

Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #53 - October 2008

Table of Contents

01.	Attract Mode
02.	Apple II Incider - Harball
03.	NES Realm
04.	Who'd Win: Altered Beast vs. Golden Axe
05.	Mario Bros. - Apple II Version
06.	Game Over



Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

With September having come and gone, many of our staff have returned to their normal school year duties, and we do not have quite as robust an issue for you this month as we like to. However, we invite you to soak up what we do have and enjoy it. Don't forget, if you do not feel like you have the time to be a regular monthly writer, but would like to contribute a guest editorial to be posted right here in this space, by all means, send in your contributions. This isn't our publication, it's yours. Send us your thoughts and have a great October!



Apple II Incider - Harball

by [Donald Lee](#)

As I write this on September 28th, 2008 (at 9:36 PM PST), the baseball regular season has completed and the playoffs will begin in a few days. The major national stories from this past baseball season are the closing of Yankee Stadium and the usage of instant replay. For myself, as a San Francisco Bay Area native, it's been a tough year for both our local baseball teams. The San Francisco Giants and Oakland A's both had seasons to forget and will have a lot of work to do during the offseason to improve their teams. As a Giant fan, I am hoping that pitcher Tim Lincecum will be selected for the National League Cy Young Award.



While I am definitely more of a basketball fan than baseball, I have enjoyed my share of baseball games over the years. I have previously written about Computer Baseball (which I may revisit), which was more of a simulation rather than an actual arcade game. Another game I played extensively in my youth was Championship Baseball. The game was produced by Sega for the arcades. The game was difficult in that if the computer scored and took a lead on you at any point of the game the game was over. That didn't prevent me from pumping the quarters down though I never tried playing the full 9 innings in the game. Championship Baseball was the closest you could get (at least in the early 80's) to playing real baseball. The graphics were all from a top down perspective and weren't perfect, but were pretty good if you compared it to most of the baseball games on video game and computer systems at the time.

However, when I first played Hardball around 1985 or so, it was the first baseball video game that had the pitcher/batter matchup in a 3D perspective while the rest of the game presentation was from field level. From

my first time playing Hardball, it was clear that developers had created an ARCADE game and not a simulation. You a choice of two FICTIONAL teams to play. Each team had it's own strengths and weaknesses.

While the game wasn't a statical simulation of actual baseball teams, you did have some managerial options. You could swap pitchers and players. You could move your infield and outfield around as well. But obviously, the main draw of the game was to pitch and bat in a 3D environment. Being the pitcher was definitely easier than being the hitter. In playing Hardball over the years, I find that any hits I get are usually out of luck more so than skill.



The game had it's share of weaknesses. A hard base hit to right field could result in the right fielder throwing the batter out at first base. However, that was the exception than the rule. Perhaps due to graphical limitations, throws from the outfield to any base was SLOW. Trying to throw runners out from the outfield was a challenge. Also, the entire outfield was chopped into two parts. That in itself wasn't bad, but just seemed odd if you were used to the top perspective of older games where you could see the whole outfield.

All in all, while the game had some limitations, I enjoyed the game immensely back in the 80's. In fact, I still occasionally play Hardball via emulator and despite the quirks, it is still a fun trip down memory lane.



NES Realm - Late December 1986

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

We're going to wrap up the very tail end of December 1986 this time. It's a combination of some very recognizable games with some not so recognizable games

Trojan

Published by Capcom on December 24th 1986

Trojan was a futuristic beat 'em up game, in a similar genre to Double Dragon, but not quite as refined. In Trojan, you walked right or left with a sword and shield in your hand. You could swing your sword at your enemies, you could raise or lower your shield to block attacks, and you could jump by pushing up on the joystick. The arcade version of Trojan was immensely difficult, with an especially difficult fifth stage that rarely allowed player to see the final stage, much less the boss of the game. The NES version was a lot more forgiving, and even contained a few extra features such as explorable manholes and powerups that increased your strength. In comparison to the arcade version, the NES version is much more enjoyable to play, simply because it's less likely that you're going to feel so entirely ganged up upon that you cannot proceed to the end of the game.



Seikima II

Published by CBS Sony Group on December 25th 1986

It would take quite a long time before Sony became the video game juggernaut that it is today, but back in 1986, it had a small software publishing group, and one of the earliest games that it made for the Famicom was about a rock band. The band's

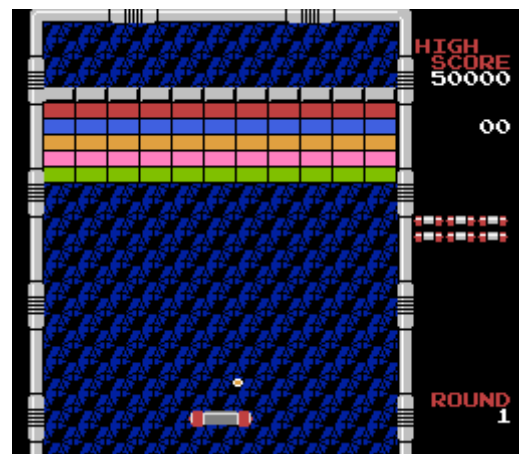
name was Seikima II, which when spelled out in Japanese was a play on the term for the end of the world. At first glance, this band may appear as nothing more than a cheap KISS knockoff with their painted faces. But this collection of musicians proved to be quite a musical force in their own right. The game has little to do with the band other than using the members to round out the cast of the game. The lead singer must travel through four worlds composed of eight interconnected "rooms," and collect every item in each room before being granted access to the eighth room where one band member is being held prisoner. Money is collected and can be used to purchase better weapons, or health, from shops. After rescuing all four band members, the final stage pits the lead singer in a one on one duel with Zeus of all people. Not a very deep game, but it can be a little engrossing early on. After a while, it will feel repetitive.



Arkanoid

Published by Taito on December 26th 1986

I doubt that the game which is credited for single handedly reviving the ball and paddle genre of video game needs much introduction. Nearly every video game enthusiast is familiar with Arkanoid to some extent. So let's focus on what made the NES version so special. For one, although the resolution was slightly off and the number of displayable colors wasn't as high as the arcade, this version is remarkably accurate to the original. For another thing, this was one of the few NES games to come with its own custom controller. The Vaus controller was a simply paddle control with a knob on the bottom and a button on the top. It was nothing special, but it really helped make the game feel more natural than trying to play with a digital control pad. Taito even saw fit to pack in three extra bonus stages that weren't included in the arcade, before pitting the player against the final encounter with the Moai-like Doh. The cartridge can be found quite easily, but the control pad is a little harder to find. Aquiring them both together is highly recommended.

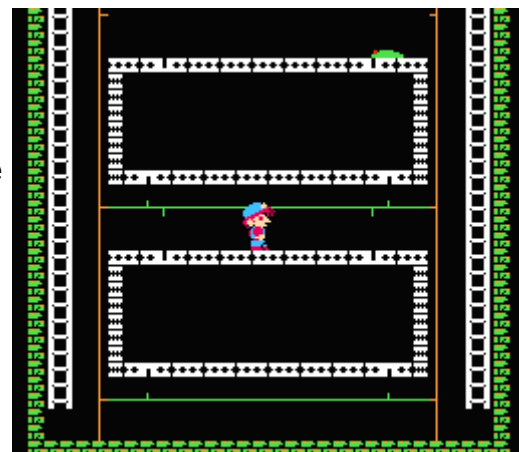


Electrician

Published by Kemco on December 26th 1986

This Famicom Disk System published game is actually a port of a Synapse Software game which only ever appeared on the Atari 800 or XL/XE line of computers. It was a not very notable release after the video game market had crashed and new software was only trickling on to the home computer scene. In the game, the player is an Electrician who is charged with the task of wiring up all of the floors throughout eight buildings. To wire a floor, the electrician must connect a wire from one end of the floor to the other, depositing floor and ceiling connections where ever available. This task wouldn't be difficult if not for the

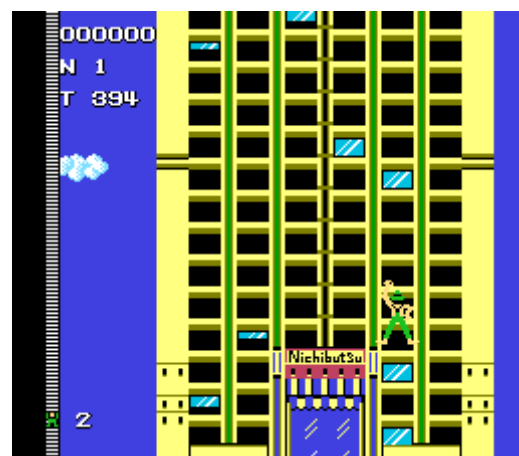
pests that roam throughout the crawl space of the building with you, such as snakes, rats, spiders, and bats. The first three pests can eat through the wiring making it difficult for you to completely wire the floor, and the last pest can pick you up and carry you away, possibly dropping you to your death. If that were not bad enough, whenever the electrician completes a building, he must travel to the next building. But the lowly electrician is not permitted to cross above ground. He is forced to traverse through a maze like sewer system complete with its own collection of dangerous animals. The Famicom Disk System version didn't change too many aspects of the game, although there are some notable differences. For the most part, the Famicom version is much easier to complete (especially considering the crash bug which is present in most versions of the original Atari game that prevents the game from ending properly). However, one thing which is notably harder is the size of the gap found on floors that contain two apartments. In the Atari version, all gaps were very easy to jump over and clear, but the gap in the Famicom version requires a perfect jump, or you will fall to the floor below, or possibly even die.



Crazy Climber

Published by Nichibutsu on December 26th 1986

Ironically, we end 1986 with a game that harkens back to an original 1982 arcade game, Crazy Climber. The goal of Crazy Climber is quite simple; to climb from the bottom of a building all the way up to the top. Naturally, the going won't be so easy, as building occupants will throw bottles and flower pots at your head, windows will close shut and become inaccessible, and other various oddities will assault you, such as egg laying vultures. If it were not for the unique control scheme, this game would not have stood out very much. Crazy Climber employed two joysticks, which represented in effect the climber's two hands. Each lever had to be operated with a particular timing and rhythm to maximize the speed at which the climber could scale the building. The Famicom version of the game replicated this control scheme by requiring that the player hold two control pads (at a 90 degree rotation from the normal operation,) and press away on both direction pads to guide the climber up the building and past the obstacles. Unlike the few other home ports that had been published of this game, the Famicom version actually contains some graphical improvements over the original.

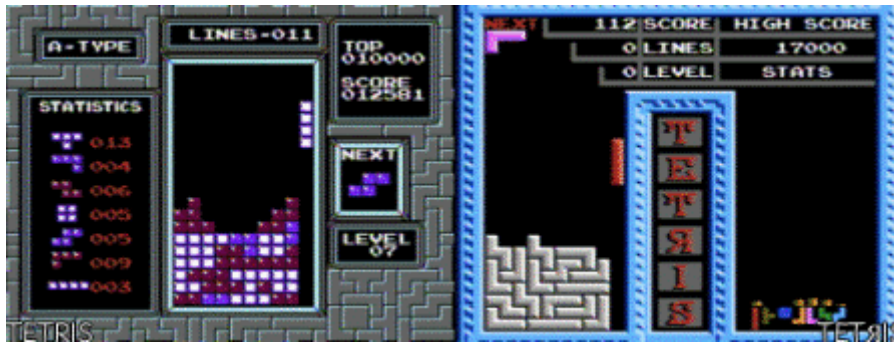


	<p>Who'd Win: Tengen Tetris vs. Nintendo Tetris</p> <p>by Andrew Vrba</p>
--	--

You're probably asking yourself "What, no Halloweenedition?". Well I'm not the cliché type! Welcome

back to "Who'd Win?" My monthly Vs. article. This month I'm doing something a little unusual. Did you know that there were two versions of the same game developed for the same system? Back in the 1980s this little game from Russia called Tetris, took the world by storm. It was being released to just about every computer platform on the market! There was a problem, however. None of these companies actually had the legal rights to do so. This caused a lot of confusion! You had companies suing one another over rights that neither of them actually owned! Eventually two companies went through the proper channels. Atari was given permission to release an arcade version, and Nintendo was given permission to make handheld, and home console versions. Once again confusion arose. Tengen, an offshoot of Atari, decided that they were going to release a port of the arcade version. So an unlicensed version called "TET?IS: The Soviet Mind Game." For the NES materialized. A court battle ensued, and the courts ruled in Nintendo's favor. The Tengen version was then pulled from the shelves, making it a bit of a rare cartridge! But which of these two versions is the better one? That's what we're here to find out!

The sights:



Both versions have their own visual charm. The Nintendo version has a more futuristic sort of look to it, the tetrominoes are made up of little boxes, and there are three different colors; Blue, Red, and White. The number of the different types of pieces used is kept track of on the left via a column of counters. The top of the well is better defined as well. The graphics for the little victory intermissions are cute, and well done as well. The Tengen version has a more "Russian" feel to it. From the inverted R on the title, down to the little dancing Cossacks, who appear between levels. The tetrominoes in this version are made of solid shapes, and each is a different color. It has a richer palette than Nintendo's licensed version. It's a little difficult to tell from the screenshot, but the number of pieces used is kept track of little bar graphs. The top of the well isn't as well defined on this version, which gets sort of annoying. Another nice touch in the Tengen version is the title screen, complete with the image of a Russian castle much like the one that appears in the completion screen of the Nintendo version's B mode. I'm giving the graphics nod to the Tengen version. It's more impressive looking on both a technical and artistic level.

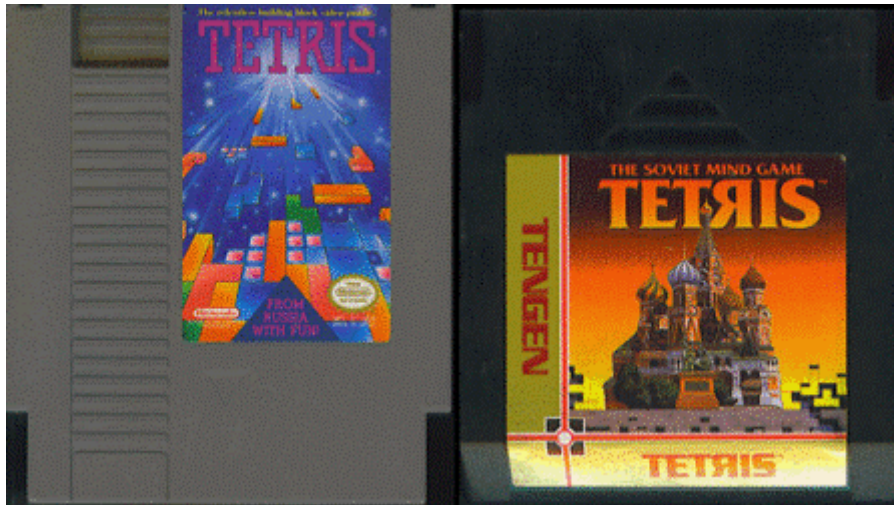
The sounds:

The Official Nintendo version features three very distinct BGMs, my favorite being #3, it's very relaxing! The Tengen version gives you a choice of four. They sound more Russian, but they are all quite annoying! Both games offer a silence option, which is nice for when you're sick of the BGMs! The Tengen version uses its music more effectively, right off the bat you're greeted with a lively title screen complete with some theme music. The Nintendo version doesn't. Tengen also has neat little musical intermissions. As far as sound effects go, I do like the Nintendo version better! Gonna go with the Tengen version here. It uses its audio assets to greater effect!

The substance:

At their deepest core mechanics, they are the same game. But make no mistakes there are some big differences. The official Nintendo version offers two one player modes. (A) Which goes on until you lose, and (B) Which ends after you complete the set number of lines needed, you can adjust difficulty settings for both. Those two modes pale in comparison to Tengen's offering! You get Single player, Two Player, Two Player Co-op, Vs Computer, and Computer Co-op! Segues between levels are different as well, the Nintendo version just changes the colors of everything, while the Tengen one stops the action, and these little Cossacks come out and dance for you! The better you did, the more dancers you get! Nintendo's presentation is very minimalistic, when compared to Tengen's. The version Tengen made has a big Russian castle with animated fireworks going off behind it for the title screen! Nintendo's version just has a small static picture of a similar castle. There is nothing wrong with either version per say, but when it comes down to it, Tengen put more effort into their version.

The cartridge:



It's pretty easy to tell which one is which from the about pic. You'll notice that the Nintendo one has Tetrominoes falling from space in a kind of forced perspective, and they included the phrase "From Russia with Fun." A play on the James Bond movie "From Russia with Love.". I have seen far worse NES cartridge art, Megaman comes to mind. But this does look very poor in comparison to Tengen's cart. A nicely illustrated Castle, with parts of the shot breaking up into Tetrominoes, gee I've used that word a lot! The cartridge itself is pretty neat too! Tengen's stands out more. It's just plain better! Looks like another point for Tengen's version.

Who'd Win?

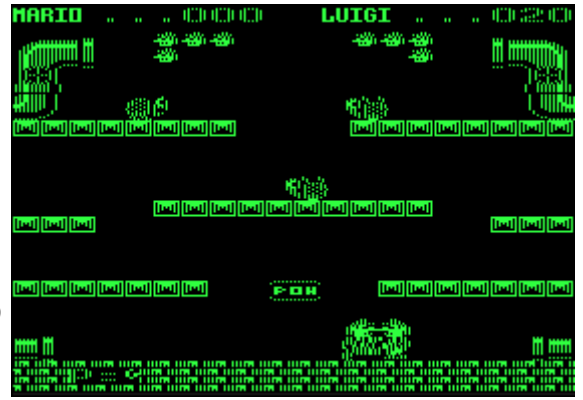
Sorry Nintendo, Comrade Tengen puts your version to shame!!! It's deliciously ironic that the unlicensed and illegal version of the game, is the best out of the two. Tengen outshone Nintendo's version in every single aspect. It's a shame that Nintendo didn't look at what Tengen did, and offer to buy it outright. Being an unlicensed game, you're probably not going to find very many laying around out there, but thanks to emulation you can play the Tengen version for yourself, and see just how much better it is then Nintendo's official version. Best of all you can bring friend, failing that you can coop with your computer! Well that's it for this month's installment! Next month I'm taking a break, so there won't be an article from me for November. Keep reading Retrogaming Times anyway! I'll be back with an installment for December.



Mario Bros. - Apple II Version

by [Todd Holcomb](#)

For my friend Scott and me, this was the original deathmatch game. Sure, we lit each other up playing Atari 2600 games such as Combat, Outlaw, and Wizard of War but it was the Apple II version of Mario Bros. that really got us screaming obscenities at each other. Putting the Alliance 202 cracked disk into his Laser 128 Apple clone, we thought we'd try the two player mode. Cooperative play lasted for all of 15 seconds and soon I was purposely pushed him off a platform into a turtle. I should've known this was coming as he loved to throw axes into my back when we'd play Gauntlet at the arcade. I'd be holding off hoards of ghosts while he'd take pot shots at my backside.



Anyway, we were soon pushing and jumping each other into creatures / fireballs, hitting the pow button at opportune moments, or my favorite - giving the other guy a "ride" on the top level. This maneuver, by getting under the other player, rendered the other player helpless until he collided with a bad guy. Then, to add insult to injury, he would respawn on the top level and the whole process could be repeated. Nothing made my friend Scott more mad. I remember him screaming about how he was going to have relations with my corpse at the top of lungs at about 2:00 in the morning. His dad would usually come storming in, yell at him to shut the hell up, and stagger back off to bed. Within 10 minutes we would be screaming again - the game had that strong of an effect on us.

Another thing that made this game so great was its controls. With only needing left, right, and jump, it made using the keyboard a breeze. Scott manned the joystick, and I preferred the keyboard because I soon discovered that I could almost always overpower him when we would meet on a platform. Luckily, he always wanted to use his coveted CH Mach II joystick so I always had the advantage. Unlike most Apple II games, Mario Bros. was very faithful to the arcade game. In fact, I think the Apple II version was more fun. In the arcade version, when you collide with the other player you just bounce off of him. No pushing him to his doom - what fun is that?

As far as the levels go, I can only comment on the first few as usually one of us was dead shortly after the bonus round. Then it was control-q and back to some more deathmatch action! And when we'd get bored with that, we'd try it at Ilgs speed on my computer. Those games ended even quicker! So give this game a try again - just make sure to play deathmatch mode with a vocal friend!

Game Over

Special thanks to Todd Holcomb for his contribution this month, and we hope to see you all back here again for another dose of retrogaming goodness next month!

Copyright © 2008 Alan Hewston & Scott Jacobi. All related copyrights and trademarks are acknowledged.