed for 80 columns of text on screen but had the additional 64K of RAM to boost the IIe's RAM from the standard 64K to 128K. What I needed to do was to tie a small wire around two pins on my memory card. VOILA! That fixed the issue and I was able to display Double High Resolution Graphics.

Unfortunately, since King's Quest 1 did not work properly at the time, I had to return the game. It took some time before I tried my next Double High Resolution adventure game, which would be Space Quest. I'll be sure to cover some Double High Resolution games in the future.

In the meantime, enjoy the screen shot of King's Quest taken in an Apple II emulator.

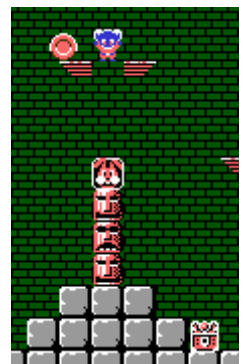
Happy Holidays wishes to everyone.



It's 2008, and I thought that I'd like to try something a little different this year. I enjoyed NES Realm, and it might make a return some day, but it was getting a little dry and repetitive, and not quite in line with my current retrogaming focus. You may remember that I started out writing about vintage gaming mags and I switched to writing NES Realm because my personal focus had shifted away from magazines. Well, for a little more than a year now, I have been an active contributor to [StrategyWiki](#) where I have focused primarily on retrogames. While I see most user actively working on their current favorite modern games, I see myself as one of the few who helps fill in the missing gaps in history.

I'm also very compulsive about it. I don't like to write a simple introduction and a basic walkthrough... no, every one of the guides I contribute to ends up looking like a full blown strategy guide, as in depth as any you might find in print, if not more so. I can't explain what drives me to do this, and I've stopped trying to figure it out. I just love it. So what I thought I would begin doing is chronically the efforts that it takes for me to write one of these guides each month. Every month I polish off anywhere from three to six guides, depending on how big the games are, so I'd like to pick the most interesting game I worked on and talk about what it was like, and what some of my discoveries were.

So we're going to start it all off with Mighty Bomb Jack. Last month I worked on a couple of games, including Ninja Kid, The Legend of Kage, and even a guide to Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo, which was a bit of a departure from my normal retro period, but a decidedly needed guide. But it was Mighty Bomb Jack that surprised me the most, for one particular reason: I could not find one complete guide to the game written in English. Yes, some of the FAQs out there describe the game very well, and explain the minimum necessary to get the best ending, but there were aspects of the game that went totally unexplained, doors and secret rooms that had no apparent means of entry. Mighty Bomb Jack is not an especially fondly remembered game by any means, but Nintendo felt it was worthy of release on the Wii Virtual Console, so I want to know everything about the game.



The incredibly hard to find location of the Tecmo Plate in Stage 5 of the Japanese version.

Part of my routine for researching each game is to google the name of the game in Japanese. I am by no means fluent in Japanese; my skills are limited to reading the Katakana alphabet which is only

used to spell words from languages which are foreign to Japan. Ironically, many names of video games and video game characters are spelled out in Katakana. But when it comes to real Japanese explanations, I have to resort to a number of tools, including Google translation, Babelfish, and Jim Breen's WWWJDIC. The translations are usually very rough and difficult to follow, due to the misfortune that English and Japanese are so incredibly different from one another. Eventually, I get enough translation to hobble together a limited understanding of what a Japanese author is trying to explain.

Fortunately, I was able to find a wealth of information concerning Mighty Bomb Jack in Japanese, including two sites that went into a very in-depth breakdown of all 17-stages, and the secrets that they contained. Everything that the English guides lacked, including how to make the warps from Stage 4 to 7 and from Stage 5 to 11 work, and the secret treasure room in Stage 11 were all explained. So imagine my surprise when some of the explanations didn't work. Then I realized: Tecmo changed things from the Japanese version to the American version to make them a little easier. For example, the incredibly hard to find 100,000 point and extra life granting Tecmo Plate item was moved from it's early location to a much easier to find location later on in the game. Apparently it didn't help that much because people still couldn't figure some things out.

Nevertheless, thanks to these Japanese guides, I was able to report on how to access every secret in the game, not only in the American version of the game, but the Japanese version as well.



The much easier, but much later location of the Tecmo Plate in Stage 16 of the American version.

So visit the [Mighty Bomb Jack guide at StrategyWiki](#) if you'd like to know about every inch of that difficult pyramid. It's an interesting game after you come to understand all of the mechanics behind it, and how varied some of the secret solutions are. However, if you're using an emulator, I highly recommend using save states: the game is still devilishly difficult, even if you know where to look for everything!



Thanks to Scott's article a few months ago about Hand Held games from Nintendo such as Parachute and Donkey Kong (which I also played, among others), I recalled another hand held game I played in my younger days. The game was called Hungry Monster and purchased at a Radio Shack. I don't recall when the game was purchased but based on information I've seen online, it was released around 1983 or so.

If you didn't gather from the name already, the game was a Pac-Man clone. Instead of Pac-Man, you got essentially what was a circle eating dots and being chased by two red monsters. Just like Pac-Man, there were power pellets. Due to the limitations of the game, the power pellets were simply red colored and not bigger like Pac-Man. Despite the differences, the game essentially played like Pac-Man. You had a maze and even a tunnel to escape to.



I recall playing this game a lot and struggled a lot early. But once I got the hang of the game, I was able to score very high on the game. If I recall correctly, the score maxed out at 999 and then rolled over.

All in all, not a game I remembered off the top of my head. But still brings back some interesting memories.

The picture of the Hungry Monster game and screenshot was taken from the "Electronic Handheld Game Museum" at <http://www.handheldmuseum.com/>.



What if... Atari released the Famicom in the West (Part 2)

by Eric Noss

Last month we looked at the type of games we would have seen had Atari chosen the Nintendo Famicom system over their own 7800 console. The deal was that Nintendo would supply the board and chips for Atari to make and sell along with four Atari game titles made by Nintendo. The partnership between the two game companies was announced at the 1983 Summer CES show where Atari would introduce a new intermediate priced console to sell along with the inexpensive 2600 and the high end 5200. That event ended up being the highlight of the show overshadowing Coleco's plans for releasing a home computer, which for some reason got delayed and was not even shown.

The Big Deal:

1983 was a very bad year for Atari, the 5200 was selling very poorly and a massive glut of bad 2600 games flooded the market. Atari needed a new game system to restore the public trust in video gaming. They had looked at another console in development which was to use the MARIA chip for graphics but there were too many delays. So with those factors Atari signed with Nintendo and the contract was made official just before Ray Cassar was ousted from the company. Work was made to redesign Famicom board and make it fit into the plastic casing that was originally meant for the CX2100 model (a low cost 2600), but instead they used the case for the now canceled CX7800 with the controllers being retrofitted with Start and Select buttons added. The four launched titles made by Nintendo include Millipede, Joust, Star Gate (Defender II) and Crystal Castles. They will be later be accompanied by Nintendo's own games (Donkey Kong, DK Junior and Mario Bros.). Plans were also made for conversions of popular Namco arcade titles which at the time were being made for the Famicom under the Namcot label. Atari, through Nintendo, licensed the Namco games which not only included Pac-Man and Dig Dug but newer arcade titles like Galaga and even Mappy. However, due to the sudden popularity of the Famicom in Japan Nintendo took longer to fulfill not only the local Japanese orders but also the huge ones for Atari for worldwide release. Just like the 800XL computers made in the new Far Eastern factories, the new Atari game system did not make it in time for the '83 holiday season.

When 1984 got into swing Atari was in very bad shape! The CX3600 system is still in production but had not been released due to many changes being made to it. At first it was going to be a mid-range system with the redesigned 2600 and 5200 (with no controller storage and self centering joysticks) taking up the low and high ends. That now meant "three" game systems Atari had to support in addition to the struggling home computer lineup. Then with the 5200 completely phased out, the CX3600 has been renamed the "Advance Video System" or AVS with the new 2600 to be the VCS again, which now meant the cases has to be relabeled...again. While all of this was going on, Atari lost millions of dollars due to the Video Game Crash. Nintendo can now see what was really going on in America but was unable to exit from the partnership due to a strict binding contract created in part by Ray Cassar. These binding contracts have now become the norm of companies making new

systems for Atari including a small company known as Amiga Inc. The Atari AVS was to be announced for the summer of 1984 with heavy advertising during the Olympics, but after losing so much money Warner decided to get rid of Atari once and for all. Word on the street was Jack Tramiel who previously left Commodore and wants to buy the company strictly to make home computers and not produce any video games. When Howard Lincoln of Nintendo got wind of it, he got together with Minoru Arakawa and Hiroshi Yamauchi, who was visiting Nintendo Of America, to come up with a bold plan to save Nintendo's investment in the Atari project. After partnering with Namco who also wished to see their games release on the AVS, Nintendo announced that they will purchase Atari from Warner. Words could not begin to describe the shock felt throughout the industry...

Sale Of The Century:

Nobody could believe it, how could a (relatively) small company like Nintendo buy out Atari who a year before was the leader of video gaming? Plus the fact that it's a "Japanese" company buying an American one added some furor in the press articles. Nevertheless, Nintendo set into motion a long program to get Atari back into shape and win back the trust of consumers and sellers. The company was merged with Nintendo Of America and renamed Atari Games Inc. with Howard Lincoln as the chairman and Arakawa as the president that represents Nintendo. The arcade division would distribute coin-op games by both Namco and Nintendo, who owned shares in the new Atari. The home computer division however was still sold to Jack Tramiel who renamed it Atari Computers and agreed not to compete with Atari Games by having any computer games with the Atari logo. (Interestingly enough, Tramiel came across the contract with Amiga Inc. and wanted the chipset for his new computer but not the engineers. He had to hire them anyway due to the legally binding nature of the contract and hence introduced the Atari Amiga the following year.) Meanwhile, many changes were afoot at the new Atari. First of all, all development for the VCS (2600) were canceled along with other "frivolous" projects such as the MindLink. All focus of the consumer division was to go towards the AVS system, with the department headed up by Howard Philips of Nintendo. Some programmers either transferred to the arcade division, which continued to flourish, or just walked out. Others however stayed and eventually will be translating Atari arcade titles to the AVS in what would later be called the Tengen Group. Under Howard Lincoln, Atari became a very tight ship with lots of fat trimming and no nonsense policies. The days of the high strung prima donnas were over.

In July of '84 the Atari AVS was released to a test market in New York City. It was there, as Mr. Yamauchi surmised, that either the AVS will succeed or fail period. Atari had to do a lot of convincing to get the stores to sell the new AVS consoles. To win back their trust, they bought back all the unsold 2600 inventory and promised to buy back the AVS units should they fail. Even the employees set the displays and did the marketing themselves. In spite of initial reluctance, the big gamble paid off. As it turned out, the public still loved video gaming which turned out not to be a fad after all. They were just waiting for a new game system that was better than the aging VCS and even the home computers. By the end of 1984, Atari has gotten back in the black and had successful sales of the AVS. They even introduced a toy robot accessory which cashed in on the robot craze that was going on at the time.

The following year however was when Atari focused less on doing arcade ports and more on original style games made by Nintendo. Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt were first introduced as Atari arcade games but were based on AVS hardware which made perfect translations to the home console. Then came adventure games like Legend Of Zelda and Metroid. Many 3rd party games were also developed not only by those who made "decent" VCS games but also the Japanese games made for the Famicom. In order to avoid another Crash, they can only make five games a year and the carts can only be made by Nintendo in Japan. The Atari AVS had a lock out chip based on what was originally going to be used for the MARIA chip and so only games authorized by Atari were sold with their Seal Of Approval. Atari now had a complete hold on the market after Coleco and Mattel exited their systems. The only competition was by Sega who tried to unsuccessfully compete with the AVS with their Master System. This led to a series of lawsuits by Sega mainly because Atari made

sure no one else develop any games for it or even sold the Sega games at stores. Because of the exclusivity, Atari dominated the remainder of the 80's. But by the end of the decade, it would all come to an end.

End Of An Era:

According to Dave Sheff's book "Game Over: How Atari Conquered The World", there were problems between the arcade division (including the Tengen Group who did home ports) and Nintendo. Namco was representing the coin-op game ports which were increasingly getting shoved aside to make room for the imported games made by Nintendo. A great example of this is the Tetris story where Atari Games got the rights from Mirrorsoft to do the arcade version which naturally led to the home version done by the Tengen Group for Atari Games. But taking advantage of a legal snafu, Nintendo owned all the rights for non-computer platforms and made a version for the Famicom in Japan. However Nintendo insisted that Atari Games use 'that' version instead of the one which was already out and had better graphics. Though there were some rifts between Namco and Nintendo on the handling of Atari Game operations, this intensified into a big feud between the two Japanese companies. In the same year of '89, a group of former Amiga engineers came to Atari with a prototype for a portable video game system with a built in color screen which they named the Handy. Atari brushed them aside because they already had plans for their own hand held now known as the Game Boy which only had a monochrome display. But it was released under the Nintendo label instead so it can be associated with the Game & Watches.

In 1990 Namco sold their shares in Atari Games and proceeded to sue Nintendo for breach of contract. This added along with various lawsuits not only by Sega but by 3rd party developers for the exclusivity clause and a class action lawsuit which stated Atari held back shipment of games in order to increase a high demand for them. The federal courts declared Atari Games a monopoly and ordered Nintendo to break the company up. The arcade division went to Namco who renamed it to their own name to distribute their Japanese games while many American employees went to work for other coin-op manufacturers. Atari Games was renamed Nintendo Inc. and the new AVS carts like Super Mario Bros. 3 were sold under the Nintendo label. All the unsold Atari AVS consoles were replaced by the new redesigned Nintendo AVS systems which were based off the A/V Famicoms sold in Japan. The biggest change is that Nintendo will allow 3rd party developers to make games for other systems and will not stop anyone from competing with them. In 1991 Sega was finally able to release the 16-bit Genesis which went up against the Super AVS console that year.

As far as Atari Computers was concerned, while the Amiga dominated the home computer market in Europe without any competition, it barely competed against the PC's and Macintosh's in North America. Very few models were introduced and marketed such as the Mega, Amiga Plus, Mega Plus workstation and the Falcon. By 1994, Atari Computers went bankrupt and the Amiga trademark was over time sold to various companies who kept promising to bring the platform back. This marked the end of Atari brand for good.

Today the memory of Atari is being revived by games who grew up with both the VCS and AVS systems in the 80's. Nintendo would continue to make more game consoles but they would always be second place to the likes of Sega, Sony and Microsoft. The Wii however is becoming more popular with the Virtual Console offering games not only from the AVS and Super AVS but even some VCS titles as well. To those who still play those games, the spirit of Atari remains alive in the hearts of many.

(Any comments or questions? Feel free to send them to mistamaddog@hotmail.com)

Once again, happy New Years, and I hope all of you have a wonderful 2008. Special thanks to Donald Lee for pulling double duty this month!

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