Other Than Atari

The Atari 2600 appears to be the most popular system as far as homebrew games go. Many programmers take on the 2600 as a challenge because it is considered to be difficult to program. However, many other orphaned systems abound, and several have also been tapped to receive a new lifeline of software.

Kevin Horton, a designer of electronic systems and an expert on Stella (2600) architecture, decided to program a game for the Colecovision. He chose the Colecovision because it was the only system that had ever been built using 100 percent off-the-shelf parts. This meant that Horton had been able to take one apart and reverse-engineer it relatively easily.

Kevin Horton's Kevtris cartridge (courtesy Kevin Horton's web site)

Once he understood what made the Colecovision tick, he took on the task of programming a game for it. The result was Kevtris, a Tetris clone. Horton manufactured 100 copies and distributed 98 of them in June 1996.

While none of the homebrew authors mentioned so far make a living out of writing games, John Dondzila is by far the most prolific of them all. A venerable game-design machine, Dondzila has written more homebrew games for more systems than many professional game designers.

Dondzila's system of choice was the Vectrex. He had grown tired of hearing people say they were going to program a Vectrex game and then not do so. He decided to shut them up and write his own game. The result was a Space Invaders clone called Vector Vaders. Released in 1996, it was the first brand-new game for the Vectrex in 12 years. Dondzila followed it with a Missile Command clone

John Dondzila's Vector Vadors (courtesy John Dondzila's web site)

called Patriots. Next came All Good Things, a collection of five games including clones of Asteroids, Tetris, and Kaboom!, which was also the first-ever 16k Vectrex cartridge. He followed this up with Spike Hoppin', a Q*Bert clone, which was the first 16k Vectrex game. Dondzila's latest Vectrex release is Vecmania, a collection of eight games and unfinished demos contained in the world's first 64k Vectrex cartridge.

Dondzila wasn't satisfied with just the Vectrex. He ultimately wrote Amok, a Berzerk clone for the Odyssey2, as well as four Colecovision titles. In the future he hopes to tackle a 2600 game if he can think of an original one and even a game for RCA's Studio II, which he is in the process of reverse engineering. Dondzila finds programming for multiple systems rather easy. "It's just a little different for each system," he explains. "The basic fundamentals are the same for the programming language, which is why it's so easy to switch between processors. It's the graphics, sound, and I/O hardware programming for each unique system which is what's hard."