SPECIAL DIGITAL EDITION

MEGA DRIVE SEGA

HIGH DEFINITION GRAPHICS · STEREO SOUND

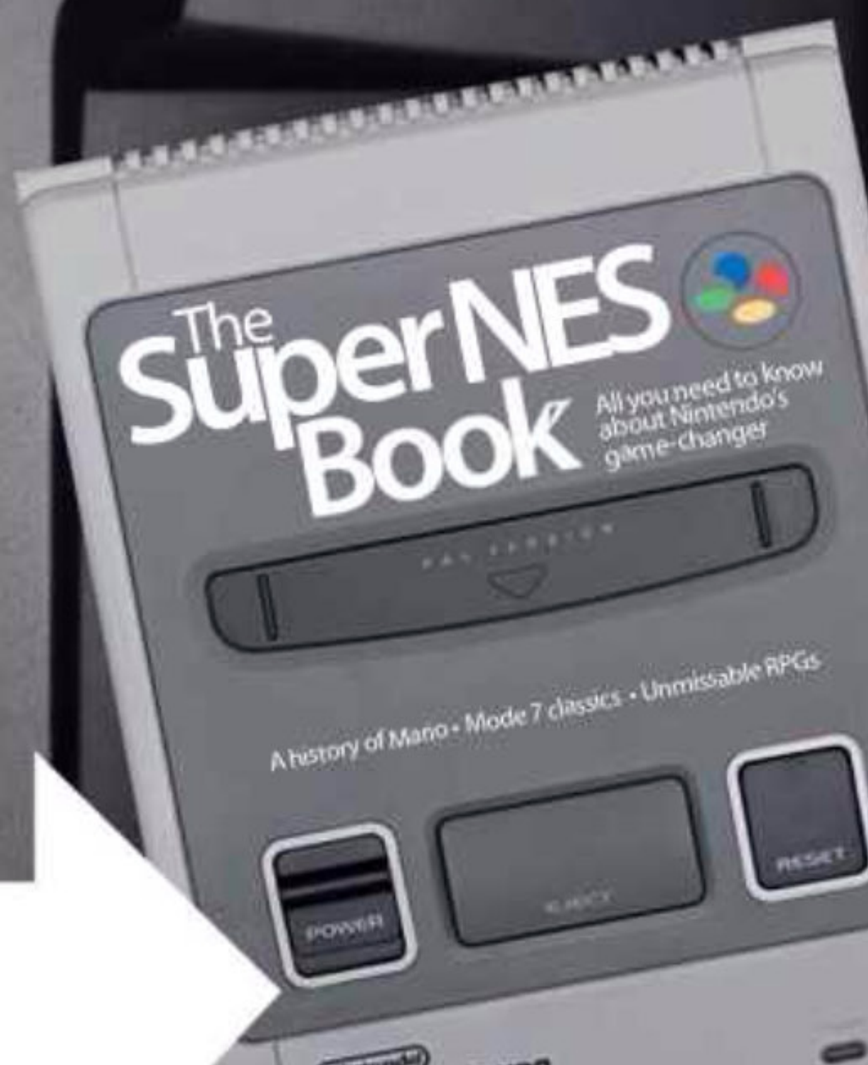
16-BIT

POWER — ON

From the makers of retro* GAMER

The Mega Drive Book

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece



Includes The Super NES Book

Welcome to

The Mega Drive Book

It's amazing to think that Sega's Mega Drive is now an impressive 25 years old. When it was first released in October 1988, Sega desperately needed a home hit. Its previous 8-bit consoles had failed to break the stranglehold that Nintendo had created with the NES, leaving Sega with a small window of opportunity before Nintendo released its own 16-bit console. The end result was the Mega Drive — or Genesis as it's known in the US — an excellent machine that, buoyed by a host of stunning conversions and original IPs like Sonic The Hedgehog, managed to loosen Nintendo's iron grip on the market. Exclusives like Gunstar Heroes, Contra: Hard Corps, Mega Man: The Wily Wars and of course Sonic delivered exciting arcade-styled gameplay that made home computers and Nintendo's NES pale in comparison. So join us as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Sega's fantastic console and highlight some of the best games to ever appear on its 16-bit masterpiece.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Mega Drive Book

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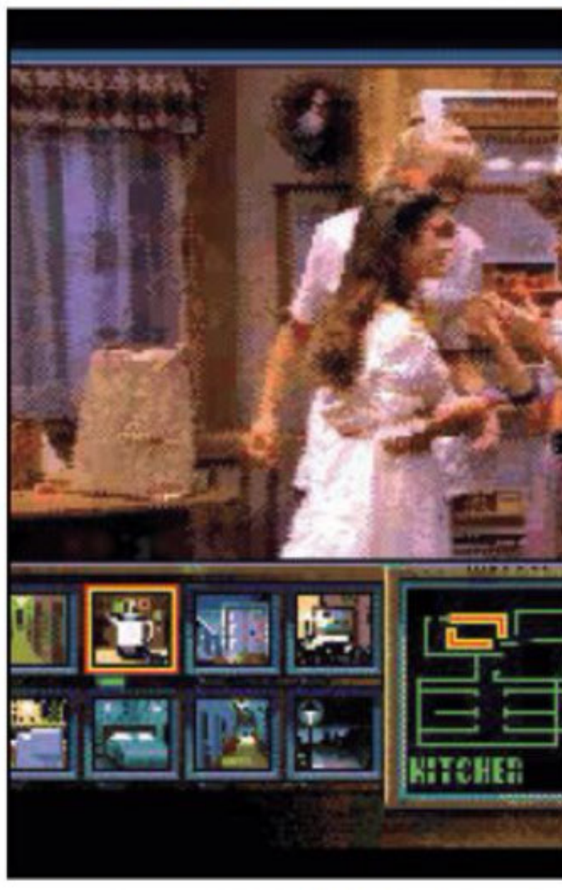

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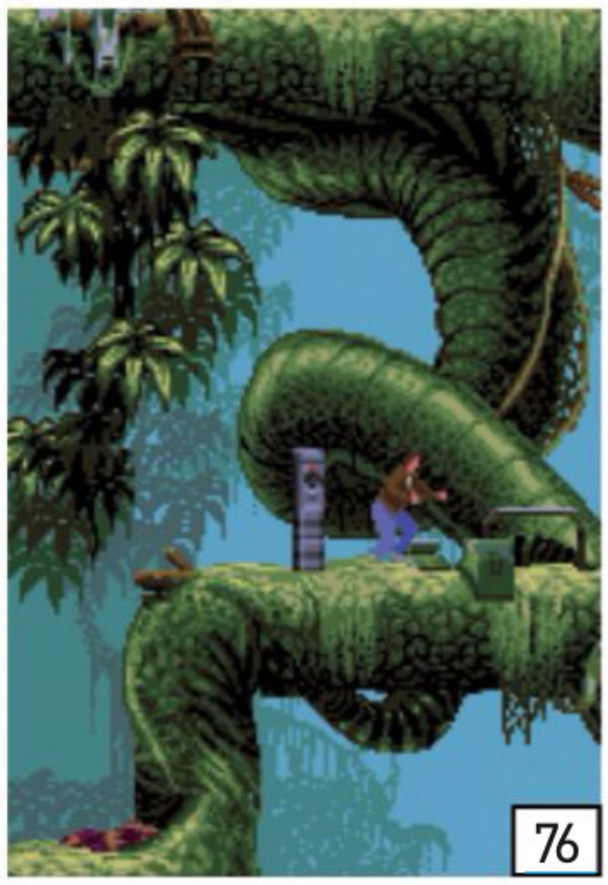

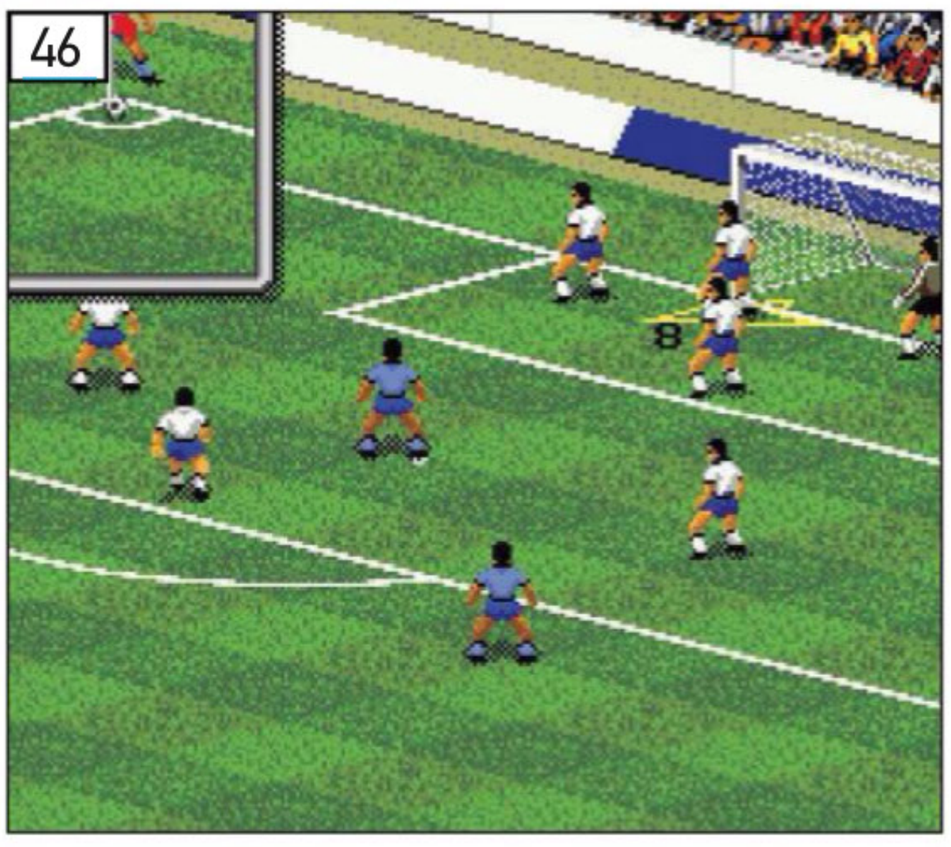

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SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT

THE MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS WAS SEGA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CONSOLE, DELIVERING A WEALTH OF FANTASTIC DIVERSE GAMES THAT HELPED THE MACHINE SELL IN THE MILLIONS. JOHN SZCZEPANAIK EXPLAINS WHAT MADE SEGA'S CONSOLE SO ESSENTIAL

Modem Wars
Sega dabbled in modem usage for the Mega Drive. Nagumo-san explained, "It was called Mega-Modem, whose sales date was November 3, 1990. It is a modem unit for Mega Drive that enabled online game communication. It used analogue lines and its connection speed was 1,200bps. The service named 'Game Toshokan' enabled downloading of games, delivery of Sega-related news and online matches." Records vary wildly on how many games utilised online play (one source stating six). We only found solid confirmation regarding *TEL TEL Mah-Jong* and Stadium titles. More interestingly was the 'Game Toshokan', which allowed downloading of games like *Phantasy Star* text adventures, *Pyramid Magic* and *Flicky* to a special cartridge. Closing in 1993, fans worried the online-only games would be forever lost. Luckily in 1994 there were two Mega-CD compilations, *Sega Games Can Vol 1* and *2*, which included nearly all-available titles. Prized among *Phantasy Star* collectors, these are incredibly rare.

Nintendo's fate has often been intertwined with the Mega Drive system. It has long had a history of benefiting from Sega in one form or another, often due to the direct competitive challenge it posed. The SNES would have been nothing without the MD; the reverse is also true. It was the Mega Drive that pushed Nintendo's into updating its aged NES hardware, and it was also the Mega Drive that changed the market forever, cutting a trail towards the situation today. It is undeniably one of the most important pieces of hardware in gaming history. So it should have come as no surprise to find that MD games would support Nintendo's soon-to-be-released Wii system. In a moment of irony, it must be noted that Sega had already dabbled in downloadable MD games with The Sega Channel, making its announcement quite apt. The decision was obvious. Later Sega systems would prove difficult, technically, and also the MD was far more successful than the Master System. As will be shown, the MD can be credited for many things – it was a magical high Sega never again reached.

The Japanese debut was October 29, 1988. The widespread American release was less than a year later in 1989, while the United Kingdom had to wait roughly another year before it arrived in November 1990. To fully understand the importance of the Mega Drive's launch, you need to know what the international climate was like during the decadent Eighties.

Sega had already entered the console fray previously, with the successive releases of its SG-1000 Mark I, II and III systems in Japan (1981-1985), the 3rd model of which was redesigned as the Master System for Western countries. To be bluntly honest, despite it being technically superior to the Famicom/NES, it was a commercial failure that never gained more than a 5% market share. Only in Brazil was it able to officially eclipse Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. Throughout the mid-to-late Eighties Japan's console market was controlled almost entirely by the Famicom, which was popular beyond description. America was gripped by the NES, again with near total market dominance. The NES was also available in Europe and the UK, though Britannia was more enamoured with 8-bit micros than high-priced consoles.

In 1987 Hudson Soft and NEC jointly released the PC-Engine against the Famicom, two years later redesigning and releasing it in America as the TurboGrafx 16. When Sega decided to position its MD as a third competitor, the odds must have seemed impossibly high. According to David Sheff, Hiroshi Yamauchi dismissed Sega as not being a threat. Yamauchi was more concerned with NEC, which was investing roughly $3.7 billion into R&D, an amount greater than Nintendo's then annual sales. Sega meanwhile was only a $700 million company, and one founded by an American. As an underdog scrapping against NEC for second place, Sega and its MD was underestimated,

Year Released: Japan: 1988 USA: 1989 UK: 1990

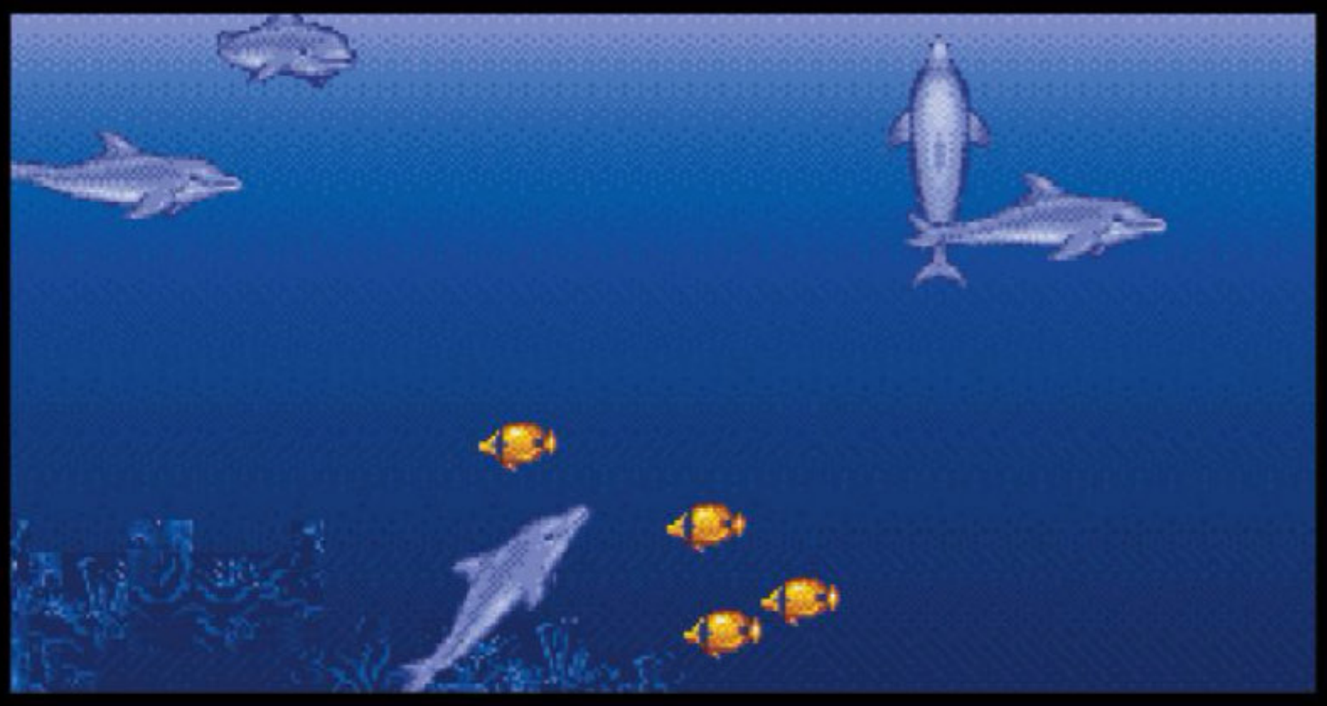
Original Price: Japan: 21,000 Yen USA: $189.99 UK: £189.99

Buy it now for: £15+ ($30+)

Associated Magazines: Beep! Megadrive, Mega Drive Fan, GameFan, Mean Machines, Sega Visions Magazine

Why the Mega Drive was great… The Mega Drive ushered in the 16-bit era; some say the last golden era of gaming. It was a special kind of scene to be a part of. No explanation, no mix of words or screenshots or memories can ever touch that sense of knowing, that you were there, playing those great games during that point in time. Though this age has sadly passed, newcomers still need to understand.

SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT



» **Above and right:** [Mega Drive] *Ecco The Dolphin*, like many Mega Drive classics, has been re-released on various compilations.

"ATARI WAS OFFERED THE GENESIS AND JACK TRAMIEL TURNED IT DOWN. JACK THOUGHT THE DEAL WAS TOO EXPENSIVE" MICHAEL KATZ

viewed by the industry itself as the weaker of the two. Retro Gamer spoke with Mr. Nagumo, the "Team Manager of SOJ CS Product PR", and asked many, many questions, few of them answered. When asked if, due to the impossible odds stacked against them, Sega had considered becoming a developer for either the Famicom or PC Engine, his answer was blunt. "No, we didn't."

Even so, Sega staff were curious about the Famicom. In two separate interviews (GameWeek and TNL) Yuji Naka admitted to making Famicom games run on the MD. His comments, amalgamated, were, "Oh my. [laughs] How do you people know about that one? Well yeah, actually I did. I once made a Famicom emulator for the Mega Drive. It was something fun to amuse myself with at the time. I couldn't play every game with it. But it was fun to call people over and show them Mario running around on a Mega Drive."

Hybrid Children
A sign of the Mega Drive's popularity is the number of variations that exist. Beyond your standard models, there was the JVC Wondermega (Xeye in America), which combined MD and Mega-CD. Then there was the much smaller combined Multi-Mega (CDX in America), doubling as a portable CD player. Following this musical theme, there was the Aiwa CSD-GM1, combining the MD/MCD with a portable "Boom Box" radio. From CD to LD, Sega's champion was also included with Pioneer's Laseractive. MSX fans will be interested to know it was integrated into the AX-330 and AX-990 models, for Arabic distribution in Kuiwait and Yemen. Computer implementation didn't end there, since it was also hybridised into the Sega TeraDrive, a Japanese home computer. Meanwhile, the Western equivalent was the Amstrad Mega PC (see buyer's guide). Then there was the portable Nomad, and the Mega Jet, which was used by Japan Airlines. And the above doesn't even take into account the many bootleg clones about!

Origins Of Genesis

Sega's main source of profit during the Eighties was its hugely popular arcade games, like Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* and *Hang On*. To beat the competition the head of Sega, Hayao Nakayama, decided to create the first true arcade home system. He worked in secret with Hideki Sato, modifying Sega's System-16 hardware – the same hardware that powered arcade versions of *Shinobi* and *Altered Beast*. This would have allowed superior visuals and audio, leagues ahead of the competition. It would also allow for easier, more accurate arcade ports (which gamers would be familiar with), and therefore plenty of games.

The new console had to be scaled down from the System-16, in terms of processor speed and available on-screen colours, but Hideki Sato planned ahead and included some extras. It was backwards-compatible with the Master System (using the Power Base Converter), and it was also designed with the future potential to use a mouse, keyboard, 2-inch floppy disk drive, modem, graphics tablet, and printer. He even considered the possibility of someday attaching a CD drive.

Beep!, a multiformat Japanese mag, first announced the system in June 1988 alongside an early prototype drawing, tentatively calling it the Sega Mark V (following on from previous names). The internal project meanwhile was called Mk-1601, but Sega wanted something stronger for the launch. It went through 300 different proposals, before finally settling on Mega Drive.

Disappointingly the Japanese launch was very understated. Their penchant for lengthy, mind-boggling queuing in Akihabara had been forgotten; there were no such queues for the MD! Supply and publicity had been well organised, but the machine was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3*, released just one week earlier. Luckily magazines

» Most Mega Jets being sold come from an initial shipment hijacked by Indonesian sea-pirates. Their distribution was organised by underground collectors.

» A young Hideki Sato working on a prototype Mega Drive; he was the main designer behind it.

» **Above and below:** By using the Power Base Converter, the Mega Drive could play Sega's back-catalogue of Master System games.

» [Mega Drive] There are countless unlicensed Chinese (and Korean) games, like *Barver Battle Saga – The Space Fighter*. It was renamed *Final Fantasy* when translated into Russian.

like Famitsu and Beep! gave it positive coverage, and so a small but loyal following began. Reportedly 400,000 units were shipped in the first year.

Despite the low uptake in Japan, Sega went on to pursue highly risky and quite odd endeavours – bad for profits, great for collectors. Along with a gaming modem (see box-out), Sega created an online banking system for Nagoya Bank. The result was the Mega Anser (sic), complete with modem, numerical keypad, and grossly overpriced 'Mega Printer'. Sega also adapted the MD for arcade use, despite it already being based on the System-16 architecture. The results were the System C-2 board, and also the timed MegaTech and then MegaPlay systems; roughly, these three had a combined total of 80 games developed. Japan also received the rarest version of *Tetris* ever, and some sublime exclusive RPGs like *Rent-A-Hero* and *King Colossus* (both fan-translated).

But Japan was never what the Mega Drive was about. Success lay in the USA and Europe. Sega had the fight of its life ahead, and it would take not only gutsy determination to succeed, but also a damned excellent roster of games, and luck. Sega clearly had just enough of these, since it nearly conquered the industry.

Globally Gamed

To bolster the inside information available to Retro Gamer, Ken Horowitz of Sega-16.com kindly donated interviews he conducted with industry figures. One such individual was Michael Katz, former head of Sega's American branch, who presided over the Genesis' initial sales year. Katz explained the early days. "I arrived one month after Genesis launched. The company was small (under 50 people). They had gone through 2-3 Presidents (Gene Lipkin, Bruce Lowery) in the "Master System" days. Dave Rosen – Vice Chairman of Sega (and original founder), was overseeing the running of the company. I reported to him and Nakayama in Japan. Sega was basically a distribution company in the US. Hardware and software development came from Japan. I initially had to deal with keeping employees happy, determining the quality of the staff and getting into the job of building the Sega vs Nintendo juggernaut." Arriving after the American launch, Katz wasn't aware of the details surrounding the name change from Mega Drive to Genesis. Consensus states it was due to a trademark dispute. The facts are blurred, but point possibly to a US manufacturer of storage devices called Mega Drive Systems Inc.

We also questioned Katz ourselves, and he revealed a fascinating anecdote from before the Genesis launch. "I will tell you that Atari was offered the Genesis (when I was President of Atari Games Division) and Jack Tramiel turned it down. It would have gotten Atari back in the game with a 16-Bit system. I attended the meeting at Atari, when Dave Rosen (Sega Chairman) visited us (Jack and I) and made the offer. Jack thought the deal was too expensive, and he was more interested in the Atari ST computer project." The system filtering into America and Europe raises an important question for importers. Why the deplorable need for regional lockout? Katz admitted he had no control over it in America, "Lockout decisions were made in Japan. The Sega Japan International VP handled international sales and marketing." Never knowing when to quit, Retro Gamer pushed Japan's PR man into a corner until he commented. As Nagumo puts it, "We implemented the security regionally to prevent game software being imported due to gaps of sales time between regions." As he wipes the sweat from his brow, we jovially comment that thankfully it wasn't successful. Enterprising young hackers soon bypassed the security with special contraptions, and later, easy methods for modifying the hardware were devised.

» The rarest most expensive version of *Tetris*. Ever. You need underground contacts and plenty of money to join this elite 'owners club'.

IF FORCED TO SUMMARISE WHY THE MD IS SUCH A BLOODY FANTASTIC SLAB OF BLACK PLASTIC, IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ALL THINGS TO ALL GAMERS

SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT

IT WAS A SYSTEM WHERE THE ALLURE WAS BORN NOT ONLY OF THE HARDWARE AND GAMES, BUT THE MAGAZINES, PLAYGROUND ARGUMENTS, CLIMATE, AND POLITICS OF THE TIME

Channel Control

The Mega Drive has so many unusual anecdotes you need a hundred box-outs like this. With the announcement of downloadable MD games for Wii, we're highlighting the revolutionary Sega Channel.

Speaking with Nagumo-san again, we hoped for a pride filled statement that championed this pioneering achievement. His answer was somewhat subdued, "It was a cable television service in the US from which videogames could be downloaded. We started the service in cooperation with Telecommunications, Inc. One could play his favourite games as much as he liked at a fixed amount every month. We also had the same services in cooperation with regional cable televisions in Japan."

From 1993 games were made available for download (divided by genre), at a cost of $12.95 per month. Games were rotated every few weeks, encompassing nearly the entire library, plus a few unreleased titles and imports! They could be played indefinitely, but lasted only while the system was turned on.

Underground importing certainly didn't harm international sales. The MD is officially Sega's highest selling system. International figures are estimated to be between 30 and 35 million units, of which only 10% is attributed to Japan. Sega was determined to achieve those higher sales abroad; it demanded the American branch chant the Japanese word "HYAKUMANDAI" (that's "one-million" in English), in order to encourage sales. Katz elaborated, "The 'one million units' chant was representative of a goal set by Sega Japan. Did they just pluck the number out of thin air? I don't know. I think they thought that if we sold a million units in the first year that would make a big statement. They disregarded Nintendo's position and the fact that all key retailers would have to come on board immediately to hit the number, and also the need for a substantial software library from the get-go." Despite the daily chanting, sales only reached halfway. Katz went on, "We sold about 500K units — which I considered damn good — because Genesis was new, didn't have a large software library initially, and the Nintendo franchise was hard to crack."

In America it seemed Nintendo was unstoppable, and that was indeed its intention. It used some very unorthodox methods to maintain superiority. Stores were bullied into not carrying Sega products, and developers were forced to sign strict licensing agreements stating they'd only develop for Nintendo. But everyone loves seeing a tyrant deposed and a colossus fall, and so various developers began thinking of the Mega Drive as a serious, more profitable alternative. Popular companies like Namco changed allegiance, while EA reverse-engineered the system before developing high quality exclusives. This all helped make Sega a tempting alternative for consumers.

But as Katz explained, Sega wasn't too pleased with EA. "Sega was unhappy about EA reverse-engineering Genesis. We were in the process of giving EA/Trip a 'sweetheart' deal, then we needed a *Joe Montana* game in a hurry (the game being developed for us by Media Genic was way behind schedule), so I asked Trip for a back up *Madden* football game. He gave us one and that assured him a low/ royalty free deal on Genesis software. The first *Montana* game being a '*Madden* back up' from EA is a little known fact."

The MD's huge success, of course, came with the arrival of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, a phenomenal mascot that endures to this day. But the question that has to be pondered is what if *Sonic* had not been a hit and never had the success that it did? When asked, Nagumo playfully hinted at the possibility that Sega had other titles, besides *Sonic*, with which to take on Nintendo and *Mario*. "We had the marketing and promotion strategies using various titles at that time. *Sonic* was one of them that led to a big hit." Katz saw things differently. When asked about SOA's initial dislike of the Sonic character, "I certainly underestimated the potential of *Sonic*. Thank God there was good and sustained gameplay (critical in any game success). I know that I thought it was nuts, when we were going for targeted and widespread awareness in everything we did, for the Japanese to develop a game based on a type of character — a hedgehog — that no kid in the American 6-16 year-old demographic would have any familiarity with. We knew we needed a great "character action" game to put in the line up. We were hoping for a *Donkey Kong* type hit. When *Sonic* was so hot, it was decided to bundle it with Genesis (just as ColecoVision was bundled with *Donkey Kong* in 1981). If Sega didn't have *Sonic*, Genesis sales would probably have been less, but it's hard to say. I don't know if Sega Japan had a back up – I think not. Sega Japan was responsible for developing the character action genre. We were responsible in the US for developing sports games."

Despite his great effort and the success he achieved in those early years, Katz was replaced by Tom Kalinske in 1990. Most agree that any successes were a result of combined team efforts, but that Katz is often unfairly overlooked in favour of his successor. In past interviews, Kalinske explained how *Sonic* became the pack-in title. "After my first month as CEO, I told Mr. Nakayama, 'You have to get rid of *Altered Beast*, the title that's bundled with Genesis. It sounds like devil worship. We have to get the price down to $149, and we have to develop more American software.' The board spoke for two

» [Mega Drive] With an unprecedented comic book styling, *Comix Zone* was one of many exclusive titles that made the Mega Drive worth owning.

» Japan's "Hyper Exciting Visual Game Magazine – Mega Drive Fan" was one of several dedicated publications

» **Top and bottom:** [Mega Drive] The anime influenced *Phantasy Star* series reached its peak with number 4. Few RPGs even come close to such magnificence.

» **Above and below:** [Mega Drive] Smooth like liquid napalm, *Ranger X* by Gau Entertainment is a frenetic blaster, with audio and visuals that'd melt the brain of those unaccustomed to it.

hours in Japanese and I was just sitting there, not understanding a word. Finally Mr. Nakayama said, 'No one here agrees with anything you've said.' I thought mine was going to be the shortest career in the business. But as I was walking out, he said, 'But I hired you to make the decisions for Europe and the Americas, so go ahead and do it.'"

Sega eventually annihilated the TurboGrafx 16, and it was doing well against the NES, but the sleeping giant had awakened, and in 1990 Nintendo launched the SNES. The ultimate grudge match began, which even today, remains fresh in peoples' hearts and minds. Nintendo had on its side Japanese stalwarts Square and Enix, which made Sega's conquest of Japan nigh-on impossible, but it had already proven itself to be hip and cool in the West, and this is where it succeeded. Sega was out earlier, priced cheaply, and provided both what people wanted, and what its rivals weren't supplying.

Everyone deep down knew the MD couldn't outperform the SNES; it was the underdog in terms of graphical and audio power (it had a faster processor though). Developers had to work harder to get great results. This extra effort, and dare it be said, love, that went into the games, was very apparent – when they came up wth a graphical trick, or something unique, it showed. The Genesis had more mature software and was also advertised on adult TV like *Saturday Night Live*, further cementing its reputation as "doing what Nintendon't." But the big tipping of scales was *Mortal Kombat*. Sega's version had blood and included all arcade fatalities; Nintendo's version didn't. The atmosphere at the time was electric, and *Mortal Kombat* was a deciding factor for many people's purchases.

By 1992 Sega had 55% control of the market (up from around 8%), and by 1993 it had more than quadrupled its net worth (up to $3.6 billion). Sega had reached its peak. But over the coming years it became like a leper, withering as its valuable bits fell off. The golden era ended, but if you look with the right kind of eyes, you can almost see the high water mark, where that glorious wave broke, and finally rolled back.

If forced to summarise why the MD is such a bloody fantastic slab of black plastic, it's because it's all things to all gamers. It appealed to hardcore elitist collectors, since it was great to import for. Plenty of action games (like *Alien Soldier*, and the explosively magnificent *Ranger X*), with sturdy boxes protecting beautiful Japanese cover-art. When SNES-owning friends had updates of Konami classics like *Contra* and *Castlevania*, MD owners were blessed with their own exclusive updates. They were no mere ports, but were designed from scratch, taking into account the hardware's limitations. And they were all the better because of this. There was no relying on vast colours or a custom Sony music chip; the gameplay had to be strong.

Importantly, it tapped in the mass market and appealed to families with low incomes. In impoverished areas in the USA it was popular among Black and Hispanic youths, who enjoyed the affordable easy-to-play arcade thrills provided. Children were also catered for, with both licensed and new IPs (*Quackshot* and *Toejam & Earl*). When the kids were tranquilised and asleep in bed, parents could indulge in a plethora of sports titles (*Madden* etc), violent brawlers (*Cyborg Justice*), or cerebral games like *Ecco*.

It was a system where much of the atmosphere and allure was born not only of the hardware and games, but the magazines, playground arguments, climate, and politics of the time. One of the most notable American magazines covering the system was GameFan, which, despite being multiformat, loved the Genesis. Its founder, Dave Halverson, understood, appreciated, and helped generate a lot buzz for Treasure too. GameFan praised their games, rightfully hyped up *Gunstar Heroes* to encourage sales, and were one of the very first English language magazines to conduct an interview with Treasure. Of course, not every multiformat magazine had quite the same views, which is why Edge infamously only gave *Gunstar Heroes* a half-page 6 out of 10 review. If you were an MD fan back in the early 1990s, Halverson's GameFan was the magazine you wanted to be reading!

We've not even yet mentioned subjects like the VR headset, Menacer Gun, Activator peripheral, *Virtua Racing*'s 3D graphics, pirate flash carts, Brazilian rock band Megadriver, Boris Vallejo, or the million-and-one related subjects. But it doesn't matter. Experiencing the system will tell you more than these words ever could.

» **Top and bottom:** [Mega Drive] *El Viento* and *Alisia Dragoon* are two very similar, very fun, and very Japanesey action-platformers.

» **Top and bottom:** [Mega Drive] Konami knew how to love Mega Drive owners: Insane hyper-exaggerated action in *Contra*, and classic vampire hunting in *Castlevania*.

» [Mega Drive] Every kid wants to rip his best friend's spine out. The uncensored Sega version shifted the tides between MD and SNES popularity.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Many special thanks to www.sega-16.com, the best unofficial Mega Drive site online, for donating interview segments and images. Visit them for the full interviews! Thanks also to www.segagagadomain.com for images, Michael Katz for answering additional questions, and Sega's PR departments!

» [Mega Drive] There was certainly no shortage of exclusive, epic, and utterly essential action-RPGs: *Beyond Oasis* (1), *Soleil* (2), and *Landstalker* (3) are all must-haves!

MEGA DRIVE

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's practically impossible to sum up the Mega Drive's best games as there were so many classics to choose from. If you are new to the machine, then these are some of the most important titles that you should consider adding to your collection

01

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

01 **After the success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it came as no surprise to see the lovable scamp returning a year later in a brand new adventure.** With a refined engine, the addition of Miles "Tails" Prowler, a greatly enhanced bonus stage and an excellent two-player mode, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is easily one of the hedgehog's most memorable 16-bit outings. While the core gameplay is little different to that seen in the original, Sonic Team threw in plenty of new touches to ensure that gamers wouldn't feel short-changed. The end result is not only one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers, but quite possibly the hedgehog's finest hours on any system.

GUNSTAR HEROES

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DYNAMITE HEADDY

02 **Outrageously good platformer/shooter that features dazzling graphics, a crazy relentless pace and dozens of fantastic boss encounters.** Created by a bunch of ex Konami staffers (you should all know the story by now) *Gunstar Heroes* does tricks with the Mega Drive's hardware that many thought impossible, and even today it has a freshness that belies its 13-year-old roots. While special mention must obviously go to the game's astounding visuals, Treasure also ensured that the gameplay was just as special and injected all manner of interesting play mechanics to ensure that every level remains as fresh as a proverbial daisy. If you're after a frenetic blaster then look no further. This is run-and-gun heaven.

02

DEVIL CRASH

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THUNDER FORCE III

03 **There's a few pinball games on Sega's Mega Drive but this superb 1991 offering from Techno Soft remains a firm favourite.** While it only features one main table, it's well designed and boasts all manner of different bonuses that lead you to several smaller, mini-tables. While Techno Soft's previous pinball title *Alien Crush* featured an alien theme, *Devil Crash* has chortling knights, chanting monks and dragons occupying its tables. Released in the UK as *Dragon's Fury, Devil Crash* is a superb pinball game that should last you forever. Oh, and it's got one of the most rocking soundtracks we've ever heard.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STREETS OF RAGE

04 **As with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Sega took everything that made the original *Streets Of Rage* so fun to play and turned it up to 11.** The visuals have had an overhaul with all the heroes and enemies being beefed up and boasting greatly improved detail. Yuzo Koshiro is back with another thumping soundtrack and the game's many bosses are tougher than ever. Each character now has a selection of special moves and there are four different protagonists to choose from: Axel and Blaze from the original game and new boys Skate and Max. A magnificent scrolling fighter that's crying out for a next-gen remake.

STRIDER

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** AFTER BURNER

05 **Oh come on, did you really think we'd do a Mega Drive top ten and not feature *Strider*?** Despite Darran's obsessive love for Capcom's purple clad ninja (it's a long sad story) *Strider*'s addition is easily justified, as it's quite simply the strongest arcade port on Sega's 16-bit console. Not only does it capture all the character of the coin-op classic, it goes one step further and delivers a stunning soundtrack that actually manages to improve on the arcade original. Sure there's a fair amount of flickering here and there but as far as capturing the essence of the original game goes no other Mega Drive conversion comes close. Essential.

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DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JUNGLE STRIKE

06 **Set a year after the events in the Gulf War, *Desert Strike* sees you climbing into an Apache and using it to stop a despot in the Middle East from starting World War III.** Utilising an isometric viewpoint, EA's blaster saw you storming into armed bases to rescue POWs, whilst using your firepower to take out anything that stood in your way. Despite the destruction you can cause, *Desert Strike* is quite a cerebral affair, with many of the later levels requiring a fair amount of strategy to complete. The thinking man's shoot-'em-up.

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

07 **Despite a lengthy development period, *Shinobi III*'s four-year wait was worth it.** Not only has the pace been increased, your ninja now knows a selection of new skills. Flying-kicks, a running dash and using your hands to swing across ceilings are just a few of the new abilities you can use and all have been perfectly integrated into the game. There are even sections where you can ride horses or surf along the crest of a wave, dispensing bad guys as you go. If only the later games showed a tenth of the imagination of *Shinobi III*…

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JAWS UNLEASHED

08 **Delightful underwater adventure that sees you trying to rescue your dolphin friends when they all get sucked up by a mysterious hurricane.** With its focus on exploring the expansive stages and its many devious puzzles, *Ecco The Dolphin* was quite unlike any other game at the time and instantly caught the public's attention. The underwater environments are full of detail and bursting with all sorts of exotic undersea creatures. Our only real complaints with *Ecco* is that some of the sections can be difficult to negotiate, ruining the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.

09

THUNDER FORCE IV

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALIEN CRUSH

09 **While *Thunder Force III* was never released in the UK, Sega atoned by releasing its superb sequel in 1993.** Techno Soft's fourth *Thunder Force* title (and the third to appear on the Mega Drive) boasted amazing visuals, over-the-top weaponry and a stunning soundtrack that perfectly complemented the frenetic on-screen action. As with *Thunder Force III*, the first four levels could be approached in any order, but the stages themselves were far larger in scope and featured both vertical and horizontal sections. Throw in some insanely tough bosses, plenty of exotic locations and those stunning visuals and you have one of the Mega Drive's classiest shooters.

SHINING FORCE II

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE

10 **While it essentially features the same combat system and gameplay mechanics as the original *Shining Force*, Sega's sequel is generally considered by many to be a far superior RPG.** Take the combat for example: it's a lot quicker now, making fights far less of a chore than before, and the new counter-attacks add a great degree of spice to the proceedings. The interaction of items is also better integrated with little touches like automatically passing a picked up item to another character when your main hero's pockets are full, and being able to view an item's stats before you buy them means that everything flows along rather nicely. A superb RPG that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

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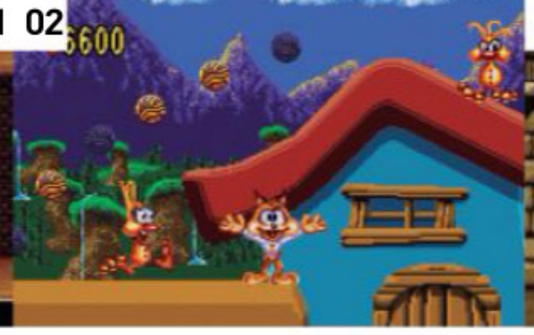
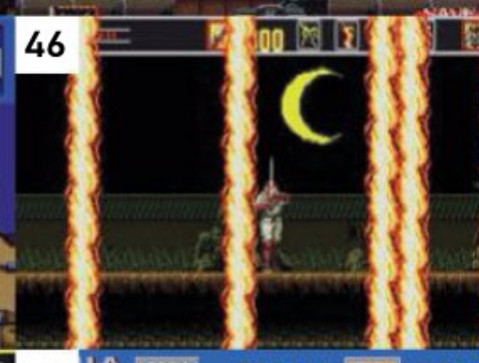
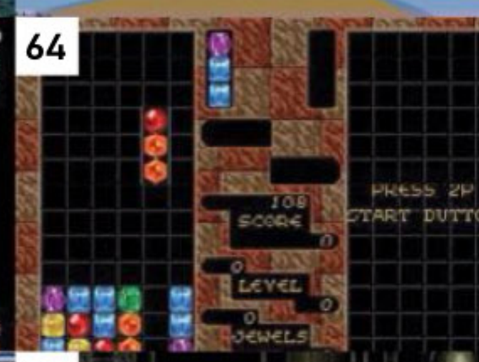


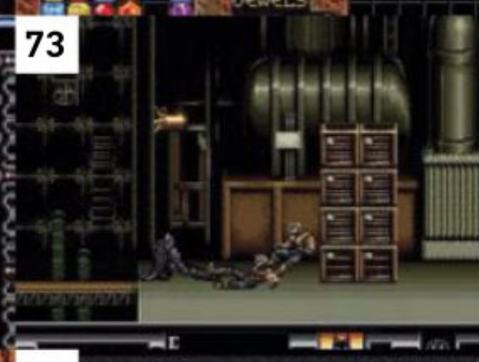
MEGA DRIVE

and the rest...

Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive is easily its greatest triumph and boasts a huge catalogue of fantastic games across a wide variety of genres. Don't believe us? Here's the proof







01 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
02 BUBSY THE BOBCAT
03 FANTASIA
04 SPACE HARRIER II
05 KLAX
06 ROAD RASH
07 AQUATIC GAMES
08 NSECTOR X
09 RAMBO III
10 CHAKAN THE FOREVER MAN
11 RISTAR
12 GHOSTBUSTERS
13 STRIDER
14 FLICKY
15 DJ BOY
16 VIRTUAL BART
17 ALTERED BEAST
18 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
19 TETRIS
20 NHL HOCKEY 92
21 DARK CASTLE
22 PAC-MANIA
23 LETHAL ENFORCERS
24 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
25 STEEL EMPIRE
26 LEMMINGS
27 WARDNER
28 KID CHAMELEON
29 MORTAL KOMBAT II
30 STREETS OF RAGE II
31 HELLFIRE
32 BATTLETOADS
33 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
34 SPLATTERHOUSE 3
35 MEGAMAN: THE WILEY WARS
36 EARNEST EVANS
37 SHADOW DANCER
38 FANTASTIC DIZZY
39 MERCS
40 THE TERMINATOR
41 PGA TOUR GOLF
42 AEROBLASTERS
43 ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
44 TOY STORY
45 THE GADGET TWINS
46 REVENGE OF SHINOBI
47 MICRO MACHINES 96
48 TOEJAM & EARL
49 JAMES POND
50 RAINBOW ISLANDS
51 AFTER BURNER
52 CASTLE OF ILLUSION
53 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
54 STREETS OF RAGE
55 TURBO OUTRUN
56 GAIN GROUND
57 PHANTASY STAR IV
58 GOLDEN AXE
59 CANNON FODDER
60 ECCO THE DOLPHIN
61 FLASHBACK
62 ALADDIN
63 TRUXTON
64 COLUMNS
65 WORLD OF ILLUSION
66 SPEEDBALL 2
67 THE JUNGLE BOOK
68 WONDERBOY III
69 THUNDER FORCE III
70 AIR DIVER
71 ULTIMATE QIX
72 DEVIL CRASH
73 BATMAN
74 DECAP ATTACK
75 GYNOUG
76 URBAN STRIKE
77 OUTRUN
78 RED ZONE
79 ALIEN 3
80 GAUNTLET IV: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER
81 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
82 THE IMMORTAL
83 NBA JAM
84 QUACKSHOT
85 GUNSTAR HEROES
86 CASTLEVANIA: THE NEXT GENERATION
87 THUNDER FORCE IV

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MEGA

MANY GAMERS ASSOCIATE THE NAME 'MEGA-CD' WITH 'ABJECT FAILURE', BUT OTHERS BELIEVE THE PLATFORM'S ONLY FAILING WAS TO BRING CD-ROM TECHNOLOGY TO THE PARTY A GENERATION TOO SOON. DAMIEN MCFERRAN CELEBRATES A TIME WHEN SEGA WASN'T AFRAID TO TAKE MASSIVE RISKS IN THE HARDWARE ARENA

INSTANT EXPERT

- **Some later Mega** CD games were coded to make use of the additional power of the ill-fated 32X add-on – when fully assembled, this hardware setup was quite a beast and required three different power supplies.
- **The Mega-CD** was also able to play the CD-G+, a format used mainly to display karaoke lyrics on screen – a karaoke add-on was also produced for the system.
- **Digital Picture's** *Sewer Shark* and *Night Trap* were going to be released on the Super Nintendo CD-ROM system – when this was cancelled, a deal was signed to bring them to Mega-CD.
- **All Mega-CD** games carry a region lockout system. This can be circumvented by chipping the machine or purchasing a converter cartridge (such as Datel's CDX) that slots into the Mega Drive's cartridge port.
- **The Ricoh RF5C164** sound chip is one of the machine's greatest assets and grants an additional eight channels of sound, all of which can be used to play samples.
- **Game saves were** recorded to the Mega CD's internal RAM; it was also possible to purchase a RAM cartridge that would offer even more space. Some games – such as *Shining Force* CD – required so much memory to save a game that these carts were almost essential.
- **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD both feature the same 16-bit Motorola 68000 CPU, but the one present in the Mega-CD has a clock speed almost twice as fast.
- **Notable 'pack-in' games** included *Road Avenger, Sol-Feace, Cobra Command* and *Sega Arcade Classics*, which featured several popular Mega Drive games such as *Golden Axe* and *Revenge Of Shinobi*.
- **Titles such as** *Ernest Evans* and *Sol-Feace* were later released on the Mega Drive, with only the CD audio and cut-scenes missing.
- **Rapper-turned-thespian** Mark Wahlberg can count himself as a Mega-CD star – he appeared in *Marky Mark: Make My Video*, which allowed players to edit three of the Funky Bunch's songs.

They say that pride comes before a fall but as the first broadsides of the 16-bit war were unleashed at the dawn of the Nineties, Sega certainly had plenty to feel proud about. The launch of the Mega Drive (rebranded 'Genesis' in the US) had transformed the company from plucky also-ran to industry leader virtually overnight; the hitherto unchallenged dominance of Nintendo's 8-bit NES was broken and by the time 1992 arrived Sega was able to call 50 per cent of the American home console market its own.

It was during this exciting period in Sega's history that Scot Bayless joined the company. He vividly remembers what it was like to work for Sega at its peak: "It was exhilarating; we were running about 50 per cent on sheer bravado. One of the great things about Sega in those days was the company's willingness to just try stuff. We had a T-shirt made with the slogan 'This may not work, but what the hell' – that was pretty much our attitude." Such joyous ebullience imbued Sega with the confidence to experiment with new technology – and in this case, it was the medium of CD-ROM that intrigued the Japanese firm.

Coming straight from Spectrum Holobyte (where he worked on the epic air combat flight simulator *Falcon 3.0*) Bayless took the position of Technical Director at Sega of America and was ultimately put in charge of overseeing the US debut of Sega's latest piece of hardware – the Mega-CD. It wasn't the first company to embrace the possibilities of the shiny plastic disc – rival NEC had produced its own CD-ROM add-on for the 8-bit PC Engine in 1988 – but with the Sega brand in the ascendancy and the war between the Mega Drive and Nintendo's SNES about to go global, all eyes were on this latest system and the new era of technological brilliance it was about to usher in. "Sega of Japan was already well along the road and the first development kits showed up not long after I did," reveals Bayless. "My first responsibility was to help get the first demos ready for the big announcement event in New York."

The machine had been conceived by Sega's top hardware team in Japan, but so fearful was the company of internal leaks that it had been intentionally slow to provide Sega of America with vital technical information relating to the project. This clandestine attitude meant that Bayless and his team had to work overtime to get things ready for the US launch, which was scheduled for 1992. "At that point there were virtually no software tools – only barely functional dev kits and incomplete documents that were being translated more slowly than they were being revised," he remembers. "There was one stretch where I spent four continuous days in the building – as in didn't actually leave the premises. I lived off vending machines and coffee while I slogged through a bunch of systems code, trying to get the demos to function reliably."

Because the hardware development was being done exclusively by Sega's Japanese team, Bayless decided early on that it was vital that he familiarise himself with the new machine. "One of the first things I did was to go to Tokyo and get up to speed on the hardware," he recalls. With the relevant tools in place, Bayless and his US team were able to start tinkering around with the console, and it didn't take long for potential problems to arise. "The big headline was that there was a second CPU with its own memory – that was the good news," he says. "The bad news was that the data path between

Year released: Japan: 1991 USA: 1992 UK: 1993

Original price: Japan: 49,800 Yen USA: $300 UK: £270

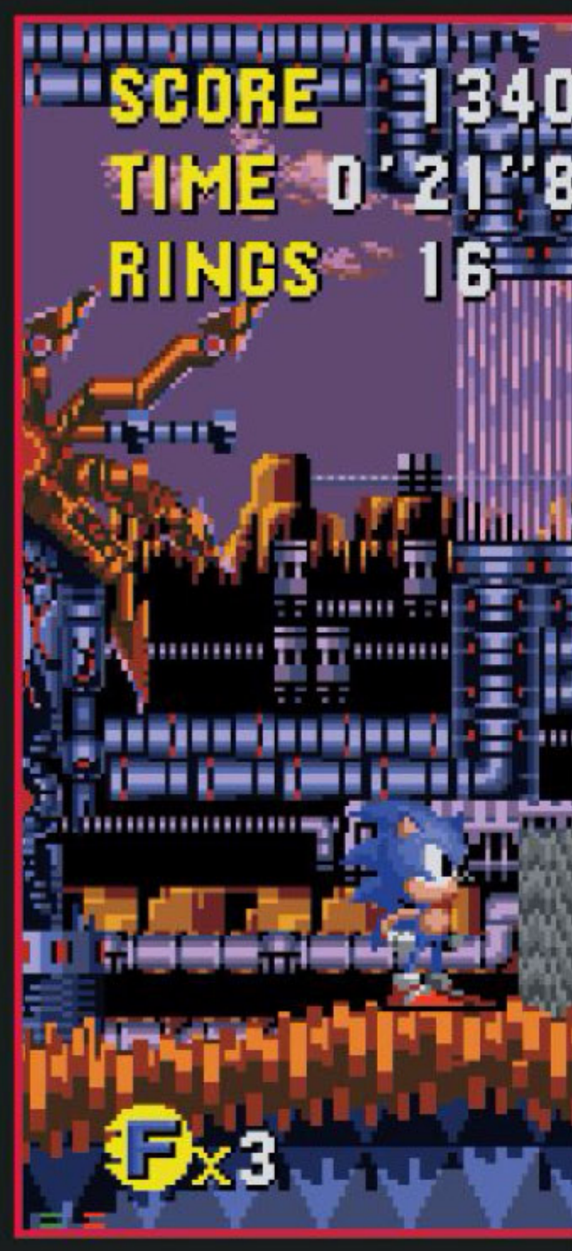
Buy it now for: £30+ ($50+)

Associated magazines: *Megatech, Mean Machines Sega, Sega Power, Sega Pro, Mega*

Why the Mega-CD was great…
For many gamers it was their first glimpse of the raw potential offered by the CD-ROM format, and while it wasn't the success that Sega might have hoped for, you can't deny that the Mega-CD was privy to some wonderful games. Plus the 'Mark 1' Mega Drive and Mega-CD combi is one of the sexiest hardware setups in the history of consoles – fact.

MEGA-CD

16-BIT
POWER
ON
POWER
ON
OFF
RESET
MEGA DRIVE
SEGA
CONTROL 1
CONTROL 2
MEGA-CD
SEGA
READY
COMPACT
disc
ACCESS
CD ACCESS
CD IN
CD OUT
STAND-BY MODE



COMMUNITY MEGA-CD SITES TO WATCH

PAL Sega Mega-CD Library
http://www.sega-mega-cd-library.co.uk

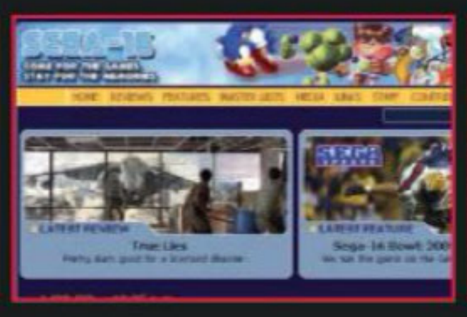
If you're thinking of collecting every single PAL Mega-CD release then this site is an essential resource. It contains an exhaustive collection of Mega-CD info, including details about games that never made it and how to emulate the Mega-CD on your PC.

Eidolons Inn
http://www.eidolons-inn.net/tiki-index.php?page=SegaBase

Although it's not specifically aimed at covering the Mega-CD, SegaBase is one of the longest running Sega resources on the net and is home to an excellent piece on the history of the Mega-CD.

Sega-16.com
http://www.sega-16.com/

Another long-running Sega fan site, Sega-16 is incredibly professional and a joy to navigate. It houses loads of Mega-CD reviews as well as some intriguing features regarding Sega's history. It's all too easy to get hopelessly lost in this excellent site.



Sega Memories
http://sega-memories.blogspot.com/

If your rose-tinted specs have a pronounced 'blue' hue to them then this site will float your boat. Again, it's not expressly aimed at covering the Mega-CD but the sheer volume of Sega nostalgia is guaranteed to strike a cord with fans of the machine.

the Mega Drive and the Mega-CD was very limited. What really stood out was the machine's ability to store (for that time) ridiculous amounts of data; the real challenge was figuring out what to do with all that storage. Given the tools of the time, the human cost of building that much content was prohibitive, so people started looking at other possibilities. Probably the most promising element of the hardware was the sound system; it hugely enhanced the sound capabilities of the system of the Mega Drive. But, short of just playing back Red Book audio, nothing really interesting got done with that lovely hardware."

Of course, Bayless couldn't go public with his concerns; Nintendo was gearing up for the launch of the Super Nintendo and as a result Sega was putting a lot of effort into making the Mega-CD a success. However, even when he tried to talk up the power of the console, it didn't always work out as expected. Take the infamous 'Blast Processing' boast, for example. "Sadly I have to take responsibility for that ghastly phrase," admits Bayless with a grimace. "One of our programmers called Marty Franz discovered that you could do this nifty trick by hooking the scan line interrupt and firing off a Direct Memory Access at just the right time. The result was that you could effectively jam data onto the graphics chip while the scan line was being drawn – which meant you could drive the Digital-to-Analogue Converters with 8 bits per pixel. Assuming you could get the timing just right, you could effectively draw 256 colour static images. There were all kinds of subtleties to the timing and the trick didn't work reliably on all iterations of the hardware, but you could do it and it was cool as heck. So during the run-up to the Western launch of Mega-CD the PR guys interviewed me about what made the platform interesting from a technical standpoint and somewhere in there I mentioned the fact that you could just 'blast data into the DACs'. They loved the word 'blast' and the next thing I knew 'Blast Processing' was born."

Tinkering around with new technology was undeniably fun but not having any input into the actual development of the machine was frustrating for Bayless and his team at Sega of America. However, as fate would have it, they were able to pitch in with critical assistance from time to time. "There was one technical issue that we did a pretty good job of coping with before it got onto consumers' radar," remembers Bayless. "The CD drive Sega of Japan chose was, predictably, an inexpensive single speed consumer CD drive. What nobody stopped to think about was how that drive would get used by those early FMV games. I got this frantic call one day from the Quality Assurance guys; they were using retail Mega-CDs – the same ones queuing up to be sold to consumers – for final QA, and they were suddenly experiencing an insane hardware failure rate. Units were burning up in droves; in fact, a few of them had literally caught fire as they died. We were in the big push toward launch and the whole place was in a panic because QA was out of hardware on which to test games. It was like an episode of *House*; the patient was doomed but nobody could figure out why. About all we knew was that the systems started flaming out when the FMV-based titles were being tested by QA. All of those games used some form of multi-stream video technique, which meant they were constantly seeking the read head in the drive. What

» **[Mega Cd]** *Sonic CD* was easily the Mega-CD's most sucessful platformer. It's still superb fun.

finally tipped me off was an obscure manufacturer's specification for the CD drive; it was rated for a five per cent duty cycle – which means that they were expecting that no more than five per cent of the time would the drive be seeking from one track to another. It was built for people who wanted to play music CDs and, of course, you rarely seek between tracks more than once every few minutes, so five per cent was way more than they'd ever expected people to need. What nobody anticipated was a multi-stream FMV videogame seeking 75 per cent of the time – or more. We were literally cooking the motors that moved the heads." Bayless had identified the problem in the nick of time and ultimately saved Sega from suffering a potentially catastrophic PR blunder.

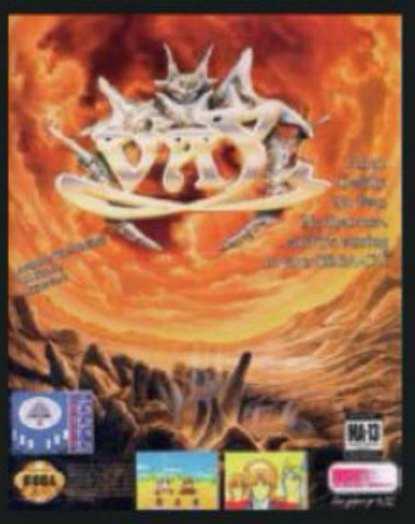
Despite these setbacks, the allure of CD-ROM technology – coupled with Sega's recently elevated status within the videogame industry – meant that hype for the Mega-CD grew exponentially as the launch drew ever closer. As a result, Bayless found himself receiving phone calls from somewhat unexpected quarters. "I remember I was sitting in my office one day tinkering with some low level code when the phone rang," he recalls. "This sexy female voice said, 'Is this Scot Bayless?' I said, 'Yes,' and she replied, 'This is David Bowie's office. Can you please hold?' It turned out it was Bowie's manager, a very cool guy named Bob Goodale. Bowie was completely jazzed about the potential of Mega-CD as a window for music into games." The artist formerly known as The Thin White Duke wasn't the only musician to take interest in the aural capabilities of the Sega's new baby. "I had the bizarre meeting with Michael Jackson around the same time," Bayless remembers. "He'd already signed the *Moonwalker* deal with Sega and they were touring him around the Redwood City studio. I spent about half an hour showing him all kinds of techie stuff we were doing and not once did he ever comment or even make eye contact; he just kind of stood there with about 15 of his minions hovering around him. When we finished there we walked him over to the sound studio, which was just down the hall. Suddenly there was this new person in the room; it was uncanny. Jackson came to life like someone had flipped a switch. It was obvious that the only thing he was excited about was the music."

The Japanese launch of the Mega-CD took place in December 1991. Units flew off the shelves despite the high retail price of ¥49,800, but the relatively small installed base of the Mega Drive in that region meant that sales soon dipped. Sega knew that the US launch was far more important, given the strength of the Genesis. It took place almost a year later (with the machine being re-christened 'Sega-CD') and although the public was ravenous for this new add-on, production issues meant that a paltry 50,000 units were made available to American retailers. Like Japan, the price was bordering on the prohibitive but Sega's lofty standing Stateside helped the company quickly sell through what limited stock it had; by the time 1992 drew to a close, 200,000 units had found their way into US gamers' homes. Likewise, 60,000 of the 70,000 machines made available for the UK release the following spring were snapped up before August. It was a positive start, but it wasn't to last.

> **"A few units had caught fire as they died"**
> SCOT BAYLESS ON INITIAL PROBLEMS

With the Super NES and Genesis/Mega Drive locked in deadly combat, Sega of America decided to brandish the Mega-CD as a unique weapon in the

» SIMS' *Vay* was picked up for Western release by Working Designs but failed to make the same impact as *Lunar*. It was given a new lease of life on Apple's iPhone.



VERSIONS SOME OF THE BEST

Mega CD MK II

Introduced in order to bring down costs, the Mk II model is smaller than the original and lacks the motorised CD tray and function lights. It's also a lot less sexy than the previous model, but in its favour it takes up less room and is more reliable.

Wondermega

JVC decided it wanted a bite of the Mega-CD cherry and produced this sleek, all-in-one unit. MIDI and karaoke options were included and the hybrid console was even released Stateside as the X'Eye, although sales were disappointing.

Multi-Mega

The Multi-Mega was little bigger than a portable CD player (it could even be used as such and was powered by two AA batteries for audio playback) but the price was bordering on the insane – UK gamers were expected to shell out £500 for it.

Aiwa CSD-GM1

Perhaps the rarest of all the Mega-CD systems, this Mega Drive/Mega-CD combo looks very much like a traditional boom box. It was produced in limited numbers and only saw distribution in Asia, and as a result it is almost impossible to track down these days.

» Renamed the CDX in the US, the Multi-Mega fused the Mega Drive and Mega-CD into one package – but at £500 in the UK, the pricing was way off.

» Sega focused on promoting the machine's unique FMV-based games, but people soon realised that this gaming revolution was a false dawn of epic proportions.

» **[Mega CD]** *Jurassic Park CD* was a massive undertaking for Sega's newly-founded multimedia studio, but with Scot Bayless's guidance, it was pretty decent.

fight against rival Nintendo. A dedicated multimedia studio was established within the company's Californian headquarters at great expense in order to produce top-quality content with which to fill the Mega-CD's shiny discs. "It was a pretty cool place and Sega was willing to invest a lot of money in making it a showpiece," explains Bayless. "The art team was buying SGI Indigo work stations for about $50K per seat, including a copy of SoftImage, and the sound studio was a showcase of sparkly new technology. It was impressive."

> **"Could Guitar Hero have gone on Mega-CD? Hell yes"** SCOT BAYLESS

The first project assigned to this new studio couldn't have been any more high profile; Sega had secured the *Jurassic Park* licence and was keen to produce a game that demonstrated the Hollywood aspirations of the Mega-CD technology. "The *Jurassic Park* project was a huge priority for Sega, mainly because the association with Steven Spielberg was seen as so important to the PR campaign," recalls Bayless. "Every resource you can imagine was made available. Kathy Kennedy, producer on the film and one of Steven's longest standing collaborators, went way out of her way to help Sega. She opened doors to everything from Phil Tippet's early stop-motion dinosaur studies to concept art from Stan Winston's team to the CG models used for the film. I remember one day this package arrived from Amblin with a cassette tape inside; the only thing on the tape was take after take of Wayne Knight gurgling out his death rattles from the scene with the Dilophosaurs – they really did give us everything." Despite this intense focus, the project endured a torrid development period. "Fast forward about six months and I get this phone call at about 2am from our studio head in Tokyo, who was meeting with the Sega of Japan execs," explains Bayless. "He said, 'I just showed Hayao Nakayama [Sega's CEO at the time] a build of *Jurassic Park*. As of right now, you're in charge of the project. Do whatever you have to do to get it back on the rails.' So I rolled up my sleeves, fired some people and eventually shipped a pretty decent game."

As *Jurassic Park* proves, the advent of CD-ROM technology brought with it amazing potential, but there were less welcome side-effects, too. "*Jurassic Park* represented the transition from the small budgets and tiny teams of the old days to something much more expensive and demanding of real production discipline," says Bayless. "When you're building a game that has to fit into a few megabytes of ROM, it's not inconceivable that you can keep the whole project in your head. But when you're making something that requires a dozen CG animators, casting calls,

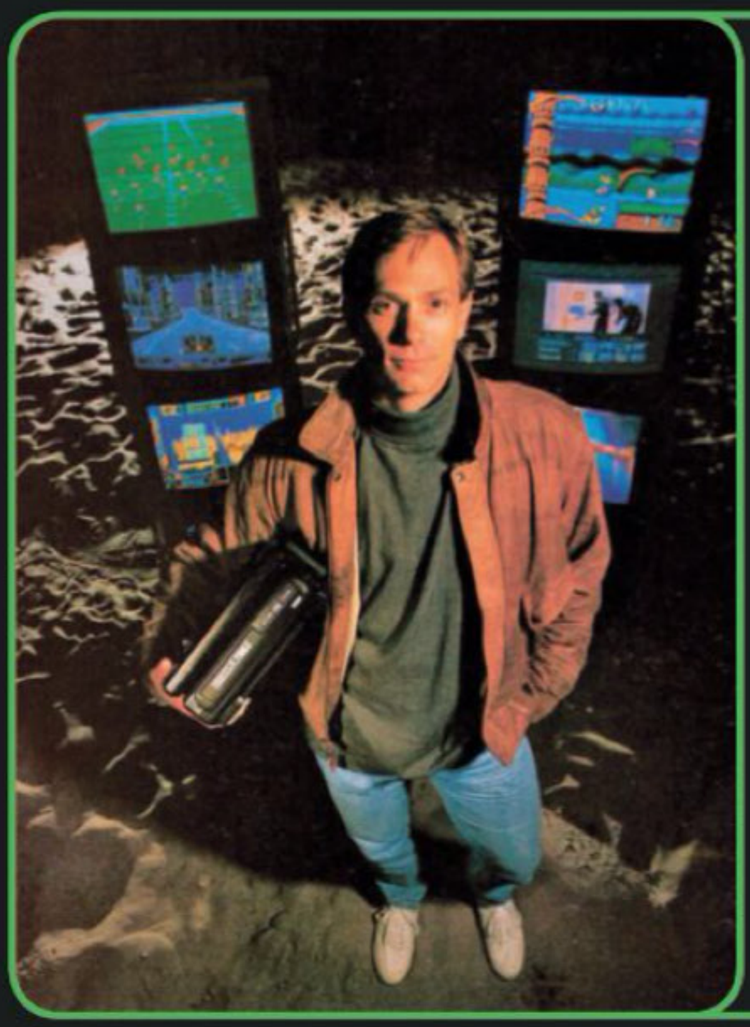
location shoots, ADR and Foley sessions, you can't afford to do anything without a plan. I remember that before I took over the *Jurassic Park* project, a team went romping off to Hawaii where they hired a steadicam and spent a week running around in the jungle taking hours of video of palm trees whizzing by. If you look at the finished game, maybe a total of two minutes of that footage survived the project. The rest was worthless, but it cost maybe $20K to get it."

Cash continued to be poured into Mega-CD development and for a time hardware sales were encouraging, but by this point Nintendo had stepped up its game and the SNES was rapidly asserting itself in the West. The once insatiable public interest in Sega's CD-based machine began to wane and the previously 'innovative' tech began to appear stale. This process was aided by the fact that one of the console's key selling points – FMV-based gaming – was something of a non-starter. "Sega got way too focused on FMV," admits Bayless. "There was all this talk going around about games converging with movies and Mega-CD being the gateway to that convergence. Suddenly game guys were thinking of themselves as movie makers. But if you really looked at how that translated into an entertainment experience it didn't take a rocket scientist to realise that the things Mega-CD could do well really had very little to do with movies." As the Nineties progressed, rival CD-ROM-based consoles emerged; while they could hardly be classed as tremendous successes themselves, the arrival of the CD-i and 3DO essentially made the Mega-CD technically obsolete. The failure of the machine was followed by the abortive 32X project ("I was present at the inception of 32X and it was literally designed on a cocktail napkin," reveals Bayless with a laugh) and Sega's previously soaring reputation was left in tatters. To say that Sega's slide began with the release of the Mega-CD is probably doing the machine an injustice, but the high-profile collapse of the format certainly didn't help the company's public image.

It's all too easy to be overly negative when looking back on the Mega-CD, but it's often forgotten that the platform boasted some truly brilliant games. Sega's conversion of Capcom's *Final Fight* was a definite highlight, offering all three characters and a two-player mode (both famously absent from the SNES port), and Working Designs localised Japanese RPGs such as *Lunar: The Silver Star*, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* and *Vay*, making themselves heroes with English-speaking Sega fans in the process. But what does Bayless consider to be the best titles for the system? "For polished gameplay, *Sonic CD*, hands down. For the best soundtrack, *Ecco CD*. For the best use of the platform, I'd have to go with Kojima's *Snatcher*."

Plenty of theories have emerged as to why the Mega-CD failed to make a significant impact on the world of videogames; it's been argued that the price was too high, the inability to function without a Mega Drive limited its sales potential and the technology involved simply wasn't powerful enough to convince people to upgrade. Bayless has his own verdict. "What turned out to be problematic was the content," he explains. "Personally I don't think the platform ever really demonstrated successfully what the value proposition was. A few years later Sony very successfully positioned the PS2 as a competitively priced DVD player that also happened to offer a great gaming experience. The Mega-CD might have been able to play a similar gambit but that was never part of the plan. However, there was a deeper issue; it was fundamentally a solution in search of a problem. I remember sitting in lengthy head-scratching sessions – not just at Sega of America but at Sega of Japan as well – where we were saying to each other, 'Great, so now we have a storage system that's 100 times bigger than before. So what?' Worse still, access to all that data was 100 times *slower*. It was a fundamental paradigm shift with almost no thought given to consequences. I honestly don't think anyone at Sega asked the most important question: 'Why?' There's a rule I developed during my time as an engineer in the military aviation business: never fall in love with your tech. I think that's where Mega-CD went off the rails. The whole company fell in love with the idea without ever really asking how it would affect the games you made."

When asked what could have been done to improve the Mega-CD's chances, Bayless recounts an interesting anecdote that is made all the more ironic given the game industry's current preoccupation with music games. "Record producer Todd Rundgren showed up at the studio one day, pitching something that was like the pre-biotic version of *Guitar Hero*," recalls Bayless. "He wasn't all the way there but he was poking in the right direction. Sadly we were all too caught up in our own skewed vision to really understand him or what could have been done with his embryonic ideas. Could *Guitar Hero* have been done on Mega-CD? Hell yes. Would that have transformed the business and saved Mega-CD? Who knows, but I bet it would have made a splash."



LIFE'S A BEACH

Bayless may have been instrumental 'behind the scenes' at Sega of America but thanks to a famous American magazine advert, he also became the visible 'face' of the Mega-CD to many gamers. He was featured on a double-page spread where he extolled the virtues of Sega's latest system, and the promotion was printed in leading US magazines such as *GamePro* and *EGM*. "That shot was taken on Stinson Beach just north of San Francisco," recalls Bayless when questioned about his brush with superstardom. "The agency had hired some very high profile photographer to do the shoot and his vision was to put that wall of TVs in front of the setting sun with me in the foreground. So there we were, on the beach with him on a ladder and the two of us surrounded by a herd of people and gear. The agency guys are there sitting in director's chairs like directors on a movie set. They're moving stuff around, restacking the TVs, testing low angles, testing high angles. They're facing the sun. They're facing away from the sun. They're sending people into the city to buy me clothes because the photographer wants to try out new outfits – I changed about six times during the course of the afternoon with people holding up blankets while I stripped. At the end, the only thing I was wearing that was actually mine was my shoes. Meanwhile, there are all these people walking by on the beach asking if I'm someone famous and, of course, while all this is going on the sun is going down. Finally, they start shooting at like 7pm, but by then the sun was gone. So when it's all done you have a shot they could have done on a sound stage with a couple of buckets full of sand. But hey, for about seven hours I got to be a movie star!"

» [Mega CD] *Night Trap* went on to become something of a 'video nasty' and sparked an age rating classification scandal upon its release in the US and Europe.

MEGA-CD

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's easy to laugh at Sega's Mega-CD, but to do so would be rather foolish. Despite it's poor sales and the numerous problems Sega faced while making it, plenty of great games were available for the system. The following examples are the very best, representing a wide range of different genres that still hold up today

01

SONIC CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

Every console needs a killer app to justify its existence, and *Sonic CD* is as close as you're going to get on the Mega-CD. Regularly cited as one of the best games in the series, this ambitious title made good use of the CD format's storage potential by including gigantic levels, Mode 7 bonus stages and a spectacular soundtrack. The game was made even deeper by the fact it was possible to time-travel forwards and backwards on each level, essentially making the stages three times as big. Interestingly, the US version features a completely different soundtrack to the Japanese and European variants – although both selections of songs are equally fantastic.

FINAL FIGHT CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SEGA/CAPCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPIDER-MAN VS. THE KINGPIN

When *Final Fight* (unquestionably the quintessential arcade hit of the late Eighties) was ported to Nintendo's Super Famicom in 1990, you could practically hear the cries of despair emanating from Sega fans the world over. For a time it seemed as if this Capcom classic would remain exclusive to Nintendo, but thankfully Sega was granted permission to reprogram the game when the Mega-CD came along – it produced what is arguably the best home console conversion (aside from recent emulated ports). *Final Fight CD* is packed with all three characters and all the levels. Needless to say, the previously smug SNES owners were left feeling a little put out.

02

SHINING FORCE CD

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC SOFTWARE PLANNING
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE GAIDEN (GAME GEAR)

The only *Shining Force* game to make its way onto the Mega-CD is a combined remake of the Game Gear releases *Shining Force Gaiden* and *Shining Force Gaiden 2: Sword Of Hajya*. Visually it's not what you could call a massive improvement when compared to the Mega Drive instalments, but the sheer scope of the challenge is almost overwhelming. So epic was the quest that the Mega-CD internal save game RAM wasn't enough to contain all the data; the purchase of a separate RAM cart was essential if you wanted to see everything the game had to offer.

LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SILPHEED

Game Art's epic RPG was the closest the Mega-CD ever got to having its own *Final Fantasy*, and following its Japanese release, the console's sales in that region were given a boost. Although the in-game graphics were hardly ground-breaking, they were accompanied by some lush anime sequences and an astounding soundtrack by Noriyuki Iwadare. US firm Working Designs picked *Lunar* up for Western localisation and did a fantastic job – the company later returned to the game when it was remade for the PSone in 1996.

THUNDERHAWK

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** CORE DESIGN
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHUCK ROCK

UK-based Core Design was a staunch Sega supporter and produced some of the Mega-CD's finest moments. While games such as *Battlecorps* and *BC Racers* pushed the hardware but fell a little short on enjoyment, *Thunderhawk* was a complete success in both regards. Smooth Mode 7 rotation and scaling was coupled effectively with some of the most frantic action ever witnessed on the format, and the game was rightly praised by the press upon release. A 32-bit sequel followed that added full 3D visuals, but the original remains the one we're most fond of.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO GENERATION-MSX.NL FOR ADDITIONAL SCREENS

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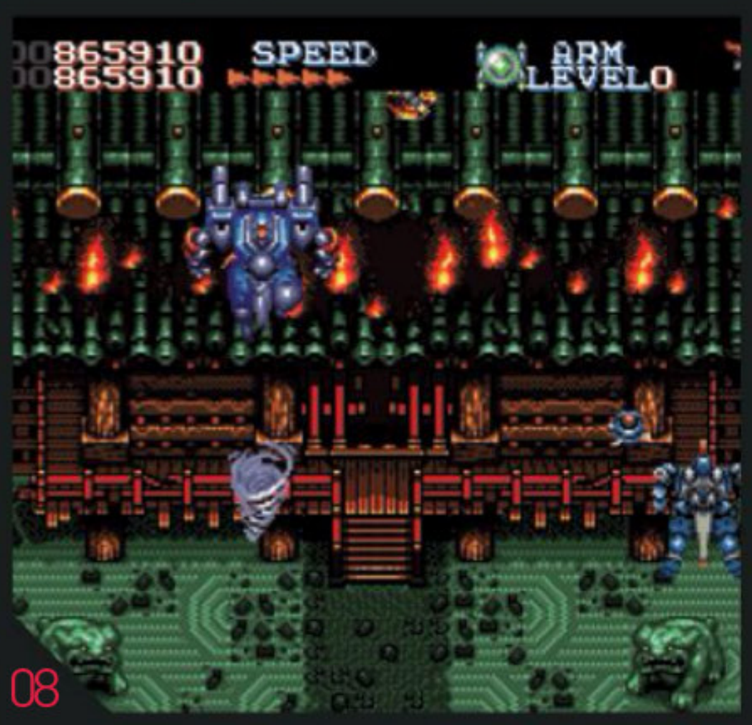

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LUNAR: ETERNAL BLUE

- **RELEASED:** 1994 (JAPAN)
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TENKA FUBU

06 **Although it doesn't** attract as much praise as its predecessor, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* is just as enjoyable an RPG experience as *The Silver Star*. Also, despite featuring a new cast of protagonists, the gameplay remains largely unchanged. Again, Working Designs took the plunge and brought this Stateside with a great translation. In both Japan and the US, this was one of the final high-profile pieces of software for the ailing platform; by the time of the American launch the system was all but dead.

POPFUL MAIL

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** FALCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** YS

07 **Originally produced for** the NEC PC-8801 in 1991, this 2D action RPG title shares many similarities with the *Wonderboy: Monster World* series. The player takes on the role of a bounty hunter named Mail, but it's possible to switch to other characters. With the excellent English translation and voice work, the Western version of *Popful Mail* is arguably the best of all the conversions and carries a justifiably inflated price tag when it appears on auction sites today. While we're not fans of unscrupulous game resellers, *Popful Mail* is unquestionably worth paying through the nose for.

ROBO ALESTE

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** TENGEN
- **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHADOWRUN

08 **A spiritual sequel** to the shockingly brilliant Mega Drive shooter *MUSHA Aleste*, *Robo Aleste* featured the same fixation with large mecha as its predecessor, but was unique because it placed these mechanical killing machines in feudal Japan. Although the gameplay doesn't really present any ideas that couldn't have been achieved on the good old Mega Drive, the music and cut-scenes genuinely elevate the game to a new level of greatness. The game saw release in all three key territories and is in high demand thanks to its overall quality.

09

SNATCHER

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LETHAL ENFORCERS

09 **It's ironic that** while many developers wrestled in vain with grainy, low quality FMV to create the ultimate interactive movie, *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima succeeded where others had failed – by using traditional hand-drawn 2D visuals. Showcasing a plot that owes more than little debt to the likes of Hollywood movies such as *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, *Snatcher* remains one of Kojima's most beloved works. It was also released on the PC Engine CD-ROM, PlayStation and Saturn, but the Mega-CD outing remains the only version to be officially translated into English. This makes it a highly sought-after title. You need this game, but your bank balance won't thank you.

KEIO FLYING SQUADRON

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** JVC/VICTOR
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FUNKY HORROR BAND

10 **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD were never gifted with a conversion of Konami's deliriously playable *Parodius*, but JVC's *Keio Flying Squadron* is a perfectly acceptable substitute. Putting the player in the high-heeled shoes of a girl dressed in what looks like a Playboy bunny outfit, *Keio* boasts a similar style of horizontally scrolling wackiness and puts the Mega-CD hardware to good use to produce some excellent cut-scenes and a brilliant CD-quality soundtrack. A Saturn sequel followed in 1996 that added 2D platforming sections, but for pure shooting brilliance the Mega-CD original is where it's at. A relatively late release, the PAL version of *Keio* is common and reasonably priced.

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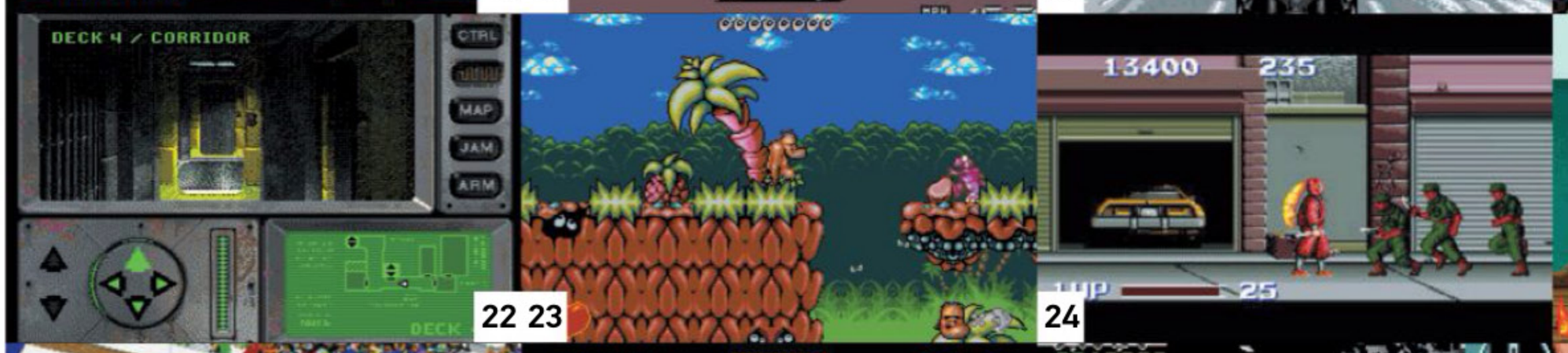
MEGA-CD and the rest...

FMV flop or 16-bit wonder? Regardless of your viewpoint Sega's Mega-CD still has plenty of games that are worth seeking out. Here are some of the best and worst



1 SAMURAI SHODOWN
2 ECCO THE DOLPHIN: THE TIDES OF TIME
3 BRUTAL: PAWS OF FURY
4 HEART OF THE ALIEN
5 MORTAL KOMBAT
6 SPACE ACE
7 AFTER BURNER III
8 EARTHWORM JIM: SPECIAL EDITION
9 FLASHBACK: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY
10 PRINCE OF PERSIA
11 SEWER SHARK
12 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
13 THE ADVENTURES OF WILLY BEAMISH
14 LETHAL ENFORCERS
15 ROAD AVENGER
16 JAGUAR XJ220
17 BATMAN RETURNS
18 COBRA COMMAND
19 HEIMDALL
20 PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
21 SHADOW OF THE BEAST II
22 IRON HELIX
23 CHUCK ROCK
24 THE NINJA WARRIORS
25 WILD WOODY
26 BLACK HOLE ASSAULT
27 DOUBLE SWITCH
28 FATAL FURY SPECIAL
29 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
30 MICROCOSM
31 SILPHEED
32 HOOK
33 GROUND ZERO TEXAS
34 TOMCAT ALLEY
35 NIGHT TRAP
36 BC RACERS
37 CRIME PATROL
38 JURASSIC PARK
39 NBA JAM
40 BATTLECORPS
41 RACING ACES
42 SENSIBLE SOCCER
43 WINDS OF THUNDER
44 ETERNAL CHAMPIONS
45 CITIZEN X
46 WHO SHOT JOHNNY ROCK?
47 STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT
48 DUNGEON MASTER II: SKULLKEEP
49 MAD DOG MCCREE
50 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
51 DARK WIZARD
52 SOL-FEACE
53 THE LAWNMOWER MAN
54 WOLFCHILD
55 BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA
56 SOULSTAR

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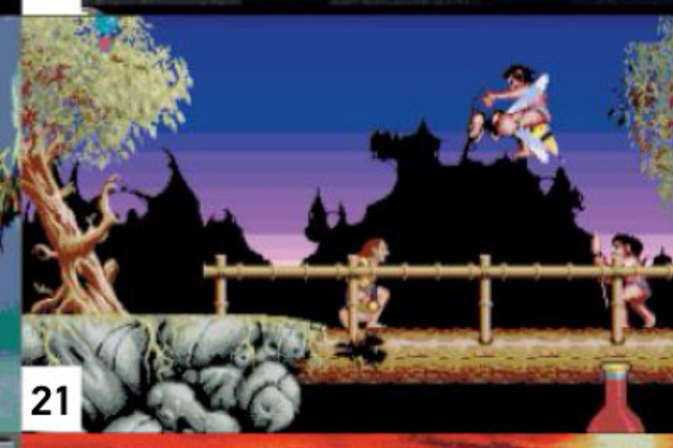

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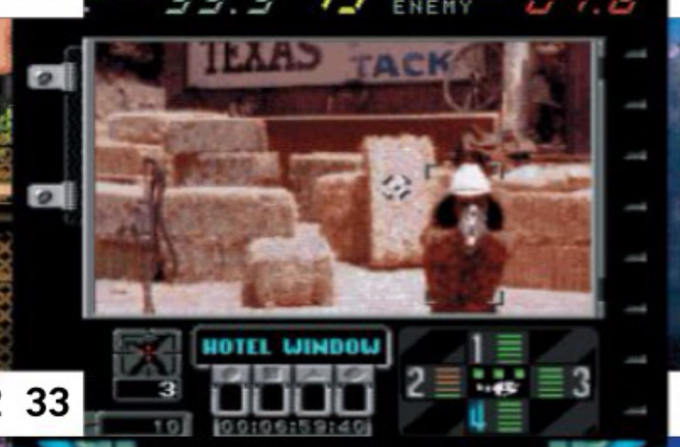

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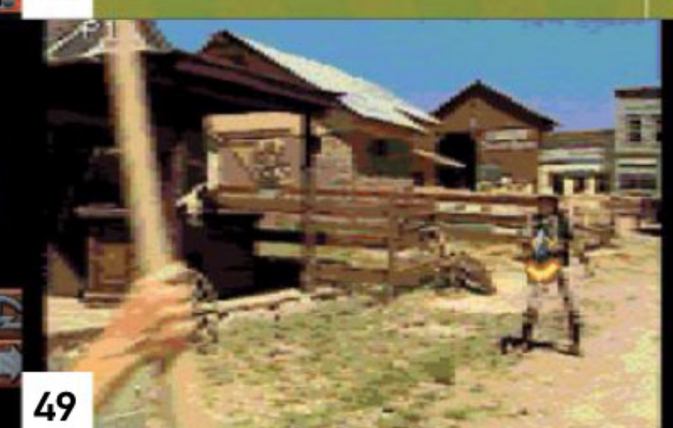

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BOOM: The Success Story Of Sonic The Hedgehog

His Mega Drive outing stunned gamers and challenged Mario. Here we chart the Blue Blur's story so far and talk to many of the designers charged with keeping the hedgehog spinning

SONIC BOOM: THE SUCCESS STORY OF SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Is it possible to write a history of Sonic without mentioning Mario? In theory, but you'd be foolish to try. Though created a decade later, Sonic's existence hinges on that of Mario, and the two have been rivals ever since. Sonic's history is therefore also Mario's, and even platform games as a whole.

The sheer brilliance of *Super Mario Bros* put a Nintendo Entertainment System into more than 60 million homes worldwide, while Sega's 8-bit equivalent, the Master System, had to make do with just 13 million. There are several reasons for this disparity, of course, but Mario was one of the biggest reasons and Sega knew it. Launching its 16-bit system, the Mega Drive, in 1988, Sega had a two-year head start on the Super Famicom/SNES, but even with such an advantage it struggled to keep up with the ageing NES.

Sega's expertise, right through the Eighties and beyond, focused on its coin-op games. This was where Sega ruled videogames, its comfort zone, and the company certainly managed to attract a sizeable fan base just by being able to convert its greatest hits to the home. But the tastes of console gamers gradually shifted throughout the mid to late Eighties. NES games like *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania* and *Final Fantasy* represented a shift away from the instant gratification of the arcades and towards a more protracted experience that gamers could spend hours, days and weeks absorbed in.

Sega remained extremely successful in the arcades, of course, so its home conversions also remained a core part of its business, especially since they were relatively cheap to produce and sold in large enough numbers. But the Master System and Mega Drive needed original games, unconnected to the coin-ops. These came slowly but surely. Games like *Phantasy Star* and *Streets Of Rage* were great console exclusives that represented a step in the right direction, and Sega even published some wonderful platform games in the shape of *Psycho Fox* and *Alex Kidd*, but these did little to slow *Mario*'s astronomical rise in popularity. By 1990 there had been four incredible *Mario* platform games, each one somehow more ingenious than the last, to the point where for many people Mario and videogames were one and the same thing. Sega still needed its Mario.

Perhaps it's a sign of how things had changed by the Nineties, or maybe it shows just how different Sega and Nintendo really were, but Sonic's origins were actually very different to those of Mario. The latter was famously created out of necessity. The limitations of 1981's visual technology meant that it was difficult to even create a character that could be recognised as a person, so Mario became a short, fat plumber with a moustache not because Shigeru Miyamoto had any urge to tell a story about a man in dungarees but because that was all the technology would allow. By 1991, however, technology had progressed to the point where just about any character could be represented on screen, so instead of creating a character out of blocks on graph paper with a particular type of game in mind, Sega simply started with paper and the desire to make a character of any kind.

"Everything about Sonic The Hedgehog was designed to make the game play quickly, keep momentum up, keep moving at top speed"

In what is now a part of the company's legend, Sega set several of its best designers to work, challenging them to create a new character that could become a new type of hero for Sega and a true rival to Mario. Several characters were created as a result of this exercise, many of which were used in later games, but the winner was a little blue hedgehog, drawn by Naoto Oshima, one of the designers on the first two *Phantasy Star* games.

Originally named Mr Needlemouse, Oshima's hedgehog was coloured the same blue as the Sega logo, which only seemed appropriate since the character was designed to be the company's new mascot. Designed primarily to appeal to an American audience, he also featured the colours white and red, though Oshima puts this down to coincidence, citing Santa Claus's colour scheme and the belt across Michael Jackson's jacket on the cover to *Bad* as the inspiration for Sonic's shoes. Finally, Oshima wanted to imbue his character with a 'can do' attitude, inspired by television footage of the then Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. In the original design, Sonic also had fangs and played in a rock band, but these elements were removed under the advice of Sega America's Madeline Schroeder.

Sonic's friendly but cool character design was certainly effective, but nobody ever played *Super Mario Bros* because they liked the character. At least we hope they didn't. Sonic needed the best kind of platform game, and he got one from Yuji

Developer Quotes

"I have great memories of *Sonic*. In fact, it provided a ton of inspiration for a game Team17 developed in the early Nineties (*Superfrog*) and I guess a host of others too. The speed of the game, along with great vibrant art was a real head-turner at the time. It's a powerful series that's had a rollercoaster ride the last few years but I would like to hope it's getting back to where it was. I much prefer the 2D playfields."

Martyn Brown, co-founder of Team 17

Developer Quotes

"I remember seeing *Sonic* at an early trade show in the US. It was January 1991 at CES Las Vegas. It was a single level and fairly low profile on Sega's booth – just one or two discreet screens. The Genesis had been launched in the US six months before.

"Six months later at the summer CES in Chicago, Sega went into overdrive promoting *Sonic*. It stole the show. Back then all videogames were slow, so this was revolutionary and eye-catching! Sega set out to use *Sonic* to demonstrate the speed of their new console, and they pulled it off fantastically!"

Phillip Oliver, CEO & co-founder of Blitz Games Studios

Must-Have Merchandise

There's been an unquantifiable amount of Sonic merchandise produced in the past 20 years. Here's our pick of some of the most interesting examples

1. BOARD GAME

MB Games licensed tons of videogame properties for its board game business in the Eighties and Nineties. The *Sonic* one is typical of the line, vaguely translating the videogame experience into a fun but uncomplicated board game.

2. STYLUS

Released as a pre-order incentive for DS RPG *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*, this collection of three styluses allows you to decorate your DS with Sonic, Knuckles and... uh... someone we don't recognise.

3. SONIC RACING SYSTEM

Being focused on speed, Sonic has appeared in a bunch of racing games, both video and physical. This one is a lot like Scalextric, only with a hedgehog and a fox instead of cars.

4. PAPERCRAFT

Created by Sega to celebrate Sonic's 15th anniversary in 2006, this model re-creates Green Hill Zone in colourful, papery style. Get it from: **sonic.sega.jp/SonicChannel/enjoy/papercraft/index.html**

5. CONFUSING BACKPACK

You might have a hard time finding this bootleg backpack out in the wild but it's sure worth the effort. Just look at how many confusing, incongruous elements it packs into a single item.

Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, Sega programmer and game designer respectively, who joined with Oshima to form Sonic Team and develop *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

Yuji Naka was practically legendary at Sega for his incredible programming ability, and his influence over *Sonic The Hedgehog* cannot be overstated. Naka was a great fan of *Super Mario Bros* but wanted to play something much faster, so that was the direction that the project went in. Everything about it was designed to make the game play quickly – quite ironic given the slow speed of hedgehogs. There are the loop-the-loops and the springs, all good for keeping momentum up, and the gameplay flowing from left to right, while Sonic's ability to curl into a spiky ball mid-jump allowed him to hit an enemy, eliminate it, and then keep moving at top speed.

The resulting game was pure Sega. Almost blinding in its use of colour, thrilling to play and totally unwilling to take itself too seriously, it was a true pleasure that effortlessly appealed to anyone who tried it and had a very likeable character as its star. Tyler Sigman, lead designer on 2006's *Sonic Rivals*, recalls: "I played the original *Sonic* on Genesis when I was a teenager, and like most people, I loved it! The speed, graphics and character were great. Like *Mario* and *Mega Man*, *Sonic* was really memorable platforming. It seems such a small thing now, but Sonic's attitude really did stand out from a lot of other characters at the time," he says, citing the way Sonic would impatiently tap his feet when left alone as an example of the hedgehog's cool factor.

Christian Senn, director of the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*, is also a fan of Sonic's famous attitude but takes the time to praise the exciting, kinetic gameplay of the original game. "I liked Sonic's look, his attitude, and the way it felt to zoom around the playfields," he says. "I liked the look and functionality of the enemies, the fact

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic The Hedgehog

Multi | 1991

One year after the competition to find a Sega figurehead, Sonic's first outing was unveiled. Created by Yuji Naka, *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s mixture of speed and graphical finesse helped to establish the Mega Drive as a serious contender in the hearts of gamers the world over.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Multi | 1992

This time, players found themselves immersed in a game that had been improved in every conceivable way. It was also the first console game to have a worldwide launch when Tuesday 24 November 1992 became known as '*Sonic 2*'s Day'. Geddit?

SEGASonic The Hedgehog

Arcade | 1993

With the home market stitched up, Sega decided to try its hand in the arcades. Trackballs at the ready and two new characters to play with failed to inspire much interest. Poor distribution and the fact that the game deviated from the normal gameplay didn't help either.

Sonic CD

Mega-CD | 1993

New hardware meant that there really was only one character to sell it to the masses. Basically, this was *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* with a time travel element. For what it's worth, the game did try to make use of the CD-ROM, with much-improved animation and sound.

Sonic Chaos

Game Gear | 1993

Handheld gamers rejoiced at the knowledge that Sonic was back on the Game Gear. This time you could play through the game as Tails, who had been absent from previous Game Gear outings, as the game revealed more fully what the handheld was capable of.

"Following directly behind Sonic at all times, Tails' ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride"

that they provided some challenge and offered a break from the rush of speed. I think what I enjoyed most of all about the game was the balance between puzzles, speed, combat and collection. The physics and feeling of interaction really felt great."

The game and its star became synonymous with Sega and helped propel the Mega Drive to sales of around 40 million, only 9 million short of the SNES – a minuscule gap compared to the 47 million that separated the Master System and NES. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was so popular that it inevitably became a huge brand for Sega, starting, of course, with sequels. Four such sequels followed on the Mega Drive and Mega-CD alone, not to mention all the spin-off games and Master System and Game Gear exclusives that also appeared in the same period. Aside from some tiny proportional changes, Sonic's appearance remained the same in the sequels. And why wouldn't it? Sega pretty much got the design spot-on from the beginning. Plus, the company's artists probably had their hands busy designing the multitude of new characters that the publisher somehow seemed to think were so necessary.

Tails wasn't so bad, admittedly. In fact, his inclusion in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is one of the single most underrated features of the series. Following directly behind Sonic at all times, his ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride. And then there's the fact that a second player could plug in their own pad and take control of Tails, happily jumping around behind Sonic and helping out with enemies, but without the risk of failure. It's the sort of feature that games all too rarely employ, allowing a younger or less skilled player to join in and have fun without any frustration, and it's something that the *Mario* series has only recently begun to experiment with in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s co-star mode.

» [Mega Drive] *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* introduced Tails, who was fine on his own but started a worrying trend.

Developer Quotes

"Like a *Super Mario* game on steroids, *Sonic* was a wonderwall of hyperkinetic play for the ADHD generation. The feeling was supersonic... sans gin and tonic!"

Eugene Jarvis, creator of Robotron: 2084 and Defender

Sadly the same can't be said for the other characters introduced through *Sonic*'s early years. The likes of Knuckles and Amy Rose signified the start of a worrying trend toward unnecessary, annoying new characters that would only get worse as the years went by. Though the early to mid Nineties certainly has its fair share of terrible sidekicks. Anyone remember Mighty the Armadillo, Espio the Chameleon or – ahem – Nack the Weasel? No, thought not. Despite the invasion of the world's most annoying characters, *Sonic 2* and *3*, *Sonic & Knuckles* and *Sonic CD* all proved to be brilliant platform games and all played their part in catapulting Sega's little blue hedgehog into popular culture as a whole. Countless merchandise tie-ins

Sonic Spinball
Multi | 1993
As popular as Sonic was, *Sonic Spinball* was an attempt to cash in yet further on the blue speedy one. Once again, deviating from what gamers expected proved its undoing, and the fact that this was a deeply average game didn't help matters.

Sonic Drift
Game Gear | 1994
What Game Gear fans needed was a *Mario Kart* game, or so Sega decided. A *Mario Kart*-style racer would have been ideal. However, what Japanese gamers got was a slow, dull and uninspired racing game that was never released outside Japan, thankfully.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Mega Drive | 1994
A return to form for Sonic with this very impressive outing that not only looked beautiful but also added a greater depth of gameplay than had been seen previously. Of special note is that this is the first *Sonic* game to feature a save feature, thanks to the built-in battery.

Sonic & Knuckles
Mega Drive | 1994
Picking up where *Sonic 3* left off, this is more of the same great gameplay lifted from its predecessor. However, thanks to the use of Sega's lock-on technology, further gaming bonuses could be attained by simply connecting the cart to other *Sonic* games. Genius.

Sonic Triple Trouble
Game Gear | 1994
After a glut of ill-conceived Game Gear outings, the ickle Sonic was back on form and back to doing what he and Tails did best – collecting rings, emeralds and racing through bonus stages. As Game Gear *Sonic* games go, this was mightily impressive.

followed, including a total of four different animated TV series, a movie and enough comic books to destroy an entire rainforest. And there were more games too, Sonic proving so popular that Sega felt it could drop him into any old game to boost sales. Which, to be honest, it was right about. Throughout the early Nineties, *Sonic* characters starred in a *Puyo Puyo* clone, a pinball game, two kart racers and a couple of isometric platformers too, all of them very successful. Sega had clearly got the Mario equivalent it was looking for.

As Sega transitioned from the Mega Drive to the Saturn, it only seemed inevitable that Sonic would make the leap too, but, for a multitude of reasons, it never really happened. He certainly put in his fair share of appearances, though. There was the not really 3D at all *Sonic 3D*, the actually quite brilliant retro compilation *Sonic Jam*, and the technically impressive racing game *Sonic R*. But no proper platform game. Sonic Team chose to spend the Saturn era developing original ideas like *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* instead – for which we're very thankful, of course – while the US-based Sega Technical Institute was charged with developing a full 3D update of the series in the form of *Sonic X-Treme*, which sadly failed to reach completion.

Developer Quotes

"Sega knew they needed a character of their own that could match up with Mario, but that is easier said than done. They set an ambitious goal and managed to pull it off in a compelling and unique way."

Trip Hawkins, founder of Electronic Arts and 3DO

Christian Senn recalls the process of trying to rework the character of Sonic into three dimensions. "I wanted to maintain the look and feel of the 2D Sonic from *Sonic 3* for *Sonic X-Treme*," he says. "In addition to the game graphics, the original sketches of Sonic by Naoto Oshima were wonderful and I was drawn to them as inspiration for *X-Treme*. I discussed a desire to maintain the integrity of the original 2D art style with lead artist Ross Harris, who subsequently did a brilliant job of bringing Sonic to life in 3D. We had not yet seen any representations of Sonic in 3D, so it was very exciting to pave new ground. We wanted to continue the quality and polish that our predecessors had achieved, so attention to the big picture and the details was essential."

Translating the gameplay into 3D was less easy, however, and may be the key to the reason why the troubled *Sonic X-Treme* was never completed. "I desired to take the aforementioned balance of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and translate it into 3D," says Senn. "Not having any idea of how large a bite we were trying to chew, the intention was to combine speed, puzzle-solving, ring-collection, bonus rounds, special rounds, enemies, bosses and some new gameplay elements nobody had every seen before. One of the hallmarks of the successive 2D *Sonic* titles was to introduce something new every game. We were trying to create all of the original elements for the first time in a whole new dimension, and even add more. In hindsight, it might have been wise to attempt to re-create the basic elements of the 2D games in 3D, which might have allowed us time to polish the game before finishing and releasing it."

"The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'. Getting the feeling of speed was a real challenge"

Jon Burton, founder and director of Traveller's Tales, had more success than Senn, creating and finishing two *Sonic* games, *Sonic 3D* and *Sonic R*, for the Saturn, though neither of them could really be classed as proper *Sonic* platform games. "The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'," says Burton. "In *Sonic 3D*, getting the feeling of speed was a

» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3* was so big and ambitious that it was split in half, with the rest of it going into *Sonic & Knuckles*.

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Drift 2
Game Gear | 1995
Compared to the original, *Sonic Drift 2* was a much more considered sequel. This time the game delivered a better Grand Prix mode, banked curves, hills and the all-important link-up mode. Not the class act that *Mario Kart* proved to be, but a worthy attempt nonetheless.

Sonic Labyrinth
Game Gear | 1995
Sega continued to treat Game Gear owners to more variants. This time it decided that a puzzle game in the style of *Marble Madness* was the order of the day. However, the time limits and puzzle elements brought down what may have been a half-decent game.

Sonic The Fighters
Arcade | 1996
It had been three years since the last *Sonic* outing at the arcades, so it must have seemed prudent to have another stab at the coin-op fans. Unfortunately, because it was aimed at kids, it lacked depth and ultimately proved to be an unrewarding experience.

Sonic 3D
Multi | 1996
New console, new *Sonic* game. Well, kind of... This was pretty much the same game that would appear on the Mega Drive but with added 3D tunnels. However, at the time it impressed gamers and gave them an indication of what the Saturn was capable of.

Sonic Jam
Saturn | 1997
This had nothing to do with fruit, but from Sega's point of view it wasn't a bad ploy to get some money from Saturn owners who missed out on the Mega Drive games. Aside from the omission of *Sonic CD*, this was the perfect way to enjoy classic *Sonic* action.

Toon Struck

Robby London was head of creative affairs at DIC, the animation studio behind scores of popular children's cartoons between 1980 and 2008, including three different Sonic The Hedgehog series. Here he tells us what it was like to work with Sega's most famous face

Retro Gamer: What was your first experience of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and what did you think?
Robby London: We knew just from its trending popularity at the time that we wanted to pitch Sega of America on the idea of developing *Sonic* into an animated series for television, and so we needed to bone up on the property. Since I am not a gamer, we got one of the DIC artists who was a *Sonic* aficionado to play it for a video capture. So I was introduced to it by watching a video of the game being played. I recall thinking it had a very charismatic lead character and an interesting look. Of course, I couldn't make too much sense of the story elements, but then in those days it was quite typical for the lore behind most games to be elusive and impenetrable.

RG: What instructions did Sega give you in terms of what you could or couldn't do with the character?
RL: I don't remember any specific upfront instructions per se, other than emphasising to us how crucially important and valuable Sonic was to them. Which, of course, we knew! Sega did retain a contractual approval right for everything we did. So when we'd submit something like a character design, they would often have comments or requests for revisions, mostly on specific details of the designs, and mostly to ensure there was conformity across all the *Sonic* products they were licensing. They also had approval rights on all the voices, music, individual scripts for the episodes and various other creative elements. While they gave notes and requested revisions from time to time, I can't remember any specific theme to their comments nor any generic instructions. They had a representative named Jane Thompson who spent a lot of time with us in LA. Because she was professional and knowledgeable about production, that turned out to be exceedingly helpful.

RG: What do you think are the important characteristics of Sonic and how are these captured in a cartoon rather than a game?
RL: Mostly, I think it's attitude. Even Sega's original design of the character conveyed a lot of 'tude; cockiness, perseverance and a sort of a devil-be-damned outlook. Traits such as these lend themselves really well to an animated character for a television cartoon and can be significantly enhanced in that medium. Those of us who were writers created a lore and a context and situations for Sonic to demonstrate this persona with a richness that was not possible in the game. We came up with the phrase 'fastest thing alive', the signature arms-crossed, impatient foot-tapping pose, along with the catchphrase: 'I'm waiiiiting.' We also gave the character an actual voice, in this case Jaleel White, a huge TV star in America at the time for his role as Steve Urkel [in sitcom *Family Matters*]. Writers created the lines and the personality and Jaleel helped bring it to life. And in those days, even the animation itself that was possible in television far surpassed the limitations of videogames of the time.

real challenge. We had an upper limit on how fast we could physically scroll the screen, so Sonic could never move as fast as we wanted him to. Having the boost pads and bumpers helped, but he definitely moved slower in *Sonic 3D* than any other *Sonic* game. In *Sonic R*, the whole point of the game was racing, so the feeling of speed could really be focused on. In that game, the rings were very important as they would open up boost gates and secret short cuts, so the rings were used like a currency to 'buy' short cuts for better lap times."

The Saturn had some incredible games, of course, but if ever a console needed its star attraction it was this one. Up against the spectacularly popular PlayStation, the Saturn really needed every advantage it could get, and particularly after the world-changing brilliance of *Super Mario 64*, everyone expected *Sonic* to make the transition from pixels to polygons in style. It never really happened on the Saturn, but *Sonic* did eventually go 3D in the following generation, and Sega wasted virtually no time getting the game out there, launching *Sonic*

Developer Quotes

"Growing up, I was a hardcore Nintendo fanboy. The Genesis changed all that and made me an overall videogame fan instead of a one-console fanboy, which is a really silly way to be, but that's another article. I loved character platformers, so when *Sonic* came around with that crazy blast processing and insane speeds I was hooked. Loved the look, style and play, and it had a huge influence over my first commercial success – *Jazz Jackrabbit*!"

Cliff Bleszinski, creator of *Jazz Jackrabbit*

Sonic R
Saturn | 1997
A cracking Saturn game and one that succeeded because it offered something different. *Sonic R* was a 3D racer that pitted familiar characters against one another. Oddly enough, this wasn't developed by Sonic Team but rather by British developer Traveller's Tales.

Sonic Adventure
Dreamcast | 1999
After the demise of the Saturn, Sonic returned faster and sleeker than ever. Determined to make the Dreamcast a success, Sonic Team did everything to ensure that *Sonic Adventure* was a big adventure that ably demonstrated the technical proficiency of the new console.

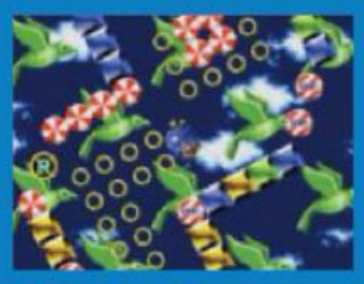
Sonic Pocket Adventure
Neo Geo Pocket Color | 1999
'Anything but the GBC' must have been the cry at Sega when it decided to make another portable edition. Taking elements from *Sonic 2* and *3* as well as bolting on a link-up option where you could race against your friends once again showed the prowess of Sega.

Sonic Shuffle
Dreamcast | 2000
Hot on the heels of *Sonic Adventure* came *Sonic Shuffle*, a collection of puzzle games not unlike *Mario Party*, which must have partly inspired Sega's stab at the genre. It was a fairly dire experience but it was capped off with some lovely cel-shaded graphics.

Sonic Adventure 2
Dreamcast | 2001
By now the Dreamcast was all but gone, but it didn't stop Sonic Team releasing one last *Sonic* game on a Sega console – it was Sonic's tenth anniversary and it would have seemed rude not to. However, this wasn't the last we'd see of the Blue Blur...

The Special Stages

One of the most memorable parts of the early Sonic games are the hidden stages that featured completely different gameplay to the main adventures



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

The original special stage isn't exactly the best, but it is still fun. In it you control a curled-up Sonic as he bounces around a rotating maze, trying to get to the Chaos Emerald in the centre while avoiding the exits. The same special stage also appeared in *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

Definitely the most popular special stage of them all, this one saw Sonic and Tails running straight down the screen along a half-pipe, collecting rings and avoiding bombs. It was a technical marvel at the time, creating a sense of 3D depth that was rare on the Mega Drive.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3

Continuing the trend of 3D bonus stages, *Sonic 3*'s effort asked you to run around a globe and walk over the top of coloured balls in order to change them from blue to red. Hit a red ball, however, and Sonic would bounce off, often straight into trouble. This stage was also in *Sonic & Knuckles*.

SONIC CD

Making great use of the Mega-CD's sprite-scaling abilities, *Sonic CD*'s special stage was basically a 3D open world in which Sonic could run in any direction, in order to hunt down and destroy robots. Another technical marvel, this was just one of many things that made *Sonic CD* special.

SONIC 3D

The Saturn version of *Sonic 3D* featured a special stage that was very similar to *Sonic 2*'s, but the Mega Drive edition was more original, using sprite rotation to create platforms for Sonic to use to reach the end. Though they looked great, these stages suffered from some unfortunate pop-up.

Developer Quotes

"I first saw it when shown to me by a journo mate – same guy who brought me a NES and *Super Mario* one weekend, which really was a life-changing event. I remember being impressed by the bright colours and the speed. It seemed ridiculously fast, especially compared to *Mario*. It was obviously Sega's reply to Mario, attempting to establish a similarly iconic main character with an excellent platform game. I liked that they didn't try simply to ape *Mario*, but distinguished *Sonic* with detailed environments, big areas and the speed. *Sonic 2* remains my favourite, though!"

Jeff Minter, developer of Tempest 2000

Adventure alongside the Dreamcast in America and Europe.

Sonic Adventure was a bold new direction for Sega's mascot, and though far from perfect, it was an interesting update after so many years of anticipation. Sonic Team could have easily settled on a simple 3D interpretation of the classic *Sonic* games but went so much further, incorporating many contemporary ideas such as vast explorable areas in addition to its linear, rollercoaster-like levels. The focus was also broadened far beyond Sonic himself, allowing control of six different characters, all of whom had their own adventure and style of play. A great idea in theory, this proved successful from a game design perspective but didn't exactly make *Sonic Adventure* popular with those who didn't like the series' ever-expanding cast.

"The rise of the Mega Drive days, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point and ultimately the modern era's focus on classic values"

Sonic Adventure also divided fans by lending a voice to its characters, almost turning the game into an interactive cartoon. American voice actor Ryan Drummond portrayed Sonic and recalls the loose approach that Sega took towards defining

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Advance

Game Boy Advance | 2001

Having spurned Nintendo's GBA in favour of less popular handhelds, it was great to see the little fella finally getting the small screen attention he deserved and, best of all, it was an all-new adventure, which drew upon elements from all his previous outings.

Sonic Advance 2

Game Boy Advance | 2002

Having become one of the bestselling GBA titles, it was a pretty safe bet that Sega would ensure that *Sonic* would return. Not only is this a better game than the original GBA outing but it also introduces us to the rather oddly named Cream the Rabbit...

Sonic Battle

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A woefully bad fighting game, *Sonic Battle* tried to cash in on the popularity of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros* series on a system that wasn't nearly powerful enough to pull off a game of that calibre. This is one *Sonic* spin-off game that's best avoided.

Sonic Pinball Party

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A fun little pinball sim that also happened to feature tables based on other Sega fan favourites *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Samba De Amigo*. *Sonic Pinball Party* wasn't quite as clever as the Mega Drive's *Sonic Spinball*, but it was still pretty good fun.

Sonic Heroes

Multi | 2003

Sonic made his cross-platform debut in style with this underrated platformer, which played like *Sonic Adventure 2* but with a new system that saw three characters teaming up at once. Players had to swap between all three to overcome the game's challenges.

such an important part of the character. "At the audition, there was a picture of Sonic hanging up in the voiceover booth," he remembers. "The direction I got from the studio engineer was more of a question: 'If you heard a voice coming out of that blue hedgehog, what would it sound like?' I knew Sonic was all about energy and speed and youth, so I just thought it over, opened my mouth, and that's what came out. I remember that I didn't have time to rehearse it. I didn't even know what the voice was going to sound like until I was actually doing it into the microphone for the Sega folks. It just happened."

Sonic himself also got a complete overhaul with *Sonic Adventure*. Redesigned by Yuji Uekawa, a Sonic Team veteran with experience dating back to *Ristar*, the new Sonic was a much edgier creation. Taller, slimmer and somehow spikier, he'd lost a little of his friendliness but made up for it with an anime-style cool. This is the Sonic that has remained ever since, though the games have been wildly different.

Part of the reason for this was Sega's switch to multiformat development. After abandoning the Dreamcast, the company had to take Sonic to new frontiers, creating games for Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo formats for the first time. Our hero probably felt most at home on Nintendo formats, which had a similar user base to that of the Dreamcast, so both *Sonic Adventure* games were quickly ported to the GameCube, in addition to the friendly and colourful new *Sonic Heroes*. But Sega also made some rather unfortunate assumptions about its new audiences. The huge Western focus of the Xbox and PlayStation 2, for example, led Sonic Team to believe that the consoles' owners would prefer a moodier, more violent *Sonic* game, and so the developer created the terribly misguided *Shadow The Hedgehog*, in which Sonic's nemesis embarrassingly wields two handguns and drives a truck.

"As he became more 'hip with attitude', Sonic became faster and faster," notes Christian Senn of this later period of *Sonic* history. "I think it was good to push boundaries, explore new avenues, and learn what worked and what didn't so that successive games could improve. One element I think had a difficult time translating into 3D was the precision control offered in the 2D games. Pushing more towards blinding speed and combat seemed to be a trend, as well as introducing many new characters. Some amazing environments, visuals, gameplay mechanics and special effects have

Developer Quotes

"I bought a Genesis during my early days at LucasArts, and I still keep it hooked up. I have only a dozen games for it now, and two are *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The first one came with the machine. I'm not sure if I, an allegedly cool and sophisticated 20-something, would have purchased a platformer about a cute animal, but there it was, so I gave it a whirl. It was highly addictive, and I played it relentlessly. I liked zooming around, flinging myself into the air – in fact, my enjoyment of *Sonic* was not unlike my enjoyment of pinball. If I close my eyes I can still hear the jingling sound of rings."

Dave Grossman, Telltale Games

» [Dreamcast] Some series fans still can't utter the name 'Shadow' without shuddering.

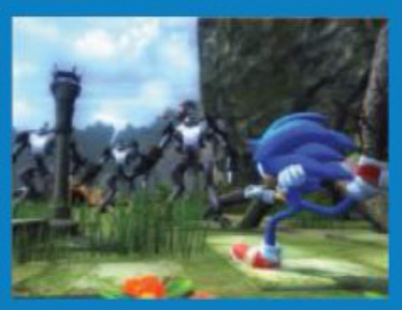
» *Sonic Spinball* was turned into a rollercoaster at Alton Towers, where it remains today.

Sonic Advance 3
Game Boy Advance | 2004
The final GBA game focused on the interplay between Sonic and his co-stars. A tag system allowed you to swap between two characters on the fly, a bit like *Donkey Kong Country*, while various pairings unlocked different abilities depending on the combinations.

Sonic Rush
DS | 2005
After showing a terrible over-the-shoulder *Sonic* DS demo at E3 2004, Sega went back to the drawing board and returned with this effort. Its major innovation was the use of two screens for huge loops and other fun bits of level design.

Sonic Rivals
PSP | 2006
Though it looks like a platform game, *Sonic Rivals* is actually a pretty clever side-scrolling racing game. It's also, strangely, the first *Sonic* game to break with its roots and not be released in Japan, but don't let that put you off. It's actually pretty decent.

Sonic Riders
Multi | 2006
Yet another *Sonic*-themed racing game, this one used the same engine as the Sega-developed *F-Zero GX* and saw Sonic and chums riding hoverboards. Sadly, it was total rubbish and spent more time firing you into walls than anything else.



Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 2006
Sonic arrived on HD consoles in a game that looked promising and was reminiscent of the original *Sonic Adventure*, only far inferior in quality. This unfortunate reboot is the main reason that people assume all modern *Sonic* games to be rubbish.

been created throughout the years that really did appeal to me."

It's quite fashionable to write off all modern *Sonic* games as rubbish, but the truth is that they've been of varying quality, ranging from abysmal to brilliant. The 2006 version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a total disaster, featuring some really dodgy gameplay and a worrying relationship between hedgehog and human girl. And then there's *Sonic Unleashed*, an initially promising platform game that absolutely ruined itself with a series of awful beat-'em-up levels in which Sonic transforms into a sort of werewolf thing with big stretchy arms. But then there's *Sonic Rush*, a fun little 2D platformer with the added bonus of skating-style grinds and tricks that actually fit very comfortably into the regular gameplay. Or even the recently released *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* and *Sonic Colours*, both extremely playable platform games that happened to ditch the furry friends.

"I've got to say that *Sonic* has always worked best in 2D, in my opinion," says Jon Burton of Traveller's Tales. "I also think that the character from *Sonic Adventure* onwards changed, and I didn't like it as much. The cameras in those games I found really hard work compared to something like *Mario 64* as well. Personally, I think a blend of what we do in the *Lego* series of games and the traditional 2D *Sonic* gameplay style would make for an amazing game. You have my number, Sega..."

Tyler Sigman, lead designer on *Sonic Rivals*, agrees: "The franchise has definitely changed, but that's something to be expected. In *Sonic*'s case, I'd say it's a bit of a victim of its own success. What I mean by that is that *Sonic* is a great 2D side-scrolling platformer franchise. I think the translation to 3D has had more misses than hits. That's not to say they are all terrible, but the quality has varied a lot and in general I think it remains a better side-scrolling game than over-the-shoulder game."

It's certainly true that the best *Sonic* games of recent years are the ones that play in the traditional style, but you can't ignore the fact that some of the worst are also the ones with the most unnecessary additional characters. Shadow the Hedgehog, Silver the Hedgehog, Big the Cat, Cream the Rabbit, Blaze the Cat and Rouge the Bat... All were unnecessary and all annoying. Thankfully, Sega seems to have finally realised this and has mostly relegated them to ensemble pieces like *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* or *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, keeping the platform games focused purely on Sonic himself. Or Sonic *themselves*, if the latest game is anything to go by.

Designed to celebrate Sonic's 20th anniversary, *Sonic Generations* teamed its hero up with the 1991 version of himself, taking the series full circle with both completely 3D and 2D levels depending on which Sonic you choose to play as. It was a highly entertaining outing that did a

» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3D*, while flawed and not truly 3D, was a reasonable attempt at bringing Sonic into the third dimension.

Developer Quotes

"Up until the point where I had moved out on my own, I had been primarily a Nintendo fan, at least in regards to home consoles. My NES had carried me through high school and college, as the Master System hadn't quite done it for me. This changed when *Sonic* arrived on the Genesis. As a young man with little money, struggling with new-found responsibilities, it took careful consideration to determine what games I'd buy, but there was no getting around it: I had to have this amazing, impossibly fast blue creature running amok. Sonic was the character who turned me into a Sega fanatic."

James Mielke, Q Entertainment

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Rivals 2
PSP | 2007
Sonic Rivals 2 was pretty much more of the same as last time out, except that it expanded the cast of playable characters from five to eight. Each character was also paired off with a team-mate who would run behind them, harking back to *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.

Sonic Rush Adventure
DS | 2007
A fairly unsuccessful sequel, *Sonic Rush Adventure* spoiled its otherwise excellent gameplay by implementing totally unnecessary seafaring sections, reminiscent of the similarly divisive sequences in *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, only much worse.

Sonic And The Secret Rings
Wii | 2007
Sonic has had a fairly good run of games on the Wii, and his debut on the system was very good indeed. An over-the-shoulder platform game, it made good use of the Wii Remote's tilt controls for a fast and intuitive rollercoaster ride of an experience.

Sonic Unleashed
Multi | 2008
Titled *Sonic World Adventure* in Japan, this 3D *Sonic* game promised to revitalize the series by mixing *Sonic Adventure*-style 3D gameplay with more classic 2D assault courses. But it ruined all that by adding 'werehog' sections with tedious beat-'em-up gameplay.

Sonic Chronicles
DS | 2008
The first and only *Sonic* RPG, *Sonic Chronicles* was actually made by BioWare, the Canadian studio behind high-profile RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. *Chronicles* wasn't quite up to its usual standard but was one of the better *Sonic* spin-offs produced.

Sonic's Cameos

Sonic is so famous, he's even appeared in a bunch of other characters' games too. Here are some of the most notable

RAD MOBILE

This 3D arcade racing game from AM2 and Yu Suzuki features a Sonic-shaped air freshener hanging in front of the windscreen. Interestingly, this was actually the first appearance of Sonic, predating his Mega Drive debut by about six months.

SOLEIL

A Mega Drive RPG with similarities to *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Soleil* features a scene in which Sonic can be found sunbathing on a beach with his feet up. All that running around, defeating Dr Robotnik, must tire him out.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

Years before Sega and Nintendo made friends, the latter took a swipe at Sonic here. The ranking screen features a number of famous Nintendo characters but alludes to Sonic and Earthworm Jim in the category of 'No Hopers'.

CHRISTMAS NiGHTS

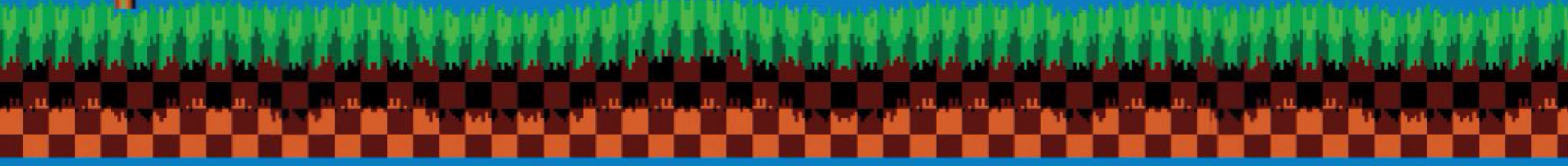
This free Christmas-themed edition of Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* allowed you to collect several interactive Christmas gifts within the game, including one where you could play the game as Sonic and fight a huge, round Dr Eggman boss.

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

After years of rumour, Sonic finally got to fight his rival in the Wii's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, and he even got his own stage based on Green Hill Zone, with a newly rearranged version of the Angel Island Zone theme from *Sonic 3*.

"Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. What it got is a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad"

fantastic job of capturing the spirit of his earlier games. Next up is *Sonic: Lost World*, which again attempts to take Sonic in fresh and exciting directions, this time on Wii U and 3DS. This last point is interesting as it marks yet another Nintendo exclusive for Sega's popular mascot. If you were to summarise the career of Sonic over these past 22 years, you could definitely say that he's lived an interesting life. The meteoric rise of the Mega Drive days, the explosion into popular culture, the wilderness years of the Saturn, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point of mediocrity and over-saturation and ultimately into the modern era and its focus on quality, experimentation and classic values. It's definitely, appropriately, been a series of ups and downs, even loops. But it's testament to Sonic's enduring popularity that he's managed to bounce back from any low point in this time. Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. But what it got is something slightly different; a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad and has gone on to become a hero to all gamers, no matter which console they happen to own.



Sonic And The Black Knight

Wii | 2009

One of the more derided modern *Sonic* games, *Sonic And The Black Knight* is actually much better than it's given credit for. Set in a medieval fantasy world, it re-imagines the *Sonic* characters as knights of the round table and equips them all with swords.

Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I

Multi | 2010

Returning to the series' roots, this completely 2D game starred only Sonic himself and played fairly close to the style of the original Mega Drive trilogy. Only some slightly stodgy physics stopped it from being perfect.

Sonic Colours

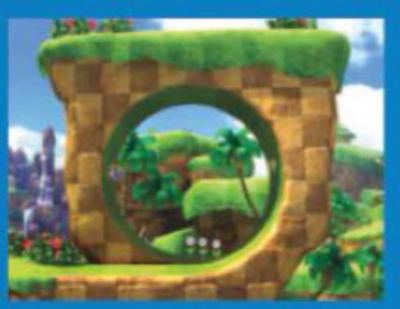
Wii | 2010

One of the best *Sonic* games in recent years, *Sonic Colours* featured mostly side-on gameplay as well as collectable Wisps that temporarily change Sonic's abilities. It almost played like a cross between *Sonic Adventure 2* and *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

Sonic Colours

DS | 2010

The DS version of *Sonic Colours* went even further than the Wii version in its drive to return to a more classical 2D style of *Sonic* gameplay. Some people even believe that it's the superior version of the two… and they happen to be correct.



Sonic Generations

Multi | 2011

Though not yet released, *Sonic Generations* looks to be another great *Sonic* game. Teaming up the modern version of Sonic with the more cartoony retro version, it allows you to play any stage either completely in 3D or completely in 2D. It's about time too.

THE MAKING OF

GUNSTAR HEROES

Treasure's stunning debut on Sega's 16-bit console was a game that many assumed simply wasn't possible due to the machine's hardware limitations. Jonti Davies chats with Masato Maegawa, producer of Gunstar Heroes and president of Treasure, about the finer points of running and gunning through a gorgeous 2D world

Treasure was born in early 1992, when a group of Konami employees with a shared vision left their parent company. Their motivation for quitting such a successful developer/publisher was simple: they wanted to fully realise their own ideas, free from the restraints typically felt by individuals in large corporations. Setting a dangerously high benchmark for the then-nascent developer, Treasure's landmark first release was the result of a kitchen-sink approach to the run-'n'-gun sub-genre, bringing new ideas to a game style that was in danger of becoming stale.

Masato Maegawa, Treasure's president and *Gunstar Heroes*' producer, is an affable chap, completely modest (but realistic) about the strength of his team's productions. We ask him about the context of *Gunstar Heroes* – what led to its production? "We'd only just established our new company, Treasure, so we were just really keen above all else to do something that we liked and something that was our forte," says Maegawa. "*Gunstar Heroes* was that game. We approached the project with the concept of 'anything goes', and we incorporated many types of separate ambitious ideas in that concept."

Among those fresh ideas for the genre were numerical energy counters in place of the more common one-hit-you're-dead routine; symbolic colour labelling in lieu of character names; a heady blend of long and close-range attacks; a mishmash of auto-scrolling and player-led passages of action; weapons that could be mixed to form new attacking powers; and some of the most imaginatively constructed bosses to grace a videogame, regardless of vintage or genre, peaking in the inspired melding of a board game with a string of boss battles. To say that *Gunstar Heroes* was created with a notion of 'anything goes' is an understated simplification on Maegawa's part.

Gunstar Heroes begins with a suitably explosive cut-scene sequence, which details the plight of Gunstar 9, the planet on which most of the game is played out. Ambiguous scripting initially leaves the player with only a vague idea of what might be afoot. "WHERE IS HE? THAT LIGHT! IT'S TOO LATE!"... "NO!...

» [Mega Drive] There are some memorable characters in *Gunstar*, including Dr Black, who refuses to give up his gem to Red.

» [Mega Drive] Some ambiguous writing leaves much of *Gunstar Heroes*' world open to interpretation.

THE EARTH... UNDER ONE PERSON'S POWER..." is a classic, befuddling exchange from this opening scene. But it eventually transpires that *Gunstars*' Red and Blue need to reclaim four gemstones in order to stop Smash Daisaku ('Daisaku' being Japanese for 'epic'), an evil dictator who looks a bit like *Street Fighter*'s M Bison, from using those gems to re-power a robot called Golden Silver, which had previously caused havoc by draining planets of their natural resources. Daisaku has even kidnapped Green, the elder brother of Red and Blue, who has been tricked into working for the enemy. Once the four crucial gems are retrieved, the heroic journey of Red and Blue eventually leads to the moon of Gunstar 9, where Red and Blue have to defeat the immense (3D-effect) Core Guard System, before a final multi-stage battle against the game's assembled cast of baddies brings Golden Silver out of its sleep.

In Red and Blue, two iconic videogame characters were born. With nomenclature bordering on the nondescript, they were never likely to capture the imagination of the population at large; but Red and Blue retain a certain mystique that still lights fires in the eyes of gamers. How did *Gunstar Heroes*' characters come to be named in such a way? Maegawa confesses that it wasn't his idea, but the work of *Gunstar* team's character graphics specialist, Han.

"Maybe for Han there was some deep meaning," Maegawa says about his input, "but I think it's just a really good idea because it made it so easy for users to understand what was happening in the game."

Gunstar Heroes' development appears to have been a consummate team effort. Treasure has remained a small studio since its formation, and the first title to come out of Treasure was principally the work of just seven people. Maegawa speaks of the team in familiar terms,

"EVEN WHILE THEY REMAINED AT KONAMI, THE CORE MEMBERS OF TREASURE WERE REGULARLY GETTING TOGETHER TO PLOT A REVOLUTION"

dropping their surnames and referring to them by the nicknames they use within Treasure to this day.

"There were only seven of us who worked on *Gunstar Heroes*: myself, as producer; Yaiman, who was the director and main programmer; Nami, who programmed the enemy AI and other routines; Han, who did the character graphics; Iuchi, who was responsible for the graphics; Non, who did all the music; and our sound effects man, Murata. It took us about ten months to develop *Gunstar Heroes* once we'd established Treasure, but even before that we'd meet in coffee shops and other places for planning sessions."

It's fascinating to visualise such coffee house meetings. Even while they remained at Konami, the core members of Treasure were regularly getting together to plot a revolution. And by finding Sega as a publisher, Treasure's coup d'état would soon be complete: *Gunstar Heroes* blew open the state of 2D platform-shooters, with Treasure rewriting the constitution.

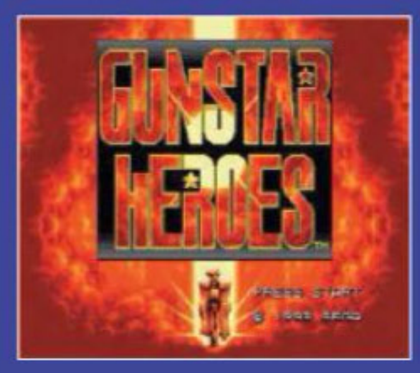
Treasure's deal with Sega was the result of a carefully planned proposal, which suggests that the results of the 'anything goes' approach were largely determined before development began. Maegawa is understandably satisfied with the outcome of events, and stresses that none of the ideas plotted in Tokyo cafés during 1991 and early 1992 were sacrificed or compromised in production.

"There was nothing missing from the final version of *Gunstar Heroes*. It ended up exactly as we first planned it – everything that was in our original specification and proposal to Sega was packed into the game that was eventually sold to players."

Mission accomplished, then. Working with Sega as a publisher, Treasure had full creative control – and that was key to *Gunstar Heroes*' success. Indeed, the only issue that resulted in a difference of opinion between Sega and Treasure was the relatively trivial matter of the game's name. Treasure had considered calling its debut project '*Blade Gunner*', in honour of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, but eventually settled on '*Lunatic Gunstar*'. Maegawa looks back on this matter with good humour.

"It's true that within Treasure we referred to the game as '*Lunatic Gunstar*', right from the start," he says with a wry smile. "We felt that the word 'Lunatic' was a perfect fit to convey the

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE, INC

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

» [Mega Drive] Like *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Gunstar Heroes* has a big airship and is proud of it.

THE MAKING OF

GUNSTAR VERSIONS

There have been five *Gunstar Heroes* releases. The original Mega Drive game appeared in September 1993. An inferior Game Gear version followed, featuring odd modifications such as a switch from mine carts to helicopter jetpacks in the Underground Mine stage; it lacked some of the original's content (most conspicuously, the Dice Palace level was dropped completely) and ran at a much lower frame rate than the Mega Drive version. An enjoyable sequel, *Gunstar Super Heroes*, was released on the Game Boy Advance in 2005, but this too falls a little way short of the standard set by the Mega Drive original.

It wasn't until late 2006 that the original game resurfaced on the Wii's Virtual Console, preserved in perfect form via the wonders of emulation.

More impressive still, in February 2006 Sega of Japan had published the *Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box* as part of its PS2-based *Sega Ages* series. The disc contained both the American Genesis version of *Gunstar Heroes* and the Japanese Mega Drive code, along with a subtly different prototype build and the Game Gear version (useful purely for reference).

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALIEN SOLDIER
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1994

RADIANT SILVERGUN
SYSTEMS: SATURN, ARCADE
YEAR: 1998

GRADIUS V (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2004

exhilaration of our game, what with all the explosions and detonations; but that didn't go down too well with Sega of America, who thought that the word 'Lunatic' conveyed a really bad image. Anyway, the 'Heroes' part of the title came from Sega of America – they seemed to think that 'Heroes' was a cool term because it carried a notion of there being some great sense of justice in the game – so in the end we were requested to adopt the *Gunstar Heroes* title."

Irrespective of concerns over its title, Sega must have been happy to see the results of Treasure's early Mega Drive work, especially considering the limitations of the hardware. Maegawa recalls that Treasure had to work around the Mega Drive's limited palette to achieve the desired visual style in *Gunstar Heroes*. "Because of the relatively low number of colours the Mega Drive can display, we had various difficulties in doing what we wanted to do," Maegawa explains. "At first we were drawing the backgrounds with a single palette of 16 colours, but we thought the results looked too sad and desolate, so I requested that we draw scenery with two palettes, giving us 32 colours to work with, which is what we ended up doing."

Aside from the richness of *Gunstar Heroes*' extended palette use, effects such as the rotation and scaling of sprites were used expertly to create a sense of depth. Most impressively, there can be a dozen or more characters on screen and yet the frame rate holds up almost flawlessly throughout, regardless of how explosive the action is becoming. The transformations of the Green-controlled Seven Force boss show Treasure in a cocky frame of mind, juggling and spinning sprites as though they were going out of fashion (funny thing: they were). The faux 3D of the Core Guard System, too, was a spectacle of some note in 1993, its impact almost measuring up to the feats of contemporary FX chip-powered games over on the SNES.

Gunstar Heroes' soundtrack is also hugely impressive. The score shifts in pitch and tone quite dramatically, waltzing with the on-screen action without ever stepping on its toes. We ask Maegawa how such well-judged tunes were achieved in light of the ever-changing nature of the gameplay and its themes. "Well, the music producer was Non," Maegawa reiterates, "who is still here at Treasure. He always, without fail, waits for all levels of a game to be designed so that he can experience the movement of the whole game, and then he begins his composition. And that's how he was when we worked on *Gunstar Heroes*."

» [Mega Drive] The appropriately named 'happy item room' offers sustenance and weapons in the middle of The Dice Palace.

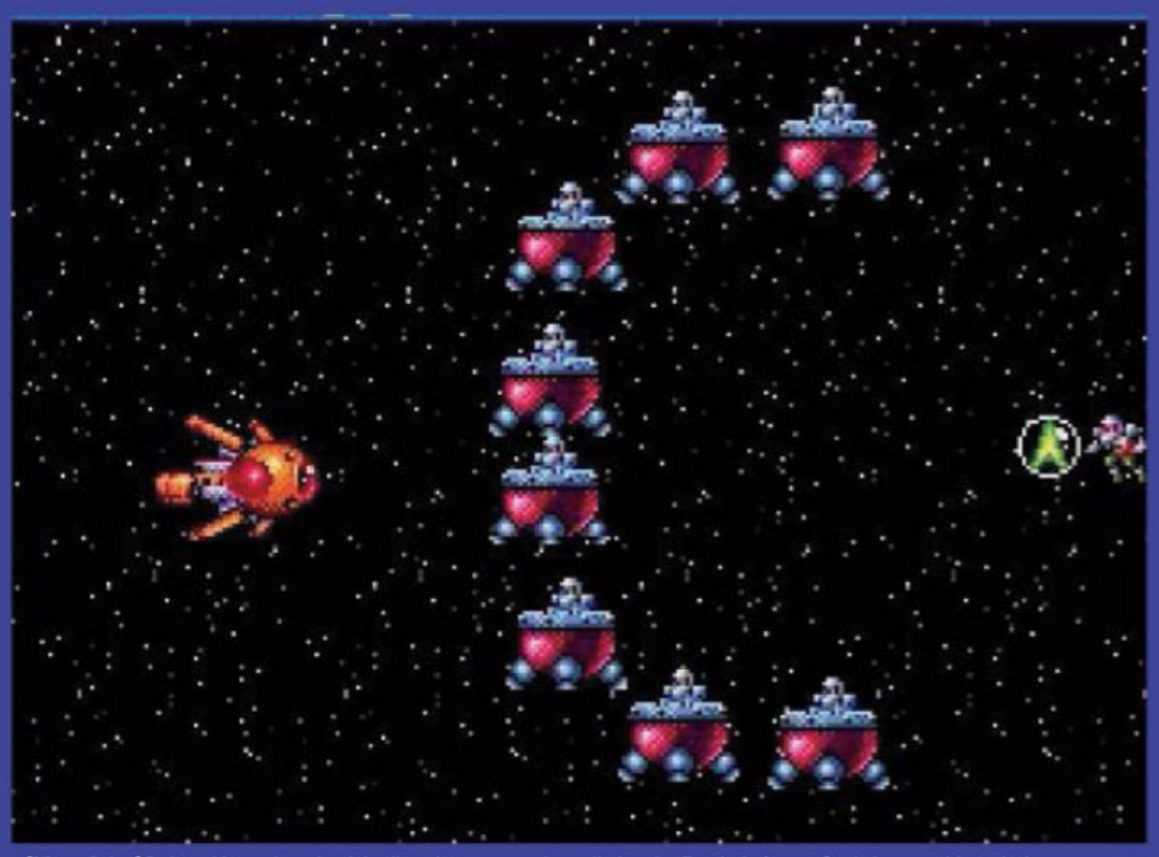
Another vital ingredient of *Gunstar Heroes*' unrelenting punch, often overlooked, is its clever use of sound effects. From the creaking of robotic bosses' limbs to the easily identifiable and distinguishable weapons effects, Murata's work almost sounds like percussion to Non's music. We ask whether Murata worked on *Gunstar Heroes* in the same manner as Non. "Yes," says Maegawa. "In a similar style to Non, our sound effects specialist Murata waits for everything else to be in place and functional before he begins, very slowly and carefully, to apply his sound effects."

Playing *Gunstar Heroes* today, it's difficult to imagine how contemporary publishers would react to its hotchpotch design. Of course, Treasure has virtual immunity in this regard, and can apparently still get away with releasing games that defy convention (see 2001's *Freak Out* on the PS2 for a prime example of bizarre game design being smuggled past publishers and out into retail), but this is principally because of Treasure's reputation – the basis of which was laid in *Gunstar Heroes*.

There are initially four stages to play through, but these can be approached in any order. Only after these levels have been completed and the four gems have been collected does *Gunstar Heroes* shift into a linear gear.

One of *Gunstar Heroes*' most inventive stages is the Dice Maze level, where Black beckons the player to his 'strange fortress', inside which is found The Dice Palace. A board game of sorts ensues, with Red and/or Blue throwing a die to move around a board containing spaces that lead to mini-boss fights, free weapons (received in the

» [Mega Drive] Smash Daisaku attempts to cause Red to crash by throwing live soldiers at him. That's not nice.



» [Mega Drive] Being able to shoot in eight directions, even when piloting the Empire's Space Craft, is something of a boon.

"AS DEBUTS GO, GUNSTAR HEROES IS A PHENOMENAL ACHIEVEMENT – FEW DEVELOPERS HAVE MANAGED TO WORK SUCH ASSURED MAGIC IN THEIR INITIAL PROJECTS"

'happy item room'), and fights without weapons (tricky). One space is reserved for the traditional board game penalty of reversing your progress, while the final space sets up a decisive battle with the Yakuza-styled Black, who shows up in his Beat Stepper robot.

"The dice stage is really experimental," Maegawa concurs, "and again it was under the idea of 'anything' being acceptable that we decided to throw a board game into the mix. But none of us are particularly fans of board games as such…"

Other levels are also experimental. For example, the Underground Mine stage is literally 'on rails', with the action switching to a ferocious pace as Red/Blue journey deep underground on high-speed mine carts. With parallel tracks at the top/bottom or left/right (depending on the section of track, progress through the mine can be horizontal or vertical), a jump to midair enables the cart to escape from the magnetic field of one track and enter the field of another, opening the possibility of upside-down mine cart control. Nintendo's recent *Super Mario Galaxy* has been lauded for doing a similar thing – *Gunstar Heroes* was clearly ahead of its time.

As well as experimental play concepts, there are radical and unexpected shifts in style. The first stage plays like a *Contra*-esque platform-shooter – but by the fifth level Red and Blue are piloting the Empire's Space Craft in what is ostensibly Treasure's first attempt at a horizontally scrolling shmup – but still retains the omni-directional shooting system found in all other areas of *Gunstar Heroes*. Again returning to the *Gunstar Heroes* team's enthusiasm for including anything/everything in Treasure's debut production, Maegawa explains how the game came to be such a diverse proposition.

"Because we had this concept of 'anything goes', we decided that if it was fun and interesting, we would put anything into the mix. And because of that *Gunstar Heroes* ended up having shooting, action and fighting elements."

This certainly wasn't development by numbers, though. In playing the game there is no sense that *Gunstar Heroes*' design was at all contrived; in many areas, such as its insistent flitting from automated scrolling scenes to movement-led platforming sections, the game almost seems deliberately prone to challenge and confuse players, rather than sweet-talking them into appreciation of its qualities. It appears to have been the product of a wild burst

» [Mega Drive] The Ancient Ruins stage is deceptive, easing the player in with a *Contra*-style run through a bright environment.

TREASURE BEFORE TREASURE

We ask Maegawa to set the record straight: which games did he and his Treasure team actually work on while they were at Konami? Politely, he refuses, stating that he'd "rather not name specific titles, so as to avoid any potential trouble with Konami." Fair enough. "But I can tell you," he adds, "that I worked on Game Boy, Famicom and Super Famicom games for Konami while I ws there." This didn't quite sate our curiosity, so we did some research, completely unaided by Maegawa by the way, and discovered some rather startling revelations.

From what we've learned from our Japanese sources, Maegawa worked on the following games before founding Treasure: *Dracula Densetsu* (aka *Castlevania: The Adventure,* Game Boy, 1989), *Gun Sight* (aka *Laser Invasion,* NES, 1991), *Rollergames* (NES, 1991), *Bucky O'Hare* (arcade, 1992; NES, 1992).

Other Treasure members such as Yaiman, Han, Iuchi and Nami worked on these Konami titles: *Quarth* (arcade, 1989; MSX, 1990), *Aliens* (arcade, 1990), *Punk Shot* (arcade, 1990), *Akumajou Dracula* (aka *Super Castlevania IV,* Super NES, 1991), *Escape Kids* (arcade, 1991), *The Simpsons* (arcade, 1991), *Axelay* (SNES, 1992), *Contra Spirits* (aka *Super Probotector,* SNES, 1992). Iuchi also went on to do a gig as the level designer for Time Warner Interactive's rather great 1997 *Shinobi* clone *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taroumaru.*

THE MAKING OF

TOUGH BOSSES

Bravoo Man is built like a brick shithouse – or at least, he's been constructed from brick – but his moves are limited to a flying spin and clumsy kick.

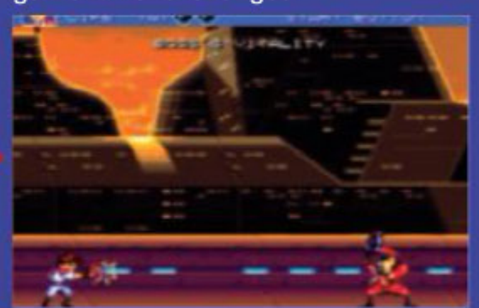
Pink and a couple of sidekicks called Kain and Kotaro attempt to stop Red and Blue by blocking their path with the interestingly named Pinky Loader contraption.

Seven Force is piloted by Green, who guides it through seven transformations. Iterations include a golden gun, a blue phoenix, an iron man and a tiger.

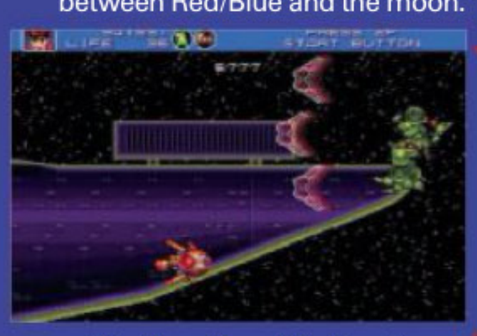
This early mid-level boss is easily beaten, and can be attacked from positions on the robot's feet and under its body, as well as from above.

Smash Daisaku challenges Red to a fight on the wings of a helicopter (yes, a helicopter with wings) before making way for his bulkier comrade, Orange, to have a go.

Doctor Black appears as the final boss of his rather strange fortress, having already led Red/Blue through a board game full of challenges.



Smash Daisaku returns, this time with a jetpack and flame-thrower. He's easy to dodge, but he has more stamina. He's all that stands between Red/Blue and the moon.



Seven Force doesn't look quite so threatening when seen in space, but it really zips about the screen and is certainly not an easy enemy to defeat.

The Core Guard System is one of *Gunstars*' few self-explanatory features. It launches a series of attacks, such as chains of orbs and miniature spacecraft.

The final boss series leads up to a fight against the revived Golden Silver robot. Before that, all of the game's main enemies reappear in sequence.

Golden Silver presents *Gunstar Heroes*' final challenge. It's effective to grab and throw him, but it's also essential that you shoot at the four gems to drain Golden Silver's power.

» [Mega Drive] Care for a piece of Gunstar Gum? Never mind in-game advertising – *Gunstar Heroes* did in-game self-promotion.

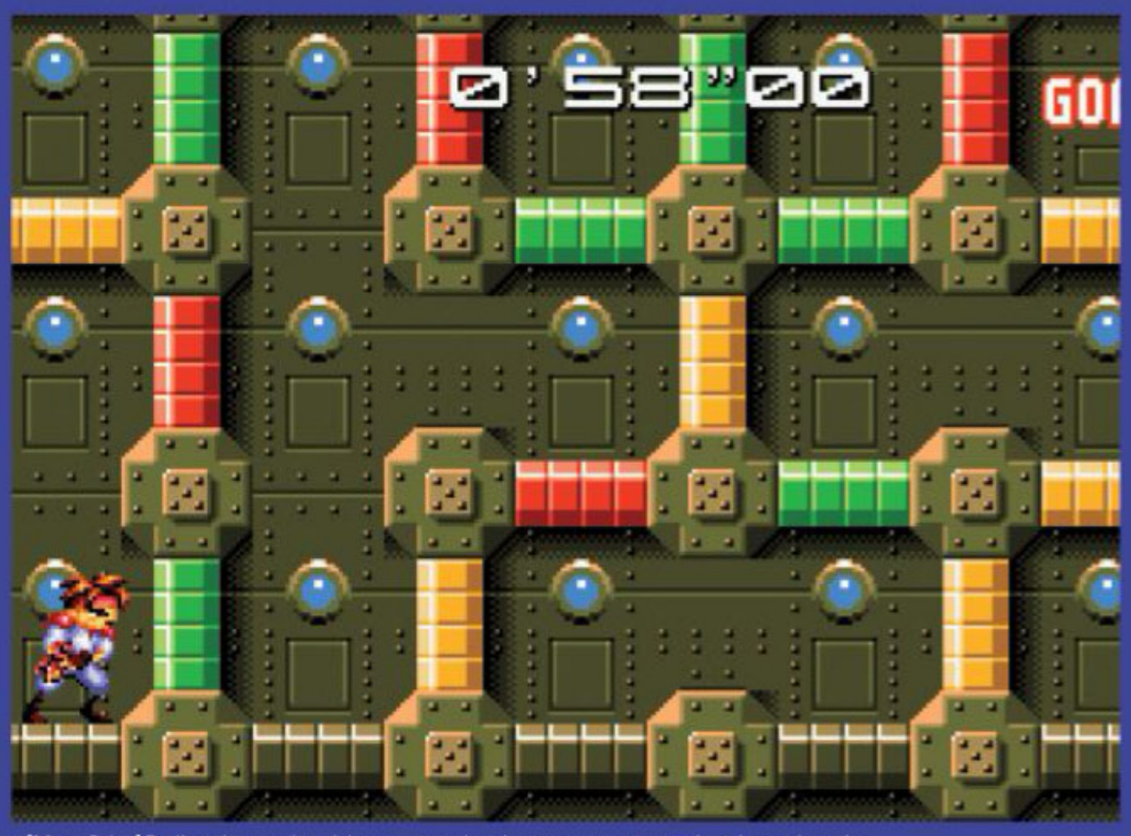
of creative thinking, and not the result of any focus testing or considerations of marketability. Maegawa confirms Treasure's slightly random and carefree methodology. "We didn't really bother about the details of how each stage was being developed," he says, "but we produced each scene with a different attitude, which led to there being plenty of variety in the game. I feel that as a result of this approach the overall balance came out really well."

Variety was also seen in the game's weapon system, which starts from a base of four weapon types (Force, Lightning, Chaser and Fire) but expands to 14 variations via the mixing of different weapon types. Red/Blue can choose one weapon initially, but have space in their primitive 'inventory' (displayed at the top of the screen) to hold two weapons simultaneously. Each of these weapons can be used in isolation, if so desired, or the two can be used in combination; the three choices on offer from each brace of weapons can be cycled through mid-game by holding A and B. It's an effective system, encouraging tactical use of weapons. Rather than simply give the player a procession of increasingly powerful weapons, Treasure decided to spread *Gunstar*'s range of attacking options in a more imaginative way.

"We developed the weapon combination system like that," says Maegawa, "because we wanted players to discover their own ways of getting through stages, and for them to have lots of different experiences according to which weapons they were using on which levels. The weapons become different when you go from Easy mode to Expert mode, as well."

As with many subsequent Treasure titles, *Gunstar Heroes* is not a huge game when measured in terms of how long it takes to get to the credits – it can be played through in an hour, if you're good – but it presents such a wealth of diverse ideas during play that it manages to project an unfeasibly large personality. This is a game, which, once played, cannot be forgotten.

The most memorable scenes in *Gunstar Heroes* are probably its boss encounters (it soon became apparent that boss design was one of Treasure's strengths, as evidenced by such incredible sights as that of the Creator in *Radiant Silvergun* and the interplanetary conclusion to *Sin & Punishment*), which span the gamut from a brick man in the form of Bravoo Man to a midget called Minion Soldier. Maegawa recognises the importance of these characters to the game's enduring appeal, citing the impact of *Gunstar Heroes*' bosses on



» [Mega Drive] Red's rather confused; he was sure that there was some way of getting to the exit…

» [Mega Drive] Mini-bosses are peppered throughout every level of *Gunstar Heroes*.

"WE FELT THAT THE WORD 'LUNATIC' WAS A PERFECT FIT TO CONVEY THE EXHILARATION OF OUR GAME, WITH ALL THE EXPLOSIONS AND DETONATIONS; BUT THAT DIDN'T GO DOWN TOO WELL WITH SEGA OF AMERICA" MASATO MAEGAWA ON THE NAMING OF GUNSTAR HEROES

players who make the effort to explore all corners of the game. "As you might expect," he says, "my favourite boss is probably the famous one: Seven Force. The seven transformations are absolutely worth seeing."

Describing features of *Gunstar Heroes* as being 'worth seeing' is wholly appropriate in a game whose overarching theme is ultimately less to do with story and more obviously centred on the fireworks of destruction. 'Anything goes' might be one recurring ideal, but the notion that 'more is more' also had an influence on Treasure's work here, and the studio's fondness for creating spectacular set pieces has never gone away. Maegawa retains a childish appreciation of pyrotechnics, along with an understanding of the power of scale.

"My favourite aspects of *Gunstar Heroes* are the way in which scenes and stages become progressively more expansive," Maegawa smiles, "and the sense of exhilaration that comes from seeing so many explosions! I think that was really refreshing for many players."

Time has been kind to *Gunstar Heroes*, and it deserves its place in the highest rank of Treasure's consistently excellent output over the past 20 years. It even received a highly enjoyable sequel for the Game Boy Advance. As debuts go, it's a phenomenal achievement – few developers have managed to work such assured magic in their initial projects. For Maegawa and friends, the creation of *Gunstar Heroes* was a cathartic experience, with their newly acquired independence fuelling their enthusiasm, and creating a super game. We ask Maegawa if Treasure faced any difficulties as independent developer.

"There isn't any particularly trying episode that I can recall from the development period – it all went really smoothly. But as we'd just established Treasure, we were of one mind in thinking, 'At last we can make the exact kind of game that we love.' We were completely absorbed in making our game and all thoroughly enjoying the project. That's what I remember foremost about making *Gunstar Heroes*."

» [Mega Drive] Under siege from all directions and yet still in with a fighting chance.

» [Mega Drive] Green realises how stupid he's been and decides to make amends with a kamikaze attack on Golden Silver.

THE CLASSIC GAME

STREETS OF RAGE 2

The peace is broken once more. Mr X is back and this time he's hit Axel were it hurts: in the Adam. Yes, the once peaceful, apparently crime-free city of New York is again thrown into upset after one third of a friendship is mercilessly locked in a room. Don't panic though as the remaining two thirds – accompanied by a token wrestler-type character and a rollerblading ten year old – set out to save their captured comrade and bring some order back to all the chaos.

It might sound like the most clichéd of action-film plots, but *Streets Of Rage 2* is a game that lets two people throw a punk rocker into an arcade machine of itself and eat apples off the floor. Such a blatant display of ill-hygiene and acts of ironic vandalism are just two elements what make walking the streets of rage so awesome. Still not convinced? Read on…

Axel

Axel is the easiest character to get to grips with and to finish the game within an hour of purchase. This is basically down to his potent special attacks – particularly his Ground Upper (see Best Special boxout) – which make easy work of most to all enemies.

Blaze

Dance Teacher and ex-plod Blaze Fielding is the fastest of the four characters. As well as being agile and quick, Blaze also boasts fast weapon attacks – particularly with the knife, where she stabs and swipes with one tap of the fire button – so is one of the best all-rounders in the game.

Skate

Adam's kid brother Eddie 'Skate' Hunter is the most agile of the four characters on offer, but he's also the weakest. He's the only character in the game that can perform a dash, but he seriously struggles when wielding the larger weapons in the game.

Max

Max's biggest downfall is that he's too slow. Ninjas, kickboxers, bikers and anything that owns an animation will cause him all kind of problems. This is counteracted somewhat by Sega blessing him with the strongest moves in the game – particularly his devastating Atomic Drop.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Where's part 4 Sega?

There are many reasons – the thumping score by Yuzo Koshiro and the awesome visuals, the pace of the game, the cool-looking bosses and brilliantly themed stages – why *Streets Of Rage* can be seen as a classic. The SNES bagged itself a home port of *Final Fight*, but it was a load of lazy crap. Despite not looking as refined as its Capcom rival, *Streets Of Rage* let two players work together to smash up a load of gangly goons. It's also shockingly violent (for its day), with stabbings, women in leather and fishnets attacking you with electric-charged bullwhips and some brutal moves that included administering several quick knees to the face.

Not Max

Looking like he hailed from a circus of strong men and with a pointlessly slow and laborious quick attack, we're all in agreement that Max is by far the worst character. The mantle for the best character though is a close toss up between Axel – for his balance, but losing points (not of his own doing) for looking like every other videogame character to ever throw a punch – and Skate for his speed and being able to beat up people seven times his Body Mass Index, but losing style kudos for dressing like Pac-Man. These pros and cons are just too equal to try to split hairs over, so we're going to bottle out and give the award to Blaze Fielding instead.

Grand Uppercut: Forward, Forward, B

Axel's Grand Uppercut is good for three reasons: first, it looks pretty darn impressive; second, it doesn't sap any of your energy if it connects with something; and third, it makes your Mega Drive say 'Grand Upper' (or 'Bare Knuckle' in the Japanese version) in a demonic tongue. The Grand Upper is easy to pull off and stupidly effective against enemies charging towards you. The actual move involves watching Axel scrape his knuckles along the pavement to create a concentrated charge of friction, with which he can then use to melt the face off of any person with the name Signal.

Shiva

Shiva is Mr X's mysterious underling and martial-arts muscle. Because he seems to have this pungent air of sensible about him (owing to the fact that he looks relatively normal in comparison to everyone else you've had to fight up until that point), you can tell right away that he's going to put up a bit of a fight. Strutting around calmly, draped entirely in black, Shiva's entire move arsenal consists of potent windmills and posing. Also, he can pretty much break all of your attack combos and he consistently threatens to make your life a complete misery with his annoyingly fatal 'Final Crash' move.

Stage 2: Construction Bridge

Starting on a street, then moving into a bar, to a baseball stadium and then to a theme park, on to a jungle section, a factory and a well-guarded HQ – to say *Streets Of Rage 2* is a boisterous beast is no understatement. But it's the bridge section that is the best stage. Crossing said bridge though is tough – it's full of guys on scrambler bikes trying to smite you with pipes – but by heck it's a lot of fun. And when you cross the bridge you end the stage in a construction site where you fight a guy with a jetpack called Jet. You're then forced to fight him using pretty much just flying kicks. Yes, it makes the fight look cheap, but it's the best way.

Co-op – two pads are better than none

To say that the true brilliance of *Streets Of Rage 2* becomes apparent exactly two minutes into plugging the stringy end of a second control pad into your Mega Drive and plonking what looks like a plastic kidney into the hands of a friend is no lie. *Streets Of Rage 2* contains one of the most comprehensive move lists of any side-scrolling beat-'em-up, leaving plenty of room for you and a pal to experiment with the action. Fighting for health-apples, flipping over adversaries like a pair of gymnasts and launching a Big Ben into a group of Talks, was truly one of the best multiplayer times to be had on the Mega Drive.

What the mags said... ages ago

Mean Machines

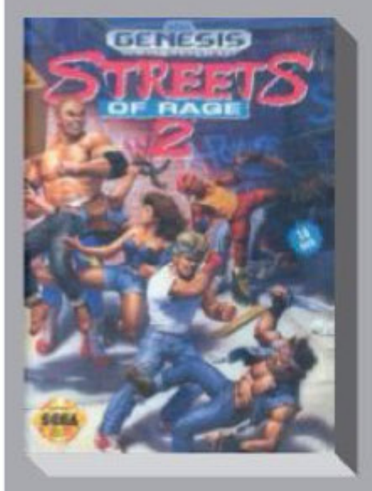
"Let's make no bones about it, *Streets Of Rage 2* is the greatest sequel we've seen for ages and is certainly the best-scrolling beat-'em-up ever to hit a home console."

Mega

"The best beat-'em-up on the Mega Drive. Just make sure you use the *hard* setting with no continues – it's for your own good"

What we think

Yup, certainly does. *Streets Of Rage 2*, along with *Sonic 2*, are the greatest Sega sequels ever made. And yes *Mean Machines*, it still can be considered the best-scrolling beat-'em-up to hit a home console – name one better, it's impossible.

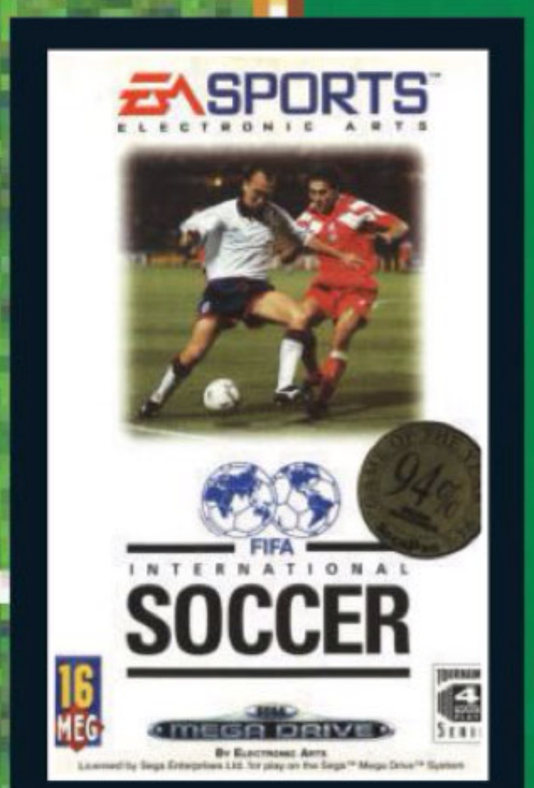


IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** GAME GEAR, SMS

THE MAKING OF

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** EXTENDED PLAY PRODUCTIONS/EA CANADA

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** SPORTS

While all the cool kids are playing FIFA 14, with his Mega Drive nestled under his arm Stuart Hunt calls for Matt Webster, the man who helped kick off the franchise 20 years ago

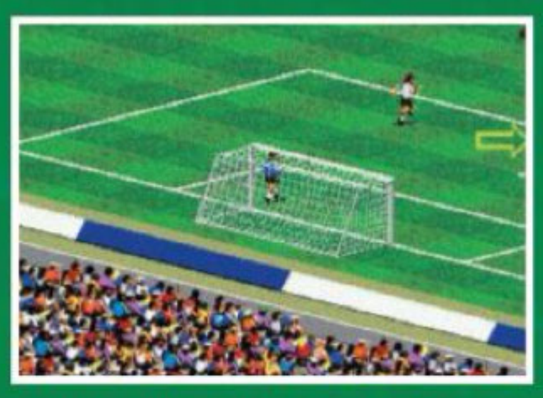
For many, the run up to *FIFA*'s annual release is seen as the biggest event in the videogame calendar; one that generates a global pre-season warm-up comprising excitement, fanaticism, competition against its long-standing rival in the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series and, hopefully, cause for celebration. A unique sports series, then, as it succeeds in capturing not just the action and emotions that occur on the pitch but also off it. Now seen as one of the biggest and most successful franchises in videogames, this month we look back at how this football legend was born.

Throughout the late Eighties and early Nineties EA had seen huge success releasing sports titles for the Genesis in the US, most notably with the popular *John Madden Football* and *NHL Hockey* franchises. Often regarded as a key title for Sega, the *Madden* games put an early chink in Nintendo's seemingly impenetrable armour and ultimately helped Sega to win majority share of the North American games market. Unsurprisingly, then, it was the success of these two sports series, combined with the fast growth of the console in the US and Europe, that would inform EA's decision to put a Mega Drive football game into production.

At the time, EA Sports was known as EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) and was being led by EA in San Mateo. It was here that a prototype football game was created utilising the *John Madden* engine, but its progress didn't get very far. Football wasn't as popular stateside as it was elsewhere in the world, and the project wasn't getting the attention it needed. With development moving slowly, EA enlisted the help of Brit Matt Webster to help get things back on track.

Matt, who is credited as associate producer on the game, was working at the company's newly established UK studio and began this most important of assignments by putting together a fresh new design idea for the game. And fresh it most certainly was. While most football videogames at the time adopted either side-on or top-down viewpoints, as utilised by *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer*, Matt settled on a rather unusual isometric perspective to represent the game. Considering that neither *John Madden Football* nor the *NHL Hockey* series had ever used such a unique viewpoint, top on our list of burning questions to ask Matt was to find out why this perspective was chosen, and whether any others were ever tested.

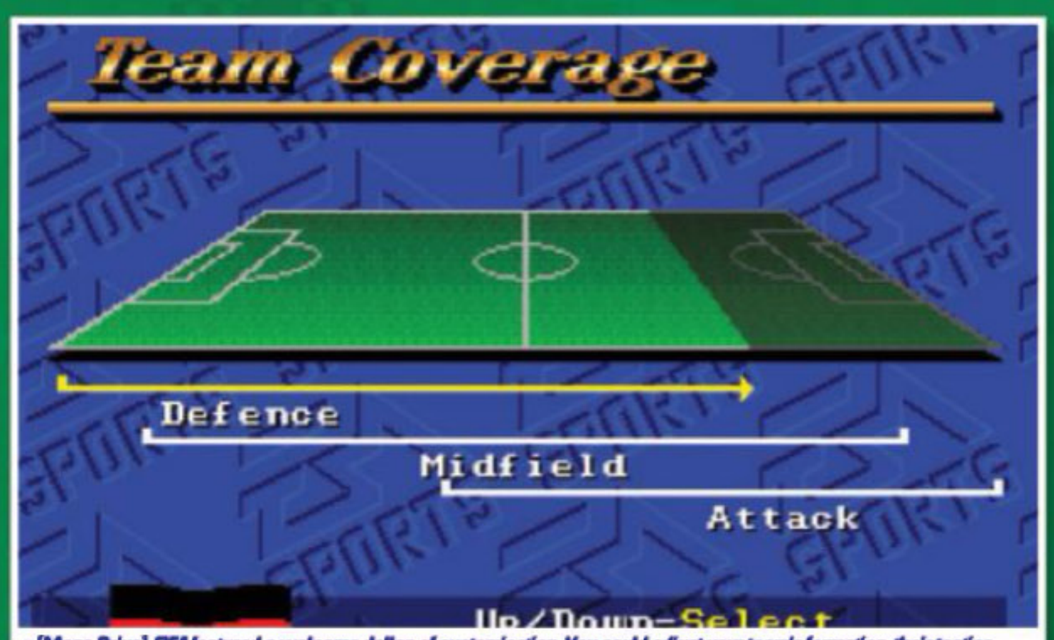
"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different," Matt told us. "But mostly because I thought that we'd be able to get a better game out of it. I had pulled together the original design and vision for the game, and we were working with a couple of guys



up in Widnes. They had a cobbled together Mega Drive development set built off a Commodore Amiga. We'd asked them to look at the pseudo-3D like *Madden,* the side-scroller that was most popular at the time, and an isometric view. When we looked at the prototypes running, the isometric was just the clear winner. When you looked at them together it was a no-brainer."

Once the isometric viewpoint was settled on, work began on putting together a prototype, and it was shortly after this that EA would decide to move production to EA Canada (EAC) in Vancouver.

Located in Burnaby, British Columbia, and currently employing around 2,000 staff, EA Canada is EA's oldest and largest studio, and the place where every main *FIFA* game has been developed. The massive campus, which houses three production studios, is equipped with the latest motion and facial capture technology to ensure that player animations look as believable as possible and nary a single hair on Rooney's newly fertilised head looks out of place.



» [Mega Drive] *FIFA* featured a welcome dollop of customisation. You could adjust your team's formation, their tactics and even the amount of space they covered on the pitch.

"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different"

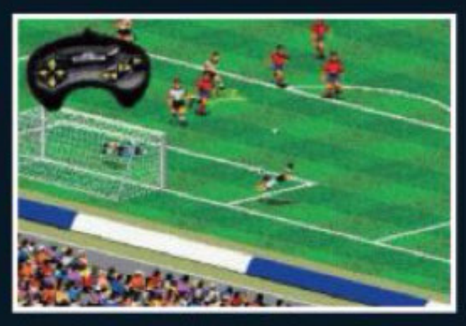
"EAC was fairly new to EA, created when EA acquired [Distinctive Software] in Vancouver," remembers Matt. "There was an experienced console team there ready to go, and we figured that we could get development running quicker if we moved it there. So we took the difficult decision to cease the development with the guys in Widnes and moved it to Vancouver. These decisions aren't easy, but both of these guys ended up accepting internal positions with the newly expanding UK Studio. The remote development was challenging, but nightly calls and weekly deliverables meant that we could stay on top of the development. The fact is that the team at EAC were very strong, experienced already with EA's amazing development tools that existed on the Sega console, so progress was fast."

Despite the obvious stresses that come with long-distance working relationships, with a fresh and innovative new plan of attack and a passionate captain leading the

...AND OFF THE PITCH

LIKE EA'S ESTABLISHED early Mega Drive sports franchises, the presentation throughout *FIFA International Soccer* was exemplary. It allowed players to tweak the rules of play, let you and three friends play together using EA's 'four-way play' adaptor, and featured an innovative action-replay mode that allowed you to stop the action and replay the last few moments of gameplay, among other things. The thought and extra effort made by the EA team to ensure that *FIFA* gave footy fans the complete sports package was undoubtedly a big factor in its success.

Curious as to whether there was anything the team had to drop from the original game, we put the question to Matt. "We ended up cutting out large amounts of variety in the crowd chants," he replied. "The things I remember feeling sorry about was the player-controlled celebration stuff. I really wanted to be able to ram it home when I scored against a friend, but it was great when that went in the following year!"

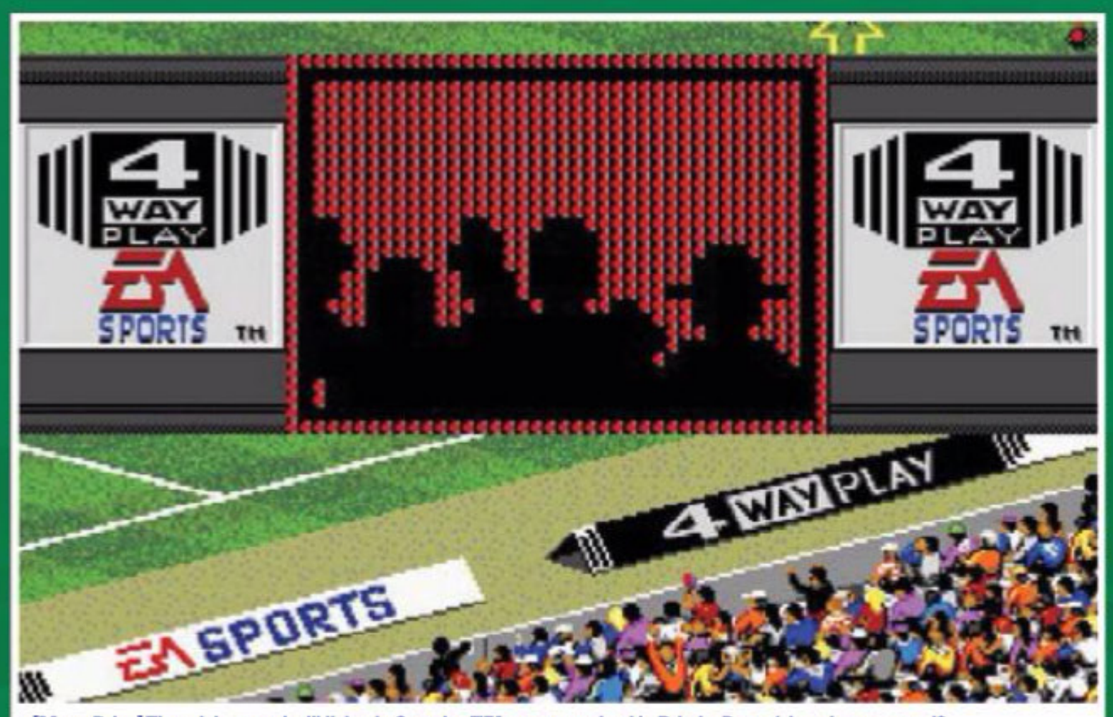


THE MAKING OF

experienced team of developers, development of EA's isometric football game began to take shape as the EAC team "immersed themselves in the sport" and set about creating an authentic football experience for gamers.

"We started with how the players looked as you controlled them," said Matt. "The isometric view meant that we could get a ton more detail than ever before. I was also able to tune the formation and AI editor, which was linked to where the ball was on the pitch. If the team responded in the right way to where the ball was, then everything flowed together to give a more realistic feel than had gone before. Audio then really came to the fore as we put the crowd chants into a footy game for the first time. The atmosphere really came through."

As well as trying to capture the look and atmosphere of football, the team at EAC also gave careful consideration to how the game would be played. Football games of the time typically assigned one button for passing, lobbing and shooting, but there was often a sense that this was more out of necessity than choice, be it technical limitations on the number of player animations or controller design restricting the number of buttons afforded to players. For *FIFA* the team utilised the power of Sega's 16-bit console and its three-button control pad to incorporate an array of moves into the game. This was something that was especially important to Matt.



» [Mega Drive] Though born and still living in Canada, *FIFA* was conceived in Britain. Doesn't it make you proud?

"As I said, I wanted to be able to do more than just kick the ball. To create moves you need to build up to a shot. I wanted that depth. Being able to see the team responding to the ball and player position, and seeing the action differently to that which had gone before, really showed that we had something more than our competitors. Gave us an edge."

What struck critics and fans most about *FIFA International Soccer* was the high level of presentation in the game, and this has remained a hallmark of the series. Though the player sprites were identical, they were extremely well animated, able to perform impressive flying headers, back heels, bicycle kicks and theatrical dives. And while the quasi-3D perspective can make it difficult to judge the position of the ball at times, the viewpoint did offer a good playing field for those players who liked to pass the ball and think about their approach. Indeed, rather than use whichever player had possession to dash towards the opposition's goal and shoot, *FIFA*'s design and gameplay encouraged players to take a more considered route towards goal. This was something Matt really wanted to instil into the gameplay.

"I felt that you could see more and get a deeper sense of building up a move with the isometric view," he explains. "The competition at the time was very much about twitch control of the way the player interacted with the ball. For me, at the time, I wanted to see across the pitch and have a sense of crossing

"We put the crowd chants in for the first time and the atmosphere really came through"

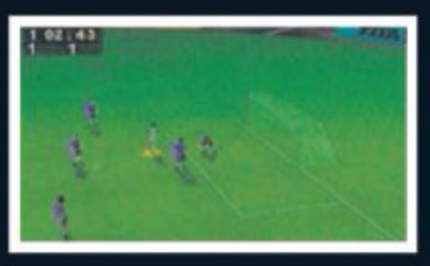
EVOLUTION OF FIFA

LOOKING BACK AT highlights from the past 20 years of videogaming's most successful football franchise...

1. FIFA International Soccer

2. FIFA Soccer 95

3. FIFA Soccer 96



4. FIFA 97

10. FIFA Football 2003

11. FIFA Football 2004

12. FIFA Football 2005

13. FIFA 06

14. FIFA 07

» [Mega Drive] US sports pundit Ron Barr was *FIFA*'s original face. He was a man of very few words and liked to repeat himself. Probably why he was dropped in *FIFA 95*.

the ball laterally ahead of a player to run on to."

For most of its development the game was known as *EA Soccer* within the walls of EAC. The FIFA licence actually came as a late but vital goal, and is now a badge of honour that the series has proudly worn for 18 years. For many, that close affiliation with football's governing body is what makes *FIFA* the only football game to play.

While the late FIFA affiliation meant that the series didn't really make best use of the licence until the release of *FIFA Soccer 95*, which introduced club teams, authentic kit colours and player names to the mix, securing FIFA's blessing was certainly an important moment for the franchise. It gave EA exclusive use of licensed clubs, kits and player likenesses, and, of course, the leagues – most importantly the English Premiership, which was established around the time that the original *FIFA* was in production. So just how difficult was it to convince FIFA to let EA use the licence for its game at the time?

"It wasn't hard at all," admits Matt. "I did a bit of research and found a name at FIFA of somebody connected with external relations, made the call and then passed it on to our marketing department to close out. At the time, FIFA wasn't a commercial heavyweight as it's become now. It was a natural addition to the EA Sports line-up so, in a way, having NHL and the NFL relationships helped us."

To date there have been 19 releases in the main *FIFA* series and around 30 spin-off games, with some of the latter falling inside the successful *FIFA Street* and *FIFA Manager* franchises. Selling more than 100 million copies worldwide, *FIFA* is now one of the bestselling videogame franchises ever, and in all that time has remained in the care of EA Canada.

Now a senior producer at Criterion Games, a subsidiary of EA, Matt no longer has anything to do with the *FIFA* series, but there's no doubt it's a series that he is incredibly proud to have played such a key role in creating.

Noticing that we're entering the last few moments of injury time, we therefore finish up by asking Matt for his thoughts on the last 18 years of the franchise and why he thinks it remains so popular today. "It's retained its easy-to-pick-up roots, something that a number of years ago it was derided for, but it's important that anyone can feel like they can get a game and score a goal. It's authentic, looks amazing and plays beautifully. You can't help but be entertained when you play a game. When you watch someone play, it looks like you're watching a real match. The commentary system is a total revelation. I'm in awe of what the team at EAC has achieved over the last [20] years or so with the game. It's remarkable."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1990

ROAD RASH
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MEGA DRIVE, MEGA-CD
YEAR: 1991

THE NEED FOR SPEED
SYSTEM: 3DO, DOS, PLAYSTATION, SATURN
YEAR: 1994

» [Mega Drive] The *FIFA* series kept the isometric engine for its entire tenure on the Mega Drive. Amazingly, the final release for the system was *FIFA 2000*.

5. FIFA 98: Road To World Cup

6. FIFA 99

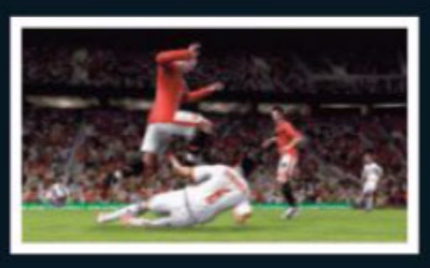
7. FIFA 2000

8. FIFA 2001

9. FIFA Football 2002

15. FIFA 08

16. FIFA 09

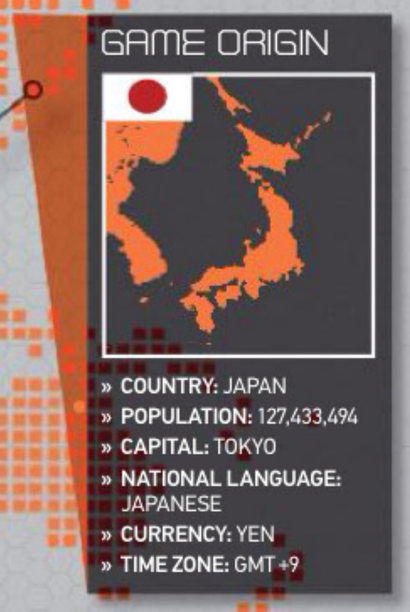


17. FIFA 10

18. FIFA 11

19. FIFA 14

IMPORT ONLY



INFO

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** MEGASOFT
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
» **ALSO ON:** GAME BOY, GAME GEAR
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25 ($55)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro

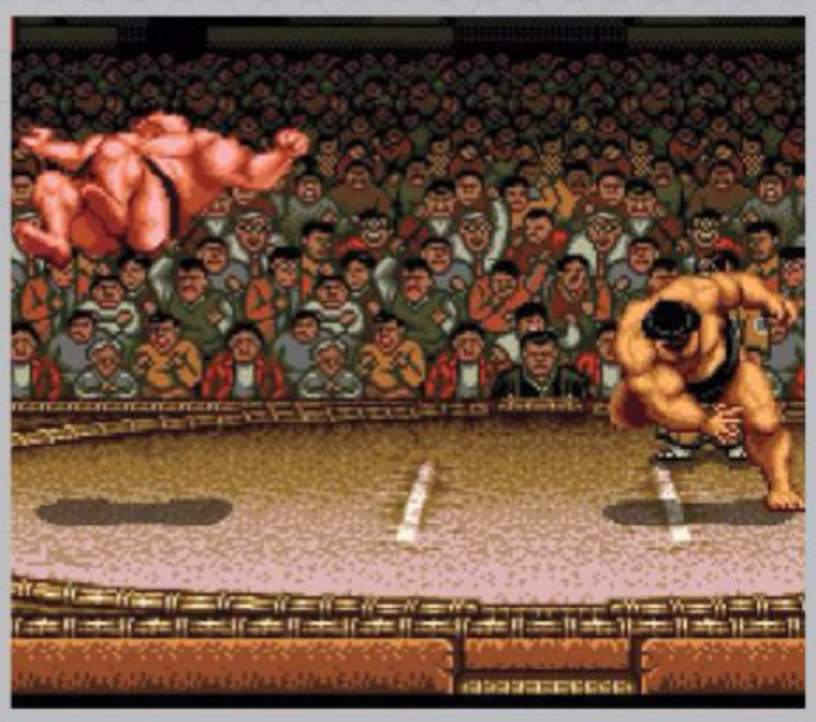
SYUSSEI OOZUMOU
RELEASED: **1984**
This is earliest sumo game we could find is this arcade game by *Double Dragon* makers Technos. With nice detailed visuals and an intuitive by frantic button mashing grappling system, it's a fairly solid recreation of the sport.

▼ Modern

WWE '13
RELEASED: **2012**
Coming up empty when trying to find a modern sumo videogame, we copped out and went with a western wrestling game instead. *WWE '13* is the latest entry in the popular *Smackdown* versus *Raw* series, we've not played it so can't tell you if it's any good.

AAH! HARIMANADA

» If football's a funny old game then, by comparison, sumo must be a hilariously ancient one. Stuart Hunt doesn't have the build or the hair for sumo, but does have pretty good dexterity and patience, two things you'll need to play this obscure Mega Drive fighter



» [Mega Drive] The human hammer throw competition was in full swing, first prize: a loincloth change.

The sport of sumo wrestling is grossly under-represented in videogames. In fact, this month's title is the first we've come by – though we're sure there are more out there. Actually, let us don our research hats and go investigating… In the meantime, here are some sumo-related facts to keep you entertained, some of which may or may not be true.

1. Sumo is the national sport of Japan. 2. It dates back to the Edo period of Japan and was played to entertain the Gods. 3. The game is traditionally played by large men in loincloths, each of which is worth thousands of pounds. 4. There is an alternative version of the sport called Suitmo which is played by tall skinny men wearing sharp black tailored suits.

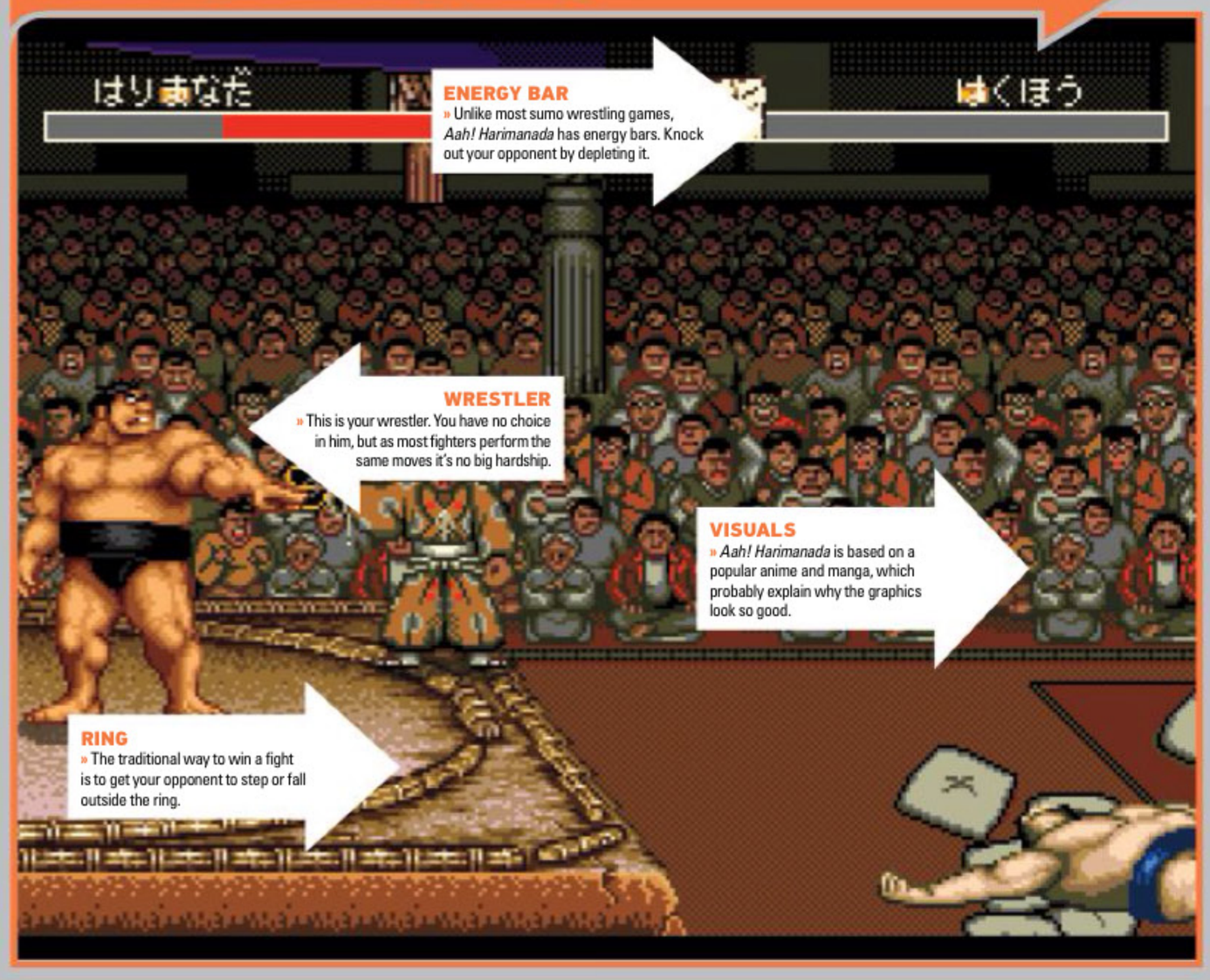
Right, sorry about that, we're back. Well, would you believe it, it turns out that there are actually a lot more sumo videogames than we thought, around 20 in fact, and most have appeared on Nintendo consoles and didn't see release outside of Japan. The one we want to draw your attention to is *Aah! Harimanada*, which appeared on the Mega Drive in Japan and was based on a popular manga and anime. It was also developed by Megasoft, developer of one of the Mega Drive's greatest action games – *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master.*

There are three versions of *Aah! Harimanada*, one for the Game Boy and another for the Game Gear. The Mega Drive version is often criticised by westerners for being ferociously tough. As such, there are many who will warn you off it. And initially we were in agreement. However, after discovering who was behind the game we decided to stick with it, and were glad we did. Simply spamming the fire buttons won't get you off the second bout, but with only three buttons to worry about, *Aah! Harimanada*'s combat system is simple to figure out, and when you do it gets a helluva lot more entertaining.

» [Mega Drive] The wrestlers can perform special moves, like this one here. Clearly the developers weren't aiming to create a factually accurate sumo sim.

» [Mega Drive] We're not going to say what this guy's cheeks and nose look like; we're way more mature than that.

GO DEEPER A Sumo Lesson



"With only three buttons on the Mega Drive, the game's combat system is relatively simple to figure out"

Aah! Harimanada takes dramatic licence with the sport it's based on by playing more like a one-on-one fighter in the mould of *Street Fighter II*. The wrestlers have energy bars and special moves, and matches can be won by pushing or throwing your opponent out of the ring or depleting their energy bar to get a knock out. The game also has an air of *Punch-Out!!* too as you're only given the choice of one fighter, and you must help him climb the ranks of various sumo wrestling circuits (that's the impression we got, anyway). Before fights, a screen flashes up showing the stats of you and your opponent, though as it's all written in Japanese, that's probably only useful if you speak the language.

As we said, the control system is spread across three buttons, which makes it pretty simple to grasp. You have a light attack, heavy attack and a grapple which can be used to pull and push your opponent. Depending on the opponent, some fights can be won by madly mashing away at the two attack buttons, but other wrestlers are just too strong and will quickly shave chunks off your fighter's energy bar if you decide to go toe-to-toe with them. Against these stronger opponents, it is best to block their attacks (blocking is performed by pressing the D-pad away from your opponent) and force them to the edge of the mat. Initiating a grapple there will cause both men to lock horns and by madly smashing away at the buttons you will hopefully throw your opponent out of the ring. Some of the heavier set fighters are difficult (maybe even impossible) to defeat in this way though, and in this instance the best tactic is generally to exploit their slow speed and just go for a KO.

Though the fighting does get repetitive and there are a lot of opponents to face (we got to about thirty, and it seemed like there were more), *Aah! Harimanada* has a real addictive quality. This is basically owing to the random skills and abilities of the opponents, the tense and unpredictable nature of the sport and the fact that fights can be over in seconds. Add some lovely looking chunky arcade visuals (though the music and sound FX are not all that great) and *Aah! Harimanada* is by far the best sumo wrestling videogame we've played. [It's the *only* sumo wrestling videogame we've played -Ed]

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY

STREET FIGHTER II (PLAYING AS E. HONDA)

» It's obviously not sumo wrestling but as we're struggling to find any sumo wrestling videogame that was released in Europe (do get in touch if you can find one, there's some random bit of office tat in it for you) just play *Street Fighter II* and select E. Honda. With special moves and energy bars, *Aah! Harimanada* feels a little bit *Street Fighter* anyway.

The Revenge Of Shinobi

Instant Expert

Due to Sega cheekily borrowing the likenesses of various pop culture icons for many of the game's end-of-level guardians, five slightly different iterations of the game have found release.

The Revenge Of ***Shinobi*** was released in 1989. It was directed by creator Noriyoshi Ohba with Shizuoka Taro (*Space Harrier II*) working as lead programmer.

The game's revered soundtrack was written by Yuzo Koshiro. Working freelance for Sega at the time, he went on to compose for a clutch of Sega classics, most notably the *Streets Of Rage* series.

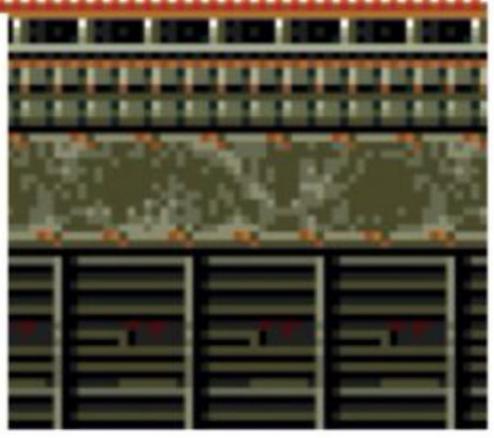
There have been 13 *Shinobi* games in total, but Joe has only appeared in six of them. This tally includes the Western version of MD *Shadow Dancer*, which substituted out Joe's son for Joe.

The series has seen Joe's son, Hayate, and Joe's grandson (who is also named Joe) appear as central characters.

In 2002, THQ and Sega released a Game Boy Advance game titled *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. Despite what its title insinuates, it is neither a port nor a follow up to the Mega Drive game.

The Revenge Of Shinobi did find its way to arcades courtesy of Sega's Mega-Tech arcade board, which was based on Mega Drive hardware.

With five iterations, ninjitsu spells and no shortage of memorable bosses, Stuart Hunt dons a white Shinobi Shozoku and pieces together everything you need to know about Joe Mushashi's second, and best, mission



That *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is still considered by many to be one of the best action games to ever find release on the Mega Drive is a true testament to its brilliance. Released over 20 years ago, some six months or so after the Mega Drive's official launch in Japan, Joe Musashi's second adventure (entitled *Super Shinobi* in Japan) has gone on to become one of the machine's most enduring titles, and serves as conclusive proof that the best games don't necessarily come to us towards the end of a console generation.

Released in the wake of *Space Harrier* and *Super Thunderblade* – two pretty lacklustre Sega Mega Drive arcade sequels – *The Revenge Of Shinobi* came to effortlessly leave its mark on Mega Drive owners. This was largely thanks to its canny blend of arcade action, its jaw-dropping visuals, having one of the most memorable videogame soundtracks of all time and also for some cheeky unlawful impersonating and sometimes blatant use of a few well-established pop culture icons for its enemies and bosses, which forced the developer to make a series of revisions to the game to ensure they avoided litigation (turn the page to find out more).

It may surprise some of you to learn that the most recent revision of the game occurred as late as last year when the game was unshackled from copyright handcuffs, which was due to its inclusion of Spider-Man (which Sega no longer holds the videogame rights to – it's now Activision), and saw its first downloadable release through Nintendo's Virtual Console service, marking the fifth and very likely last incarnation of the game to find release.

Out with the old, in with the new

With its history rooted in the short-frills nature of arcade gaming, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* can be seen as one of the first – and arguably best – examples of Sega daring to do something a little different with one of its established arcade brands. The game was directed and overseen by *Shinobi* creator Noriyoshi Ohba, who, with the help of his small team, set about pushing the franchise in a subtle new direction. That's not to say *The Revenge Of Shinobi* eschews its arcade heritage, rather it cleverly carries over the iconic parts from the original coin-op (the use of magic, the many Western pop culture influences and memorable bosses) but omits those elements that feel inherent to arcade gaming (having no health bar, simplistic level structure and gameplay). In doing this Sega created a game that felt bigger, better and more suited to console gaming, while at the same time it offered a true showcase of the impressive technical capabilities of its new 16-bit machine.

For the benefit of those not familiar with the series, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s story followed on

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of The Revenge Of Shinobi. How many have you seen?

» Joe Musashi

» Blue Lobster

» Infantry Grunt

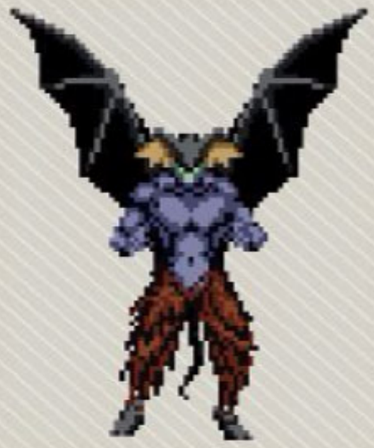
» Zeed Ninja - Wings

» Purple Phoenix

» Zeed Ninja - Green

» Kasumi

» Doppelgänger - Batman


» Doppelgänger - Devilman

» The Terminator

» The Terminator - Cyborg

» Infantry Grunt - Grenadier

» Shadow Dancer

» Pink Dragon

» Red Dragon

» Flamethrower Grunt

» Attack Dog

» Rambo

» Shogun - Red

» Blue Dragon

» Shogun - Blue

» Zeed Ninja - Black

» Kasumi - Disguise

» Doppelgänger - Spider-Man

» Infantry Grunt - Ground

» Supercomputer

» Neo Zeed Leader

» Godzilla

The Revenge Of Shinobi

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

"One of the most outstanding games on the Mega Drive... The graphics are exquisite, the music superb, and the gameplay out of this world!"

- **MEAN MACHINES** 1990

directly from the original. It saw the return of the series' recurring antagonist, a shady criminal organisation known as Zeed, that decides to exact revenge on Joe after he foils their plans at the end of the first game. Newly reformed, now under the slightly flashier-sounding name Neo Zeed, they attack Joe's Oboro ninja clansman, kill his master and kidnap his girlfriend and bride-to-be, Naoko. Understandably, Joe is left a little annoyed by all of this, so he sets out on a mission to seek some counter-vengeance by travelling to the Zeed's eight hideouts to defeat its new leaders, put a stop to their new reign of terror and save his girl.

Change is definitely a good thing

The sequel made a number of changes to the existing *Shinobi* template. Perhaps the most noteworthy alteration was the dropping of the previous 'free all the hostages to progress' gameplay. Instead, it was made simpler with Joe having to find and reach the exit to finish the stage. This was made challenging, though, through more intricate level design that included environ-based puzzles and the odd tricky platform section to test players. The game's levels were more varied too, with Joe's mission taking him from idyllic locales in Japan, a dazzling nightclub, the top of a speeding commuter train, and ending in a well-fortified marine base. This sense of variety bled into other areas of the game too, with Joe given a much deeper combat system to play with.

While he kept his shurikens and katana (which he uses for close-quarters combat) from the first game, his ninjitsu spells were now split between offensive and defensive attacks. Players were also forced to conserve shurikens (Joe had an unlimited reserve in the first game), which also helped to imbue a subtle sense of strategy.

As well these various gameplay tweaks, the sequel also boasted better visuals through its great use of the Mega Drive's powerful M68000 processor, and came packaged with what many regard as one of the single greatest videogame soundtracks ever. Written by famed videogame composer Yuzo Koshiro, who later composed equally resplendent scores for the *Streets Of Rage* games and *Beyond Oasis (The Story Of Thor)*, the sublime soundtrack to the game is a real audio treat, and helps to further cement *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s status as a true videogame classic and the very best episode in the series.

» [Mega Drive] Certain stages revert back to the dual-plane mechanic utilised in the original *Shinobi* coin-op.

Twin Galaxies High Scores

NTSC
- **NAME:** ANTONIO R. FILHO
- **POINTS:** 1,070,600

PAL
- **NAME:** ANDREW PETE MEE
- **POINTS:** 37,600

NTSC
- **NAME:** DANIEL C TEIXEIRA
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 16.13 MINS

PAL
- **NAME:** ASHLEY JACKSON
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 26:03 MINS

Joe's Ninja Arsenal

As well as his katana sword, Joe's not short of some fancy ninja armaments and spells to aid him on his revenge mission

»Shurikens /Throwing Knives
Joe's standard long-range weapons; conserving them is vital.

»POW
Increases the power of shurikens/ throwing knives so they can break through enemy defences.

»Ikazuchi
A thunder spell that surrounds Joe with lightning bolts to protect him from enemy attacks.

»Karyu
A spell from the first game. It causes dragons made of flames to rise from the ground and attack all foes.

»Fushin
Gives Joe enhanced agility to get around the game's tricky platform sections.

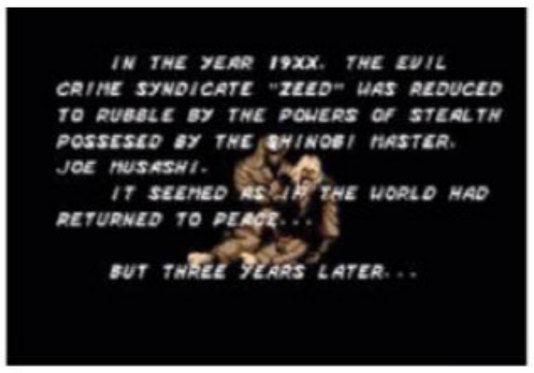
»Mijin
This offensive spell causes Joe to explode, attacking everything on screen. This is at the cost of a life.

Memorable Moments

Our favourite bits from The Revenge Of Shinobi

Flashy flash screen

The game's title screen shows a picture of martial arts actor, Sonny Chiba, and is taken from the television series *Kage No Gundan*. Oddly, it gives the impression that Sonny is seen dressed in a black Shinobi Shozoku, despite the fact Joe's attire is white.



Scene setting

The intro offers us our first true snippet of information about Joe's past. He's from a clan of ninjas known as the Oboro and was due to wed Naoko. That was before Neo Zeed kidnapped her, attacked his clan and murdered his master.

Whiter than white

TROS marks the first time in the series that we see Joe wearing his lustrous white Shinobi Shozoku. It's certainly a far more striking costume than the boring grey and yellow number from the first game.

Joe be nimble

It's fair to say that, in the original *Shinobi*, Joe wasn't the most agile of ninjas. This point was addressed in the sequel, where Joe was given a handy but tricky-to-perform double-jump that enabled him to navigate around the levels easier.

Spell casting

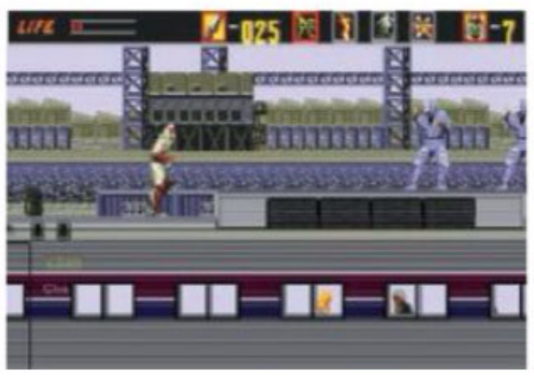
While Joe's Ninjitsu spells were in the first game, Sega was starting to think a lot harder about how it could better implement them in the sequel. It stumbled on incorporating defensive, as well as offensive, spells in the game.

Panic at the disco

Perhaps the most memorable boss battle in the game is the fight against the yellow *Shadow Dancer* ninja in a nightclub at the end of the second stage. An inspired mix of visual effects and music make this a standout moment.

Sonic Boom

The soundtrack is widely considered to be one of the best videogame scores of all time. It's a joyous blend of emotive Japanese compositions and techno beats, and serves as another fitting example of the series' 'East meets West' theme.



A visual treat

With its nicely detailed characters and variety of levels that made brilliant use of the Mega Drive's parallax scrolling capabilities, it's easy to see why the game became so popular on its release. This or *Altered Beast*? No contest.

Unlicensed to kill

TROS is famed for its unauthorised use of various pop culture icons in the game, of which include Godzilla, Spider-Man and Batman. When their respective owners found out, Sega was forced to alter the offending sprites.

Getting in a muddle

The levels in the game are larger than those in the prequel and many contain subtle puzzle or platformer elements. The game concludes with a tough final stage that sees Joe getting lost in a labyrinth inside Neo Zeed's marine hideout.

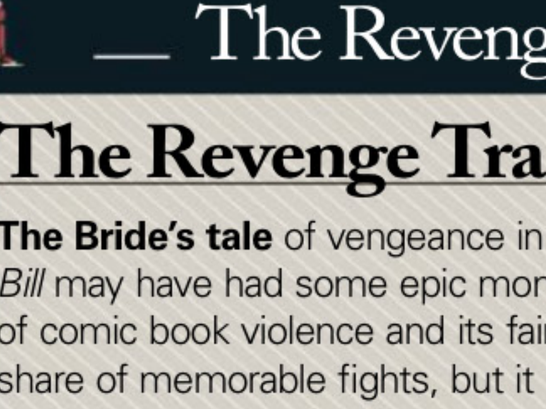
Happy endings

The final boss fight sees Joe racing to defeat the Neo Zeed leader before Naoko, who's trapped in a cage, is crushed by the lowering stone ceiling. It's a dramatic conclusion to the game, and a final and fitting test of skill for any *Shinobi* fan.

There are two endings to The Revenge Of Shinobi - good and bad. The good ending is widely considered one of the hardest videogame challenges, and is your reward for defeating the Neo Zeed leader before the ceiling flattens Joe's fiancée. If you've managed to see the good ending, well done – you may now change your name to Joe Mushashi by Deed Poll.

The Revenge Trail

The Bride's tale of vengeance in *Kill Bill* may have had some epic moments of comic book violence and its fair share of memorable fights, but it pales in comparison to Joe's mission of reckoning. We plot his bloody trail for revenge after his Oboro clansmen are attacked, his master killed and his girlfriend kidnapped.



01 Ibaraki Province, Japan

The first stage plonks Joe in familiar ninja surroundings. Featuring bamboo thickets and shoin-zukuri architecture, Joe must battle ninjas and attack dogs to reach The House Of Confusion – which, oddly, isn't all that confusing when you arrive there. With switches and a hidden underground passageway, it demonstrates straight away the subtle gameplay changes Sega made to the gameplay.

Boss: Blue Lobster

This boss may only have one tedious attack but his tough samurai armour makes him no pushover. His weak spot is his head, which he leaves open every time he makes his attack. Make easy work of him by repeatedly dodging his sword attack with a timely double-jump shuriken spray attack – just ensure you've been conserving those shurikens.

02 Tokyo

The first section is probably one of the trickiest in the game. Set against a canyon, Joe must rely on his ninja agility to get around by jumping between logs as they travel down a waterfall. The second is simple straightforward side-scrolling beat-'em-up action, taking place on the dark streets and rooftops of Tokyo where martial artists and female assassins dressed as nuns try to take him down.

Boss: Shadow Dancer

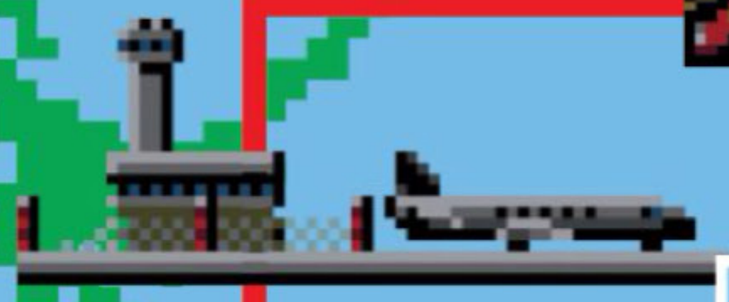
This stage ends in an impressive-looking nightclub where Joe must face off against the Shadow Dancer, a yellow ninja who can create a trail of doppelgangers of himself like some kind of human ninja centipede. Each doppelganger takes one hit to kill, and when he's down to his true form he blends into his dark surroundings like a chameleon.

03 Military Base

Enemies on this level include armed guards, more attack mutts and flamethrower-wielding *Rambo* lookalikes – although these are substituted for bald guys in later versions. This section is notable for being the first of two stages in the game that pay homage to the dual-plane mechanic from the first *Shinobi*, with Joe jumping between the foreground and background to take out his enemies. The second section is set aboard an airship, and Joe must be mindful of the ship's airlocks, which pull him out the stage at the cost of a life.

Boss: Supercomputer

One of the more unusual bosses in the game is this large laser-guarded supercomputer, which is running from a human brain. The brain serves as the rather obvious weak spot of this boss, and must have been extracted from a nosey idiot ninja as it keeps popping in and out of its protective metal casing to take a look at the action, which is Joe's time to strike.



04 Detroit

This stage takes place in the rundown-looking Detroit, and has obviously been inspired by Paul Verhoeven's bleak vision of the city in *Robocop*. The second stage, which takes place inside some kind of automobile manufacturing factory, also riffs off *The Terminator*, with Joe avoiding crushing machinery as he works through the level's maze-like design using his ninja agility and the environment to find the exit.

Boss: The Terminator

Signalling the first of *TROS*'s many litigation-baiting bosses, this familiar-looking muscle man draws things to a memorable close on the fourth stage. With giant chest and sunglasses, this car-tossing boss is clearly based on Arnold Schwarzenegger. However, when he gets hit he slowly turns green with rage like The Incredible Hulk... that is until his skin breaks away to reveal a T-800-style endoskeleton, which then explodes.

06 Chinatown

Similar to the second stage of the Tokyo level, this level sees Joe beating down martial art gangs and more fake nuns through the dimly lit streets of Chinatown. The second section sees Joe fighting ninjas on top of a speeding train while avoiding steel obstructions – get hit once and it wipes out a life.

It's certainly a tense and tricky level to beat, but the setting, coupled with the two-part boss fight that ends this stage, makes it one of the standout levels in the game.

Boss: Spider-Man

Marvel's mouthy web-slinger makes a cameo at the end of the scene, in what is possibly the Mega Drive's first ever WTF moment. Spidey sticks himself to the ceiling and fires down webs to trap Joe, occasionally dropping down to hit him. Sega actually held the licence to Spider-Man when it produced *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin*, so Spidey appears in every version of the game bar the most recent VC release. His proper Marvel signed-off appearances, though, are found in versions 1.02 onwards – distinguished by a copyright message on the start screen.

Boss: Batman/Devilman

To at least keep things fair, Sega decided not to discriminate between the two big comic book publishers, so after Spidey has been beaten in comes Bats to finish the fight. The Caped Crusader only appears in version 1.0. From 1.01 onwards Sega replaced him with Devilman, a character based on a Japanese manga who actually went on to appear in two of his own videogames.

08 Neo Zeed Marine Stronghold

This is it – the final stage of the game. Yet for all its promise and cinematic buildup it ends on a bit of a frustrating note. The first section is very similar to the New York docklands stage, and sees Joe battling to reach Neo Zeed's heavily guarded stronghold. Then, once inside, he is greeted by a perplexing maze of entrances and exits, and must find the correct doorway that will lead him to his betrothed.

Boss: Neo Zeed Leader

The Neo Zeed leader is basically just an evil troll doll, attacking Joe with his weird sentient wig, which he either slaps forward like a wet towel or tosses like a hirsute boomerang. Defeating him is pretty easy, though. Simply get in close, duck when he makes his wet towel attack and give him a good kicking. Defeating him before the stone ceiling crushes Naoko to reward you with the good ending is a little trickier, however.

05 Area Code 818

According this stage's title, this level takes place in California. The first section sees Joe fighting to reach the top of a skyscraper fortified with armed guards and gun emplacements, while the second section (which feels very reminiscent of the first level of *Dragon Ninja*) is set on a freeway. Here, Joe fights nun-dressed assassins and soldiers while avoiding speeding traffic.

Boss: Ballistic Missile

This end boss is a typical *Shinobi* guardian: a giant mode of transportation. This speeding ballistic missile carrier pegs down the freeway and Joe must stop it before it reaches its destination. To do this Joe must destroy the three bulbous weak spots found on its roof. This won't be easy, however, as they're protected by cannons and an electric pulse that travels down the entire length of the carrier.

07 New York

No videogame featuring ninjas would be complete without a stage set in New York, and that's exactly where the penultimate level is set. Weirdly enough, perceptive *Shinobi* fans may notice that this stage looks very similar to the second stage of *Shinobi*. It takes place around the city's docklands, with Joe avoiding a drenching by jumping onto dinghies and bollards. The second part sees Joe inside a container ship full of armed guards. Wonder what they could be hiding in there that's so important?

Boss: Godzilla

It's Godzilla, of course. Use his sluggish speed to your advantage by drawing him to one end of the screen, attacking his head while avoiding his fire-breath attack, and then double-jumping over his tiny cranium to repeat the process at the other end. In version 1.03, Sega replaced Godzilla with a giant dinosaur skeleton.

CASTLE OF ILLUSION

SCREW FANTASIA, HERE'S THE REAL DEAL

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY

After ripping into the vomit-inducing *Fantasia* last month, we felt it was only fair to restore peace to the affronted Mickey Mouse videogame community.

Despite arriving early on in the console's life, it's quite astonishing to realise that Mickey's very first Mega Drive outing remains one of the greatest platformers ever to appear on the 16-bit console.

Just look at this screenshot. Back in 1990 this was cutting edge stuff, and even today it manages to hold its own against more recent platformers. Mickey is a masterpiece in sprite design, and while his animation routines now look a little ropey, he's still filled with more charm and character than a dozen Ratchet and Clanks. Indeed, when *Castle Of Illusion* first appeared it was so impressive that you could have sworn you were taking part in an interactive cartoon, such was its beauty.

Outstanding graphics told only half the story, as, with saccharine soundtrack in tow, *Castle Of Illusion* presented you with some of the finest level design around. Granted it wasn't a tough game to complete, but the beautifully crafted stages ensured that you wanted to return to them again and again and again. But then, Sega had crammed so much variety into each and every stage that you just had to revisit them – if only so you could take everything in.

For example, one minute you're being chased down a hill by a huge apple, the next you're leaping into a giant's cup of tea and swimming around in the hot brew, while later stages saw you swinging from light switches, taking massive leaps of faith over immense holes and daintily stepping past cute spiders whilst making your way through the cobweb-infested level that we've shown here.

Crikey, we've run out of space and haven't even had a chance to cover *Castle Of Illusion*'s many bosses. Just take our word for it that they are as challenging as they are inventive. Enough already, just play the damn thing and wash away those *Fantasia* memories forever.

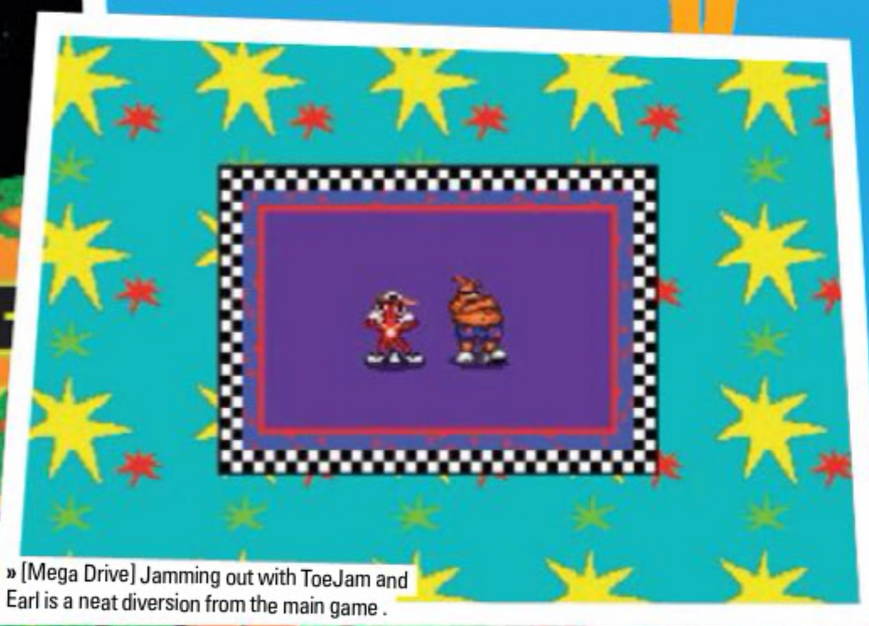
THE MAKING OF

ToeJam & Earl

There are aliens and then there are **ToeJam and Earl**, the hippest cruisers of the galaxy who like nothing better than to rap while cavorting with earthlings. Join him wild ass **Greg Johnson** demonstrates how to strut some funky moves

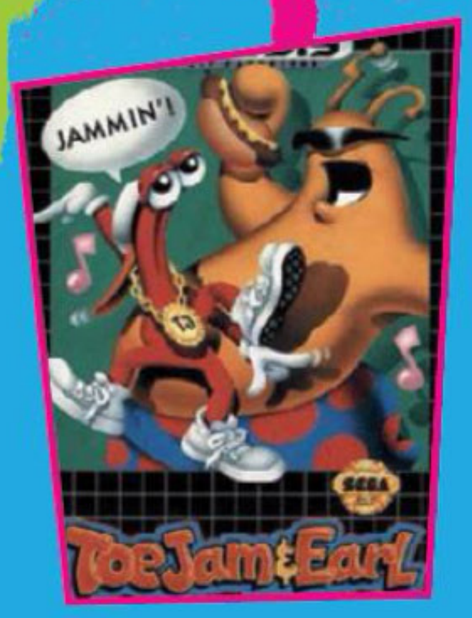
THE MAKING OF: TOEJAM AND EARL

» [Mega Drive] The fanbase has just discovered **Retro Gamer**'s secret hideout.


» [Mega Drive] Jamming out with ToeJam and Earl is a neat diversion from the main game.

» Don't go to this dentist – he's insane. Look at those eyes!

» [Mega Drive] The infamous split-screen mode of which the team is so proud.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS

» **PLATFORM:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE

» **RELEASED:** 1991

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

We've seen some crazy aliens in our time. Mechanical beings, green-headed men, blobs of goo and even flesh-eating terrifying beasts, which all fall under the alien category, but none quite match the eccentricity of ToeJam and Earl, the red and orange duo with their love of rap and fast food and a laid-back approach to life. The epitome of cool, these aliens know how to dance, enjoy life and rap with the best of them, even if their piloting skills clearly need some improvement. Yet their distinctive names came about purely accidentally.

"I don't think I've mentioned this before, but my old game development partner Mark had a bit of a hearing problem, and when we were first making the game I told him that the names of the characters were FlowJam and Whirl, which seemed like good hip-hop dance names," remembers Greg Johnson. "Mark heard me wrong and coded them as ToeJam and Earl. I only noticed it when we were showing the game to Sega, and they liked the names so we decided to keep them." When it comes down to their bizarre appearance, it really is the stuff that dreams are made of. "When I was little, my favourite stuffy was this little red giraffe named Puffy Muggins," recalls Greg. "Puffy was missing a leg and his mouth had come off. When I thought of the ToeJam character I was having a dream about Puffy Muggins. He was being chased by this giant orange marshmallow creature that wanted to eat him and everything else. It was horrible; I woke up shouting Puffy's name. That's where they both came from."

Greg Johnson and Mark Voorsanger were the duo behind the *ToeJam & Earl* series, with Greg being responsible for the art, design and voices and Mark programming every inch of code. The two had formed their own company in 1989 called Johnson Voorsanger Productions, which was later renamed ToeJam & Earl Productions once the characters became more popular. It was a relationship that proved fruitful, with the duo frequently bouncing ideas off each other. As a result, the two wanted to create a game that they could play together during development.

"I always played Big Earl, and Mark always played ToeJam – he's a little shorter than I am and he wore this crazy medallion. We would high-five when we did something good, or say stuff like, 'Yo, ToeJam,' when we came back together again. Then Mark said, 'Hey, why don't we just put that into the game?' I said, 'No way! I was just thinking the same thing!' I'm still trying to figure out if I was the one being psychic or if it was Mark."

> "IT TOOK FOUR POLICE TO DRAG ME OUT OF THE INTERSECTION WHERE I WAS COMMUNICATING WITH PLANET FUNKOTRON"

The game itself saw ToeJam and Earl crash land on Earth, scattering ship parts across the globe. In order to return home to Planet Funkotron, the alien duo need to locate all ten parts to reassemble their ship. With a gameplay style heavily inspired by *Rogue* – "Actually it was a rip-off. Don't tell anyone." – either character could be controlled across the levels, which are littered with presents to help you on your way. The content of the presents is a mystery but varies from tomatoes for weapons to rocket skates for super speed and even Icarus wings.

When it came to deciding what was included as a power-up, Greg came up with an ingenious method of selection.

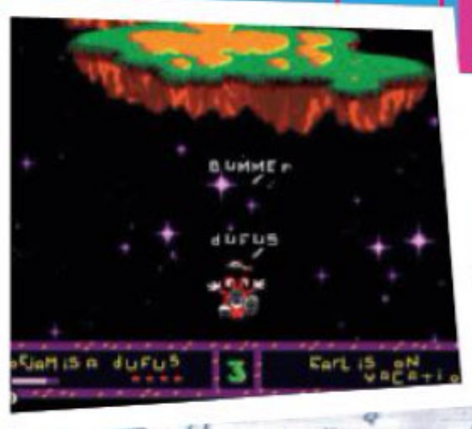
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

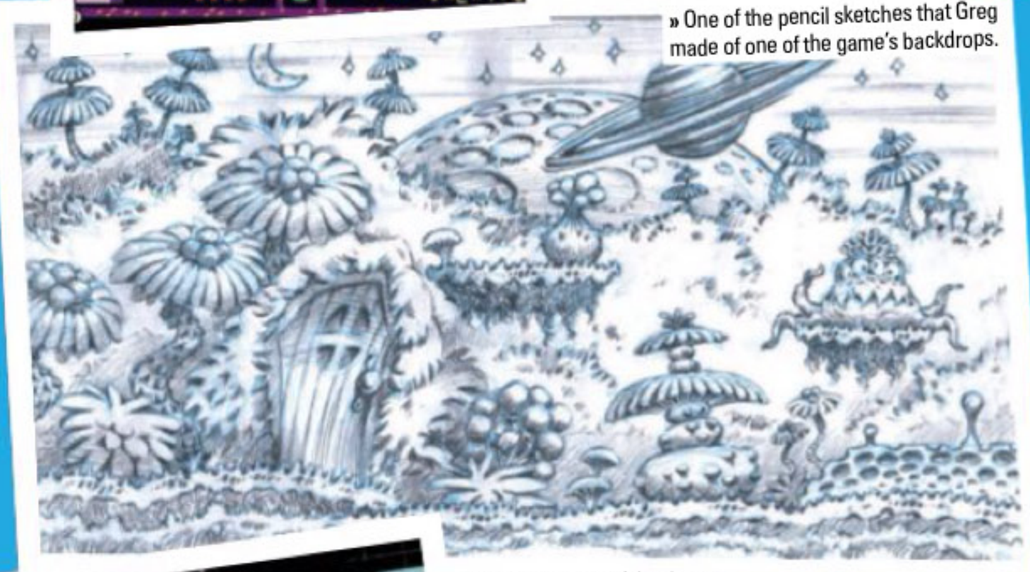
TOEJAM & EARL IN PANIC ON FUNKOTRON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

ORLY'S DRAW-A-STORY
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1999

TOEJAM & EARL III: MISSION TO EARTH
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2002

THE MAKING OF





» One of the pencil sketches that Greg made of one of the game's backdrops.

» Painted artwork of the three main characters in *ToeJam & Earl III*: ToeJam, Earl and female protagonist Latisha.

READY, AIM, TOMATOES!

Not content with strutting their stuff on Planet Earth, ToeJam and Earl took time out to feature in a lightgun mini-game created for Sega's new invention: the Menacer. "When Sega released their Menacer gun they asked us if we could whip together a *TJ&E* game in a hurry. We said sure, and put that together in just a month or so using mostly art from game one. It was lots of fun. Mark and me had shooting competitions every day. I still say I would have won if he didn't stand so close to the screen."

> "THE ONLY THING I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GENESIS WAS THAT IT WOULD BREAK EASILY WHEN YOU THREW IT"

"I came up with about 250 ideas for presents, but I could only fit about 30 of them into the game. So I wrote all of my ideas on Post-its and put them on the floor sticky-side up. Then I put my cat down in the room, and slammed the door. I took the first 25 Post-its that stuck to her feet. I use that method quite a lot, actually. It works pretty good, but sometimes it's hard to get her back because she goes under the sofa."

Of course, there are plenty of enemies out to stop you, like crazed shoppers, Cupid, the insane dentist, a phantom ice cream truck and our particular favourite, the Wahini, otherwise known as the hula girls who would force any nearby characters to dance. Leave ToeJam or Earl to their own devices and they will jam out. All music featured in the game was penned by John Baker, who would listen to recordings of Greg Johnson singing into a tape recorder and then re-create the songs in the computer.

With two characters at your disposal, you don't have to embark on the quest alone, which is where the technical marvel of the split-screen two-player mode comes in. Claimed by Sega to be an impossible feat, it was nevertheless implemented by Mark without any technical hiccups. "The Genesis was a great little machine. Everyone at the time said that you couldn't do the split-screen trick, but Mark pulled it off – even though it was his first time programming for the Genesis. The only thing I didn't like so much about the Genesis was that it would break easily when you threw it. Mark got annoyed when I would 'fix' his code every time he went to the bathroom. I got pretty good at ducking out of the way when I'd see the Genesis flying at me. We went through probably eight or nine machines."

While the random map generator received a lot of praise for keeping the game fresh, this was a freak occurrence. "We had spent a lot of time making the maps perfect, and then, when I was demonstrating a Big Earl dance move for Mark, I spilled some soda on his keyboard," confesses Greg. "I don't know exactly how it happened, but it caused a bug that made the maps random. It was really cool. The only bad thing was that sometimes the random generator made the maps into weird shapes. For some reason, when we ran the map generator on Fridays, the maps would come up in the shape of Moses. It was freaky."

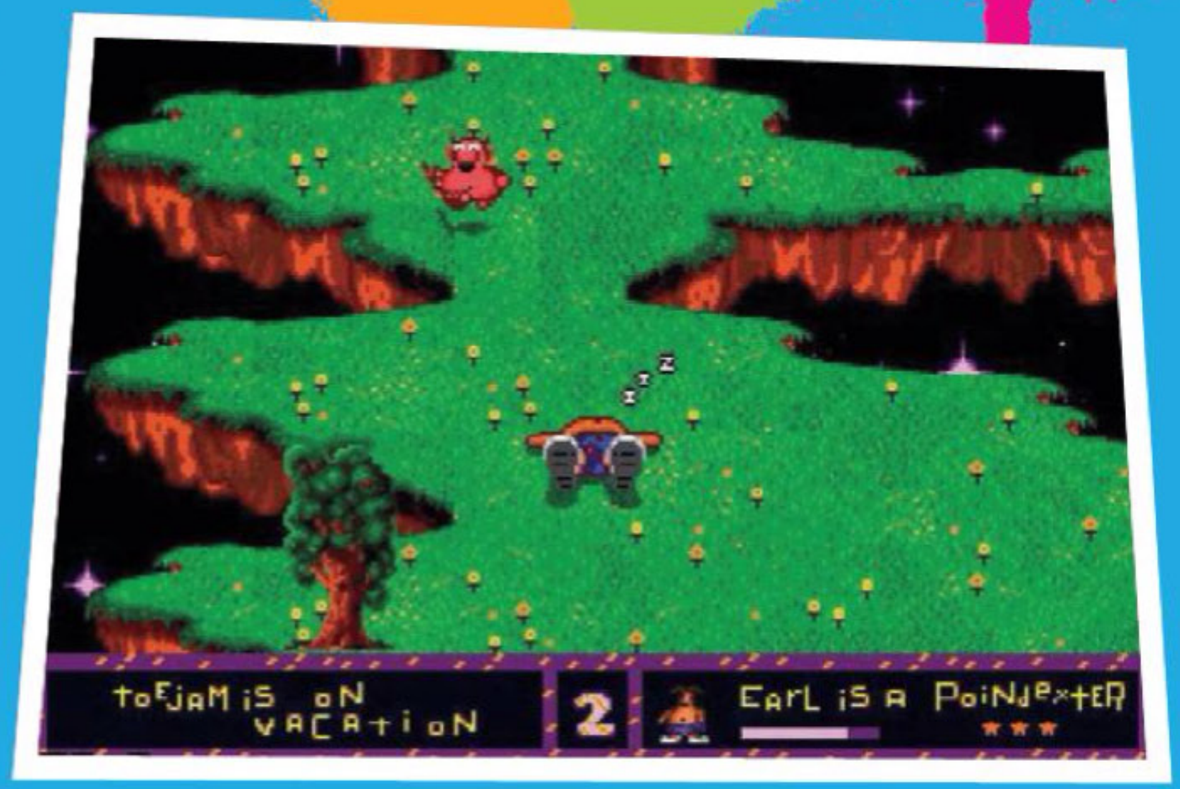
Development went from its scheduled year into its second, for which Greg has an interesting explanation: "That's because at one point in the project I thought I'd try not sleeping for about a week. It turns out that that's not such a good idea. I can't remember it so well myself, but Mark tells me that it took four policemen to drag me out of the busy intersection where I was standing, communicating with the aliens of Funkotron. Fortunately I was still able to work from the mental ward."

Despite its delay, when *ToeJam & Earl* was released in 1991 it became something of a sleeper hit, growing in popularity as time progressed. As the game was entirely unique in comparison to the rest of Sega's output, the company

» Another sketch of the game's background visual style featuring the lead characters.

WAITING FOR A STAR TO FALL

Before *ToeJam & Earl* came to be, Greg Johnson's first project was working on a game called *Starflight* for EA on the PC, later ported across to the Mega Drive. As space simulations go, it was an epic quest with a huge world crammed with solar systems comprised of multiple planets that each had a detailed history, and it was all contained on just two floppy disks. Initially starting off as an explorer with limited resources, finding artefacts and ruins makes it possible to travel further afield, encountering other species that have the potential to help or harm. 'What's this got to do with *ToeJam & Earl*?' we hear you cry. It seems that Greg desired to meet some real aliens yet felt it would be quicker to build some of his own. With the birth of *Starflight*, "ToeJam and Earl were the aliens that followed."



was unsure how to market it, which meant that initial sales were quite slow. However, rave reviews raised its profile and word of mouth began to spread, eventually translating into around 250,000 units worldwide – not too shabby for an unknown franchise, and its popularity didn't stop there. "*TJ&E* was on the top ten for rentals for about ten years after its release, and a lot of people played it that way," explains Greg. "We never get any money for rentals, though. Sega was never that into the game for some reason. I think it was a little too weird for them."

With such success under their belt, the two began work on a sequel in the same style as the original, with new surfaces like ice and snow, buildings to enter and more presents to collect. Until, that is, Sega intervened. "Sega never really got the first game so much," recalls Greg sadly. "Their marketing department was like, 'Hmmm, this *ToeJam* game is too weird. Let's just focus on this fast side-scrolling game with the angry blue hedgehog from Japan.' We saw that and said, 'Okay, we're going to do plan B and give you guys a side-scrolling game to sell,' so we bailed on the regular sequel and started *Panic On Funkotron*. Looking back, I think we confused the fans. I know I was confused."

For quite a while all was quiet from our intrepid aliens as they plotted their next conquest. Plans for an N64 release were shelved after a publishing deal fell through, and the Sega Saturn wasn't viewed as popular enough for the third game. So development began on a version for the Sega Dreamcast, which sadly got canned once the console hit financial disaster. *ToeJam & Earl*'s new home would become Microsoft's new flagship console, the Xbox, which had the financial backing to fund the new adventure. Named *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth* – changed from the more interesting subtitle of '*All Funked Up*' for marketing reasons – the game went on to receive a mixed reception among the press and its fans, many liking the characters' trademark style and humour but not really gelling with the gameplay. Its conflicting choice of style was once again down to publisher pressure.

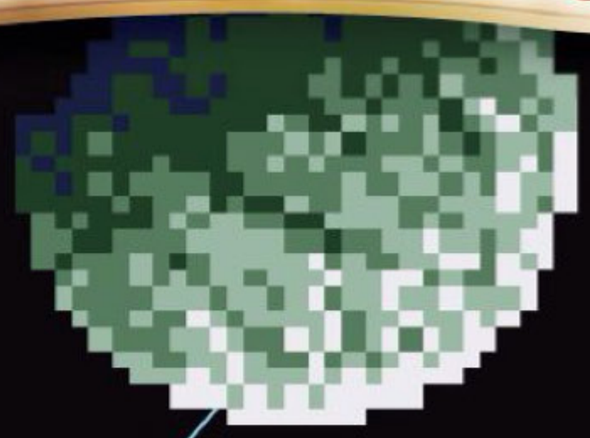
"Well that's pretty much Sega's fault, or more to the point, Visual Concepts. They're the guys who were paying us millions of dollars for the salaries of the people making the game. They said that we needed to change the game to be more like *Donkey Kong*, and they kept wanting us to make it harder. We wanted to make a straight-up remake of *TJ&E*, which is what our fans really wanted. Oh well, you've gotta do what the people with the chequebook say or it's game over," laments Greg. "We did our best to still make it like game one, but it ended up with a lot of extra junk in the game and it was easier to get stuck."

Mission To Earth also introduced Latisha, created so that female gamers would have a character that they could play with rather than being stuck with two guys. "I added her because *TJ&E* is a co-operative game for everybody," says Greg. "I wanted to give the female players a girl character that they could play. I suppose for purists it doesn't seem right – after all, it is *ToeJam & Earl* – but hey, I don't get why people whine about that."

Before Greg embarked on his flight back to Planet Funkotron, we had to ask if there was anything new he had to share with **Retro Gamer** readers. "Yes! If you like the music in *ToeJam & Earl*, go to YouTube and check out *Choo-Choo Soul* – I wrote the music for that too. Also, there is a new movie studio interested in maybe making a feature film based on the characters. If that happens then it's game on, baby. I'd love to make more *ToeJam & Earl* games." Jammin'!

THE CLASSIC GAME

THUNDER FORCE III



Hydra

This planet acts as an introduction to the game, with fairly weak enemies. It's designed around an ancient forest with heavy gun emplacements, and is guarded by the fire-breathing Gargoyle.

Ellis

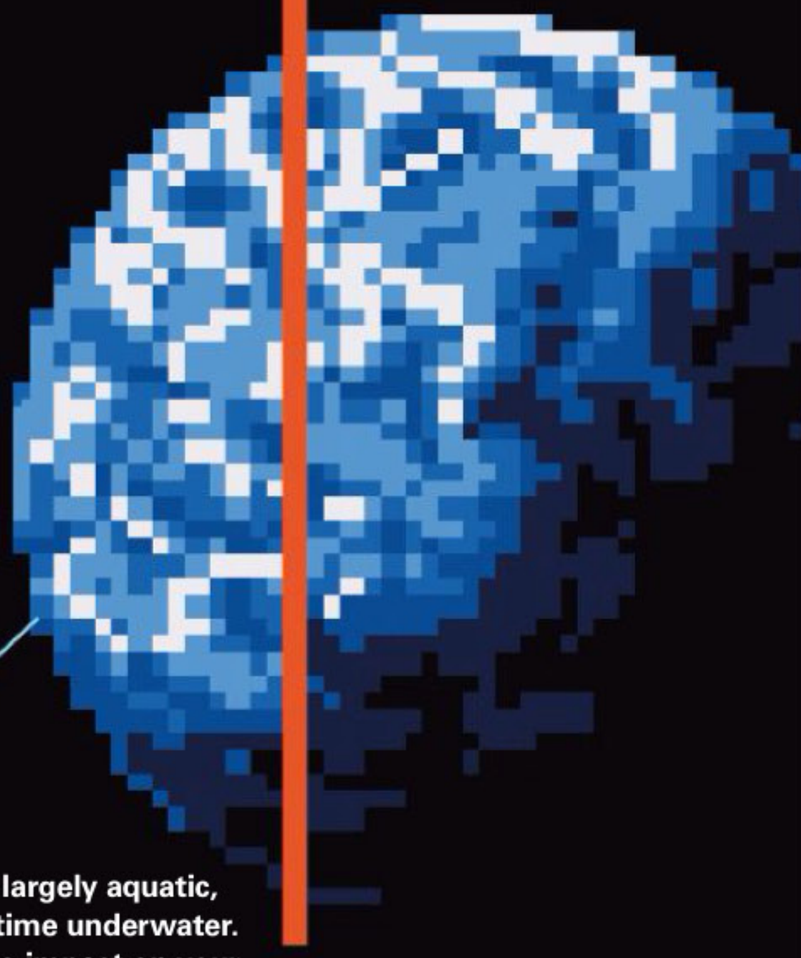
The ice world of Ellis scrolls both horizontally and vertically, making it an exceptionally challenging stage. Enemies come thick and fast, and often from behind. It's guarded by the gigantic Mobile Fort.

Orn

The final planet isn't accessible until you've completed the others. It's a real ball-ache as well, consisting of three separate areas including a massive mothership called Cerebus and a final boss called ChaOs, found at the planet's core.

Gorgon

This small planet might look innocent, but it houses a deceptively tough level. Filled with lava and featuring lots of fire-based enemies, it requires a fair amount of skill to negotiate. Mechanical Twin Vulcans guard the exit.



With its stunning visuals, a rocking soundtrack and some gigantic bosses, it's little wonder that Technosoft's *Thunder Force III* is deemed to be one of the best games in the franchise. Usually cowering in the shadow of the equally magnificent *Thunder Force IV*, we've decided to once again penetrate the planet Orn and reveal why this excellent threequel is just as worthy of your time. Darran Jones is in the pilot seat and prepares to take his Fire LEO-03 Styx fighter to hell and back.

Haides

One of the toughest levels in the game. This is due to ever-changing rock formations that can often lead to dead ends. Its guardian is the massive G Lobster, who is much weaker than he actually looks.

Seiren

The world of Seiren is largely aquatic, so you spend all your time underwater. Fortunately, this has no impact on your craft, letting you concentrate on the aquatic enemies and its King Fish boss.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Perfectly formed

Thunder Force III constantly gets ignored in favour of its epic sequel, but it remains an excellent game in its own right, and an important part of the franchise. It's beautifully paced, for starters, and has a number of interesting gameplay mechanics, challenging enemy waves and some genuinely entertaining bosses. It's also aesthetically amazing, for what is a relatively early Mega Drive release. Meticulous sprite design, a stunning soundtrack and some gorgeously designed levels all combine to create an excellent shooter that really needs to be experienced by anyone with even a casual interest in the genre.

Déjà vu time

The only downside to boss encounters in *Thunder Force III* is that they're a little too easy, even if they retain some excellent designs. While we've a soft spot for the huge G Lobster found on Haides and Gorgon's Twin Vulcan, our favourite boss is actually Cerebus, a massive mothership discovered after defeating the first five planets. In addition to being packed with lasers and cannons, it launches waves of enemy ships at you. You finally defeat it by flying inside it and taking out its core. Yes, it's just a rip-off of *R-Type*'s third stage, but rarely has it been aped as well as it has been here.

Laser-spewing hell

Thunder Force III is packed with plenty of meaty weapons, from the homing power of the Hunter to the useful utility that is the rear shot. By far the most impressive, both in terms of use and aesthetic value, is the Sever laser. Once picked up and selected, it enables your ship to spew out huge bolts of energy that effortlessly slice through most enemies. Many feel that the laser is a little too powerful due to the ease with which you can use it to take down bosses, but due to the relentless assault you're faced with, keeping it until the end of a level is often an achievement in itself.

Stay for the credits

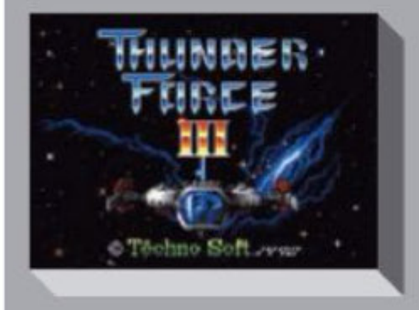
Technosoft is well-regarded for its superb chiptune scores, and it really pushed the boat out with *Thunder Force III*. Many of the compositions are suitably manic and fast-paced, easily re-creating the frenetic action seen on-screen, but the best tune is saved for the ending. After your flight from planet Orn and a truly bonkers plot summary, the triumphant tune shifts to become a melancholic little ditty that's perfectly themed to the scenes of your fighter docking his ship and celebrating with his friends as the credits run. It's a truly fitting, moving ending to an excellent shoot-'em-up.

He's on fire

The stage designs are great throughout, but none compare to the brilliance of Gorgon. It's a cleverly constructed level that's packed with a variety of enemies but also features vicious rock outcrops that need to be avoided at all costs. It also speeds up at certain points, becoming a white-knuckle thrill ride that really takes your breath away. Best of all, though, are the sensational visuals, which show an undulating background representing the intense heat of the planet. It may not look as astonishing as it did in 1990, but it's still impressive enough to make you realise just how talented Technosoft was.

Stick with the original

Thunder Force III proved so popular that Technosoft released it in arcades as *Thunder Force AC* several months after its debut. Haides and Ellis were replaced, the difficulty was upped, and the status bar and autofire option were removed. Its audio is also weaker. This version was ported to the SNES as *Thunder Spirits* and again featured several changes, including a new mothership. Its biggest issue, though, is that it is hampered by slowdown throughout, due to the SNES's slower processor. Our advice is to stick with the original, unless you fancy the stiffer challenge of the arcade version.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **PUBLISHER:** TECHNOSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said... ages ago

Mean Machines

"There's no denying that the [graphics] remain superb, and the sound is pretty good, but it's playability that counts, and though *Thunder Force* is good, it could have been better."

Allgame.com

"Shooter fans will love the inventive weaponry, variety of creatures, cleverly designed levels and intensity. *Thunder Force III* outdoes *Thunder Force II* and is far superior to [*Thunder Spirits*]."

What we think

You can argue that *Thunder Force IV* cranks everything up to 11, but *III* feels more pure. Yes, it's a little easy, but that just allows you to marvel at its excellent and imaginative enemies. After 22 years, it shows no sign of ageing.

why you must PLAY

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Techno Soft

Released: 1989

Featured Format: Mega Drive

HERZOG ZWEI

HERE AT **RETRO GAMER** WE ARE RELENTLESS IN OUR QUEST TO UNEARTH HIDDEN VIDEOGAMING GEMS FOR YOUR PERUSAL. AS A RESULT, DAMIEN MCFERRAN DUSTS OFF HIS MEGA DRIVE, FIRES UP ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED GAMES OF ALL TIME AND CHALLENGES THE PRECONCEPTION THAT THE JAPANESE 'DON'T DO' REAL TIME STRATEGY...

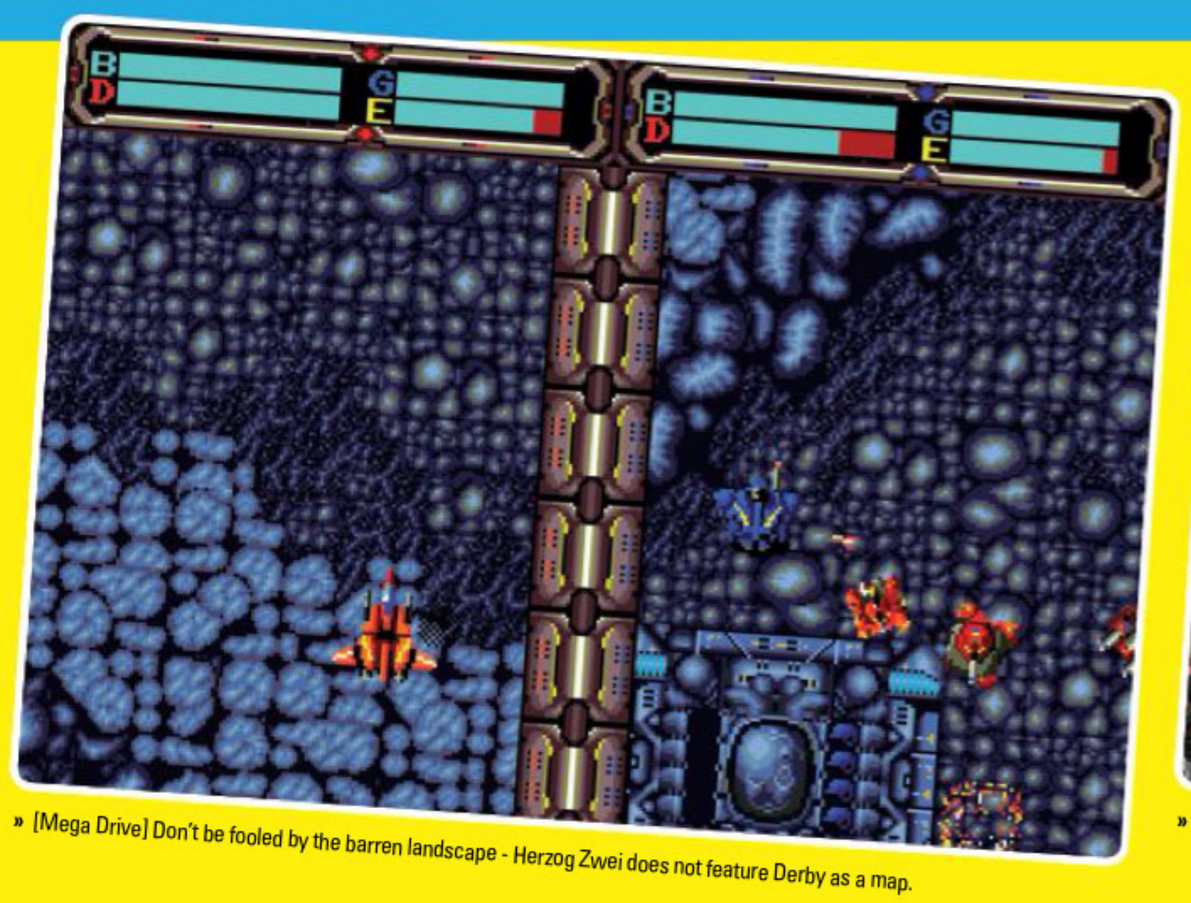
DUKE IT OUT

In the late Eighties, 'strategy' games were predominantly turn-based affairs with grid-like maps. The concept of having two entire armies facing off and carrying out commands in real time was deemed too demanding for gaming machines of the era (and possibly players). *Herzog*, released on the MSX home computer in 1988, changed that perception. Heralded as a 'real time combat simulation' by Techno Soft, *Herzog* was graphically crude and rather basic in execution but it would lay the groundwork for the Mega Drive sequel.

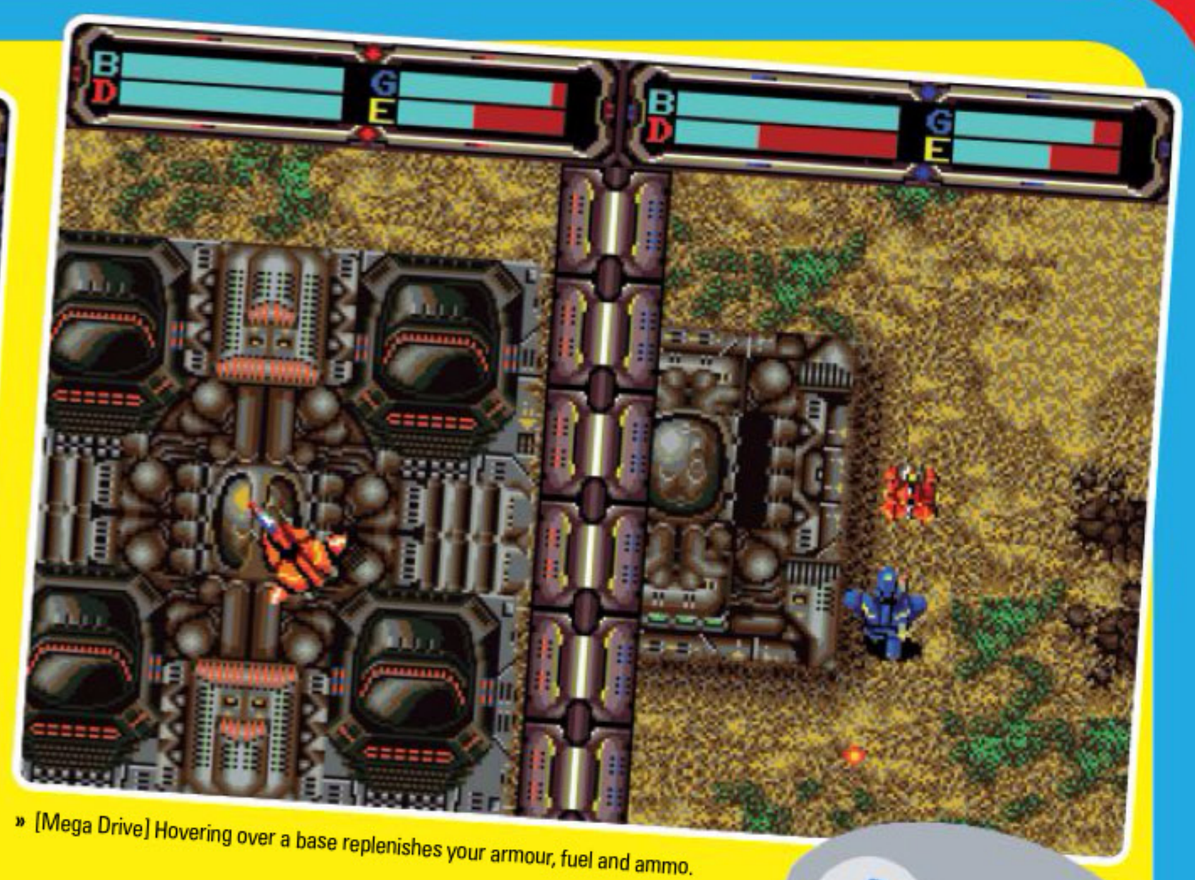
If you asked the average gamer which company they think should be credited with creating the Real Time Strategy (RTS) genre as we know it today, they would most likely respond with 'Westwood Studios', thanks to the tremendous worldwide success of its *Dune* and *Command & Conquer* franchises. However, it would be the wrong answer. The company responsible for laying down the blueprint of the modern RTS is not American, but Japanese – and rather ironically it's better known for its mindless (yet enjoyable) shoot-'em-up releases than its methodical strategy games. Tecno Soft (or Techno Soft as it was known in the West) is a moniker most people will instantly associate with the sublime *Thunder Force* franchise. When *Thunder Force II*, one of its earliest Mega Drive releases, was published in Japan in 1989 alongside an obscure title called *Herzog Zwei* (German for "Duke 2"), it was unsurprising that it received the lion's share of the attention (not to mention sales) and went on to spawn two successful sequels on Sega's 16-bit console. However, it could be argued that *Herzog Zwei* left a more indelible impression – it gave birth to a whole new genre.

The basic premise will be familiar to every RTS fan – two armies clash with the mutual aim of wiping each other off the face of one of the eight different world maps. Unlike

» As always the Japanese boxart (seen on the right) looks far superior to the US effort (far right).



» [Mega Drive] Don't be fooled by the barren landscape - Herzog Zwei does not feature Derby as a map.



» [Mega Drive] Hovering over a base replenishes your armour, fuel and ammo.

most strategy titles, *Herzog Zwei* limits you to exclusive control of just one unit – an incredibly cool mech that can morph into a jet fighter at the touch of a button. There are additional units to construct and these range from foot soldiers to massive tanks and gun emplacements. These units have to be manufactured (which costs both money and time) and issued with instruction programs that determine how they will behave when sent into the field of battle. Assigning instructions is made easier by the use of self-explanatory icons – if you were one of those people who happened to find the Japanese version in your Christmas stocking, this came as a godsend. Although initially it all appears complex (a fact that has no doubt dissuaded many players from persevering with it over the years), it soon becomes second nature. Once you're familiar with the units available and understand which command does what, there really is nothing else to it – however (as is the case with many things in life) *Herzog Zwei* takes a moment to learn but a lifetime to master.

"LIKE MANY THINGS, HERZOG ZWEI TAKES A MOMENT TO LEARN BUT A LIFETIME TO MASTER"

The single-player campaign provides a decent level of challenge and offers ample opportunities to brush up your basic skills and develop tactics, but once a few hours have been invested it becomes too easy to exploit obvious flaws in the CPU intelligence. As with so many games of this type, *Herzog Zwei* only really springs to life in two-player mode – nothing compares to the excitement of competing against a human opponent of equivalent skill. Battles can last for hours as each player assembles their forces, captures bases, loses bases, regroups and starts their offensive anew. To put it bluntly, *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most breathtakingly brilliant multi-player experiences you're ever likely to witness on Sega's 16-bit console and certainly one of the most innovative strategy titles in recent memory.

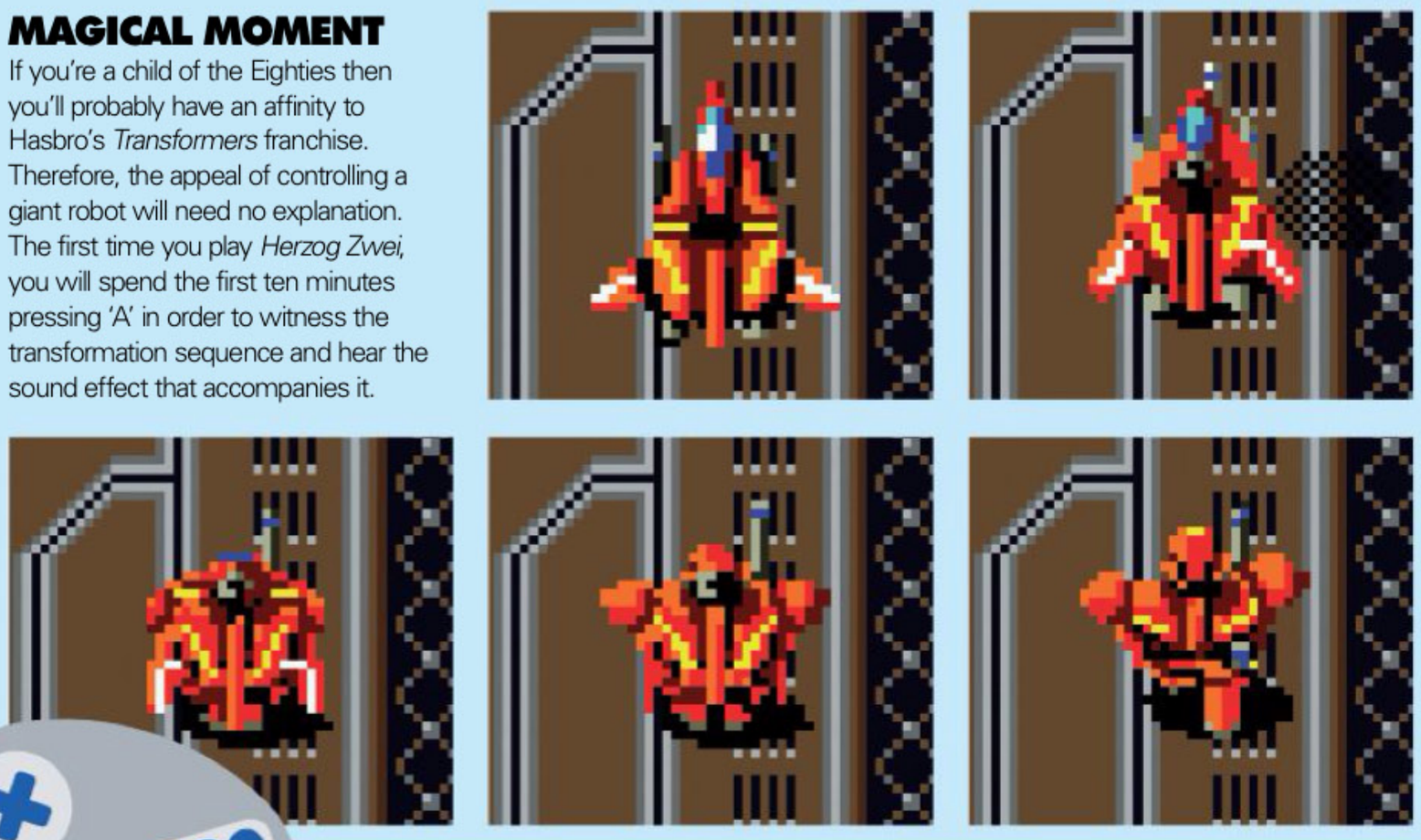
Unit deployment is simplicity itself – once the unit is constructed and ready, all you have to do is hover your plane over a friendly base and pick it up. Then the piece can be airlifted to any point on the map (so long as you don't run out of fuel – an event which results in you being returned to HQ – you never actually 'die' in the game) and dropped into position. Even in the heat of battle, you have the ability to pick up your forces and relocate them. So although 'complete' control of each unit is never granted (as was the case in Westwood's games), you're still able to redistribute your forces and plan new tactics 'on the fly'. A special mention must be made regarding your avatar on the field of battle – the transforming robot/jet plane. Serving as both mouse pointer and an offensive weapon in its own right, the use of the mech is one of the main factors that sets *Herzog Zwei* apart from subsequent RTS titles. It allows the player to participate

REMEMBER WHEN?

Nothing beats the feeling of victory and in *Herzog Zwei* winning against a human opponent is very sweet indeed. You never forget your first triumph over a fellow carbon-based life form…

MAGICAL MOMENT

If you're a child of the Eighties then you'll probably have an affinity to Hasbro's *Transformers* franchise. Therefore, the appeal of controlling a giant robot will need no explanation. The first time you play *Herzog Zwei*, you will spend the first ten minutes pressing 'A' in order to witness the transformation sequence and hear the sound effect that accompanies it.



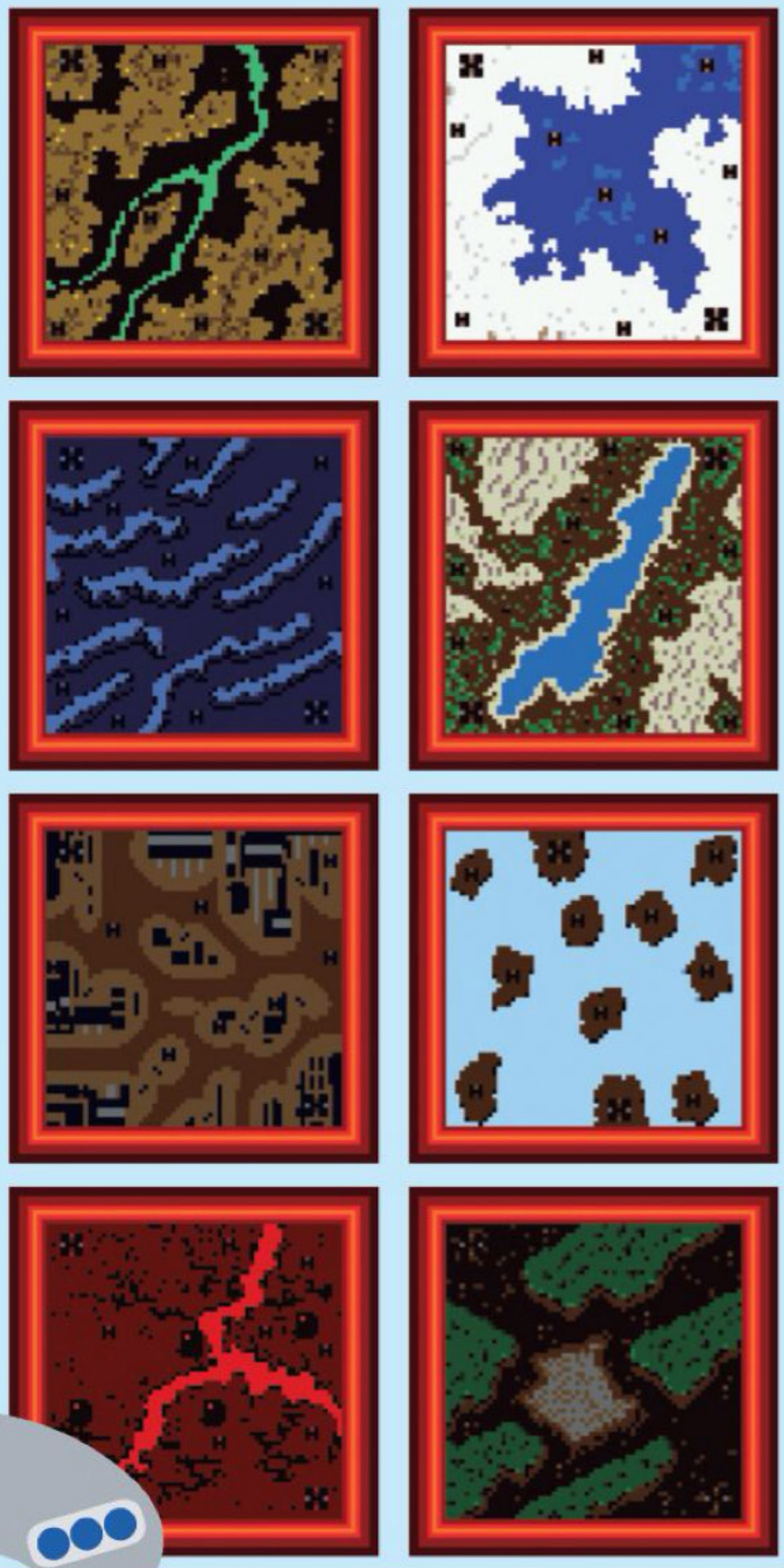
why you must PLAY

» [Mega Drive] That yellow marker shows an incoming missle - lummie!

» [Mega Drive] The 'SOS' sign indicates your HQ is under enemy fire - cripes!

MAPS

There are eight different stages in *Herzog Zwei*. Each one has different characteristics, which will affect your battle tactics accordingly.



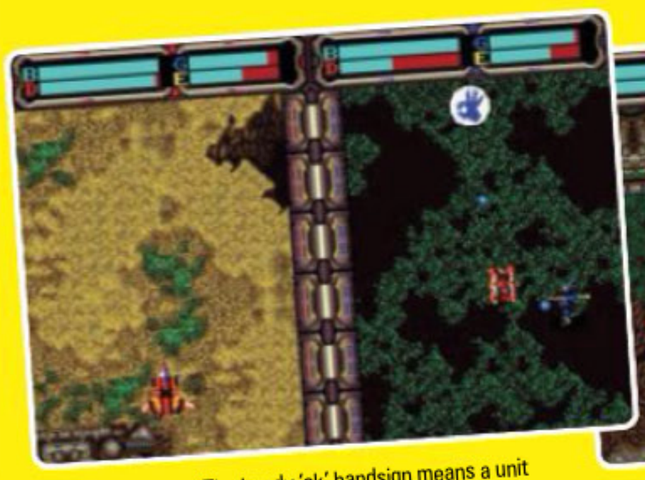
"SUCCESS IN HERZOG ZWEI DEPENDS ON CONTROLLING THE VARIOUS NEUTRAL BASES SCATTERED ACROSS THE MAP"

» [Mega Drive] Red reforms at HQ after getting a bit of a beating. No doubt it will be more careful next time…

» [Mega Drive] Sadly, 'Go Faster Stripes' are not an optional extra when building armoured cars.

in the melee rather than just sit passively as friendly units find themselves on the wrong end of a beating. If the tide of battle turns against your forces, there's the option to fly into the thick of things and vaporize a few of those hostiles personally.

Although ultimate victory is gained via the destruction of your rival's headquarters, success in *Herzog Zwei* depends largely on controlling the various neutral bases that are scattered across the map. Foot soldiers, when given a specific 'occupy' order, will proceed to the nearest neutral or enemy base and enter it. Once four units have been sent in, it falls under your control. Not only does this grant additional funds with which to construct forces (money is drip-fed into your war chest every few seconds – the more bases you own, the amount of cash you receive in each 'top-up' increases), it also means that the base can serve as an outpost where you can collect newly built units, restock your fuel and ammo and use as a rally point to launch attacks on the opposing HQ. Because all units in the game only have a finite amount of fuel and ammo (including your mech), control of these bases is vital. In order to stage an effective offensive it is important that a foothold is established close enough to permit a sustained assault. Even when a base is occupied, it doesn't mean it will remain that way – your rival can send in their units to reduce the tally and eventually occupy it.



» [Mega Drive] The handy 'ok' handsign means a unit is constructed and ready for pickup.

» [Mega Drive] The Red Commander attempts to stop the Blue army from occupying a neutral base.

THE UNITS

INFANTRY (FOOT SOLDIER)
These are the basic grunts. They have weak firepower and poor armour, but are vital to your army as they are the only unit that can occupy bases.

FWA (MOTORCYCLE SCOUT)
Has much the same firepower as a foot soldier, but these guys are seriously nippy. Handy for drawing out enemy forces.

ARM-51D (ARMOURED CAR)
This is rendered largely pointless by the Tank, though these units are still handy if you need to keep enemy soldiers at bay.

TAX-52 (TANK)
Strong armour and excellent firepower at the expense of speed, but you'll be relying on these guys to perform most of your offensive manoeuvres.

SAM-42 (SURFACE-TO-AIR UNIT)
These are designed specifically to attack the enemy commander's plane. The missiles lock-on and a few hits are lethal.

GMR-34A (GUN EMPLACEMENT)
The most powerful unit in the game, but there's a catch – it can't move. Also features anti-air capabilities.

ST-57U (BOAT)
These possess a decent degree of firepower, but can only be used on levels where there's water, which is obvious, as it's a boat.

SUPPLY (SUPPLY TRUCK)
These units have absolutely no offensive capability whatsoever; their purpose is exclusively to refuel and re-arm units in the field.

THE PROGRAMS

BDF-1SD (OVERWATCH)

Unit does not move, and attacks only when an enemy comes within range.

AF-001A (PATROL)

Unit will move in a patrol circle and attack any enemy forces that it encounters.

AT-101 (APPROACH BASE)

Unit will head towards the nearest neutral/enemy base and wait there until it is occupied.

AT-101H (OCCUPY)

This means a unit will enter the nearest neutral/enemy base. (Infantry only).

DF-F02A (PURSUE AND ENGAGE)

Unit will remain stationary until an enemy unit approaches, it will then pursue until it either destroys it or the enemy escapes.

BA-001C (ATTACK HQ)

Unit will set off to attack the enemy HQ – this is probably the most important command in the game – without it, you can't win.

PW-SS10 (SUPPLY)

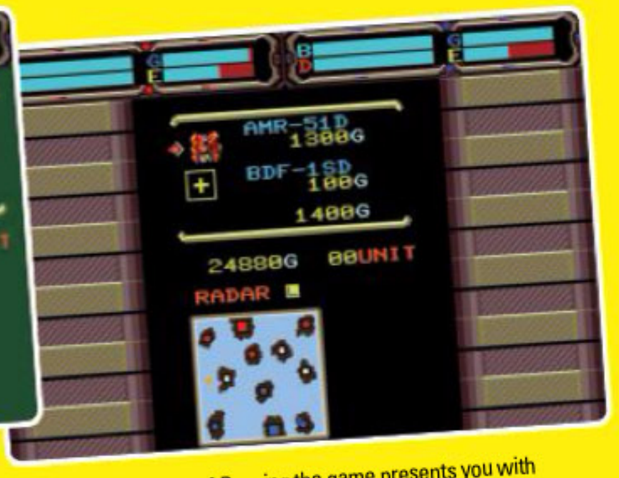
This command is only available to the supply truck. The truck will provide aid to any units that need fuel or ammo.

Because the game is unashamedly unconventional and difficult to pigeon-hole (being neither a shooter or an out-and-out turn based strategy title), it sold poorly when it was released and was quickly forgotten in favour of games which offered more immediate gratification (ironically, games like the aforementioned Tecno Soft stable mate *Thunder Force II*). American magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly gave it one of the lowest ratings for a Mega Drive/Genesis title (at the time) – a clear indication that the contemporary press were just as baffled as the general public (although it must be mentioned that EGM recently reassessed their stance and named it as one of their all-time favourite games). Tecno Soft's pedigree worked against it too – as *Herzog Zwei* featured shooter-elements, people judged it as such and they obviously came away sorely disappointed. It could be argued that the game only saw the light of day in the West because it was completely free of Japanese text and was released early in the Mega Drive's life – traditionally this is when most unusual Japanese games have the best chance of being localized due to the limited amount of software available.

Commercial failure aside it's startling that no developer, not even Tecno Soft itself (now sadly departed), has ever tried to improve on what is a near-flawless gaming concept. It's possible to pick up a second-hand Mega Drive and a copy of the game for a reasonable amount, so there really is no excuse not to experience this fantastic piece of software. *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most essential multi-player titles ever released, and quite simply deserves to be played.

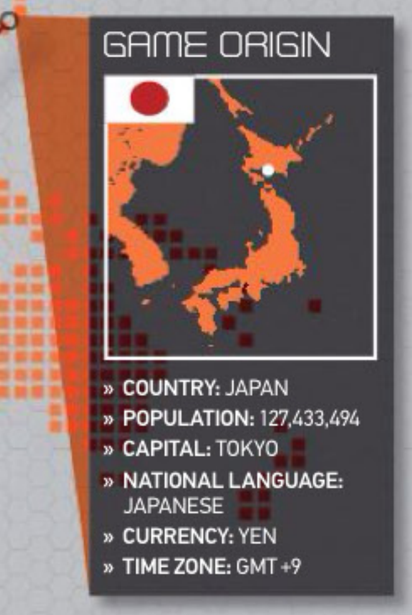
» [Mega Drive] The two commanders clash over some hot lava, the loser will really feel the heat. Ouch!

» [Mega Drive] You can construct units and check the map using the status screen.



» [Mega Drive] Pausing the game presents you with a map and plenty of useful information.

IMPORT ONLY



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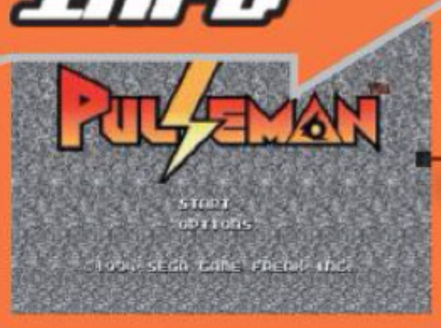


» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
» **ALSO ON:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20+ ($40+)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro

SONIC 2
RELEASED: **1992**
The best platformer on the Mega Drive and you can pick it up for pennies. Sonic's second 16-bit outing was a defining moment for the Blue Blur, adding a popular sidekick, a neat dash move and Super Sonic to the canon.

▼ Modern

RAYMAN LEGENDS
RELEASED: **2013**
We were expecting Mario to reinvent the platformer after all this time, but the task has fallen to Michel Ancel and his talented team at Ubisoft Montpellier. *Rayman Legends* builds upon the fun of 2011's *Rayman Origins* and adds all sorts of inventive new tricks. The end result is a stunning platformer that all fans of the genre will adore.

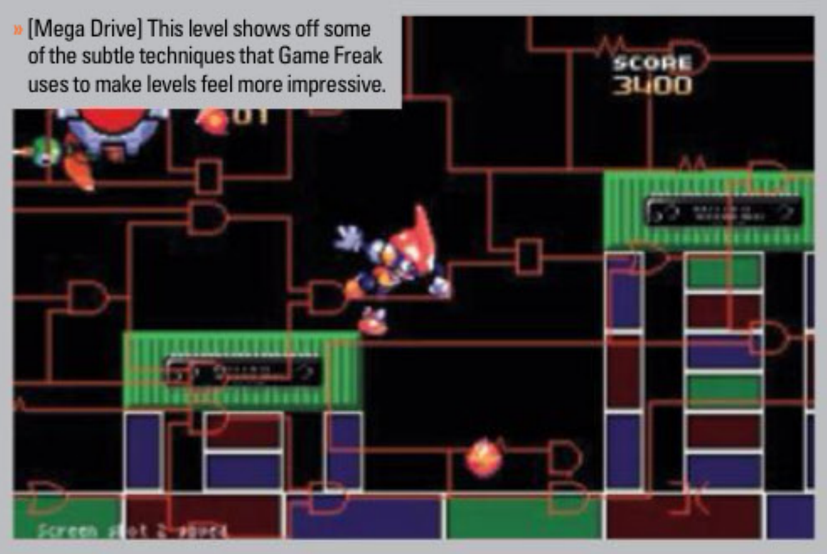
PULSEMAN

» From the fertile minds that brought us Pokémon came Pulseman: not only one of the best Mega Drive titles to never leave Japan, but also one of the most electrifying platform heroes to appear on the console. That's the only electricity pun in this entire feature, honest

It's likely that you've never heard of *Pulseman*. The game was released relatively late in the Mega Drive's life, and was only released officially in Japan despite the 16-bit era marking a bit of a renaissance period for the platform genre. It's a shame, too, as this lavish-looking offering by Game Freak – the team that would go on to create *Pokémon* – and, most notably, *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori, was one of the better platform games to come out of that epoch, in our opinion, and is widely regarded as a masterpiece in game design.

A mixture of *Sonic* and *Mega Man*, but with a strong pang of *Rocket Knight Adventures*, *Pulseman* was a glorious-looking platform game that may have felt like a mixture of other platform games you've played before, but it brought these pilfered ingredients to the boil with an impressive amount of care and attention, making it a bit of an undiscovered classic for the Mega Drive.

In the game you play as a Pulseman: a half-robot half-human boy who is the result of his scientist dad creating artificial life and then copping off with one of his creations. It's a weird back story, and one that, for legal reasons, we have to leave right there, but from this odd union of man and machine, Earth gets itself a new platform game hero who can harness electricity – a power that Game Freak would later give to Pikachu – and travel freely between the electronic and real world. However, when prolonged exposure to the digital world changes Pulesman's dad into a crazed scientist, and he embarks on a bit of global cyber-terrorism, it falls to Pulseman to put an end to the evildoer's… uh… evildoing.



» [Mega Drive] This level shows off some of the subtle techniques that Game Freak uses to make levels feel more impressive.

Split across six sizeable stages, glued together by a variety of bonus levels, plus a final one to draw things to a nice close, *Pulseman* certainly holds a lot of longevity. And the fact that you're given a bit of freedom in what way you can attack the game means that even if you're

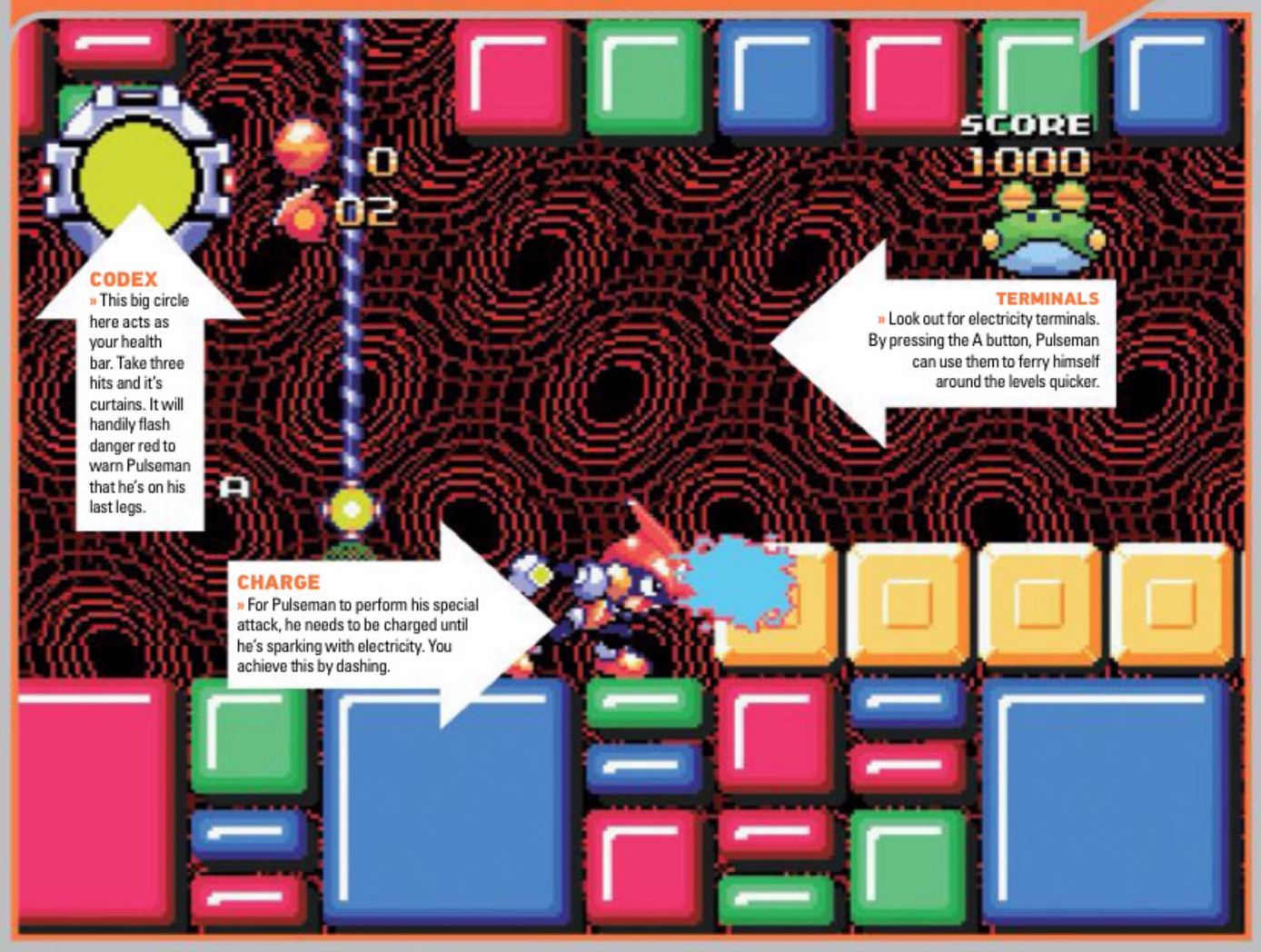
» [Mega Drive] As well as being wonderfully animated, Pulseman has a dizzying array of moves.

» [Mega Drive] *Pulseman* clearly borrows elements from other games, most notably *Mega Man*.

» [Mega Drive] Pulseman was the creation of *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori.

» [Mega Drive] The levels are the stars of *Pulseman*, with each feeling unique.

GO DEEPER — What to look for when playing Pulseman



“Many who have actually played the game cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to ever find a release”

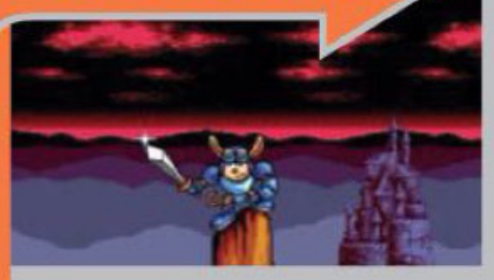
rubbish at it, you can still get to see a lot of the good stuff that *Pulseman* has to offer – another *Mega Man* parallel.

The levels in *Pulseman* are large and well-detailed, but oddly sparse and usually only containing a handful of enemies to circumvent. The challenge tends to come from helping Pulseman negotiate his way around the game's brilliantly designed worlds using his various powers. And this is another great element of the game. Pulseman boasts an impressive arsenal of moves, which includes a neat jump kick that destroys those annoying enemies lurking on overhead ledges – why can't all platform game heroes have a handy move like this? There's also a close-range electric slash attack, and a dash move that generates enough friction to allow him to morph into a concentrated ball of electricity and pinball around the screen a bit like Sparkster.

Also featuring sublime music courtesy of *Pokémon* composer Junichi Masuda, it's clear that a great deal of effort went into the game. In fact, many who have played *Pulseman* cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to find a release, and while we agree that the game certainly is a looker, if we had one criticism, it's that many of the enemy designs do feel a little bland and uninspired: a metal mouse, something that looks like a piece of moving metal grass, and a giant metal balloon of a cat's face firing oranges are just a few examples of the throwaway adversaries that Pulseman has to face in the game. But as we've said, the levels are the true stars of the show, as all have some quirky element that makes them both a joy to discover and a pleasure to negotiate.

Sadly *Pulseman* never found an official release outside Japan – it was available for a period on Sega's on-demand Genesis games service Sega Channel in the US, however – and, owing to its scarcity, copies usually fetch in the region of £20-40 ($30-$60) on eBay. If you own a Wii, though, you can now pick up a regionalised version of the game on Virtual Console for 900 Points (around £6/$10).

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

» Developed by Nobuya Nakazato of Konami, the man behind some of the best games in the *Contra* series, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was a neat mix of cutesy platformer and run-and-gunner interspersed with neat side-scrolling shooter sections.

THE MAKING OF

THE IMMORTAL

We've always considered it a delicious irony that the main character in *The Immortal* meets a sticky end in a variety of particularly gruesome ways. Damien McFerran caught up with creator Will Harvey and thanks to the Dust of Compliance, convinced him to spill the beans on this underrated action adventure

Ever done something on the spur of the moment and found yourself in a tight squeeze as a result? Will Harvey certainly has. Back in his high school days he studied computer programming and when the teacher enquired if anyone in the class knew about Assembly language, Harvey keenly thrust his hand skywards despite the exact opposite being true. The youngster was perturbed to discover that this moment of irrational impulsiveness had resulted in him receiving the dubious honour of putting together a class presentation about the aforementioned programming language the following day. "I learned a lot about Assembly that night, I can tell you." chuckles Harvey today, older and thankfully much wiser. However, this one, fleeting moment of barefaced dishonesty had fateful repercussions and ultimately set him on the road to videogame stardom.

Having unwittingly exposed himself to the questionable joys of Assembly programming, Harvey discovered that

» [Mega Drive] One wrong step and you're worm food. Oof!

"SEGA WERE FINE WITH THE DEATH ANIMATIONS, BUT NINTENDO WEREN'T. THEY MADE US GET RID OF THE BLOOD" WILL HARVEY

he had become curiously hooked and therefore continued to expand his knowledge long after the infamous class presentation had been and gone. "At 15 I wrote a game called *Lancaster* for the Apple II" he vividly recalls. This rather basic *Space Invaders* clone was completed in 1982, and it was the need for musical accompaniment that led effortlessly onto Harvey's next project: "I required music for *Lancaster*, so in 1984 I wrote *Music Construction Set*." This proved to be his breakthrough release – a glorious mixture of entertainment and education, which allowed users to learn the basics of musical notation. Astonishingly, Harvey was a tender 15 years of age when he began work on this sizable hit. Electronic Arts subsequently picked it up for publication and quickly ported the game to other popular platforms of the era. In keeping with its early promotional campaigns (which focused heavily on the normally camera-shy guys responsible for the incredible games they were publishing) EA decided to showcase the fresh-faced Harvey as a 'star programmer'. The shy youth soon discovered that he was becoming something of a video-gaming icon.

Despite his newfound fame, Harvey refused to rest on his laurels and proceeded to gain numerous qualifications at Stanford University (including a PhD in Computer Science) while simultaneously furthering his programming career. He founded his own company – Sandcastle Entertainment – and released *Zany Golf* in 1988 for the Apple IIGS. Once again, heaps of critical acclaim followed and Electronic Arts eventually ported the light-hearted isometric golf sim to several formats, including the fledgling Sega Mega Drive/Genesis in 1990. It was around this time that Harvey began to brainstorm the concept of a fantasy role-playing title, but with a twist that would have been tremendously unique for the time. "I wanted to make an online graphical adventure," he remembers. This was a tall order and a bold move, when you consider the fact that the internet was still very much in its infancy back in the early-Nineties, nevertheless Will Harvey persevered with his grandiose plan.

Assembling a crack team of artists and programmers – which included Brett G. Durrett, Michael Marcantel and Ian Gooding, Harvey set about crafting what would eventually evolve into a wholly unprecedented fantasy epic. The project was initially christened 'Campaign', which gives an indication of where Harvey was headed with his original vision. "Initially it was playable with others over a modem, which was very cool." The idea involved each player selecting a different fantasy role (Elf, Warrior, Wizard and so on) and setting off into the uncharted wilderness of the World Wide Web for fame and fortune. The name was later changed to *The Immortal* and Harvey discovered that as he and his team tinkered with the project, it began to shake off its

» [Mega Drive] Although they initially appear to be hostile, later on the goblins come to your aid.

» [Mega Drive] When was the last time you saw a hole covered in creepy spider webs and thought, "I think I'll venture inside"?

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** SANDCASTLE

» **RELEASED:** 1990 (APPLE IIGS)

» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

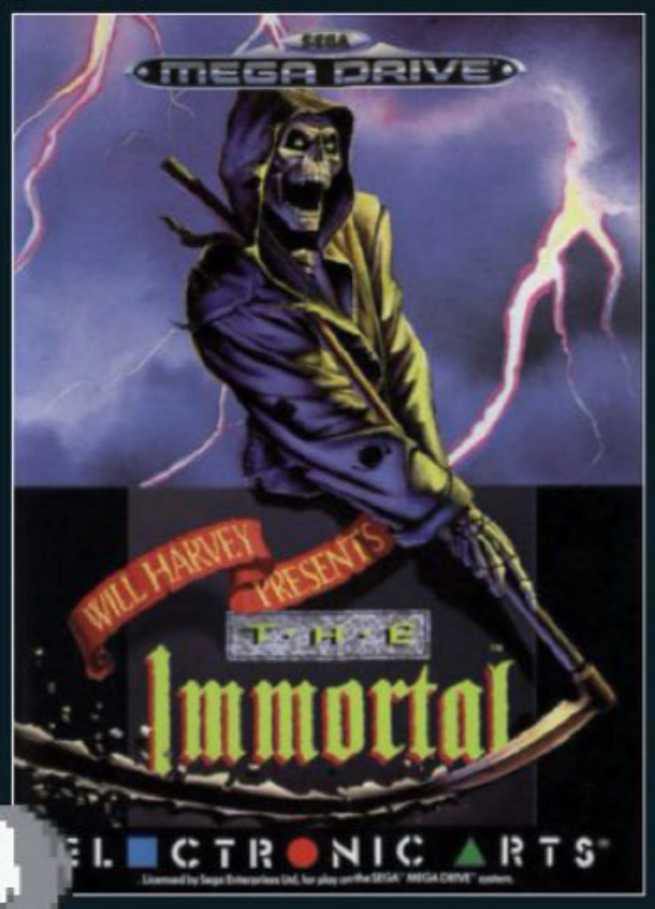
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZANY GOLF
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988

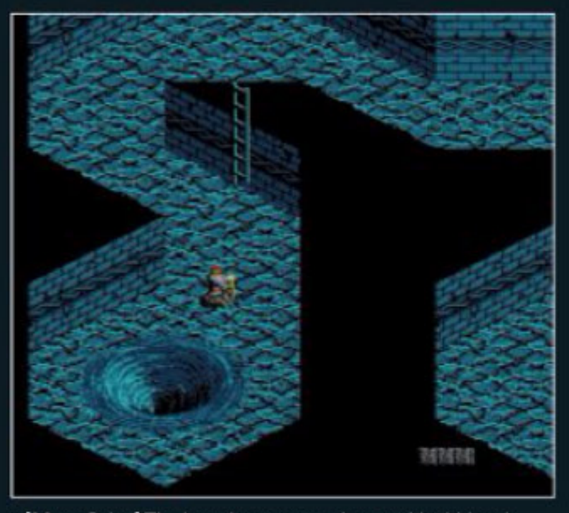
MUSIC CONSTRUCTION SET
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1984

THE MAKING OF

» Will Harvey



» The Mega Drive version featured some lush artwork, which no doubt helped shift a few copies.



» [Mega Drive] The barrel was great. Just avoid whirlpools.

online aspirations. "Over time the focus became the storyline instead of the online plan," he comments. Eventually the team realised that if they were to incorporate an arresting plot, the online multiplayer would have to be sacrificed entirely. The focus was duly altered and as a result *The Immortal* became a resolutely single-player adventure.

The game made its debut on the Apple IIGS in 1990 (it turned out to be one of EA's last major releases for the system) but when it became obvious that Harvey and his team at Sandcastle had crafted a truly unique role-playing experience, *The Immortal* was ported to the Amiga, Atari ST, IBM PC, Mega Drive and even the lowly 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).

It's very easy to pigeonhole Harvey's game as 'just another role-playing adventure', but in reality it's actually more of a curiously compulsive mixture of real-time action and 'point-and-click' exploration. Viewed from an isometric viewpoint, the action takes place in the dank subterranean ruins beneath the ancient city of Erinoch. The player assumes the role of an apprentice wizard desperately searching for his master Mordamir, who has absent-mindedly got himself lost within the ominously titled 'Labyrinth of Eternity'. Along the way there are numerous encounters with shady denizens of the deep, including goblins, trolls, giant worms, spiders and finally a massive, fire-breathing dragon.

Harvey didn't want his new game to blend into the crowd and nurtured definite ideas regarding the kind of experience he wanted to create. Rather than follow the clichéd route of pitting good against evil in a fantasy environment, the team decided to force players to think carefully about what course of action they took. "We had a theme to the storyline," explains Harvey. "That is to say, the story had a point, or a moral. The moral was: 'Think before you act; be aware of the consequences of your actions'. This moral is supported by the plot." As the player descended ever further into the labyrinth this became more and more apparent and several moral judgements had to be made in order to progress – the actions of which had a telling impact on the eventual outcome of the adventure. "For example, if you indiscriminately kill goblins, then you will miss the opportunity to make allies of them later in the quest" explains Harvey. "You can still finish the game but you get a different ending at best." Few games of this type ever attempted to portray tangible consequences to the player's actions in the same way *The Immortal* did.

Possibly the most memorable aspect of *The Immortal* was the innovative combat engine. At certain points the player was able to engage enemies in one-on-one combat. In the console and PC versions the viewpoint would quickly switch to a close up of the two combatants, and by combining button presses with the direction pad the player was able to swing a particularly sharp sword at their quarry. Evasive manoeuvres were also possible, allowing for an effortless shift between offensive and defensive postures. This called for a refined sense of timing, as it was imperative that the sword swipes and dodges were executed correctly. It hardly ranks as the most awe-inspiring fighting engine ever crafted but remains a definite improvement on the usual turn-based variety seen in fantasy adventures of the era.

The incredible enemy death animations were the icing on the cake and unsurprisingly they caused the design team a few headaches when it came to porting the game to the 'kiddie friendly' home console market: "Sega

> "IT'S KIND OF HARD TO HAVE A WIZARD'S HEAD BLOW UP WITHOUT BLOOD" WILL HARVEY

» [NES] Sanitised, gore-free combat ensues in the NES conversion.

DEATH ANIMATIONS

While many games of the 16-bit era featured large doses of death and destruction, few came close to attaining the same level of detail as *The Immortal*. Pre-dating *Mortal Kombat's* fatalities by a couple of years, defeating each enemy rewarded the player with a grisly, ultra-violent 'finishing move'. Some of these were fairly straightforward – a quick sword swipe removing the head from the torso, for example – but others were slightly more extravagant. The player was confronted with exploding craniums, flaming incineration and spontaneous combustion in this most gruesome of fantasy games. Considering the frail appearance of the game's main character, these inventive forms of execution were made all the more shocking. It's little wonder that Nintendo refused to allow Harvey's team to incorporate them into the NES conversion – which leaves the warts-and-all Mega Drive port as the definitive console version to track down and enjoy.

» [Mega Drive] Our wizard chum appears to be offering this dragon a sore throat lozenge – what a thoughtful chap.

» [Mega Drive] Mystical-malarkey abounds as the wizard takes flight on his lucky, lucky carpet.

» [NES] The actually-quite-good NES version in all its glory.

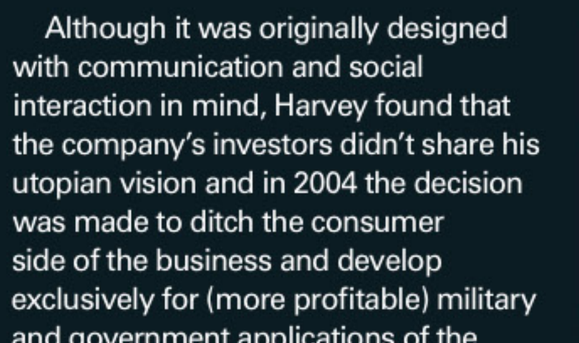
» [Mega Drive] Going behind that door is asking for trouble.

were fine with the death animations, but Nintendo weren't," remembers Harvey. "They made us get rid of the blood in the NES version." This was standard procedure as far as Nintendo was concerned (who could possibly forget the infamous SNES version of *Mortal Kombat*, which lacked the biggest selling point of the game – gore?). Harvey and his team – so used to having total freedom when coding for the Apple IIGS – could do nothing but comply with the request. "It's kind of hard to have a wizard's head blow up without blood, but we did what we could" he says with a wry smile. Regardless of this, Harvey is proud of what his team achieved with the limited power of Nintendo's aging 8-bit machine. "The graphics on the NES were unprecedented at the time," he says with a sense of pride. Indeed, when placed alongside the 16-bit versions, the Nintendo port doesn't look as shoddy as you might expect.

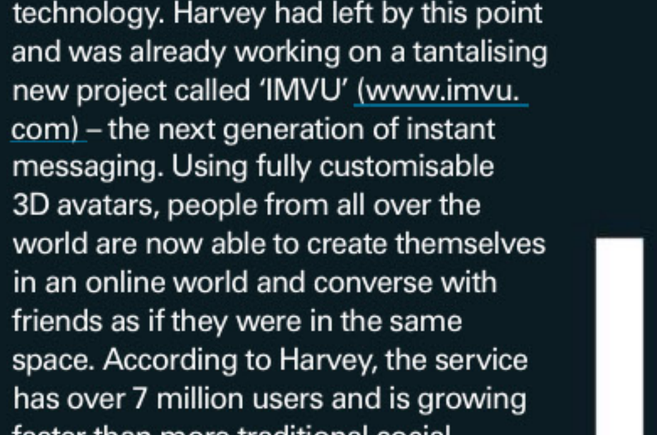
One characteristic of *The Immortal* that went down slightly less well with many sectors of the gaming public was the preference for unpredictable and wholly unexpected deaths. At many points within the game the player would be killed simply for stepping on the wrong spot or speaking to a character without having a certain item in their inventory. Playing without a guidebook quickly changed the game into an almost tiresome process of trial and error. It was essential to find out what mistakes to avoid by dying a few times, then completing the level with this vital knowledge in hand. One infamous section involved inspecting a seemingly harmless skeleton for valuable items. Replying positively when asked to inspect 'something wet' underneath the bones resulted in the player being instantly dissolved by deadly slime. To some this kind of structure proved to be an almost insurmountable obstacle to enjoyment, but to others it harked back to the unforgiving graphical adventures of old and gave the game an edgy, unpredictable quality. At times the level of tension was almost unbearable and it made players more wary of wandering into situations that might prove to be fatal. Besides, the elaborate player death animations often went some way to softening the disappointment of an unexpected demise.

Although *The Immortal* garnered worldwide success and healthy sales, it wasn't enough to gain a sequel. Sandcastle Entertainment began to dabble in online gaming technology, creating tools that permitted smooth, lag-free gaming between online players. The company was eventually purchased by Adobe in 1997 and the following year Harvey founded 'There Inc' from a room in his parents' house, working alongside artist Jeffrey Ventrella to create the immersive and open-ended virtual 3D world 'There'.

Although it was originally designed with communication and social interaction in mind, Harvey found that the company's investors didn't share his utopian vision and in 2004 the decision was made to ditch the consumer side of the business and develop exclusively for (more profitable) military and government applications of the technology. Harvey had left by this point and was already working on a tantalising new project called 'IMVU' (www.imvu.com) – the next generation of instant messaging. Using fully customisable 3D avatars, people from all over the world are now able to create themselves in an online world and converse with friends as if they were in the same space. According to Harvey, the service has over 7 million users and is growing faster than more traditional social networking sites like MySpace. With yet another success under his belt, time will tell if Harvey decides to step back into the video-gaming arena and produce another unique experience for fans of *The Immortal* to savour.



» [Mega Drive] "Which way now?"



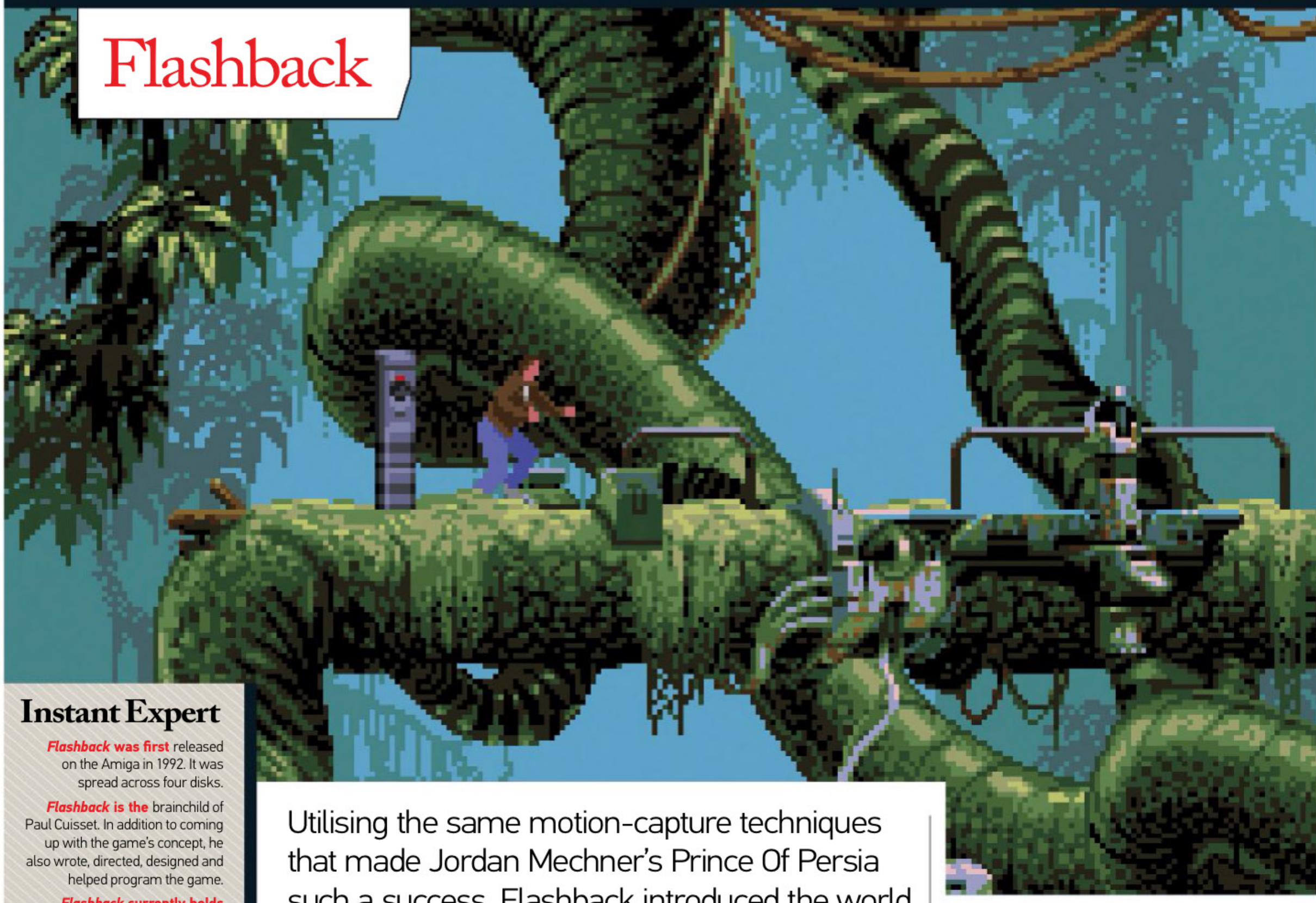
» [Mega Drive] Wasn't this in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*…

» [Mega Drive] "Now it's your turn."

MAKE MINE A DECAF

Harvey was extremely fond of inserting secret 'Easter eggs' into many of his games – *Zany Golf* famously featured a secret hole that was almost impossible to access, and Harvey's conversion of Mark Cerny's arcade classic *Marble Madness* shipped with an additional level that even Cerny himself was unaware of. *The Immortal* was no exception and contained a highly unusual hidden section. "The secret level in the Apple version has an almost infinite corridor with the design team of the game hidden at the end," reveals Harvey. "On Level five you had to make it through the trap door room and fall into the last hole without using your trap door sensor, then walk for 15 minutes in the corridor. You also needed the 'coffee maker' object which is found earlier in the game for when you meet one of the team, otherwise he kills you." Who says game designers are highly strung?

Flashback



Instant Expert

***Flashback* was first** released on the Amiga in 1992. It was spread across four disks.

***Flashback* is the** brainchild of Paul Cuisset. In addition to coming up with the game's concept, he also wrote, directed, designed and helped program the game.

***Flashback* currently holds** the Guinness World Record for being the bestselling French game of all time.

Due to its popularity, *Flashback* received a sequel that was released in 1996. *Fade To Black* was only available on the PC and PSone, and was vastly different to its predecessor.

***Flashback* was also** due for release on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Developed by Adeline Software, the port featured a brand new plot and many new locations. A leaked beta ROM is available online.

The PC DOS version has an extended cut-scene sequence that wasn't in other versions of the game.

US Gold released *Flashback* in Europe and North America. In Japan, publishing duties fell to Sunsoft.

US versions of the Mega Drive, Mega-CD and Super Nintendo games came with a Marvel comic that explained much of Conrad's back story.

Utilising the same motion-capture techniques that made Jordan Mechner's Prince Of Persia such a success, Flashback introduced the world to Conrad B Heart and another delicious slice of French gaming. Darran Jones takes the Mega Drive outing for a spin...

Many people think that *Flashback* is the sequel to *Another World*. It isn't, but we can certainly see why these comparisons are made. Both games use cut-scenes to advance their stories, both take place on strange alien worlds, they were both published by Delphine, and both benefit from truly glorious rotoscoped animation.

The similarities end there, though, and while *Flashback* certainly feels familiar if you've ever played Eric Chahi's game, it's a totally different and far more ambitious beast.

Indeed, what impresses you about *Flashback* is the sheer amount of variety and scale that it offers you. One minute you're platforming through a gorgeous-looking jungle, the next you're negotiating the new-age subways of Titan, taking part in a game show akin to *The Running Man* and exploring an alien planet. It's a huge, impressive monster of a game that was so grand in scope that at one stage it was pitched as a "CD-ROM game on a cartridge".

First released on the Amiga in 1992, it immediately won rave reviews due to its cinematic cut-scenes, breathtaking animation and varied gameplay. It was quickly ported to all manner of computers and home consoles, ranging from Sega's Mega Drive to the FM Towns and Atari's Jaguar, and it remains highly regarded by anyone who's been fortunate enough to play it.

Flashback tells the story of Conrad B Heart, an agent who has to recover his lost memory when he discovers that aliens are living in his world and disguising themselves as government officials, plotting to destroy Earth. After being captured in *Flashback*'s epic opening and subsequently escaping, Conrad must recover his precious memories – don't worry; he kept them conveniently safe – and save the world.

It's showtime!

Yes, it takes elements from numerous movies of the time – most notably the aforementioned *The Running Man* and the excellent *They Live* – but Conrad's tale still feels refreshingly different, effortlessly building on the story structure that Jordan Mechner carefully created for his *Prince Of Persia*. It also feels suitably epic, with most levels beginning with larger-than-life cut-scenes that forward Conrad's plight and keep the player absolutely enthralled with what's happening on screen. Again, it's not a new mechanic for videogames and had been utilised to similar great effect in 1991's *Another World*, and yet somehow

Pixel Perfect

Get a load of Flashback's wonderful rotoscoped animation

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

"It's challenging, entertaining, thoroughly addictive, and it looks better than any random sequence from Cindy Crawford's workout video."

- **AMIGA POWER** ISSUE 25

Twin Galaxies High Scores

Interestingly, there are no current high scores for *Flashback* on Twin Galaxies. Categories exist for both time trials (NTSC and PAL versions) and overall high scores, so let's see if a reader can set a new record for one of them.

Flashback just felt more filmic, possibly due to it riffing so heavily on those previously mentioned movies.

Even with its cinematic cut-scenes, it's *Flashback*'s riveting gameplay and sheer variety that last longest in the memory and will keep you playing through to its impressive end. Waking up in one of Titan's jungles, the first stage of *Flashback* is little more than an excuse to test your abilities and get used to Conrad's amazing athleticism. Utilising the same rotoscoping techniques that worked so well in *Prince Of Persia* – clearly a major inspiration given the number of similarities – and *Another World*, Conrad B Heart is an absolute joy to watch in motion, effortlessly climbing and leaping around the large game world. There are certainly moments that feel occasionally clunky – drawing your gun, for example, or making certain jumps – but even their limitations rarely ruin Conrad's breathtaking animation.

After negotiating the tricky platform-heavy jungle the gameplay becomes a little more sedate, with Conrad travelling to New Washington and having to earn a work permit – six years before Ryo started working on the docks in *Shenmue* – in order to earn entry to the charmingly named *Death Tower*, a *Running Man*-styled show – there's that comparison again – that allows the survivor to win a free pass to Earth. Here the gameplay becomes more action-oriented, with Conrad having to climb several levels that are swarming with enemies. Upon reaching Earth the exploration opens up yet again, until Conrad eventually finds himself transported to the alien planet of the Morphs. Several moments of extreme heroism later and the game ends with not only a nod to Ridley Scott's *Alien*, but also the prospect that all your hard work has been for nothing. Fortunately, a sequel eventually appeared in the form of *Fade To Black*.

It's frustratingly hard in places, with the controls not always feeling like they're keeping up with Conrad, but the end result is a timeless platform adventure that, like the best of wines, just keeps getting better with age.

» [Mega Drive] Whether dystopian sci-fi cities or lush jungles, *Flashback* manages to look spectacular.

The Devices

Conrad finds devices throughout his adventure that offer new abilities to turn against his pursuers

» Holocube

This essential device is picked up at the beginning of your adventure and explains where you need to go to properly continue your quest.

» Credits

You won't get far on Titan without money. Credits can be earned by getting a job permit or by simply picking them up from the ground.

» Diary

Belonging to Philip Howard Clark, this diary explains how the aliens were planning to take over and what Conrad must do to stop them.

» Force Field

Conrad's friend Ian gives this to him on Level 2. It's a relatively useful device that can shield Conrad for a limited amount of time.

» Gun

Conrad's gun is never far from his side, which is handy, as he has to use it a lot. A dependable weapon that makes short work of anything.

» ID Card

Conrad is given this by the stranger he helps on the first stage. It allows him to get about in the city of New Washington.

» Key

There are lots of blocked-off areas on the world of Titan. These small devices will ensure that Conrad is able to get through all of them.

» Map

New Washington is a massive area with lots of different locations. This handy map highlights key areas, making navigation much easier.

» Shield

There are plenty out to get Conrad, so this shield, which can absorb four hits, is very useful. It can also be recharged at specific waypoints.

» Work Permit

Conrad needs to earn money to get fake papers, so he uses this work permit to get a variety of different jobs and therefore some cash.

» Tele Receiver

An amazingly handy device that Conrad can use for teleportation purposes. Simply select it then throw it to the floor.

» Tele Control

Once you've thrown your Tele Receiver to the floor, you can use this device to instantly transport to it. Very useful for navigating tricky areas.

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy a few of Flashback's many highlights

The chase

Flashback's opening credits sequence where Conrad flees from his antagonists still manages to impress after all these years. It sets up the action beautifully and gives you a clear indication of the cinematic excellence that is to come as the game progresses.

Meeting Conrad

Sure, the techniques used to animate Conrad had been seen before, but watching the amnesiac agent as he leaps, runs and somersaults around the screen is still a joy. He also dresses far cooler than Mechner's Prince.

The pick-up

It sounds a trite thing, but picking up objects in *Flashback* is cool. Admittedly, seeing the same animation continuously used does grate a little, but it's still an impressive way of drawing you in to the on-screen action.

Frantic escape

There's a wonderful moment in one of *Flashback*'s early levels where Conrad has to frantically outrun a detonation – there's actually another in the game's finale, but this one sticks in the memory. Run, Conrad, run.

It's time to start running

Conrad's frantic dash through *Death Tower* is a massive change of pace from the rest of the game, with the player constantly kept on his toes by a seemingly never-ending line of enemies to escape.

Story time

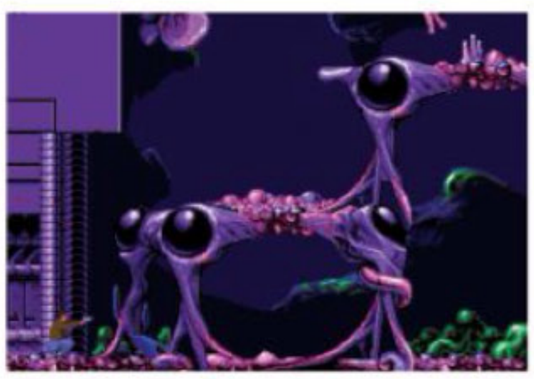
This is clever. Upon reaching Ian, you're given your memories back in a *Total Recall*-style chair. You're then treated to an elaborate sequence that sets up the cinematic chase that you witnessed at *Flashback*'s beginning. Very new wave.

Breaking glass

It seems incredibly minor here, but there was a moment on Level 4 where we just couldn't progress any further. Frustrated, we took out Conrad's gun and shot a wall, only for it to disintegrate in a shattering of glass. Genius.

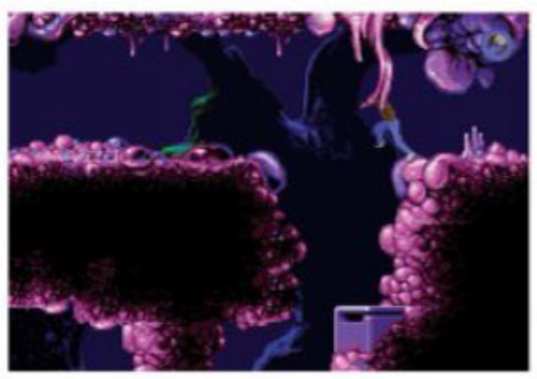
Job centre

While plenty of early videogames focused on a profession as their gameplay's main focus, not many of them saw you doing jobs within the framework of the actual game. Are there any earlier than *Flashback*? Let us know.



Meet the Morphs

If you thought Conrad's animation was impressive, wait until you see the Morphs. Devoid of their human skins, these rubbery aliens slide around the screen with a sickening realism that still looks absolutely fantastic.



Alien HQ

After traversing some dour locations, the aliens' home planet is a thing of beauty, capturing the stylish visuals of the opening jungle. It's all rather pink, but the strange plants and creatures that live in it make it feel like a real ecosystem.

Brain freeze

This is an exhilarating battle that has Conrad desperately trying to shut down the evil cerebrum, while fending off an infinite supply of Morphs. It's rather frustrating, but it still lodges itself within your memory.

Due to its massive success, Flashback spawned two sequels, only one of which received a commercial release

Fade To Black

By the time Paul Cuisset released *Flashback*'s sequel, the gaming world had gone 3D crazy. Playing like a cross between *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*, *Fade To Black* was a third-person adventure that utilised the now-popular over-the-shoulder viewpoint.

The story sees Conrad again captured and caught up in another elaborate plot for world domination. While it's extremely rough around the edges visually, *Fade To Black* has a far stronger plot.

The tricky control system and slow pace of Conrad make this a world away from the original game and almost kills it in places, but it remains a slick adventure that does capture the essence of *Flashback*.

Flashback Legends

Conrad was also set to appear in an adventure for the GBA, due in 2004. Unlike *Fade To Black*, the action once again reverted to the side-on gameplay of old and shared many elements with the original game. Locations were very similar and included New Delphi City, the Morph planet and a jungle, while familiar enemies were also present. The original cut-scenes had been replaced with a new comic strip look, and *Flashback Legends* introduced new characters as well.

Sadly, as Delphine Software ran into financial difficulties, the game was eventually cancelled, seemingly doomed to disappear forever... until a leaked beta ROM appeared on the internet in 2008. Despite lots of bugs and technical issues, the ROM gave a good indication of how the final game may have turned out, and it looks truly gorgeous on its later stages. What a shame, then, that Conrad's adventures had to end in such a downbeat way.

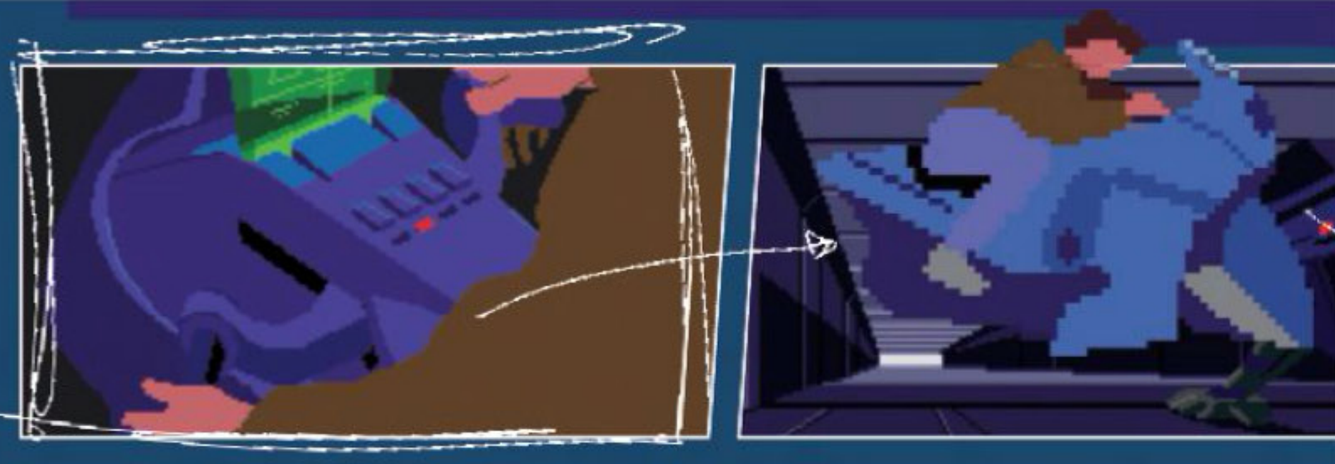
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
Flashback

Flashback – The Movie

One of the best things about *Flashback* is its gripping and enjoyable storyline. Despite the limitations of the home systems that it appeared on, Paul Cuisset uses a number of clever cinematic techniques – including, appropriately, a flashback scene – in order to immerse the player in Conrad's dangerous world. While it borrows heavily from many classic sci-fi films, *Flashback*'s tale is a surprisingly adult one and is an interesting cautionary tale. Knowing that not everyone is going to have the time to experience its greatness, we've put together these handy little storyboards, so you can review Conrad's story at your own pace. Enjoy!

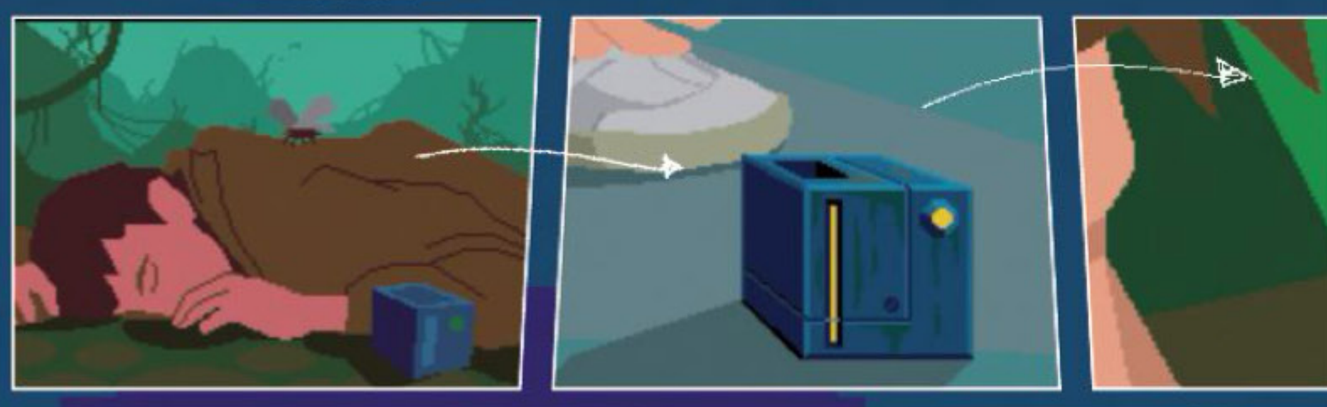
Part One

Our introduction to Conrad is watching his thudding feet as he desperately tries to escape two trenchcoat-wearing enemies. Despite quickly hopping on a nearby jetbike, his antagonists follow him in a large spacecraft. Several salvos later and Conrad's bike is hit and he crash lands in the jungles of Titan. After several moments of searching, he's eventually left for dead.



Part Two

Upon waking up, Conrad's first task is to retrieve the holocube that holds his memories. The jungle is filled with danger, but he discovers a wounded stranger who begs for help. After Conrad finds the stranger's teleporter, the grateful person teleports away but leaves behind an ID card. Conrad discovers the entrance to New Washington and, after paying for an anti-G belt, reaches his destination.

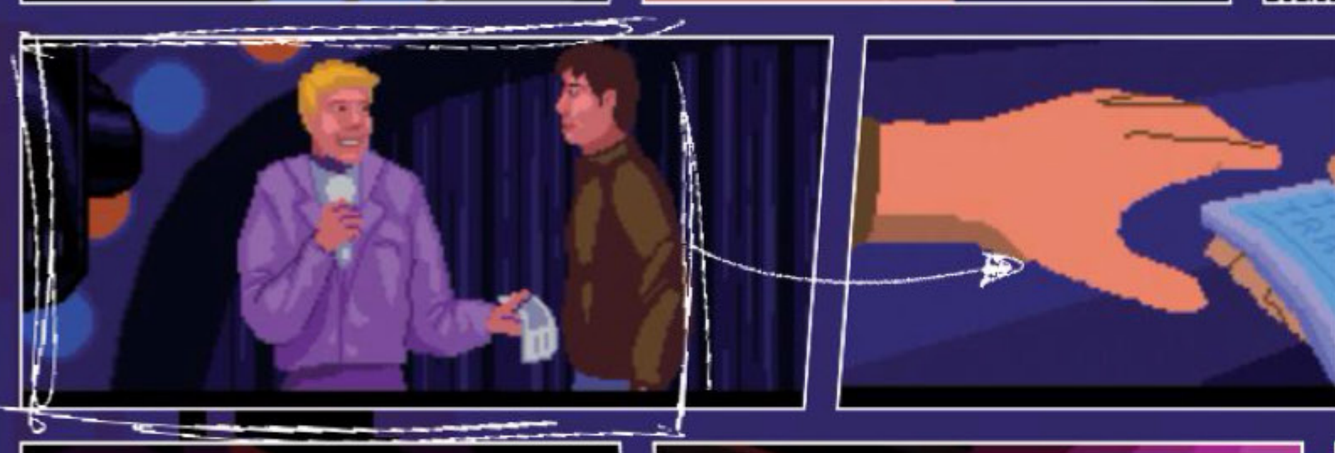


Part Three

In New Washington, Conrad seeks out his friend Ian, who restores his memory. The player soon discovers that Conrad has created a device that enables him to view the molecular structure of humans. He soon discovers that aliens are among the population and, fearing for his life, transfers his thoughts to the holocube before his memory is wiped.

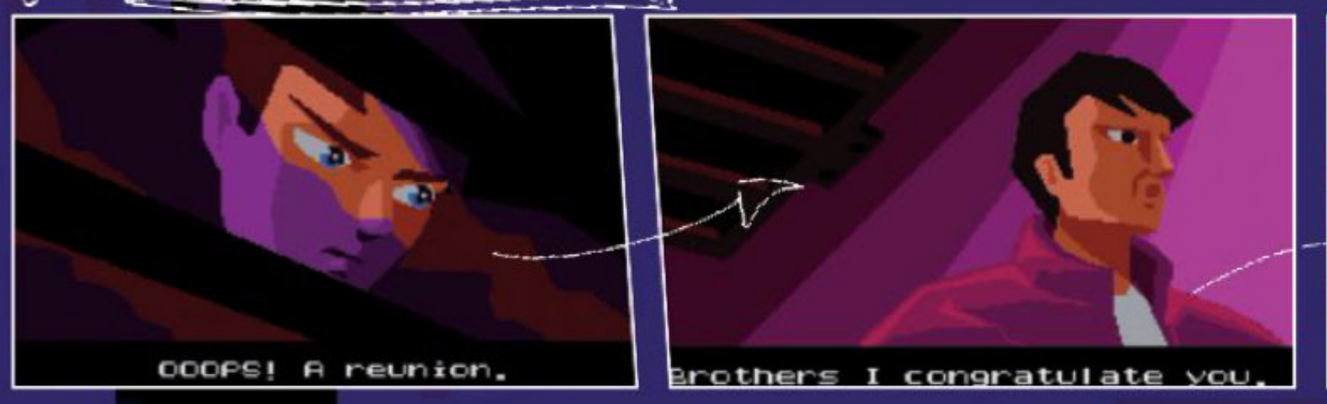
Part Four

Conrad quickly learns that he'll never earn the money to buy a ticket to Earth, so his best bet is taking part in the popular game show, *Death Tower*. After doing some jobs, Conrad earns enough money to pay a forger for papers so that he can enter *Death Tower*. He eventually wins the contest and immediately heads to Earth and seeks out the aliens' hideout.



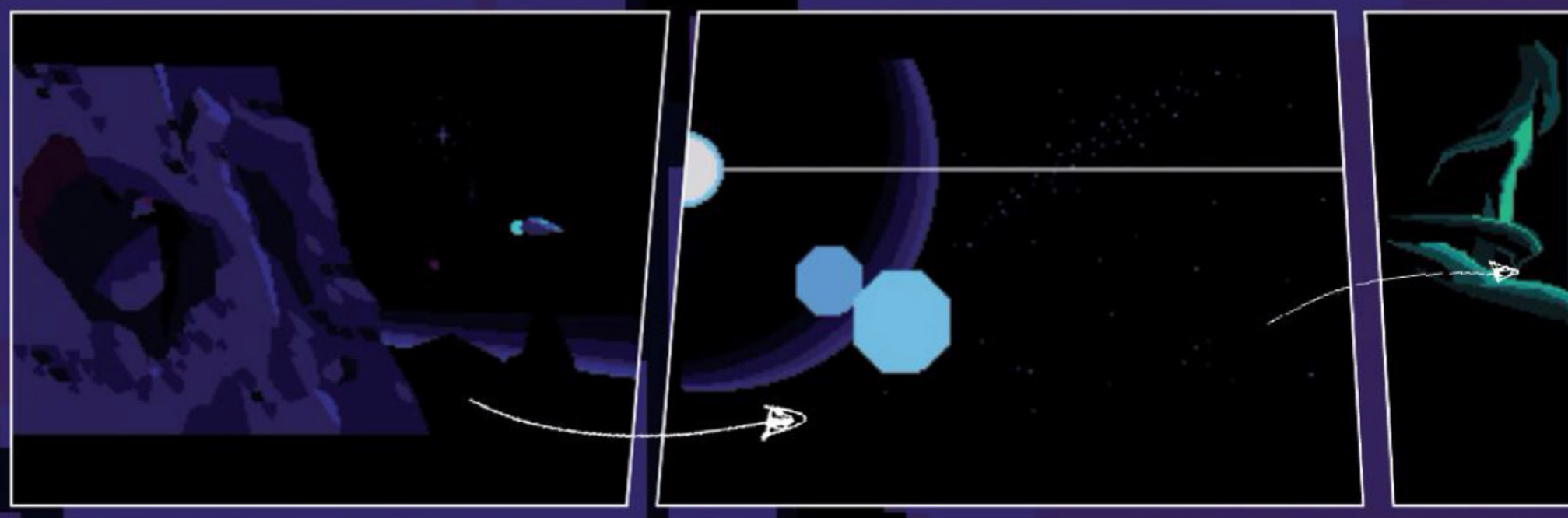
Part Five

When he reaches the hideout, he finds three aliens deep in discussion. Plans to take over the planet are moving faster than Conrad had anticipated, and he discovers that they are planning on assaulting Earth in their millions. Before he can do anything, the grate he was hiding behind gives way, revealing his location. Conrad is taken for interrogation. Things don't look good...



Part Six

Conrad escapes from prison and finds a teleporter that takes him to the aliens' planet. Once there, he discovers a human prisoner but is unable to help before aliens murder him. Conrad is given an atomic charger and picks up the prisoner's diary, which tells him how to blow up the planet. After placing the charge, Conrad flees into space but soon discovers that he's not in any known galaxy. He is last seen entering suspended animation after putting a message on his screen that implies that it may be some time before he is rescued.



REPLAY
ANTI G SYSTEM
OK
STANDARD
viduals whose molecular
Then I save the contents of my memory and send it to Ian
"I HAVE ERASED HIS MEMORY."
Thanks to our knowledge, the humans are now capable
A SPY... Throw the wretch
It's impossible for me to calculate my return trajectory.
The galaxy I am in today doesn't appear on any of our navigation charts.
I'll probably drift in space for a very long time...

MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER

"WHO'S BAD?"

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY

Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* was not a good film. In fact, it's probably one of the worst movies we've ever seen, and we'd rather melt our eyeballs with hot pokers then have to ever sit through it again. Yes, it had great music (if you like listening to the king of pop that is) but the movie itself was nothing more than a glorified vanity project for someone, who at that point in time was arguably the world's biggest star. So it comes as somewhat of a surprise to find that even though the film itself is a complete and utter turd, the actual Mega Drive outing turned out to be pretty good fun.

Each level required Jackson to hunt around the multi-tiered stages in search of missing children who had been kidnapped by the notorious Mr Big. Upon finding the necessary number of missing children, Bubbles the chimp would appear – no really – leap onto Jackson's shoulder and point him in the direction of the level's exit.

Before he could leave however, Mr Big appeared, and after mocking the moonwalker's futile efforts to capture him, would then send a load of bad guys for Jackson to deal with. What followed was easily the highlight of the game, and even now, some 16 years on, it never gets old.

Obviously not wanting his adoring public seeing him resort to fisticuffs, Michael Jackson used the power of magic to defeat his many enemies. Holding down the relevant button for a few seconds would release his hat, which would fly out boomerang fashion, destroying anyone it comes into contact with. Resist the urge to let fly with your trilby of doom however and Michael (and everyone else on-screen) launched into a stunning dance routine that culminated with the destruction of the rest of Jackson's temporary dance troupe. And if you thought seeing a group of humans go through the motions of Smooth Criminal was funny, wait until you see what the zombies and dogs on later levels get up to. Aaooow!

THE MAKING OF

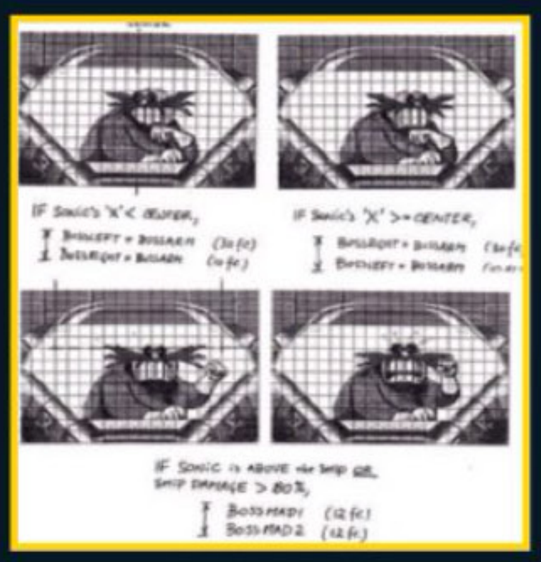
Conceived as a stop gap and developed in a hurry, Sonic Spinball still stands as the greatest thing that could have come out of another game's production delays. We talk with Peter Morawiec about how this classic came to be

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KID CHAMELEON
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

THE OOZE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995

COMIX ZONE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995



» Some of the earliest original storyboards from *Sonic Spinball*'s production.

With a title such as *Sonic Spinball*, as entertaining and well-designed as the game itself might be, it's hard to really understand the story of its creation without first putting a little perspective on some of the circumstances that surround it. In fact, it's sometimes hard to imagine certain games ever having seen the light of day without a very special set of circumstances. In the case of *Sonic Spinball*, it's all about timing.

For those who may have spent the early Nineties living in a cave, the 1992 holiday season had been a very important one for Sega. It saw the release of what would become the bestselling game ever released for the Mega Drive: *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. A title credited not only with giving Sega a much-needed sales push in its battle for console superiority with the SNES, but also with giving the title character a final and hardy thrust into the spotlight, with making secure his place in history as a gaming icon. It would be no exaggeration to say that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* had ensured that Sonic would become Sega's most important and lucrative piece of intellectual property.

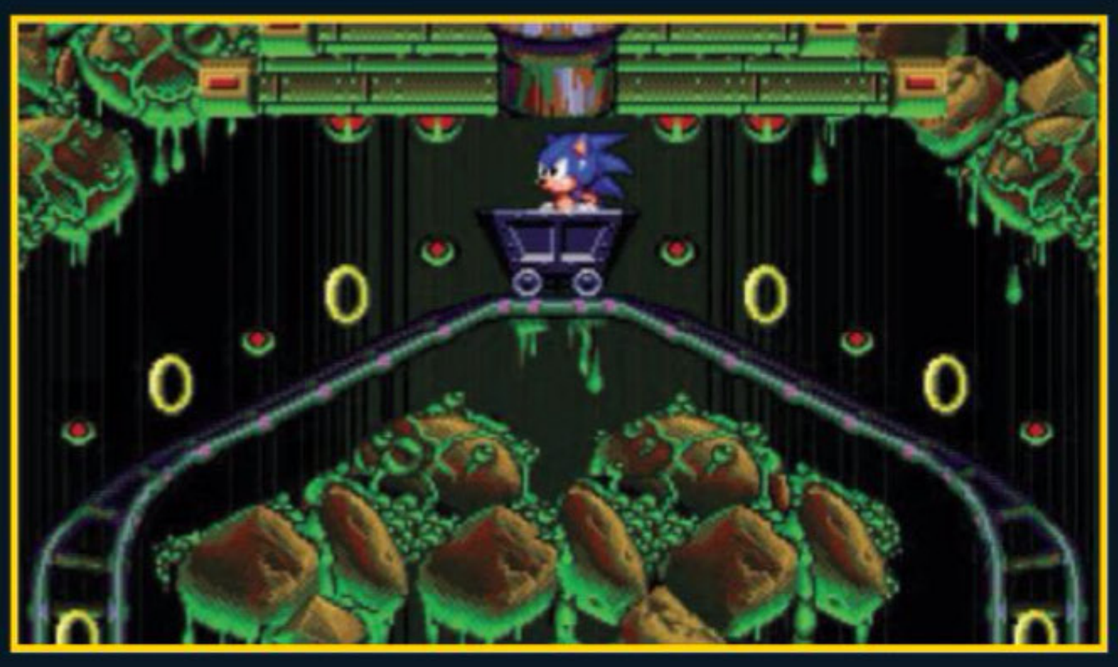
Considering the incredible success of *Sonic 2*'s holiday release, it's only natural that Sega of America would want to follow up the timely release with another title in the same vein. The only problem was that it had become quite clear that the direct sequel and only other *Sonic* title then in development, *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, would not be ready for release until well after the upcoming holiday season. If there was to be another *Sonic* game ready for every good boy and girl's stocking, something would need to be done – and fast.

"Following the success of *Sonic 1* and *2*, SOA management desired another *Sonic* game for the 1993 holiday season," says Peter Morawiec, the designer at Sega who would later go on to found Luxoflux and Isopod Labs. "Once Sonic Team communicated that they would miss that window, somebody at HQ must have asked whether a smaller, simpler *Sonic*-related title could be developed. The marketing/research folks indicated that *Sonic*'s casino levels were among the favourites, birthing the idea for the overall direction. I honestly don't know who came up with that, but it sounded fun and doable, so STI [Sega Technical Institute] jumped on it."

Now, given nothing more than a relatively loose idea of what direction the game may take and a previously established deadline, the team at STI were left to come up with some way of expanding on the concept of *Sonic 2*'s Casino Night Zone; a way of extracting the enjoyable aspects of this single level and expanding on them broadly enough to form a concept around which an entire game could be based. To somehow capture the magic of the level and take it in a new and interesting direction.

"We were given a pretty free rein to brainstorm," says Peter. "Everyone understood that we couldn't and shouldn't try to compete with the mainline *Sonic* franchise, so some departure was expected. I enjoyed the casino levels, but I was also really inspired by an Amiga game of the day called *Pinball Dreams*, which was about the nicest pinball game I've seen. I envisioned more of the real pinball mechanics brought into Sonic's world and felt it presented a truly unique proposition. Collaborating with team members Kurt

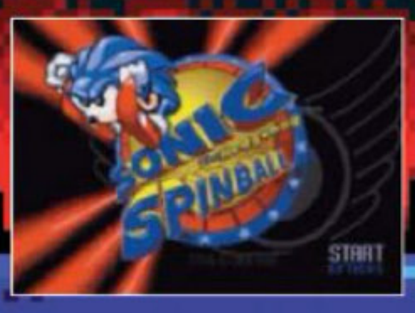
"Sonic 3 would not be ready until after the holiday season. Something needed to be done"



SONIC SPINBALL: THE ROLLER COASTER

UNVEILED IN FEBRUARY 2010, Sonic Spinball is a moderately sized rollercoaster located in the Adventure Land area of the Alton Towers theme park. Although the ride was not originally designed with a *Sonic* theme in mind, having previously existed as Spinball Whizzer, the ride became part of a sponsorship deal between Sega and Alton Towers that included both the rollercoaster and a *Sonic*-themed hotel room. As such, the ride was shut down and reworked to a suitable theme. The new vision for the ride was brought about through predominantly cosmetic changes, such as a new red and blue paint scheme, a number of new signs, new props, and even a certain amount of voice work by Sonic's current voice actor. The rebranding of the ride was not taken lightly by Alton Towers, which hosted a grand opening event and ribbon-cutting attended by both representatives of Sega and the blue blur himself.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** STI

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** ACTION

THE MAKING OF

IT'S LIKE GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

TO SAY THAT initial reactions to *Sonic Spinball* were a little mixed might be a bit of an understatement. Over the years, however, it seems clear that the game's legacy and place in the canon of *Sonic* games is a secure one. Since its original release, ignoring even the Game Gear and Master System ports and their re-releases, *Spinball* has been released in one form or another no less than six times. The game has been included in the *Sega Smash Pack* for the Dreamcast; *Sonic Mega Collection* for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube and PC; and the *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. It's also currently available for download on the Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console. Had the game been included in *Sonic Jam* for the Sega Saturn, it would hold the distinction of having been available for a major system in every generation since the Mega Drive.

Peterson, Justin Chin and John Duggan, I created an animation to showcase these ideas. We demoed this video to Sega's board, which went over very well, and STI got the green light to proceed."

With the project given the go-ahead, Peter was placed at the helm of perhaps the most important game Sega would release that year. He was given control over Sega's very own mascot, over what was in many ways the public face of the company. Not a bad break for a rookie developer.

"I think the animated demo, management's willingness to take a chance on a newbie designer, as well as a bit of luck, landed me the job," he says. "I'm still very grateful to Mr Sugano and then studio head Roger Hector for that break."

Considering the trade-off between the vote of confidence implicit in the commission to work on a game centring around such an important character and the need to ensure that this new release lives up to the standard set by the previous entries, it's unsurprising that Peter's initial feelings seem somewhat mixed: "I felt honoured but also quite overwhelmed. Development time was short and Sonic Team set the quality bar very high, so we had our work cut out for us."

Now that the concept had been cemented and with a team in place, the rush was on. If *Sonic Spinball* was to be finished in time to hit the shelves for holiday shoppers, it would need to be completed in well under a year – a very tight development schedule for a game that would require the level of quality demanded by any *Sonic* title of this era. Amazingly, considering not only this strict timeline but also the possible effects that a failure to capitalise on *Sonic*'s new-found popularity could have on Sega of America's bottom line, Peter seems to remember encountering very little in the way of corporate pressure surrounding the game's development.

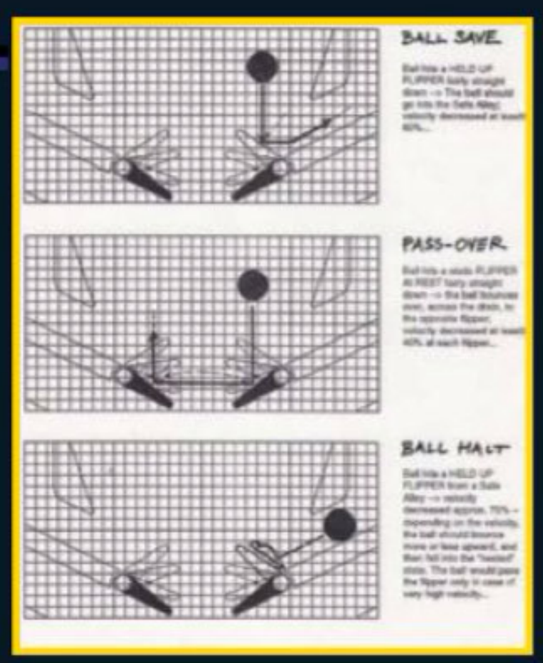
> **"If Sonic 3 had progressed a little quicker, the world may have never got to see this unique game"**

"I can only assume management was under heavy pressure from SOA to deliver, but to Roger's and Sugano's credit, they shielded the team from that very well," continues Peter. "Also, with *Spinball* being an SOA-commissioned title, there was no interference from SOJ. Early on, Roger brought in two seasoned contractors to handle the core programming: Dennis Koble and Lee Actor of Sterling Silver Software, developers of EA's early *PGA Tour Golf* games – fantastic guys to work with. Sonic Team could spare no talent, but most of the remaining STI members were enlisted, and the company also sent us an excellent artist from Japan, Katsuhiko Sato, for a few months."

Despite the decision to bring in veteran talent from outside the Institute to help speed along the project's development, in order to meet the deadlines presented a certain amount of streamlining would need to be done. In fact, changes would need to be made to even the most fundamental ways in which games for the Mega Drive were typically written, as Peter explains: "Much of the code was written in C, not assembly, which was somewhat unusual back in the day because you needed to be as close to the hardware as possible to get the most out of it. Lee and Dennis went with C due to the time constraints, so there were some frame rate concerns and optimising."

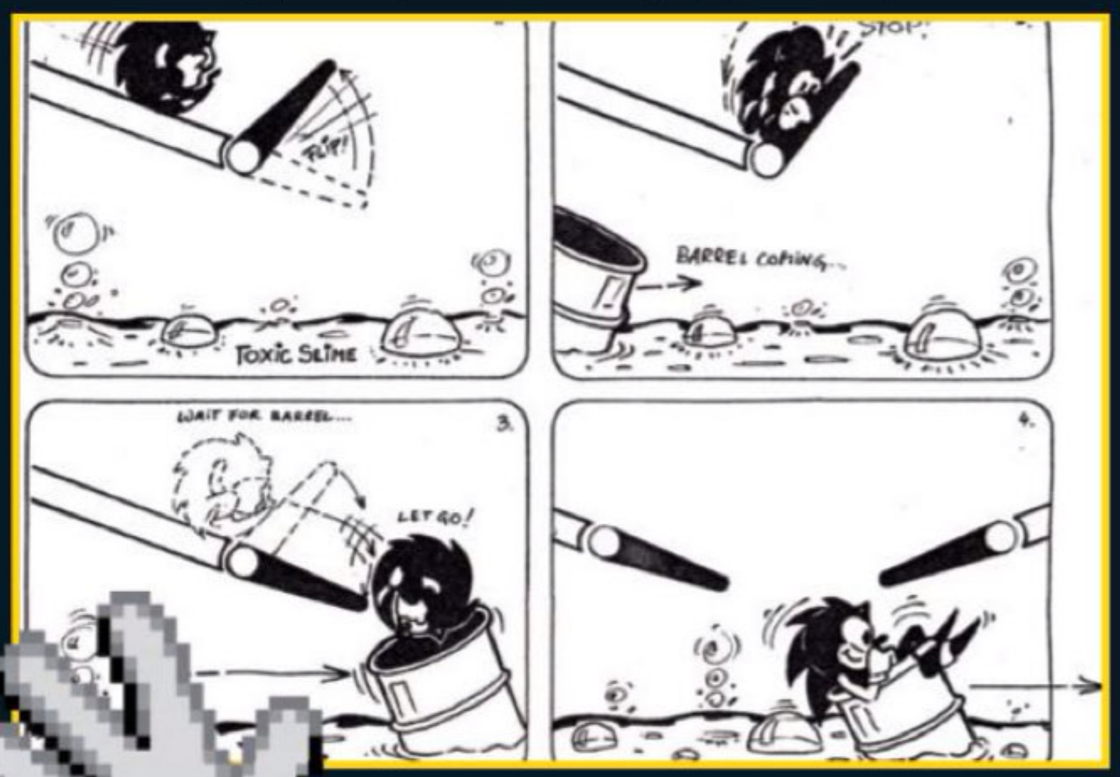
The decision to move further away from system language and squeeze performance from the system in another fashion would seem to have been the correct one. Regardless of how many late nights the project may have required, when you look over *Spinball*'s development schedule, the progress made in such a short time is nothing if not impressive. In two short months, between 15 June and August, the project developed from a roughly playable first build, featuring nothing more than the scrolling and collision systems and 80 per cent of the character animations played on a single unfinished level, to a fully completed, ready to ship final build. In 61 days it progressed from something not even suitable for a press demo to a fully fleshed-out game. Amazingly, with such a short time to work, the team had managed to produce not just a game, but a quality game.

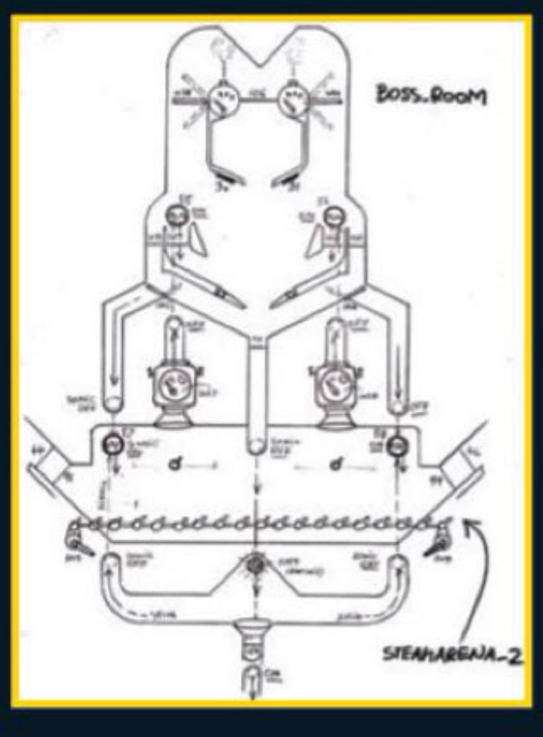
More amazing still is that by all accounts this production work went along smoothly and without drama. Well, perhaps that is something of an exaggeration. There is one piece of *Sonic Spinball* lore, one minor horror story that we just couldn't resist asking to hear a little more about: legend has it that somehow, with the commission to work on a new *Sonic*



» The game's design documents break down every interactive aspect of each of the tables.

» Tricks based on combining aspects of both pinball and traditional *Sonic* gameplay were created early on.





» [Mega Drive] Much like a real pinball table, *Spinball* is filled with loops and ball catches.

» [Mega Drive] Collecting the level's Chaos Emeralds grants access to the boss.

» [Mega Drive] The game's representation of a real table's LED display adds a little extra flair.

title granted, the message that Sega itself did not, in fact, own the rights to *Sonic*'s theme failed to be passed along – an oversight that would go unnoticed until the final minute of the eleventh hour.

"It was quite a fiasco," recalls Peter. "We were virtually code-released, having a little party in the conference room, when Hirokazu Yasuhara, the lead designer on Sonic Team, casually asked whether we acquired rights to use the title song. Everyone assumed Sega owned the *Sonic 2* theme, which we'd adapted for *Spinball*, where in fact it was a one-shot licence from a Japanese band, Dreams Come True. So, Howard Drossin, our composer, was tasked to create a brand new theme in something like two hours!"

Deadlines met, production work done and a new theme song composed, there was now nothing more to do than to sit back and wait to see how the release would fare on the market. To see how the gaming public would react to *Sonic*'s first step away from the constraints of the platforming genre. Unsurprisingly, considering the level of attention and focus that Sega's spiky blue mascot had acquired since his debut in 1991, the wait for the response from fans and media was not without its own stresses.

"I knew the game would face serious acceptance challenges from *Sonic* fans and the gaming media," admits Peter. "It was just a different animal, but I think the team did a great job, all things considered. I went to Europe for the holidays just prior to the game's release, full of apprehension. This was before the internet, and I did not make any phone calls to the States while away, so it was an amazing feeling to return and learn we've sold a ton of units. Clearly, *Spinball* benefited hugely from Sonic's popularity, and I've always wished we had the time to polish it properly. It's ultimately one of those polarising games, loved by some and disliked by others, but I'm happy with its overall success and fan base."

Though the game may still not have won over some who have trouble accepting the *Sonic* franchise's expansion into the realm of spin-off gaming, it's hard to imagine anyone who worked on the title being truly displeased with the game's overall reception.

The game has been re-released numerous times and is available for play on no less than 11 different platforms. Last February it was even bestowed with the very distinct honour of having a rollercoaster named after it (see 'Sonic Spinball: The Rollercoaster' boxout), earning Sega's mascot a clear victory over a certain rotund plumber in terms of who has the best theme park ride.

In the end, if there is one lesson that can be learnt from the story of *Sonic Spinball*'s creation, it must be this: the next time you feel inclined to get upset about a production delay, next time you feel yourself getting a little impatient over the wait for a long-anticipated game, take a moment to remember that if *Sonic 3* had progressed just a little quicker, if its release had been moved up just a few short months, the world may have never got to see the unique and interesting blend of pinball and platforming that *Sonic Spinball* had to offer.

TOP 25 MEGA DRIVE GAMES

As the Mega Drive is now 25 years old, we felt it was the perfect opportunity for Retro Gamer readers to pick their favourite games. Were yours included? Read on...

Disney's Aladdin

DEVELOPER: VIRGIN INTERACTIVE

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

25 **Of all of** the versions, the Mega Drive's *Aladdin* was best. Surprisingly put together by legendary developer David Perry in just 99 days, it may have been a platform game – the staple genre of the majority of film tie-ins from the Eighties and early Nineties – but the cartoon graphics, silky smooth animation and diverse nature of the 11 levels was inspired by *Sonic*. It therefore had a frenetic pace and numerous collectables with flowing action that remains great fun.

Jungle Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

24 **A chopper title** that was so good it kept a popular series going for three more games, *Jungle Strike*'s strategical elements and full-on airborne blasting ensures its worthy place in our readers' top 25. The wealth of missions meant that gamers played for lengthy periods of time and, while let down by the sound every now and then, there remained a feeling of being immersed in a strong battle against an intelligent enemy. Well-ported, its natural home was within this original Mega Drive version where, aggressive war-mongering aside, design and control reigned supreme.

Rocket Knight Adventures

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

23 **Seamless blending of** levels and the feeling that this first Konami game for the Mega Drive threw every graphical trick it could into a big pot, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was impressive. This was a game that oozed innovation (save for the boss battles) and higher difficulty levels lent it a challenge no gamer would want to live without experiencing.

Shining Force

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RPG

22 **A shining example** of a fine fantasy RPG, this turn-based tactical exploration of the Kingdom of Guardiana had the ability to see enemies in advance, giving players ample time to work out the correct and most intriguing strategy to employ in order to bloodthirstily slay them in combat. With elements of steampunk and a well-devised plot that employed humour and involved a great range of characters, *Shining Force*'s grid-based action and slick presentation made it an instant classic and it was recognised as such by many who played it back in 1992. Sure, there are some bizarre moments in the English translation – Lug, Luke, gah, it's so confusing – but that didn't stop it from getting into *Mega*'s Top 33 of all time and neither, it seems, did it bar it from entering our Top 25. Play it again today on iOS (like many other Sega classics) for pure retro gaming on the go.

ToeJam & Earl

DEVELOPER: JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

21 **The cover screamed** 'jammin' and it seems this totally cool and chilled-out game struck a chord with readers. Everyone likes a laugh, and ToeJam & Earl were a comedy duo to rival some of the greatest. The slow build-up at the start of this top-down action game soon gave way to plentiful giggles, and the developers no doubt had a ball when packing in their belly dancers, nerds and bogeymen among other assorted weird happenings, most of which parodied urban culture in the Eighties. *ToeJam & Earl* came into its own, in particular, when the two-player mode kicked in to allow gamers to share the experience with a buddy. While it wasn't a hard game to beat, the tone of the game drove players forward (albeit sometimes at a sedentary pace) and there was a sense of never quite knowing what was to come.

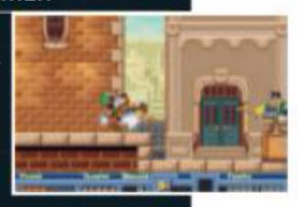
Desert Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **The subject matter** of *Desert Strike* is as relevant today as it was back then, with the affairs of the Middle East still firmly on the agenda. As befitting such a scenario, it was rather political, referencing the inability of the UN to take direct action against a war-mongering dictator and his army. However, it was also a sophisticated shoot-'em-up that was a world away from the more conventional examples of the genre, proving so popular, it was made for a host of other machines. Gulf War inspiration aside, *Desert Strike* had a rather fresh approach to war, although lead designer Mike Posehn had never made a game before he tackled this project. He ensured the game had everything you needed for a rich experience, be it maps, cut-scenes to explain the action or mission details to work out what to do next. The five main missions were supplemented with ten sub-assignments, lending depth and variety, as well as ensuring that gamers would be able to feast their eyes on the wonderful graphics and let their ears take in the Ron Hubbard sounds of war for a number of hours.

QuackShot Starring Donald Duck

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



19 **Perhaps readers were** dewy-eyed over Dewey (and Huey and Louie). *QuackShot* proved that older gamers could enjoy some Disney action, but the beautiful graphics were marred by slow gameplay. This was perhaps better for newbies.

John Madden Football '92

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

18 **The game may** have lacked NFL and NFLPA licences, but EA's second title to feature the legendary American football commentator started the annual tweak-the-gameplay trend that kicked off a long-running franchise. And boy, it was a joy to watch that crowd celebrate.

Thunder Force III

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

17 **Like *R-Type*, this** horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up excelled throughout, searing eyeballs with sharp sprites, polished parallax scrolling and bad-ass backgrounds that made the rat-a-tat waves of battling baddies and their barrage of bullets a pleasure. Great bosses too.

Golden Axe

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

16 **One of the most** well known Mega Drive games in existence, even for those that didn't play it. *Golden Axe*'s fun two-player mode made this scrolling fighter shine, as players head butted, kicked and sliced their way to victory with more than a nod or two to the *Conan* films.

Ghouls 'n Ghosts

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/SEGA
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

15 **Straight from the** arcades to home machines, this run-and-gun classic (converted by Sega) is just as frustrating as the arcade original. It remains a fantastic port however and had owners grinning at their SNES-owning friends. Until *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* came along…

Dynamite Headdy

■ **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1994 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

14 **Developed by Treasure,** the bright, colourful visuals of *Dynamite Headdy* will have stuck in the heads of all the gamers who tried this genre-busting platformer back in 1994. An all-so-knowing and relevant tale of a puppet called Headdy in pursuit of a girl's attention, it could easily have gone down the path of *Mario* (which, admittedly is a great route for games to take). After all, Headdy discovers that his girl and his friends have been kidnapped. What to do? Go and rescue them.

But where *Dynamite Headdy* succeeded was in turning perception upside down, literally at times. It also relied on getting the right head on, whether it be a strength-increasing offensive noggin or one that would let him snooze. It meant that, even for platform fans, it was a new experience, helped along by lots of useful characters.

Flashback

■ **DEVELOPER:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

13 **It is the** best selling French game of all time, according to Guinness World Records, and US Gold brought it to the wider masses. The way the screens slid in rather than scrolled when the player neared the edge, gave it an old-school feel even when it was released in 1992, but the rotoscoping and use of FMV made it feel part of the future. *Flashback* became a massive hit and was marketed as being a CD-ROM game on a cartridge due to its huge scope and size. All of the backdrops were hand drawn, and so the style was very much unlike anything that came before it. This lent it an ambitious edge which could be seen in the manner of play, the realms of role-play coming to the fore in level two and enemies suddenly feeling sharper and more intelligent the deeper you go.

Streets Of Rage

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA AM7
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1991 ■ **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

12 **At the time** of release, many regarded *Streets Of Rage* to be the Mega Drive's best fighter. We won't say it was the best ever, for reasons that will undoubtedly become clear later, but it was a two-player combat game of excellence that had scores of enemies battling against you over eight levels. A worthy alternative to Capcom's *Final Fight*, which was exceedingly popular on Nintendo's SNES, it may have been a little slow (particularly if you played as Adam) but there was no denying that the game's combat made it highly satisfying to play. It had a great multiplayer mode as well, giving it the edge over the SNES ports of Capcom's popular fighter. Add in some truly astonishing trance-style music, courtesy of Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima, and it becomes easy to see why Sega's scrolling fighter remains so popular.

Strider

■ **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM/SEGA
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

11 **This is quite** simply one of the finest arcade ports of its time on Sega's machine and it still manages to impress today. Sega handled the ambitious port itself, and the end result is a magnificent early release for the Mega Drive that proved just how powerful the 16-bit console was. *Strider* remains beautifully animated as he fights his way through the game's huge levels and, while certain sections are prone to some rather irritating sprite flicker, it's still amazing to see just how polished Sega's port actually is. Full of inventive level design - including the best second level ever - and featuring a bewildering array of crazy bosses to battle through, *Strider* is Capcom at its most inventive and creative and it remains a sensational platformer. Filled with dazzling set pieces and excellent tunes, *Strider* on the Mega Drive was arguably one of the best ports of the game, with only the Sharp X68000, PC Engine and PlayStation versions bettering it. Darran is still in shock that it didn't make your top ten.

Thunder Force IV

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

10 **Okay, so we** kind of glossed over *Thunder Force III* and that is because, as great as it was, many readers feel this is better. For those reading in America, you may know this as *Lightening Force: Quest For The Darkstar*, a game that rocked to a synth beat and locked to a hair-pulling regional program that meant European Mega Drive and Genesis owners couldn't play the Japanese version.

Thunder Force IV wasn't a gigantic leap from *Thunder Force III*. It was a bit of gameplay tinkering here, a little polish of the graphics there, and yet the result is considered by many to be the best of the series. It may still be a shoot-'em-up that scrolls to the side, but you could go up further than the boundaries of the 14-inch telly that you had in your bedroom and it felt as if you had loads more freedom.

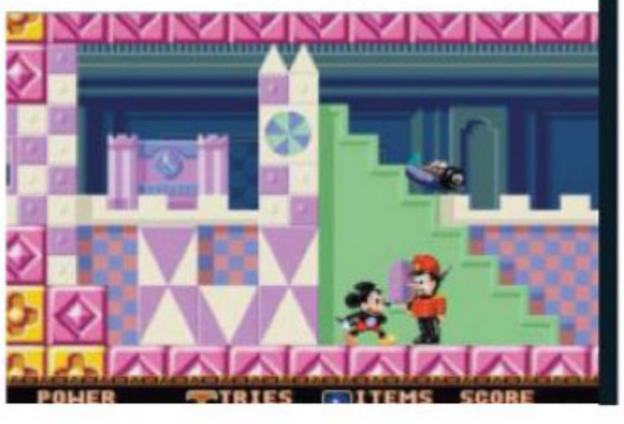
Looking as if the graphic artists had stayed up day and night for months on end due to the incredible detail of the backdrops and sprites, it is fair to say that the programmers, on the other hand, may have had some sleep. There wasn't so much innovative thinking going on, especially in terms of speed where slow-down was an issue at times but not enough to make you wince.

However, if something was achieved, then it was a sheer show of power. If nothing else, the game, while starting to feel as if it was just offering standard shoot-'em-up fare, showed the true power of the Mega Drive and you sensed that the achievement could not have been possible on other consoles. With the history of the series behind it, *Thunder Force IV* could afford to push on incrementally rather than make a wholesale change and, today, if you were going to go back and play one of the series' games, you should certainly make a bee-line for this.

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

9 **Although you may** think home consoles were awash with *Mickey Mouse* games, this was actually only the second outing for Disney's anthropomorphic rodent. It helped to cement the Mega Drive's reputation as a must-have machine, such was the addictive nature and jaw-dropping graphics that combined to make the game so loved. Beautiful parallax scrolling and a range of animated faces brought the world and Mickey to life. It wasn't an incredibly hard game and the obstacles and traps that lay before Mickey were by no means insurmountable. But who could fail to fall for a charming butt-stomp that dispatches Mickey's enemies? Not us.



The Revenge Of Shinobi

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

8 **Revenge is such** an ugly word, isn't it? But, without wishing to sound corny, it made for a very sweet game. The sequel to *Shinobi*'s 1987 debut turned Joe Musashi into a household name and, while he pounded the streets of his eight districts in a bid to confront Neo Zeed, he got to biff Batman and spring a surprise on Spider-Man among an assortment of other well-known hero-baddies. Such blasé use of said icons (explained away by the doings of a shape shifter) got Sega into some bother and it had to make some later revisions. But that only provides for what is a good yarn – not that a well-animated, sonically beautiful and addictive game would need such assistance.

Road Rash II

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RACING

7 ***Road Rash II*** is one of only two racing games in the top 25, showing that either the Mega Drive wasn't really blessed with a vast selection of such titles, or that our readers couldn't give two hoots about many of them. Great for one or two players, and having three bike classes in Ultra Light, Nitro Class and Super Bike, *Road Rash II* had a number of options that included a split-screen game, pure head-to-head and some smacks to opposing riders' faces. The learning curve was spot on too, with the difficulty increased after each section. The good news was that you could just keep going until you fell asleep (not while racing, we hope) and, once you had secured your racing passwords, you could start from where you finished off.

Micro Machines Turbo Tournament '96

DEVELOPER: SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** RACING

While basically *Micro Machines 2,* this version of the top-down tiny racing game was exclusive to the Sega Mega Drive. The game itself was already an enhancement of its predecessor, with different handling techniques that depended on the vehicles and new cars. *Turbo Tournament '96* added the track construction kit from the PC version of *MM2*, as well as updated tracks, meaning that Mega Drive owners could feel special and play the best version of the sequel too. This game wasn't produced by Codemasters but instead was contracted out to Supersonic, a company that was able to play to its strengths and produce a truly fantastic party game.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Sonic's first entry in our list and it's predictably high. Sonic's last main Mega Drive game was an impressive refinement of the series, featuring everything that had made the hedgehog so popular but on a far larger scale. Notable for introducing Knuckles to the series, *Sonic 3* also used the lock-in technology that had been created by Sonic Team and Sega Technical Institute for *Sonic & Knuckles*. It's a fantastic platformer with excellent visuals, super slick animation and a superb soundtrack – but according to you, it's not Sonic's best Mega Drive outing.

Sonic The Hedgehog

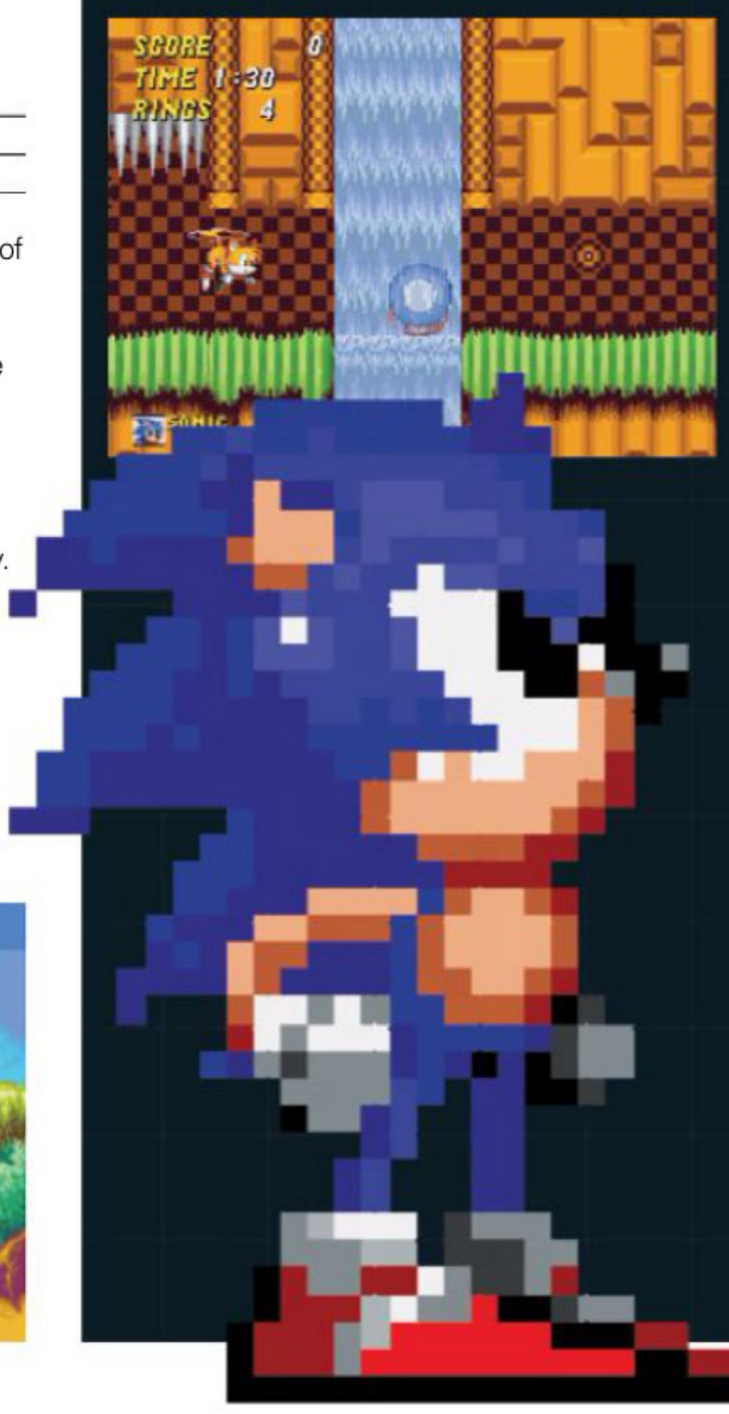
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

A true blue classic. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was eventually bundled with the Mega Drive in a move by Sega's Tom Kalinske to draw interest away from the evil-sounding *Altered Beast* that was currently packaged with the console. This shrewd move allowed Sega's new mascot to go toe-to-toe with Mario – not that the fat plumber would ever manage to keep up with Sonic's blistering speed. Bold, sleek and cool, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was as much a statement about Sega's attitude as it was a superb platformer, and it's little wonder that it went on to become one of the system's best games.

Gunstar Heroes

DEVELOPER: TREASURE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

Treasure's Mega Drive debut is one of the greatest calling cards of the 16-bit generation. Packed with imagination, and pulling off graphical tricks that the machine was supposedly incapable of, *Gunstar Heroes* was a revelation upon release and remains a stunning achievement. Like many Treasure games it has superlative visuals, but also understands the importance of great gameplay. *Gunstar Heroes* has tight controls, a clever weapon system (you can combine weapons) and well-structured levels that culminate in fantastic, imaginative boss fights. Treasure would go on to release five more games for Sega's console, but its astounding debut is clearly your favourite.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

What? More Sonic? Oh yes – but then Sega's blue mascot was a major icon, and never more so than on the Mega Drive. *Sonic 2* was able to pick up on the momentum of the first game that pretty much every Mega Drive owner would have played to death, but Sega knew it had to be special. It was released on 24 November 1992 on an occasion that was dubbed 'Sonic 2uesday'. It became the Mega Drive's best-selling title and players once again collected rings and got Sonic to run as fast as they could, but in came spin dashing and Sonic's partner Tails, whom a second player could control. A genius solution to Sonic potentially dashing away was to have Tails make his way back to him automatically. *Sonic 2* is, and there is no doubt here, the hedgehog's finest gaming moment.

"Streets Of Rage 2 is possibly the best game ever made. Would have given it 20 points if I could"
THE LAIRD

Streets Of Rage 2

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7 **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992 **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

We were surprised that *Streets Of Rage 2* took the top spot as we genuinely thought that it would be a *Sonic* game sitting at the top of your list. Sega's superb sequel strode into the lead very quickly though, and soon began to amass huge support making it undoubtedly your number one Mega Drive game of all time.

Everything about Sega's sequel was bigger, bolder, and well... better. The most noticeable difference was the truly spectacular looking sprites that looked far beefier than the weedy looking efforts shown in the original game. The gameplay had also been greatly refined, with special moves being granted to each character, including an attack from Axel Stone that looked a lot like Ryu's Dragon Punch. As with Capcom's *Final Fight*, pulling off a special move was a great way of defeating multiple enemies at once and also granted you a small amount of invulnerability (at the expense of some of your precious health).

Such strategic use of these moves was vital in order to achieve victory in a game that was hard going no matter how good you became or what difficulty level you decided to play on. However, it was clear that Sega didn't go down the path of merely bolting on a few extras. It re-jigged the entire game and was bigger and better in so many respects, not least in the aforementioned chunkier characters that moved with far greater animation than before.

New characters were also introduced, namely Max Thunder, a huge lumbering tank, and Eddie 'Skate' Hunter, a fast-paced skater who, despite his young age, had no problem leaping onto the backs of strangers and punching their faces in. Blaze Fielding and Axel Stone also returned, ensuring that players would have no problem finding a fighter that would suit their playing style.

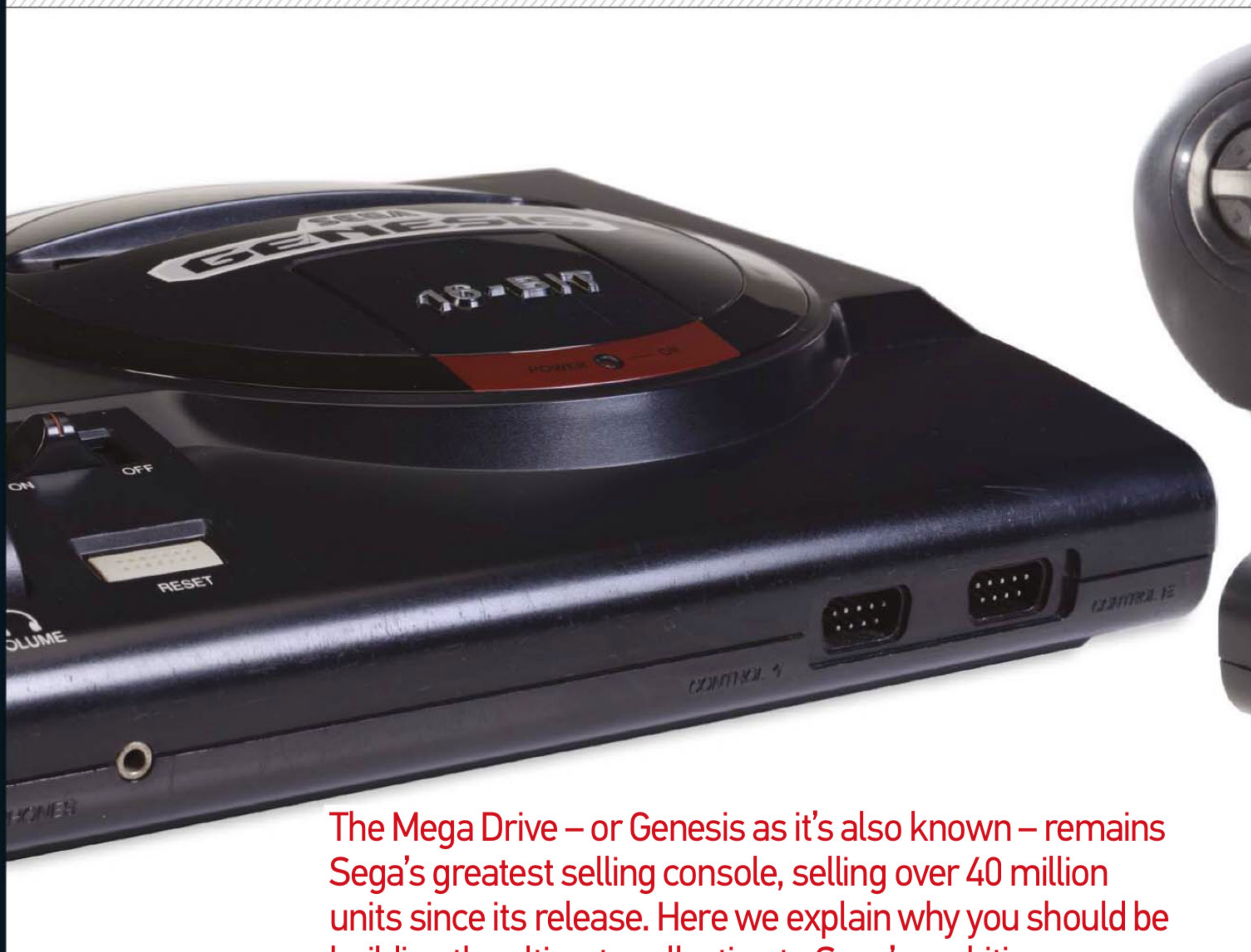
The co-operative fighting of the original once again came to the fore, allowing players to team up to pull off silly, showy moves that would decimate enemies and allow you to combat *Streets Of Rage 2*'s occasionally tough difficulty spikes. Bosses were tougher as well, and a lot more inventive, ensuring that you'd keep plugging away until you had scrapped your way through all eight stages.

Sega had even improved the excellent soundtrack, once again securing Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima to create some stirring tunes to accompany all the on-screen fisticuffs. It remains one of the best Mega Drive soundtracks of all time, with the musicians putting in just as much effort as the programmers to ensure that Sega's sequel was better in every possible way. Everything about Sega's ambitious sequel was massively enhanced, culminating in the best scrolling fighter for any 16-bit system. Hell, for many it remains the best scrolling fighter of all time.

Five reasons why it's great

- Each character has their own unique moves and abilities
- There are loads of weapons to pick up and use, from knives to metal bars
- It has one of the best techno soundtracks heard in any videogame we've played
- Graphically superb, the characters are arcade-chunky and the backdrops ooze quality
- Action moves left to right and up and down giving a feeling of exploration as you biff opponents

The Collector's Guide



The Mega Drive – or Genesis as it's also known – remains Sega's greatest selling console, selling over 40 million units since its release. Here we explain why you should be building the ultimate collection to Sega's ambitious 16-bit console and highlights its best games and peripherals

SEGA ME

» **Manufacturer:** Sega » **Models:** Mega Drive, Mega Drive 2, Mega Drive 3 » **Launched:** 1988 (Japan), 1989 (US), 1990 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

GA DRIVE

The Collector's Guide

» The Super Magic Drive was a copying device, allowing gamers to transfer ROM data to floppy disks or PCs.

» The Sega Mega Drive had numerous updates over the years. The Mega Drive II shown here was first released in 1993.

Why it's collectable

While Sega is no longer a major player in the videogame hardware world today, the legacy of its 1988 release – the Sega Mega Drive – still lives on. Despite being discontinued in the late Nineties and moved aside to make way for its younger 32-bit sibling, countless gamers are still lining up today to secure a library of Mega Drive classics.

The Mega Drive was not only set to be the successor to the Master System, but it was also a direct result of Hayao Nakayama's desire to bring the coin-op experience home. By modifying its System-16 arcade hardware, Sega intended to create a console every bit as powerful, and one that made it easy to port arcade releases to. While this creation held a lot of promise and potential, its eventual October release in Japan was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3* on the Nintendo Famicom, released a week earlier.

However, its importance was soon recognised once it arrived in the West. On 30 November, 1990, Sega brought its console over to European shores to build upon the strong foundations that the Master System had already cemented. With arcade ports of *Altered Beast*, *Golden Axe* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* available from day one, the Mega Drive had finally found success – or at least the start of it.

Aggressive advertising campaigns, Electronic Art's unauthorised reverse engineering of the hardware, and a thriving import market would begin to push Sega closer to success, but this didn't truly begin to accelerate until 23 June, 1990. On this day an instant hit was born – bearing stunning visuals, fast gameplay and an iconic soundtrack, all of which were accompanied by an attitude-filled mascot – Sonic The Hedgehog. The speedy blue mammal's emergence marked what may be the most important event in Sega's history, and the Mega Drive's lifetime. The UK based publication *Mean Machines Magazine* singled it out as 'the best platform game on the Mega Drive' to date and their assessment was spot on – not only did the title go on to sell 15 million copies worldwide and become the start of a long series, Sonic also became an internationally recognisable character. The shelves of Woolworths and the back pages of the Argos catalogue were flooded with *Sonic The Hedgehog* pencil cases, jigsaws, comics, clothing and sweets.

Whilst this is only a snippet of the 16-bit system's story, retro gamers often find themselves returning to the Mega Drive to indulge in its plethora of software that's stood the test of time. *Sonic 2*, *Streets Of Rage II* and *Gunstar Heroes* are just a small selection from the colossal count of 531 known unique European releases. While the number of available titles towered over the Japanese catalogue of just over 400 releases, it was dwarfed by the run in North America, where the platform welcomed over 700 titles. This difference produced a selection of region exclusive releases that failed to make the cut worldwide. Europe in particular missed out on ground-breaking titles such as *Pulseman*, *Twinkle Tale*, *Musha Aleste* and *Golden Axe III*, leaving fans wondering why, as they headed down to the local import shop prepared to pay double.

» Due to the popularity of Sega's console there were plenty of great magazines available for it.

» The Multi-Mega was an interesting combination of the Mega Drive and its Mega-CD add-on. It's now quite rare.

Did you know?

■ In December 1994, the hit TV show *Bad Influence* gave two minutes of prime time to something that could have knocked the stuffing out of Sega's Christmas plans. An all new and unauthorised Mega Drive hardware clone, the Scorpion 16, was demonstrated on air. For just £70, this bootleg device offered compatibility with the existing library of 16-bit titles along with built in functionality to play region locked imports. Somehow, this unofficial kit managed to make its way into a few select high street chains, but not for long. The Scorpion 16 was soon nowhere to be seen and has since become an incredible rarity.

» *Mean Machines* was an awesome magazine, covering plenty of essential Mega Drive releases like *Probotector*.

This broad selection, however, did suffer from a highly contagious infection of sports software – with nearly one quarter of the PAL selection on offer being digital renditions of the playing field, something which could be attributed to Electronic Arts' influence on the 16-bit era. Initially, Mediagenic took control of Sega's request to develop a licenced Joe Montana Football game – however, the team was soon behind schedule. With Sega of America panicking, EA was soon called upon during extra time to pass them a lifeline. Once EA's last minute replacement game touched down, it was an instant hit. Sega of Japan's previous concerns regarding sports games being a poor investment was soon slam dunked. Countless developers caught on to this growing trend, and alongside EA, just about every sport under its glowing stadium lights had its own Mega Drive triumph. The technically impressive *FIFA International Soccer* was undoubtedly the most popular digital football offering; however, these days it has quickly become the least favourite. Its never ending unwanted presence at car boot sales and secondhand shops usually signals that you were just pipped to the post of a more appealing selection.

Although the Mega Drive was officially laid to rest in the late Nineties, the last two decades have seen the system still populate the production line. South America has continued to sell the 16-bit hardware, with distributor Tec Toy targeting those unable to afford modern consoles. During an observant stroll through a South American high street, it's no surprise to see Mega Drive compatible *Guitar Hero* controllers, exclusive ports of more recent games such as *Duke Nukem 3D*, and even brand new releases such as *Férias Frustradas Do Pica-Pau*.

Elsewhere around the world, a handful of developers still consider the Mega Drive a viable platform for new releases. Super Fighter Team, to name just one, recently acquired the rights to translate and re-release a selection of obscure foreign releases. The first of these was a 1996 Chinese exclusive RPG known as *Beggar Prince*, which saw a physical cartridge release in 2006, and further proved that there was still a market for new software on the Mega Drive. Super Fighter Team released a couple more titles after that, but the playing field was then forever changed upon WaterMelon's late arrival. Their heavily delayed atmospheric RPG, *Pier Solar*, took six years to develop and became the largest title in Mega Drive history at 64Mbit. The limited 2010 print run was met with much controversy over a delayed pre-ordering process, leaving many to demand a refund. As the homemade hit now fetches nearly ten times its original cost when placed up for auction, those who abandoned ship early had to hold out for the (also limited) reprint edition.

The Mega Drive has become a popular starting ground for nostalgic gamers, while bringing more than enough challenge to the hardcore collectors. The array of reasonably priced definitive titles and several rarities bordering on the quadruple figure mark at auction, further prove that there's something for everyone with Sega's 16-bit system – as long as you can withstand all the American footballers and soccer superstars.

THE PERIPHERALS

» There was a large number of excellent games available for the Master System, making this device essential if you owned the console.

» There are two versions of the Master System Converter available. This model was designed to work with the Mega Drive II.

Master System Converter

While Hayao Nakayama and Hideki Sato were collaborating to create the Sega Mega Drive, the latter of these two masterminds decided to add a little more sparkle. Sato's forward thinking introduced built-in compatibility for keyboards, mice, floppy disk drives, modems, graphics tablets and even a printer, regardless of whether this additional functionality would ever be used by consumers. But this was just the start of a console desperate to be something more.

Not only did this pre-emptive planning pave the way for the future release of the Sega Mega CD add-on, but it also offered Sega's back catalogue a lifeline. Backwards compatibility with the Sega Master System (or Sega Mark III in Japan) was one of Sato's final additions. However, like the others, it would require additional hardware to work.

Three months after the initial launch of the Sega Mega Drive in Japan, the Power Base Converter (or Mega Adapter as it was known in Japan) was released. This unusually shaped device sat snugly on the top of an original Mega Drive console, covering a good portion of its exterior. At the top of the Power Base Convertor was a small flap that, when exposed, provided access to a Master System cartridge connector, ready for the game of your choice. Below this connector was a small credit card sized slot. While Sega did release their own 16-bit banking software, this card slot wasn't for your life's savings – instead, you could insert Sega's tried and tested media format containing games and software on a flat piece of plastic, the Sega Card (or My Card in Japan). The only other area of interest on the Power Base Converter was the Pause button, a duplicate of the same button found on the 8-bit hardware, and one Sega foolishly didn't wire up to the more accessible start button on the Mega Drive control pad.

How this adapter actually worked, though, is rather interesting. As Sato had already embedded the Master System's central processor (the z80) and sound chip (the SN76489) on the Mega Drive's motherboard, there was little for the Power Base Converter to actually do. Without a single component from the original 8-bit hardware present in the adapter, the Power Base Converter was nothing more than a glorified pass-through-port for Master System games. At ¥4,500 (or £39.95 on its UK release), you might be wondering why such an adapter was necessary. Unfortunately for gamers worldwide, no matter how hard you pushed, the Master System's cartridge pin arrangement was just too dissimilar to that of the Mega Drive's, making the Power Base Converter a mandatory purchase for nostalgic gamers.

When Sega redesigned the Mega Drive in 1993, the perfectly formed Power Base Converter was due a makeover, having become incompatible with the revised hardware. Thus, the Master System Converter II was born. This all new European exclusive adapter – formed for both the Mega Drive I and II – removed the Sega Card slot found on the original device and was more in keeping with the new look.

...AND THE REST

01. Pro Action Replay & Game Genie

■ Born into a culture fuelled by cheat codes and magazine pull-out tips, the Pro Action Replay & Game Genie offered an all new gateway into the world of game hacking. The cartridges, which slotted in-between the console and your game of choice, brought about infinite lives, level skips, one-hit kills and just about anything you could wish for.

02. Arcade Power Stick

■ Further driving home the message that the Sega Mega Drive was well equipped to serve as a coin-op equivalent, a control pad alternative known as the Arcade Power Stick arrived to give you a more authentic grip on the action. The most unusual addition to this peripheral, however, was the inclusion of auto-fire buttons – something arcade purists would likely frown upon.

03. Menacer Light Gun

■ Clearly inspired by Nintendo's release of the Super Scope bazooka, Sega's Menacer light-gun decided to take design one step further than its rival. When fully assembled with its detachable double barrelled scope and shoulder rest, the 16-bit light-gun was far from a worthy investment for reasons other than its sheer ridiculousness.

04. Magic Drive Plus

■ Hailing from the black market, the Magic Drive Plus was the Sega Mega Drive equivalent of the Super Nintendo's Super Wild Card – an unofficial device that could read and write game cartridges onto or from floppy disks. This pirate hardware was much harder to locate than its Super Nintendo counterpart, though it offered just as much functionality – albeit illegally.

05. Magic Key III

■ Throughout the Mega Drive's lifespan developers began devising various methods to prevent games from being imported before their local release date. The Magic Key III, however, rendered all attempts to hold back importers useless, due to its switchable region masking. Games from all over the world could now be played on the console with ease.

06. 4 Way Play

■ Knowing the limitations of the Sega Mega Drive's multiplayer functionality, Electronic Arts created an adapter to bring the party back home. Their 4 Way Play adapter slotted into the two controller ports on the front of the console, expanding the available player slots to four.

07. Justifier

■ While there was already a light-gun available for the Sega Mega Drive, Konami released its own bright digital weapon to accompany their 1993 port of the arcade shooter, *Lethal Enforcers*.

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ Despite having an incredible prequel to live up to, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* smashed all expectations and gave Mario twice as much to worry about.

Streets Of Rage II

■ With all new moves and comrades, the bare knuckle brawlers returned in 1992 to take on the mysterious Mr X – powering themselves up with any discarded meat they might find.

Gunstar Heroes

■ Treasure was clearly a developer capable of getting the most out the Mega Drive. The multiplayer mayhem up for grabs in *Gunstar Heroes* is captivating carnage at its best.

The Revenge Of Shinobi

■ Becoming a ninja-master is no easy feat, something Sega's incredibly hard action platformer *The Revenge Of Shinobi* taught gamers the hard way.

Disney Collection: Castle Of Illusion & Quackshot

■ While it might be cheating to include a compilation here, excluding either of Disney's cartoon capers from a top list would be criminal.

PLAY THESE NEXT

Comix Zone

■ *Comix Zone* is a direct result of Sega's boundary-pushing experimentation – a platformer that dared to think outside the box. Jumping from panel to panel of a once static comic book, Sketch Turner must take on one of the biggest Mega Drive challenges around to the sound of Howard Drossin's timeless soundtrack.

Dynamite Headdy

■ Our protagonist Headdy arrives in North Town amidst the evil puppet King Dark Demon's plans to convert the peaceful town's residents into devilish minions. *Dynamite Headdy*'s adventure isn't easy, but it is laced with cute visuals, a catchy musical background and gameplay to marvel at – something developer Treasure is known for.

Dragon's Fury (aka Devil Crash)

■ *Dragon's Fury* was an incredible interpretation of pinball, offering gamers something physical tables could not. The gothic multi-table affair featured demonic armies of skeletons to target whilst being led through winding passages and warp portals. Real tables were given a run for their money.

ToeJam & Earl

■ Any attempt to summarise the funkatron duo's attempt to escape Earth is destined to crash land. This insane multiplayer funk-'em-up, spanning multiple floors connected by disco lifts, is one of those games you need to experience at least once. You'll either love *ToeJam & Earl* or despise their many attempts to make you laugh.

Road Rash II

■ Not only did the sequel race in with more violence, more crashes and more frustration, but it also introduced nitrous oxide boosts and new weaponry. Whether you preferred to cleanly make your way to the finish line or instead, take out every rival with a chain to the face, *Road Rash II* is one of the finest Mega Drive titles ever released.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Rainbow Islands Extra

■ Despite being a coin-op classic, few decent ports of Taito's 1987 credit gobbler were released. The Mega Drive port, however, lives up to the name despite its default mode introducing questionable robotic enemies.

Golden Axe III

■ Why Sega felt their highly refined finale to the fantasy world hack-and-slash series should never leave Japan is anyone's guess. *Golden Axe III* has since become a rather desirable import.

Monster World IV

■ Stepping aside from its roots, the sixth and final game in the *Wonder Boy/Monster World* series is the incredible story of Asha and her adopted pet Pepe – a 16-bit title not to be missed.

Magical Turbo Hat Flying Adventure

■ Based upon the *Magical Hat* anime series, this bonkers platformer did in fact see a European rehash titled *De-Cap Attack*. The import's untouched charm remains more desirable.

Granada

■ Although many will turn to *Gleylancer* and *Musha Aleste* for their shoot-'em-up fix, *Granada* is quite the hidden gem. WolfTeam's on-land tank freeroamer is often, and unfairly, overlooked.

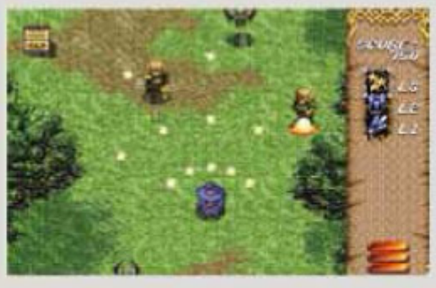
IMPORT THESE NEXT

Pulseman

■ Although most will remember Game Freak for its work on *Pokémon*, its 1994 Mega Drive offering *Pulseman* is not one you should dismiss too quickly. The energetic platformer centred around a cyber-terrorism battle brings a new dimension to this overcrowded genre, with an electrically-charged challenge to boot.

Gleylancer

■ While at first glance it appears to be nothing more than a glorified *Thunder Force* clone, this scrolling shoot-'em-up sets itself apart thanks to its advanced projectiles system. The command over the Advanced Busterhawk Gleylancer's surrounding satellites puts you in complete control to conquer this scrolling shooter.



Twinkle Tale

■ *Twinkle Tale* was a Japanese exclusive release that fell into the overly popular run-and-gun genre. Stepping aside from the clichéd themes of army-clad jungle shooters usually found in this category, the mystical narrative and magical style introduced a much more diverse array of scenery and a formidable cast of difficult enemies.

Snow Bros

■ Despite being nothing more than a 16-bit port of a winter themed *Bubble Bobble* clone, *Snow Bros* is one of the most addictive co-operative titles on offer. The overly cutesy visuals coupled with the snowball mechanics make fighting for the top score a frequent Friday night occupation – if you can afford to import it.

Yū Yū Hakusho: Makyō Tōitsusen

■ The only title from Treasure's Mega Drive line up that failed to see a European release was this one. The 2D fighter based upon the *Yū Yū Hakusho* anime took inspiration from both *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*, merging their greatest aspects into a four player free-for-all frenzy.

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Daze Before Christmas

■ Similar to its Super Nintendo counterpart, the limited shelf life of *Daze Before Christmas* saw this festive release only available during the winter season of 1994.

Fatal Fury 2

■ For reasons we'll probably never know, *Fatal Fury 2* became an Australian rental exclusive title that would fail to see a retail release – aside from the few ex-rental copies that slipped through.

The Death And Return Of Superman

■ Before the days of *World Of Warcraft*, Blizzard Entertainment tried its hand at a *Superman* themed *Streets Of Rage* clone – an awful one that would become a desirable rarity for all the wrong reasons.

The Punisher

■ Capcom arrived all too late to add another side scrolling beat-'em-up to their catalogue, leaving *The Punisher* to sell in small quantities, despite being an enjoyable brawler.

Thunder Force III

■ Believe it or not, *Thunder Force III* was actually distributed in Europe. The US version was sold with an additional German text manual, immortalising this shoot-'em-up as quite the rarity.

GET THESE NEXT

Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Stepping aside from his familiar circus theme, the sequel to *Aero The Acrobat* was nothing more than a new level pack for the disappointing platformer. Having failed to engage gamers previously, the updated release of *Aero The Acrobat 2* also sold in small quantities, making it a future rarity for Mega Drive collectors.

Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

■ *Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* from Acclaim was yet another side-scrolling brawler, but it had nothing to offer over its nearest rivals. Considered by fans to have damaged the Marvel name and strayed much too far from the original source material, this title is nothing more than a rarity.

Addams Family Values

■ *Addams Family Values* was the 1995 tie-in to the feature film of the same name. Although Ocean had all the right ideas with its *Zelda*-inspired *Addams Family* RPG, their execution was a little too late. By the time it arrived, gamers had already moved on to the more compelling adventures offered by newer consoles.

Ecco Jr.

■ In an attempt to captivate a younger audience, Sega not only released the Pico hardware, but also a small selection of child-friendly titles. The Australian exclusive, *Ecco Jr.*, removed the difficulty of its predecessors by granting infinite air and energy, leaving kids the menial task of locating hidden fish among other chores.

The Pirates Of Dark Water

■ This short lived animated series produced by Hanna-Barbera was lucky enough to join the plethora of cartoons that spawned their own videogame. Oddly enough its Super Nintendo release was a far superior side scrolling brawler that left its lacklustre Mega Drive platformer counterpart to sink beneath a sea of poor reviews.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL Mega Drive game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection

What makes it so special?

■ In 1992 Sega teamed up with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society to name one of its protected dolphins Ecco. To commemorate the partnership, an oversized *Limited Edition Ecco The Dolphin Box Set* was released, containing a unique T-shirt, shared adoption certificate, audio tape, conservation paraphernalia, and of course, the iconic videogame.

Why is it so expensive?

■ Before the days of DLC, limited editions were strictly limited – and this jewel in the crown is no different. The few remaining sets that have survived the last few decades untouched are genuinely rare, verging on endangered. Consequently, Mega Drive collectors will fight to the final bid on the rare occasions when one of these actually surfaces.

What makes it hard to find?

■ As many hunting this elusive rarity will tell you, you'll be lucky to even see the original packaging, never mind its contents. The incredibly hip *Ecco The Dolphin* T-shirt has since become discarded sleepwear, the blue-tac covered adoption certificate remains nowhere to be seen and the audio cassette tape presumably ended up at the local charity shop.

The Collector's Guide

THE MEGA DRIVE GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

Altered Beast

- [ ] Addams Family Values
- [ ] Addams Family, The
- [ ] Adventure Of Batman & Robin, The
- [ ] Aero The Acro-Bat
- [ ] Afterburner II
- [ ] Aladdin (Disney's)
- [ ] Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
- [ ] Alien 3
- [ ] Alien Soldier
- [ ] Alien Storm
- [ ] Alisia Dragoon
- [ ] Altered Beast
- [ ] Animaniacs
- [ ] Aquatic Games Starring James Pond And The Aquabats
- [ ] Arrow Flash
- [ ] Asterix And The Great Rescue
- [ ] Asterix And The Power Of The Gods
- [ ] Atomic Runner
- [ ] Batman
- [ ] Batman Returns
- [ ] Battletoads
- [ ] Bio Hazard Battle
- [ ] Body Count
- [ ] Bonanza Bros.
- [ ] Bonkers (Disney's)
- [ ] Boogerman: A Pick And Flick Adventure
- [ ] Bram Stoker's Dracula
- [ ] Bubble & Squeak
- [ ] Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble
- [ ] Burning Force
- [ ] Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- [ ] Castlevania: The New Generation
- [ ] Cheese Cat-astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales
- [ ] Chiki Chiki Boys
- [ ] Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck
- [ ] Columns
- [ ] Combat Cars
- [ ] Comix Zone
- [ ] Cool Spot
- [ ] Cosmic Spacehead
- [ ] Crüe Ball: Heavy Metal Pinball
- [ ] Daffy Duck In Hollywood
- [ ] Daze Before Christmas
- [ ] Decap Attack
- [ ] Demolition Man
- [ ] Desert Demolition: Road Runner And Wile E. Coyote
- [ ] Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- [ ] DJ Boy
- [ ] Donald in Maui Mallard (Disney's)
- [ ] Double Dragon
- [ ] Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- [ ] Dragon Ball Z: L' Appel du Destin
- [ ] Dragon's Fury
- [ ] Dragons' Revenge
- [ ] Dynamite Duke
- [ ] Dynamite Headdy
- [ ] Earthworm Jim
- [ ] Earthworm Jim 2
- [ ] Ecco the Dolphin
- [ ] Ecco: The Tides Of Time
- [ ] Empire Of Steel
- [ ] ESWAT: City Under Siege
- [ ] Eternal Champions
- [ ] Ex-Mutants
- [ ] Exo Squad
- [ ] Faery Tale Adventure, The
- [ ] Fantastic Dizzy
- [ ] Fatal Fury
- [ ] Fatal Fury 2
- [ ] Fatal Labyrinth
- [ ] Fatal Rewind
- [ ] FIFA International Soccer
- [ ] Flashback
- [ ] Flicky
- [ ] (Mis)Adventures Of Flink, The
- [ ] Flintstones, The
- [ ] Forgotten Worlds
- [ ] Gain Ground
- [ ] Galaxy Force II
- [ ] Gauntlet IV
- [ ] General Chaos
- [ ] Ghostbusters
- [ ] Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- [ ] Global Gladiators
- [ ] Golden Axe
- [ ] Golden Axe II
- [ ] Gunstar Heroes
- [ ] Gynoug
- [ ] Havoc
- [ ] Hellfire
- [ ] Herzog Zwei
- [ ] Hook
- [ ] International Sensible Soccer
- [ ] International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- [ ] James Bond 007: The Duel
- [ ] James Pond II: Codename Robocod
- [ ] Jewel Master
- [ ] Jungle Book, The (Disney's)
- [ ] Jungle Strike: The Sequel To Desert Strike
- [ ] Jurassic Park
- [ ] Jurassic Park: Rampage Edition
- [ ] Kid Chameleon
- [ ] Krusty's Super Fun House
- [ ] Landstalker: The Treasures Of King Nole
- [ ] Last Battle
- [ ] Legend Of Galahad, The
- [ ] Lethal Enforcers
- [ ] Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters

The Punisher

- [ ] Light Crusader
- [ ] Lion King, The (Disney's)
- [ ] Lost World: Jurassic Park, The
- [ ] Lotus II: R.E.C.S
- [ ] Man Overboard!
- [ ] Marko's Magic Football
- [ ] Marsupilami
- [ ] Mazin Wars
- [ ] Mega Bomberman
- [ ] Mega Man: The Wily Wars
- [ ] Mega Turrican
- [ ] Mercs
- [ ] Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
- [ ] Mickey Mania
- [ ] Micro Machines
- [ ] Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- [ ] Might and Magic: Gates to Another World
- [ ] Mighty Morphin Power Rangers
- [ ] Mortal Kombat
- [ ] Mortal Kombat II
- [ ] Mr. Nutz
- [ ] Mutant League Football
- [ ] Mutant League Hockey
- [ ] Mystic Defender
- [ ] Normy's Beach Babe-O-Rama
- [ ] Onslaught
- [ ] Ooze, The
- [ ] OutRun
- [ ] Pac-Mania
- [ ] Paperboy
- [ ] Phantasy Star II
- [ ] Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom
- [ ] Phantasy Star IV
- [ ] Phelios
- [ ] Pink Goes To Hollywood
- [ ] Pinocchio (Disney's)
- [ ] Pirates of Dark Water, The
- [ ] Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- [ ] Power Drive
- [ ] Probotector
- [ ] Psycho Pinball
- [ ] Puggsy
- [ ] Punisher, The
- [ ] QuackShot Starring Donald Duck
- [ ] Rambo III
- [ ] Ranger X
- [ ] Ren & Stimpy Show Presents: Stimpy's Invention, The
- [ ] Revenge Of Shinobi, The

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

Strider

- Risky Woods
- Ristar
- Road Rash
- Road Rash II
- Road Rash 3
- RoboCop Versus The Terminator
- Rock 'N Roll Racing
- Rocket Knight Adventures
- Rolling Thunder 2
- Rolo To The Rescue
- Saturday Night Slam Masters
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi
- Shadow Of The Beast II
- Shining Force
- Shining Force II
- Shining In The Darkness
- Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons, The: Bart's Nightmare
- Skeleton Krew
- Skitchin'
- Smurfs, The: Travel The World
- Snake Rattle 'n Roll
- Soleil
- Sonic & Knuckles
- Sonic 3D Flickies' Island
- Sonic Spinball
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- Sonic The Hedgehog 3
- Space Harrier II
- Sparkster
- Speedball 2
- Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage
- Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin
- Splatterhouse 2
- Spot Goes To Hollywood
- Story Of Thor, The
- Street Racer
- Streets Of Rage
- Streets Of Rage II
- Streets Of Rage 3
- Strider
- Sunset Riders
- Super Fantasy Zone
- Super Hang-On
- Super Hydlide
- Super Skidmarks
- Super Smash T.V.
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
- Super Thunder Blade V
- Superman: The Man Of Steel
- Sword Of Vermillion
- Sylvester & Tweety in Cagey Capers
- T2: The Arcade Game
- TaleSpin (Disney's)
- Taz-Mania
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day
- Terminator, The
- Thunder Force II
- Thunder Force III
- Thunder Force IV
- Time Killers
- TinTin In Tibet
- Tiny Toon Adventures: ACME All-Stars
- Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure
- ToeJam & Earl
- ToeJam & Earl In Panic On Funkotron
- Toki: Going Ape Spit
- Toy Story (Disney's)
- Treasure Land Adventure, McDonald's
- True Lies
- Truxton
- Turrican
- Twin Hawk
- Two Crude Dudes
- Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
- Universal Soldier
- Urban Strike: The Sequel To Jungle Strike
- Vectorman
- Virtua Racing
- Virtual Bart
- Wiz 'n' Liz: The Frantic Wabbit Wescue
- Wolverine: Adamantium Rage
- Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair
- Wonder Boy In Monster World
- World Of Illusion Starring
- Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck
- X-Men 2: Clone Wars
- Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zero Wing
- Zombies
- Zool: Ninja Of The "Nth" Dimension

Virtual Bart

Collector Q&A

We speak to Stewart Greenwood about his impressive collection.

So what drew you to collecting Sega Mega Drive games and hardware?
I was in a game store looking for a new PS2 game one day and couldn't find anything, when I noticed some really cheap used Mega Drive games, a few of which I remembered wanting when I was a kid. I still had my Mega Drive so I thought 'what the hell', bought them and never looked back!

What does the Mega Drive offer?
It's the arcade feel of the games, they're very atmospheric and the music is always fast and action packed. Mix in a big bag of nostalgia and I'm a happy chap.

How long have you been collecting for?
I'm unsure about this, but at some point in the early Noughties my games stopped just being games that I had accumulated over the years and turned into a serious collection. I'm not sure why either, I don't actually remember deciding that I wanted to collect games, it just kind of happened!

So what, if anything, has eluded you?
A Pioneer CLD A100 LaserActive. I've wanted one for many years now so I could play the Mega LD games but have never had the money available when a decent one has come up for sale. I will get one eventually...

Which one item in your collection could you not live without and why?
Streets Of Rage II, I love that game and although I have it on my phone and PS3 I would never get rid of my original copy that I've had since I was a kid.

What is the most you have spent on a single Mega Drive item and why?
£751 on a blue box copy of *World Championship Soccer 2*, which is a crazy amount to spend on a box I agree, but I needed to have it, I just wasn't happy owning the classics re-release version of the game!

How does your other half feel about your impressive collection?
She quite likes the fact that I have something I am so interested in to keep me busy, but gets annoyed when little piles of games start appearing all over the place!

What advice would you give other readers interested in collecting Mega Drive games?
Do it! It's a great console with so many fun games available for it, and for the most part games are really cheap too. The only real advice I'd give is to buy a Japanese or modified console so you don't exclude yourself from the great imports available.

If you could go back and purchase a single game upon its release, which would it be and why?
Lakers Vs Celtics And The NBA Play Offs. The only PAL Mega Drive game I need a box for, although I'm not sure it actually had a proper release!

* Rarity guide courtesy of RETRO COLLECT More information at www.retrocollect.com. Sega Genesis courtesy of Gaz Backhouse

CAUTERIZE
11TH PLACE
BIKE
03:20
OFFICER 11
086

×90
8:31
×9

"THEY" HAVE A HIDEOUT RIGHT HERE IN THE CITY

ER-1
1600
TOP SCORE
10000

はりまなだ

90
SCORE
00292210
LAP
STAGE

The Super NES Book