
HouYi Shot the Suns



An Entry by ITG-Soft for ByteOff IV

Background Information:

I originally purchased a copy of NES Maker towards the end of 2018, and then began working on making a game, which would be released during the summer of 2019. As far as I am aware, my game was one of the earliest NES Maker games to be released on a cartridge, if not *the* earliest. It was for the Famicom and was a kusoge; however, this was intentional and all personal objectives had been reached.

At the time I thought it would be a one and done, but by early 2020 I started working on another game, and by now I've had the ambition to release six or seven different titles. Some of the games have flaws or are not polished, whereas others actually turned out quite decently considering the fact that I was flying solo the whole time.

When I saw the announcement for ByteOff IV, I initially had no plans to submit an entry; however, it just so happened that things were at a bit of a lull towards the end of the semester so as a teacher, I suddenly had a lot more extra time to sit twiddling my thumbs, which led to be also spinning the gears inside my head about a ByteOff IV entry. Under such circumstances was *HouYi Shot the Suns* born.

Ambitions:

As with the other games I designed, for *HouYi Shot the Suns* one should expect to see a plethora of poorly drawn sprites and animations, barely passable music, and coding that has been hashed together based on my limited understanding of programming thanks to a history as a failed Comp Sci major, paired with the knowledge and scripts made available generously due to the greater NES Maker community and the king himself, Joe Grenato.

As someone who has been following the homebrew Nintendo scene since the late 90s (Chris Covell, Memblers, etc), we have come a long way. Some of the games that have been released in the more recent years could have been official commercial releases, and my comment stands for some NES Maker and some "from scratch" games, both. I don't have the ability or talent to develop something of such a caliber acting as a lone wolf; however, in some ways this is actually what I want, weirdly enough. My goal here is to create a game that looks somewhat amateurish, yet at the same time provides gamers with enjoyment, essentially a throwback to the earlier times of homebrew.

Inspiration:

When I Joe Granato reviewed this year's ByteOff theme to be about frontiers, I was excited. I immediately thought about a legend in Chinese mythology, which took one of the major players in the story to the moon. And that is where I began brainstorming for ideas.

As an expat in Taiwan, the vast majority of the games that I designed either relate to Taiwanese / Chinese themes, or are set in Taiwan. I didn't actually set out to do this, but it's something that just ended up happening. There are so many local legends and customs that could easily be transformed into games, yet as a large majority of games were developed by studios in Japan or in the States, these stories were often left unexplored. The story of Chang'e and HouYi is one such story.

I had been wanting to create a game based on this legend since about early 2020 – I had created a game about Chinese New Year, which ultimately went unreleased, as well as a game about the annual Dragon Boat Festival. I followed that up with a game about Hungry Ghost Month. Moon Festival, the holiday that relates to the Chang'e and HouYi legend, was one of the few major holidays for which I didn't design a game, and I had been wanting to do so for several years. The ByteOff IV event seemed like the perfect time, as I could experiment and try new things, release a demo and get feedback, and then finish things up before ultimately releasing the game on cartridge format for the Moon Festival holiday.

While the name for the game is a bit awkward, it is supposed to be a slight throwback to an awesome unauthorized Famicom game by Waixing, known as *Lin Baned (sic) the Opium*. I know most people won't understand the reference or "get" it, but it's a minor tribute to some of the unsung heroes in game development history.

Developing a Plot:

There are several popular legends about Chang'e and HouYi, a set of lovers. While the different stories all have their own flare, the common core is that Chang'e and HouYi were lovers, and Chang'e ended up swallowing a potion of immortality that sent her flying to the moon. HouYi allegedly received the potion as a gift after saving the earth from the suns, but in the end Chang'e ended up drinking all of it while he was out. Some said she took the potion to escape HouYi, others believe that she took it as the evil apprentice was trying to steal it. Either way, Chang'e and HouYi ended up separated, and a lot of the stories also throw in rabbits on the moon. Obviously this is just a very loose synopsis of the legend, but as an author and storyteller, this is how I like to start things. Why not just reinterpret the legend in one way or another, while keeping the heart of it the same?

Anyway, given the above story, it became apparent to me that an adventure game would make the most sense – have part of the game take place on Earth, and the rest set on the moon. After all, we can follow the legend in this way.

The only problem that remains is how to turn the legend into a game. What problem shall we solve? Since the separation of lovers occurred due to the apprentice, he can't be the bad guy, as his doing already occurred. Try to bring Chang'e back home to Earth? That's a bit cliché. So why not tell the story from the lens of a protagonist who is also aware of the legend, a protagonist who then sets out to actually confirm the legend for him or herself?

Gameplay:

It became clear to me early on that the most entertaining way to turn this legend into a game would be to design it as a multi-style game, akin to Disney's *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* on the NES. There would be a top-down aspect, connecting everything and progressing the story; however, the hero would have to complete a variety of tasks or games to reach the end of the game. As I'm typing this as I am working on the *ByteOff IV* demo submission, some of the points below might change, but here are some of the ideas I have floating around in my head:

1. Light gun aspects of the game, which trigger events. Like the game *Dragon Spirit*, where early actions / performance in the game impact the game, I see two parallel games here: namely *HouYi's* story as well as another unnamed protagonist in a later era who is following *HouYi's* legend.
2. Chang'e is now settled happily in her palace on the moon; therefore, she doesn't want strangers entering into her premises. That's where another game comes into play, catching rabbits to grab keys to access the palace.
3. Make a sign. I was attending church the other day (I'm Catholic) and the thought occurred to me how despite being in a building with people speaking a variety of languages and cultures, all any of us would have to do would be to make the sign of the cross for any other Catholics to recognize, no matter what the background or location. In this way, at one point the protagonist needs to hold a "sacred" button combination to "make an ancient sign" that then causes something to happen, allowing access to another area of the game.
4. As this is a game about frontiers, I decided to have the people on the moon speaking a different language. As it so happens, I happened to design a constructed language (named *Wan Khu*) a few years ago, and translated a children's story into this language. The characters on the moon are also speaking *Wan Khu*, to contribute to the frontier theme.
5. References to other games are made in *HouYi Shot the Suns*. The club on the moon is a different branch of the notorious *Peace, Love, Trippy Club (PLTC)*. The couple on the beach are reminiscent of the beach lovers found on the menus in the infamous *Unchained Melody* Famicom multicarts. The frog from *Piss the Fish* also makes an appearance, near the river way.

Development Journal:

26/02/24

Generally I have a few hours at my day job that are free, and often I will play around with game design then. As a teacher this works out fine as my students are often curious about what I am doing, and they will come to watch and chat with me as I experiment with the game; however, I am on leave for the next three days so it is likely that aside from any late-night sessions, physical progress will be limited. I always get ideas and write them down in a notebook though, things that I apply to my games as well as my writing and music.

In the morning I had time to start designing the moon palace. There are rabbit and sun tiles, as well as some columns. I envision a scene towards the end of the game where HouYi and Chang'e leave the palace together. Only one or two screens will be at the palace foyer and entry area, but from that point on it will just be dodging clouds and things like that in the sky for several screens, likely around eight or ten. I have a bit of the stage laid out, but I will need to fill in the details later, likely in the next few days.

One of the points that I haven't yet determined is whether I want HouYi to be fleeing from Chang'e, whether I want the pair to have to navigate and survive the flight together, or whether there would be some other preferable choice. This is likely to be one of the final scenes of the game.

In the evening I continued working on the banana / palm tree / betel nut tree forest situated roughly in the middle of the main island. Rumor has it that there is a hermit who lives deep in the forest, who somehow makes beer out of tiger urine. The man has likely gone loopy, but that should be no surprise given that his diet consists primarily of the two major staples, a rare species of red banana, and blow; however, that doesn't mean that his knowledge of the island or of other realms should be dismissed.

The idea of the hermit homebrewer was taken from an unreleased Chinese New Year game I was working on back around 2019 or 2020.

The forest found on the island is somewhat reminiscent of the lost forest in the original Legend of Zelda game. There is definitely something off about the place, which is likely why the old man is residing there.

27/02/24

Today was one of those annoying days one sometimes has when working with developing software. I had about an hour in the morning to work on the game before heading down to the wetlands with my father for travel, about 45 minutes away from where I live. The vast majority of the time spent this

morning was fighting to get text boxes operable. As I was using a customized module, one of the many downsides was that text boxes wouldn't load properly. I tried a lot of alternative methods, since the amount of text in the game is moderate at most, but nothing worked out to my satisfaction. This led me to ultimately abandon one or two potential features in my game, opting to switch back to a module that was less buggy. Okay, that wasn't so bad, or was it?

When I came back from the wetlands it wasn't difficult getting the text boxes up and running, but I then ran into a different problem regarding game controls on alternate game state screens. At first I thought there was an issue on my end, a small entry error that I had overlooked. After going back through the setup multiple times and experimenting a bit, I was able to determine that things were fine on my end. Another NES Maker user, dale_coop, was able to offer a suggestion and it worked! It felt great to be able to get this worked out, which allows me to finish a few of the mini games.

On a more positive note, I managed to do more work in Chang'e's thrown room. I feel that the graphics turned out quite nice there, looking like the style of graphics I always wanted to use for a NES game.

Overall, today was a frustrating day. It felt as though I was taking a step backwards at every turn, and a lot of time was wasted; however, I also feel that if I manage to scrape together some time tomorrow that I'll be in a much better place when it comes to hashing out various aspects of the game. And if not tomorrow, then work shall continue on Thursday.

28/02/24

Despite being out for the vast majority of the day, there was still time to make a bit of progress on *HouYi Shot the Suns*. Eight questions were prepared to make a quiz mini-game about the Mid-Autumn Festival / Moon Festival, which when all of the lore regarding HouYi and Chang'e occurs. A female rabbit hostess was also designed to host the game show. Can you answer the eight questions or not? At the moment I'm thinking that completion of the quiz yields access to the Moon Palace and Chang'e.

I might create a little cut scene leading into the quiz mini-game. I thought that an image of the event hall from above might be fun, and then a forward shot, having the curtains rise or open or something. Obviously the quiz needs to be in English as opposed to the constructed language Wan Khu, so I still need to think of a way to explain this aspect away in the game's story. I had been working on this part of the game late into the evening.

Another small tweak I did today was in the afternoon. I added waves to the water surrounding the islands, and I started playing with the palette cycling speed to see what looks best. I never did come to a resolution on the speed, so I'll take a look at it again one of these days in the future.

A few other thoughts I've been having: adding some kind of boat that allows travels to the other surrounding islands might be nice. I also have been thinking about adding a code on a piece of paper written in "invisible" ink, which would yield access to something. This would only be available in any physical release of the game though.

Furthermore, I learned of a new story tonight relating to the moon, namely that of Wu Kang who tried to gain immortality by attempting to chop down an osmanthus tree. I plan on turning this event into a mini-game somehow. I am also trying to think of more puzzles or mini-games to add, since somehow this game ultimately ended up to be more of an interactive story than a game driven by the motive of defeating enemies. What kind of enemies could I even add into this game? Have the bunnies chase HouYi in the Pac-Man moon mini-game? Then there's the suns. Should Chang'e reject HouYi? Will there be a showdown with Feng Meng? Again, many more points to ponder.

29/02/24

I felt like I was able to make up for lost time a bit today with the progress I made. It was an extremely light day at work today so I was able to experiment a bit with some ideas, and then I also had time in the evening to continue implementing these ideas.

The boat idea I had thought about last night became a reality this morning! One of the reasons I enjoy working on creative projects such as this one before bed is that then I can see which ideas I remember the next day – often, these are the good ideas that I then decide to use, whereas anything I forget was likely forgotten for a reason.

Getting back to the boat idea, it ultimately morphed into a rickety raft. I had an idea of how to get things running in the morning, and then was able to get it crudely implemented in the afternoon. The system isn't perfect, and there are a few bugs and issues I need to sort out, such as whether the raft can navigate narrow waterways along the main island or not, but I'll likely reach a decision on that tomorrow.

As was discussed yesterday, originally I had thought about adding a boat, which would give access to the outlying islands. As with all great decisions, the idea quickly changed from a boat into a raft when it came time for me to draw the boat sprite. I started off with a sailboat, but it looked ugly, so it quickly turned into a rowboat, but that didn't look particularly good either. By the time I was done tweaking things, it turned into a raft.

Although it wasn't my intention to create a raft, I felt it fit well with the plot. I plan on adding a cameo of the "Unchained Melody Multicart" couple in the game. They'll be coexisting (stranded perhaps?) on one of the outlying islands, and their raft will wash up on shore, to be found by a crotchety old man who gets tired of seeing young couples pull foolish stunts such as crossing rough waters on shoddy homemade rafts.

The raft segments feel very reminiscent of the boat section of Super Mario Bros. 3 in the water world (world 3). One can just cruise around the island looking at things and exploring the waterways, for the sake of it, though there will also be some practical reasons for doing so. One thing I have been toying around with, in my mind, is to change the control scheme in the rough waters sections so that the up button moves the raft left, for example, or the down button up. My thought process is that this could attempt to "simulate" rough waters, where things are chaotic and your mind is a mess and you can't correctly think due to the sense of panic and confusion creeping upon your spirit. My only worry about

this idea is that I know some, likely most, gamers will hate this aspect of the game. That being said, unless I get lazy or start running out of time, I am likely to add this wild control scheme to the mix.

Anyways, I'm glad that I was able to get the raft section crudely implemented today, and I hope that I can polish it tomorrow.

Another thing I did was I fixed the text boxes by adding a border around them. This slowed down the draw speed, unfortunately, but...meh, that's just going to be what it is for now, I'm not getting excited over it.

01/03/24

Although I got a lot done today, it was sort of a weird day. I did a lot of odds and ends. The first thing I did was fleshed out the moon palace area. Chang'e is standing by her thrown when one arrives in the moon palace. When speaking to her, she asks whether HouYi sent you, though of course she knows that he has. Being a goddess has its advantages.

As one leaves the palace, the protagonist then starts flying in the sky, and the ocean can be seen below. Once again, there's a bit of a continuity problem here, as to how or why the hero is flying, though I think we can explain it away by stating (or assuming) that at some point before arriving on the moon, he obtained the same immortality elixir that Chang'e had drank. Maybe the tree cutter can give it to the unnamed protagonist?

As the stage progresses outside of the temple, the sky continues to get lighter and lighter. An idea popped into my head that it was in this scene that some of the suns could start chasing the hero, and that he'd have to dodge them in this final showdown before reaching the end of the game. While this plan sounds good as well as a bit sensible, it is also here where things get a bit silly due to the way that my mind works.

For those who have played any of the other games I designed, one thing people might notice is that it seems that I can never make it the whole way through the game's design before doing something silly or stupid, it's just how my mind works. The secret bonus round in the Mr Lee tea game is an example – in that one, the hero can bounce off of this huge Mr Lee head to reach higher platforms and score more points. Then there's Piss the Fish, a game that was in itself just one big joke. And the list goes on and on, and apparently HouYi Shot the Suns was unable to escape this fate.

Anyways, as the hero gets further from the moon palace, the sky gets lighter and lighter until the background is all done in these horrible fluorescent colors. Throw in some palette cycling and you have this weird trippy look, as these ugly suns are chasing the hero to the exit. Enough on that for now, I might even put a disclaimer on the packaging just in case anyone wants to play the game who is sensitive to flashing lights.

Another thing that I did tonight was added the Cave of Finality to the world map. Despite the cave's slightly ominous-sounding name, the cave is actually going to lead to a secret ending that includes game design credits. Richard Miao, where are you? :D

I also spent part of the night adding in NPCs and accompanying text. I will have to go back and remove the stock graphics later, but it is good to at least see the story forming. This will help tremendously as I sketch out a way to link the events that occur in the game.

The last thing I did tonight was another biggie. I began working on the world map for the moon. The moon is not the safest place to visit. Once he lands, the player needs to safely navigate through an asteroid storm that has been pummeling the moon. If he can survive that, the fun begins as he gains access to the moon's nightlife, before gaining access to Chang'e.

At this point I've also begun thinking about how I want to handle the art for the game's box, label, manual, etc. Optimally, I'd love to be able to find a local to help sketch these items, but with such a short deadline this isn't guaranteed at all.

04/03/24

To be honest, I started panicking a bit today while sitting at my desk at work. I took out my computer but then realized that I only have about two weeks to tie up a bunch of loose ends and get the project into a working demo.

The first thing I did today was to add the suns into the final scene of the game. I added support to shoot them down with a light gun or zapper, which is somewhat reminiscent of what had occurred in the legend of HouYi.

In the afternoon, I continued to work on the upper moon area. The Hop Olympics arena was added, and although I need to rework the animations, rabbit participants were also added to the arena. While I still need to finish the moon area, I sketched it out in my mind, situating the different areas and the mini-games. I also added the Wu Gang segment and now one can help Wu Gang cut down the tree, which then lends him to providing you with a clue to obtain the Stone of Sweah, which helps you to complete the different tasks on the moon, leading one to victory.

I also linked up the splash screens that are at the start of the game.

Although I feel as though I have a lot of the main parts of the game finished, I'm starting to get worried that things will take longer than planned to finish up. Two weeks is not a lot of time!

06/03/24

Yesterday I was in a bad mood of sorts, and the frustrations carried over to today. My supervisor started picking at me randomly for not following the schedule 100%, stating that the schedule is "extremely important" to follow. For those who aren't aware, I'm a teacher at a kindergarten, albeit I'm in the process of a career change. I've been at the same job for about a decade, and given that there is more material to be taught than there is time, of course one has to prioritize certain items over others – this is

the teacher's plight, I guess, never enough time to properly do everything. Ironically enough I was then told *not* to follow the schedule today, as my co-teacher wasn't going to be there in the morning. Also, the week prior I was unable to follow the schedule as the students were having their photos taken all week.

Perhaps I'm being arrogant, but at the end of the day I just truly believe that we should be looking at the forest rather than the trees. Compared to some of the other classes, my students are well-disciplined, have learned quite a bit over the past several years, and are happy. We have fun, we play together, we learn. And parents are happy. So just let me alone and focus your attentions towards the class next door to mine, where the children are not learning nearly as well (despite being the same age). Think about the fact that you hired a male teacher to work in that classroom, who has been in and out of jail several times due to a defamation spat with his landlord. And let's not forget how the co-teacher refuses to do her duty and clean the classroom, so the bathroom stinks like a train station toilet, and the floors are black with filth – the same floors that young children might be crawling around on, during playtime. The funniest bit of it all is that the male teacher doesn't even teach to the schedule, as he doesn't even follow the curriculum! He just teaches his own materials that promote his own school down the street. What a joke!

Anyways, being in such a bad mood just put me in the wrong state of mind, which unfortunately carried over into the evening, as well as the better part of today. I really don't need the stress or mental anguish which is why I'm working on changing careers.

I fell asleep on the sofa tonight with my loyal cat, after arriving home from work. When I woke up I decided it best to try to do a little bit of work on HouYi Shot the Suns, so I continued working on the raft segment. I believe I got it more or less done, fixing some graphical issues and getting it to look how I want it to look. The next step will be to start adding some people and interesting things to the outlying islands.

I also began working on some of the features for the main island. I drew up some rice fields. The next thing to add will be some pine trees, as well as some more houses or buildings. I also want to draw some oxen and carts to work in the fields.

07/03/24

About half of the main island is now finished. I drew some more tree graphics as well as some rocks, and then went nuts tonight carefully placing some of the items around the island. Tomorrow is Friday and although I'll be away for most of the evening, hopefully I can get the better portion of the rest of the island finished before going out tomorrow night. I'm going out Saturday night as well, but hopefully once again I can get some work done before I leave.

10/03/24

Wow, today has been intense! After being out late Friday and Saturday night (man I'm getting old), I barely managed to wake up in time to head to church in the morning. As it was a nice day, afterwards I spent the next few hours driving around town, stopping to get some sesame noodles, tofu, fish, and peanuts for lunch. I also swung by a few junk shops to look for games, but I found nothing of interest. I did see some old bootleg Dragon Ball Z tattoos up for grabs though, anyone interested?

When I got home I cracked open a beer and sat down to begin working on *HouYi Shot the Suns*, but I just wasn't feeling it. I speculate that the time spent driving around today was a thinly-veiled attempt at procrastinating, knowing I had to put some series time into the game today. Anyways, in my infinite wisdom I decided to lie down for a nap, and by the time I woke up, the skies were dark outside. Yikes!

Anyways, such affairs forced me to get behind the computer for the rest of the night. The main island and smaller islands are all landscaped by now, and I also took care of things on the moon. I linked up the mini games to the map screen on the moon, too. I also began replacing the stock characters / NPCs with my own characters, and I have the title screen more or less complete. I've been stressing over this project for the past few days, as the deadline has been steadily approaching, yet in actuality I think I'm right on track. I just have a few mechanical things to take care of, as well as finishing the raft exploration section. And I also need to draw a few more NPCs. I'm optimistic that tomorrow I can take care of the bulk of this stuff.

11/03/24

Today my mom turned 70! Wow, I can't believe it – it's honestly terrifying to think about, but as Tracy Lawrence says, time does indeed march on. For the occasion I took a break from *HouYi Shot the Suns* to make my mother a Famicom birthday card. I included a picture of our dog Jenna, who then barks and says "Woof Woof". I just sent her the ROM file and had my brother help her get an emulator set up to view it. I'm going to also add images of the other two pets, as well as my cat and possibly my mother's crush, the local coffee shop's dog, before burning it onto a cartridge and sending her that. This is one of the fun things about NES Maker, namely being able to create some simple pieces of software that ran on a Famicom / NES, yet aren't focused entirely on the idea of gaming. That Pac-Man clone I had my kindergarten students do one weekend was another example; despite using original IP, it was derivative in nature but that wasn't the point. In the end, each student in my class was able to draft his or her own stage, which was then added into the game. Alright, let's get back to the progress with *HouYi Shot the Suns*.

This morning I was more or less handed a lot of downtime, so I was able to more or less finish up implementing the rafting section of the game. Visiting the runaway lovers appeases the mom, who then teaches you the ancient religious sign. Learning the sign dries up the pond, creating a land bridge that grants access to the cave, where one can obtain the very same magic elixir that Chang'e drank, gaining access to the moon above.

I also tackled the musical "game". The hero sits behind a piano on stage, with some bunnies dancing in the background. Keep to the beat as you see fit. This is the final test, and if you do a good job, you'll end up in the moon goddess's private chamber.

Up on the moon I also created the cave with the scroll, which teaches the hero how to understand the language of the moon. After collecting this item, the inhabitants will speak English (well actually they don't, but we just have them speaking English to imply that the hero now has a comprehension of what they are saying), which then allows the hero to complete the quiz game.

So what remains to be done? Likely, just superficial things. The biggest thing to be done is to draw the sprites for and then implement more NPCs. I might also add a few generic enemies to the main world, as otherwise the game will feel more like just one big fetch quest than have any sort of "game" aspect to it, though for this particular game I'm more interested in the experience, rather than any sort of proper gaming.

I also want to create the insides for a few of the buildings, as well as one or two more caves, to create depth to the game. Although I feel as though these are all just minor things left to be completed, I know that I will likely underestimate the time required to complete these things. Hopefully I can get everything done tomorrow and Wednesday. That leaves Thursday and Friday for playtesting and creating box art, a manual, etc. Goodnight everyone!

12/03/24

As the deadline keeps approaching, I can't help but feel a bit anxious. Today while at my day job I sketched out a page linking the points on the Earth together; this allowed me to figure out the NPCs I had to create to get the game up and running. I then sat down and muddled through creating some NPCs during my lunch break.

Despite taking a decent nap after work, I was able to implement about 95% of the stuff I sketched out earlier in the morning. Tomorrow I will do the rest.

Taking a look at the map, I think I'm almost there. Hopefully tomorrow I can add in the rest of the NPC stuff, and then also playing through the game in its entirety to make sure that everything links together fine. That would leave Thursday for going through each area screen by screen. I would add some extra details and fix any faults. Friday and Saturday would then be used for creating supplementary materials and uploading the ROM to the site. I hope things can work out as planned.

13/03/24

Today was an exciting day, but it was also a bit of a letdown. Please let me explain. When developing *HouYi Shot the Suns*, I developed each area in isolation from the others, since the game more or less consists of several different "activities" or "puzzles" to complete or solve, which are all accessed from the main over world. As a result, I tested individual areas to see how they would function. Today was the day I linked everything together and then burnt chips to test everything out on real hardware. This was exciting!

At the same time, I realized that the raft area was much more broken than I had imagined, which had somewhat devastated me. This is one of my favorite parts of the game, just escaping the island and mindlessly cruising around the waters, Mario 3 style, while searching out new areas and other secrets. In the current state that it is in, however, I am not sure that I'll be able to include it in the ByteOff demo, sadly.

Furthermore, I discovered a lot of minor tweaks and bugs that need to be addressed. Some of the bugs are graphical issues that occasionally occur – while annoying, I am not particularly concerned about these as they are the sort of thing that are, at the moment, above my knowledge. I'll need to ask for assistance and research to address these issues before a final ROM is produced.

Then there are the tweaks, things like continuity issues where the hero isn't wearing the proper outfit, or the HUD appears where it shouldn't, etc. Sadly there were a lot more minor instances like this than I had hoped. Hopefully I can fix these issues tomorrow and figure out what to do about the raft area.

14/03/24

Fortunately today was an easy day at work; therefore, I had a lot of downtime and was able to get a lot accomplished. I totally redesigned the rafting area, after trying several different things. I was also able to fix some of the continuity issues. I'm feeling hopeful here. With that being said...

Earlier in the day I had quite the scare. I was at home, and for some reason my ROM wouldn't compile. After some investigation, it came to light that I had accidentally deleted one of the files necessary. I wasted about an hour getting things figured out and sorted out, and felt quite sick in the process. Once I did get things solved, I decided to take a break and step back from it all, by doing something relaxing such as painting the box art.

Despite looking like it was inspired by the Lion King, the box design was inspired by another image I found of the whole HouYi / Chang'E saga online. Tomorrow I'll finish the box and get some labels printed.

15/03/24

We're on the home stretch, which is why I decided not to do much at all today. With the raft area complete, I was able to play test everything again and the solution works well, most of the time. There are a few occasions where I run into issues, which I still need to investigate.

On the other hand, it's time to start doing the promo things, which is a nice change of pace. In the morning I was able to finish up the box and cartridge labels, and I also had time to design up a label for a wine bottle at lunch. I got these printed during lunch, and then in the afternoon I purchased a moon cake from one of the local pastry shops, to be used in some of the photo sessions.

I also bought a stuffed rabbit. I had trouble finding a rabbit, for some reason. I could find owls, penguins, frogs – basically anything else. When I did find a rabbit, it was wearing clothes, which I promptly removed. I think things turned out well. Feeling good going into the weekend!

16/03/24

I need a break. Spending hours upon hours looking at a computer screen while staying up into the wee hours of the morning conjures up nightmares from my earlier university days as a comp sci major. It's quite ironic that I would be revisiting this chapter of my life, twenty years later.

I prepared a fake commercial for *HouYi Shot the Suns*. It is simple, yet I think it turned out pretty well. I also used some off the time today to make some of the NPCs walk.

17/03/24

Oh, what a nightmare! I burned some chips and gave the game another playthrough, and discovered some glitches. First it was with the bunnies on the moon. Then it was an issue with warping in – instead of warping to the location I wanted, I warped directly into a solid tile and became stuck. And yet another time, the potion connecting the earth to the moon was missing. Yikes!

It was extremely intense trying to tackle all of these issues. As soon as I would fix one thing, it would throw something else off, creating another issue. It felt endless and towards the end, I realized that once I had a build that was seemingly 98% good (I realize that when dozens of people play the game ROM, there are sure to be tons of other goofy things occurring from play test scenarios I never could have imagined), I would stop while ahead and leave the other tweaks for the final game.

It felt good to upload everything to the Retroverse. Next week will hopefully be a time where I can turn in early, after a month of extremely late nights.

Final Thoughts:

I had a lot of fun participating in the Byte Off IV competition. Similarly, it was a lot of fun developing *HouYi Shot the Suns*. I'm going to forget about the project for a month or two, and then finish it up for a third quarter release.

I'd like to thank Joe Granato for creating NES Maker as well as for cultivating a fantastic community of gamers and developers of all ages, who can share their support, ideas, and wisdom with each other. One name that constantly stands out is dale_coop. I love the games that he developed with his son, and I feel that such works really show one of the many things that has arrived from the development of NES Maker.

Similarly, NES Maker helped a lot of people achieve their childhood dreams, to finally be able to get their childhood ideas from brain or paper onto an actual screen. For me personally, I went into university as a comp sci major, for the exact reason that I wanted to develop games. I hated programming and spending sleepless nights just to get a stack functioning or a few lines of text printed so much, that I eventually switched into becoming an English major. It's quite funny to step back into this sort of environment after twenty years, and the part that is even more ironic is that NES Maker has led me to take up some programming courses and read up on assembly language, in hopes of developing better games in the future, with each consecutive release.

I could go on forever, but I'll leave it with this: I hope everyone enjoys the quirky game *HouYi Shot the Suns*. Thanks for checking out the demo!