

# DONKEY

## FROM VIDEO-GAME VILLAIN TO SGI SPOKESMODEL

by Chris Bieniek with Gabe Soria

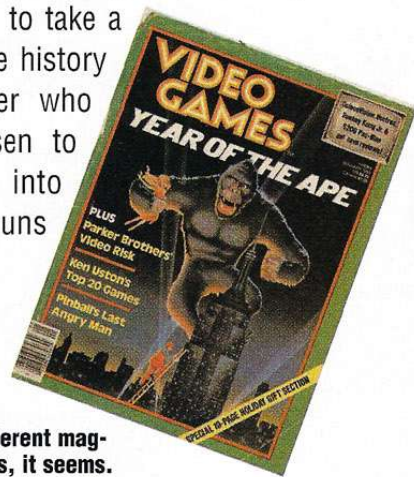
M

ore than ten years have passed since the days when you could count on seeing the face of Donkey Kong on any magazine rack. While Nintendo's infamous ape has had more than his share of recognition over the years, he's always had to take a back seat to the company's real mascot, Mario—who, ironically, made his first appearance in the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game back in 1981.

Now it's time for the king of the video-game jungle to take his place among the ranks of heroes like Mario and his brother Luigi. Nintendo's upcoming *Donkey Kong Country* SNES cartridge is a visual tour-de-force, thanks to the powerhouse Silicon Graphics machines used by developer Rare Ltd. to render all of the character ani-

mation, objects and background art in the game. However, fans of video-game trivia will be just as interested to learn that—after all of the popular games he has appeared in—*Donkey Kong Country* is the first game in which the player actually controls the Donkey Kong character himself.

Before we all bow down to the 24-meg, three-dimensional, I-can't-believe-it's-16-bit graphics of this new game, we thought it would be fun to take a look back at the history of the character who has been chosen to lead Nintendo into 1995 with guns blazing.

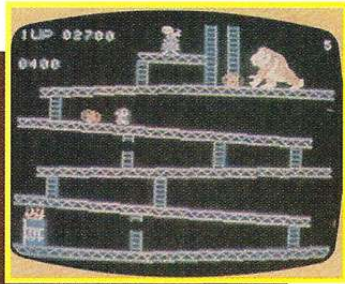


Bet you didn't know that Donkey Kong had been on the cover of *VideoGames* Magazine before! The original *Video Games* was a different magazine from a different publisher—but with a lot of the same ideas, it seems.

Arcade version by Nintendo



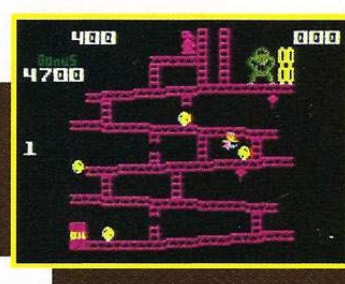
ColecoVision version by Coleco



Atari 2600 version by Coleco



Intellivision version by Coleco





# KONG®



A collection of Donkey Kong merchandise from Nintendo's own archives. (Photo by Eileen Tanner.)

As described in author David Sheff's revealing book *Game Over: How Nintendo Conquered the World* (New York: Random House, 1993), the creation of *Donkey Kong* came about when Nintendo needed a new arcade title to replace *Radarscope*, a simplistic shoot-'em-up that had failed in the Japanese marketplace. The plan was to remanufacture the existing stock of *Radarscope* machines by installing a new game program and modifying the graphics on the cabinet.

The task fell on the shoulders of a young toy designer named Shigeru Miyamoto, who drew up plans for a cartoony yet classical interpretation of the timeless tale of *Beauty and the Beast*. In it, a moustachioed carpenter had to climb ladders and avoid obstacles in his quest to rescue the princess Pauline from the clutches of a stubborn, giant ape. Miyamoto drew upon another interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast* to come up with a name for his creation: The popular 1933 monster movie, *King Kong*.

The name "Kong" is said to have been created by the film's producer, Merian C. Cooper—though at least one writer has traced its roots to a small East Indies tribe for whom the word meant "gorilla." 48 years later, the name had become so deeply entrenched in Japanese culture that it was considered a generic term for any large ape. Miyamoto meant to emphasize the monkey's stubborn nature by preceding the name of Kong with "Donkey," but the title caused a lot of puzzled looks when it first appeared in American arcades and street locations later in the year. One early review figured the title was a pun and that the game's protagonist was the legendary hero Don Quixote; indeed, Miyamoto's engineering division had always referred to the character as "Jumpman." The name of Mario was coined later by Nintendo's American staff.

Prior to the release of *Donkey Kong*, there had been platform games (*Space Panic*), climbing games (*Crazy Climber*) and other titles that strayed from the tried-and-true outer space themes the way Nintendo's new action game did.

However, none of these were able to combine a solid play mechanic with colorful, cartoonish graphics and a memorable musical score. *Donkey Kong* had *personality*, a certain something that helped Nintendo rocket straight to the number one spot on the coin-op earnings charts.



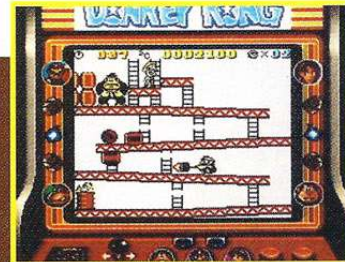
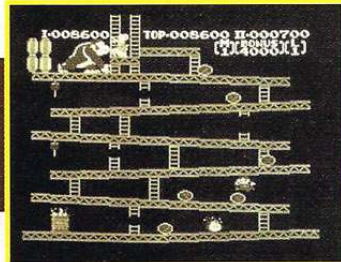
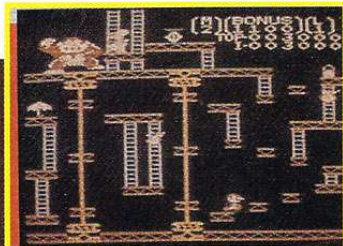
1981

Atari XL/XE version by Atari

Atari 7800 version by Atari

NES version by Nintendo

Super Game Boy version by Nintendo





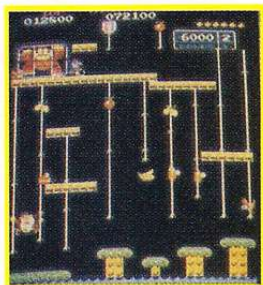
# 1982

# I

It wasn't long before Miyamoto and his R&D division—then under the leadership of Gunpei Yokoi, a longtime Nintendo manager who had been instrumental in leading Nintendo into the realm of electronic entertainment—started to develop a sequel. Where *Donkey Kong* had been unique in that its title referred to the game's bad guy, *Donkey Kong Jr.* made a hero out of Kong's son and put Mario in the position of the evil instigator. Once again, Donkey Kong's role required him to lurk at the top of the screen, hanging around and not doing much of anything; his son was the focus of the player's attention.

It was also during this time that the first home

versions of *Donkey Kong* were released. Fellow toy manufacturer Coleco signed an exclusive agreement with Nintendo to bring the game to its new ColecoVision system. There's no doubt that this faithful adaptation of *Donkey Kong* sold the hardware; the game was packed in with the machine. Coleco's license also allowed the company to release cartridge versions of *Donkey Kong* for other game systems, including Atari's VCS (2600) and Mattel's Intellivision. Coleco also scored the cartridge rights to *Donkey Kong Jr.*, while Atari Corp. licensed *Donkey Kong* for computer platforms and released several versions of the game under the Atarisoft label.



Like father, like son: *Donkey Kong Jr.* became another Nintendo arcade hit.

More *Donkey Kong* merchandise from Nintendo's private collection.



# 1983

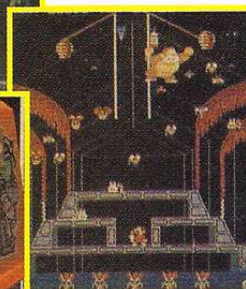
# A

Another arcade sequel, *Donkey Kong 3*, took the unconventional step of replacing Mario with a new protagonist: Stanley the Bugman. As Stanley, your job was to chase the coconut-throwing Donkey Kong out of your greenhouse—and exterminate swarms of bees—without harming your prize flowers. The game play of *Donkey Kong 3* was not quite as addictive as that of the first two games; as a result, it became one of the lesser-known *Donkey Kong* titles—which is probably a good thing. Think about it: If this game had caught on the way the original *Donkey Kong* had, we might all have ended up playing *Super Stanley Bros.*!

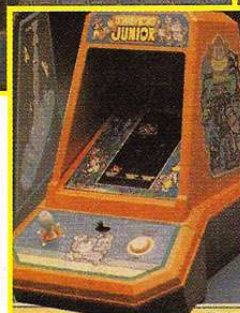
At the same time, Nintendo of Japan quietly made its entry into the home gaming market with its cartridge-based Family Computer (or Famicom) system. Trivia fans will be interested to learn that *Donkey Kong* was one of three cartridges available for use with the Famicom on the day it was introduced in Japan during July of 1983—*Donkey Kong Jr.* and *Popeye* were the other two.



*Donkey Kong 3* couldn't compare to the previous two games, but at least Kong got out of that cage!



Coleco's battery-powered tabletop games brought the arcade experience home for players without programmable game systems.



While playing the game on your ColecoVision, you could catch a sugar buzz from these cereals by Ralston-Purina.



# 1984

'84 was a quiet year for the *Donkey Kong* family, with one exception: *Donkey Kong 3* was released for the Famicom in Japan two weeks before the machine's first anniversary.

By the time the Famicom was two years old, the American video game industry had gone completely belly-up—but that didn't deter Nintendo from redesigning the exterior of its game system and releasing it in this country as the Nintendo Entertainment System (or NES.) Once again, *Donkey Kong* was one of the first games to be released for the new machine, but even this near-perfect arcade conversion was overshadowed by the antics of a certain mustachioed carpenter-turned-plumber. Shigeru Miyamoto's new game,

*Super Mario Bros.*, became the key to Nintendo's eventual dominance of the revived gaming industry; most of the 30 million NES machines sold over the next few years would include *Super Mario Bros.* right in the box.



# 1985

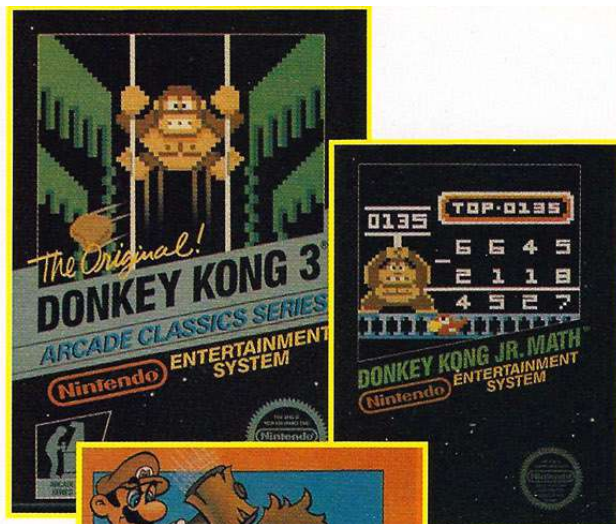
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# 1986

# D

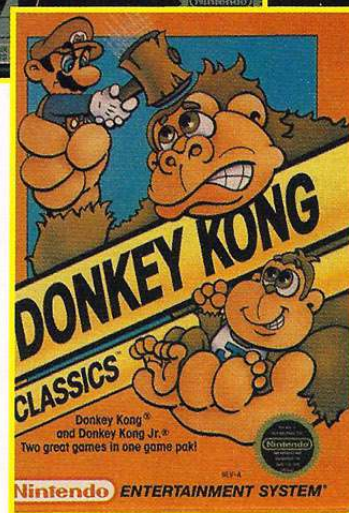
onkey Kong Jr. made it to the NES in 1986, as did *Donkey Kong 3*. Before either of these cartridges appeared, however, the *Donkey Kong* series had taken an interesting side trip into the barely-charted waters of educational software with *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*. While there was some jumping and climbing involved, the primary focus of this little-seen Game Pak was to help Donkey Kong Jr. add, subtract, multiply and divide correctly. *Donkey Kong Jr. Math* fared well in Japan (where it was complemented by a *Popeye* alphabet game), but American gamers see it as little more than a footnote in the character's history.



# 1988

# I

f the indignity of Donkey Kong playing second fiddle to Mario was not yet clear, it certainly became so in 1988. It was then that an alleged "chip shortage" had caused delays in the release of several new NES titles—most notably, Miyamoto's eagerly-awaited *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* and *Super Mario Bros. 2*. In order to make more chips available, several older titles were discontinued, including both *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.* Fortunately, the small program size of these early efforts (192K each) allowed Nintendo to reissue both games on a single cartridge that same year, under the name *Donkey Kong Classics*.



# 1992

# N

o longer committed to the arcade industry—and allowing Mario to carry the flag for its home systems—Nintendo let the Donkey Kong legacy slip quietly into relative obscurity during the transition between 8-bit and 16-bit dominance. It came as a surprise, then to pop in the new *Super Mario Kart* racing cartridge and discover that *Donkey Kong Jr.* had come out of retirement to line up with the game's seven other Nintendo characters. Outside of the release of the upcoming *Donkey Kong Country*, *Super Mario Kart* marks the only time that a member of the Donkey Kong family has appeared in a Super NES game.

Miyamoto's *Zelda* games or the updates to the popular *Dragon Quest* series of RPGs. Nintendo spurred the phenomenon by sponsoring contests to see who could complete the first course in the shortest time, and the majority of the record-breaking was being done by Donkey Kong Jr.—his higher top speed made him the choice of hardcore *Super Mario Kart* players around the world.

While it sold well in most countries, the response to *Super Mario Kart* in Japan was overwhelming—the game was received with the kind of enthusiasm which had ordinarily been reserved for

**The best players  
always choose  
Donkey Kong Jr. in  
*Super Mario Kart*.**



# 1994

# W

hen Nintendo announced the release of its Super Game Boy peripheral, the company needed a new game that would demonstrate the difference between playing a Game Boy cartridge on a tiny green dot-matrix screen and playing it in full color on a TV screen with Super NES-quality audio. The first game to be specifically coded with Super Game Boy-compatible information was a revamped version of the original *Donkey Kong*. "Revamped" is an understatement; this incredibly addictive game started

with the first few stages from the original game and took players into a whole new realm of climbing and jumping action; unlike the original, no two stages were alike.

With its dozens of new levels, new enemies and obstacles, changing colors and scrolling backgrounds, the Super Game Boy version of *Donkey Kong* took the *Donkey Kong* saga to incredible new heights. But if you thought that this was as good as *Donkey Kong* was ever going to get, you ain't seen nothing yet....





# MOVE TO DONKEY

**T**

he Donkey Kong legacy continues this winter on your Super NES with the release of the eye-poppingly beautiful Donkey Kong Country. What began as a humble arcade game has become a symbol of Nintendo's relationship with Silicon Graphics and the technology which will be used to power the company's upcoming Ultra 64 hardware.

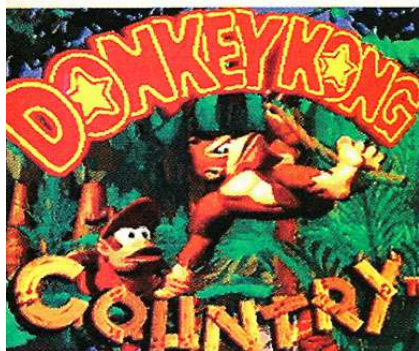
Donkey Kong Country is a platform game straight from the warped minds of Nintendo and developer Rare Ltd. (best known for games like Battletoads and R.C. Pro-Am). It sports positively unreal detailed backgrounds, wildly inventive play mechanics, eerily-animated SGI-rendered characters that move better than most cartoons and a healthy dose of whimsical monkey business.

King Kong it ain't, and you'd better be glad 'cause you'd die at the end. This is what's going on: As Donkey Kong, you must defend your island home against an invasion of evil Kremlings, nasty crocodile humanoids who want to subjugate you in various nasty ways. What would be an almost insurmountable task for one is made easier because, as Batman has his sidekick Robin, Donkey Kong has

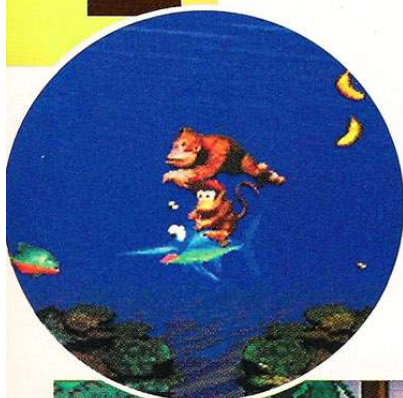
his pal Diddy Kong, a cap wearing mini-ape who looks quite a bit like Donkey Kong Jr. In addition to Diddy Kong, Donkey Kong meets other friends on the way who aid him in times of need.

Donkey Kong Country is a huge game that spans over gads of extensive levels, including jungles (where you can buck along on a rhinoceros), mines (where you can hitch a ride on a giant frog and a mine cart), the ocean, ancient ruins, plus more, more, more! Yes, it really exists—you can stop rubbing your eyes, 16-bit graphics can be this good.

You know you've always wanted to be a monkey, and now Nintendo is going to grant your fondest wish. Go hog wild this November and try not to make a mess in your pants when you see this game!



**NOW**





# KONG COUNTRY!

