OLD!

THE NES BOOK

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NINTENDO'S ICONIC CONSOLE

Includes the story of the Master System console

From the makers of retro* GAMER

OLD!

For all players

The Master System

The Sega Book

Legendary games • The hardware revisited • Th

- REVEALED: THE BEST EVER GAMES
- HOW NINTENDO CHANGED THE WORLD

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Welcome to

THE NES BOOK

The Nintendo Entertainment System was a remarkable success for Nintendo. Redesigned for the Western market – it was known in Japan as the Famicom – it arrived following the great videogame crash and helped to reignite interest in the console market. It wasn't quite as successful in Europe, but in Japan and America it reigned supreme, and eventually went on to sell over 60 million units - not bad for a machine that many wrote off as a toy when it was first released.

Many huge franchises like *Metroid*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Mega Man* started off on the NES and it helped turn Nintendo into a huge force in the console market. Indeed, for a long time it was Nintendo's most successful home console, being only eclipsed by the staggering success of the Wii. It remains greatly loved by many gamers and developers and we wanted to put together a book that reflected that love. With that in mind, we've personally selected the greatest NES content to ever appear in the magazine and have even added a few new articles to ensure as complete a book as possible. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it.



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THE NES BOOK

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Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by
Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
Tel 0203 148 3300 www.marketforce.co.uk

Distributed in Australia by
Network Services (a division of Bauer Media Group), Level 21 Civic Tower, 66-68 Goulburn Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia Tel +61 2 8667 5288

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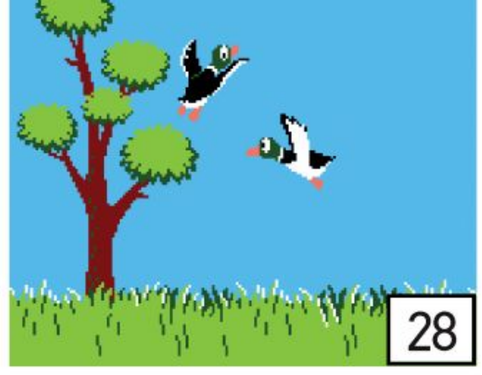
ISBN 978 1785 460 180

Part of the retro* GAMER bookazine series

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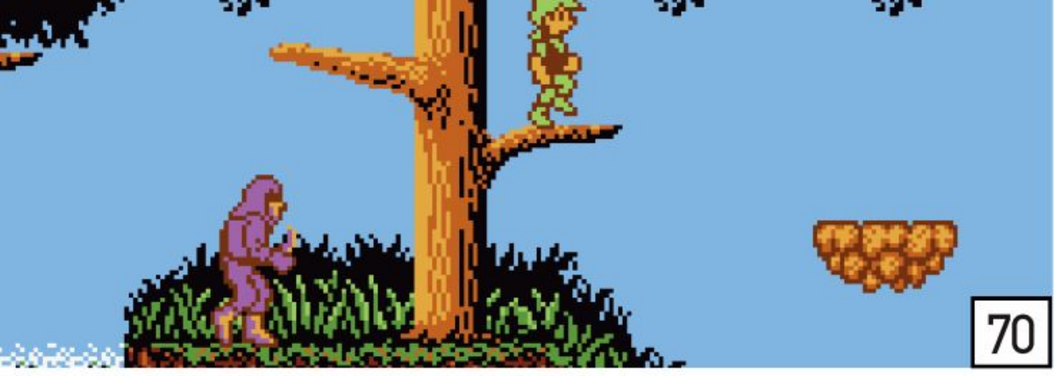
Considering how successful Nintendo's game was in the arcades, it was inevitable it would appear on the NES. But did you know that many other console ports beat it to market?

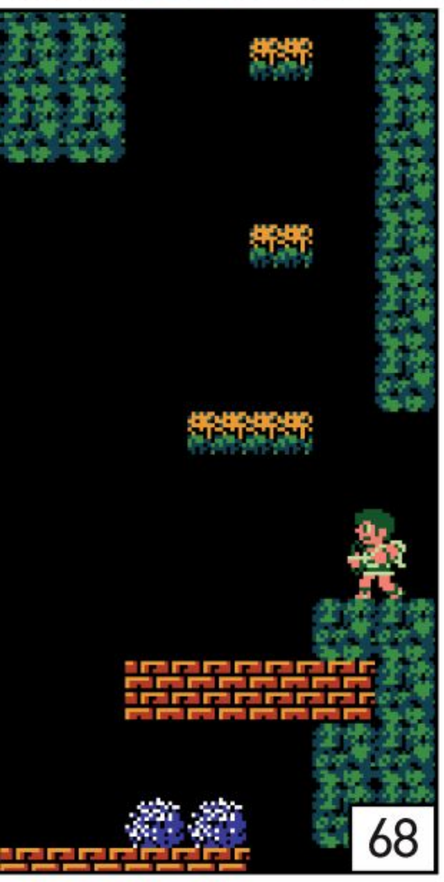
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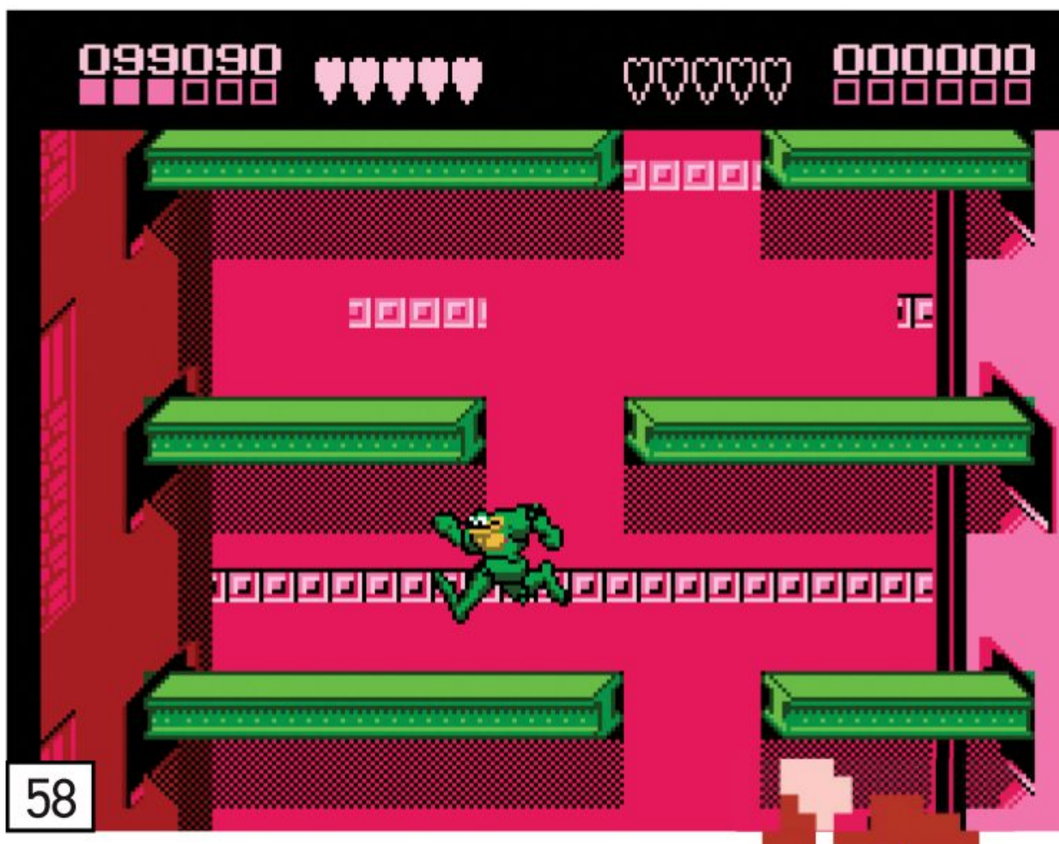














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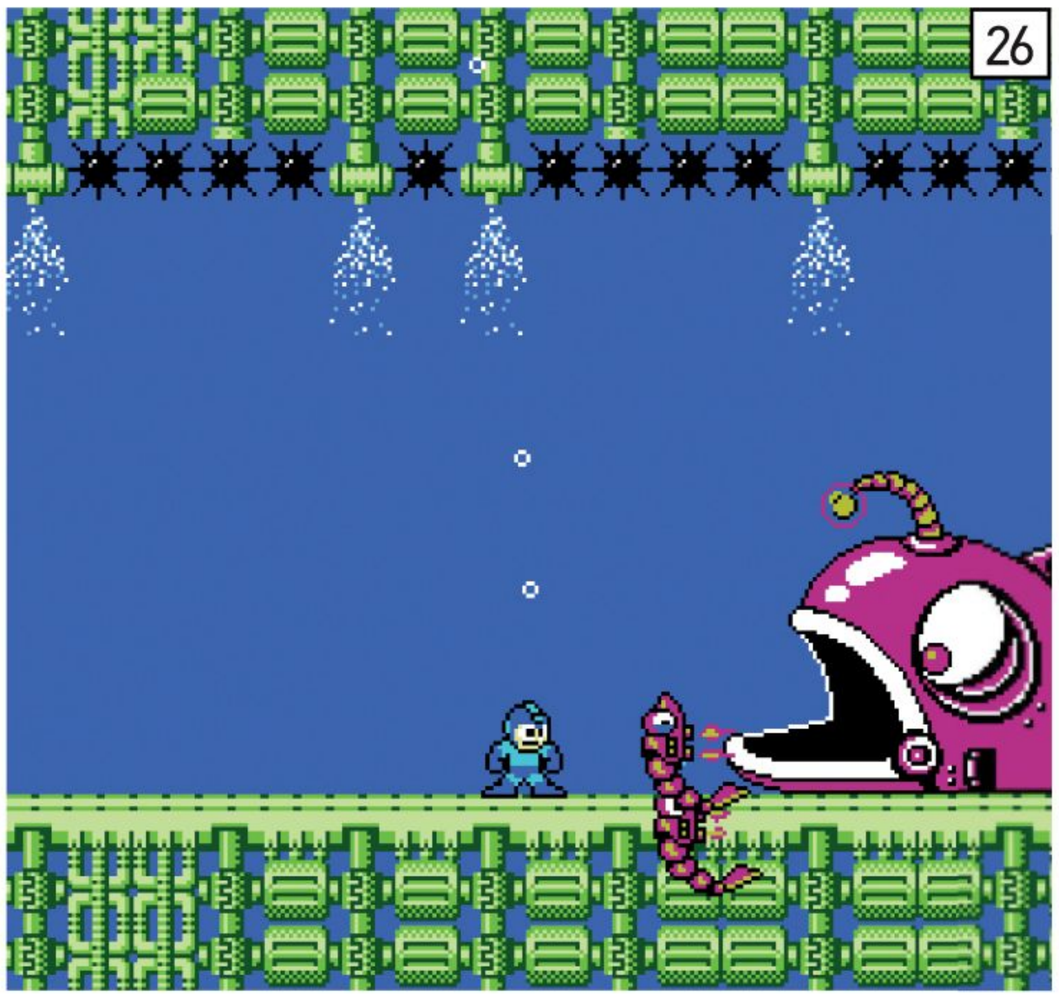
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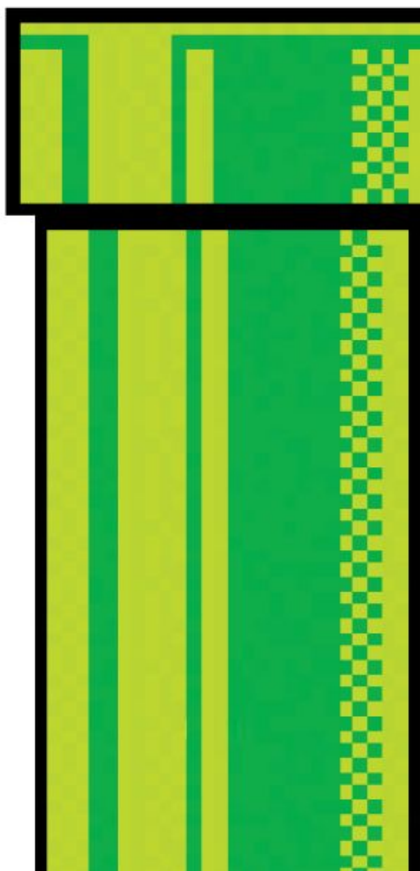
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Fancy collecting games for Nintendo's 8-bit console? Make sure that you hunt down the following games and peripherals first





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METROID

DON'T BE SCARED, IT'S ONLY A GAME...



- **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
- **YEAR:** 1986
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES



HISTORY

Nintendo's *Metroid* remains one of the best adventure games to appear on Nintendo's 8-bit console. While it's clearly been eclipsed by later games in the series, there's still something magical about returning to the original.

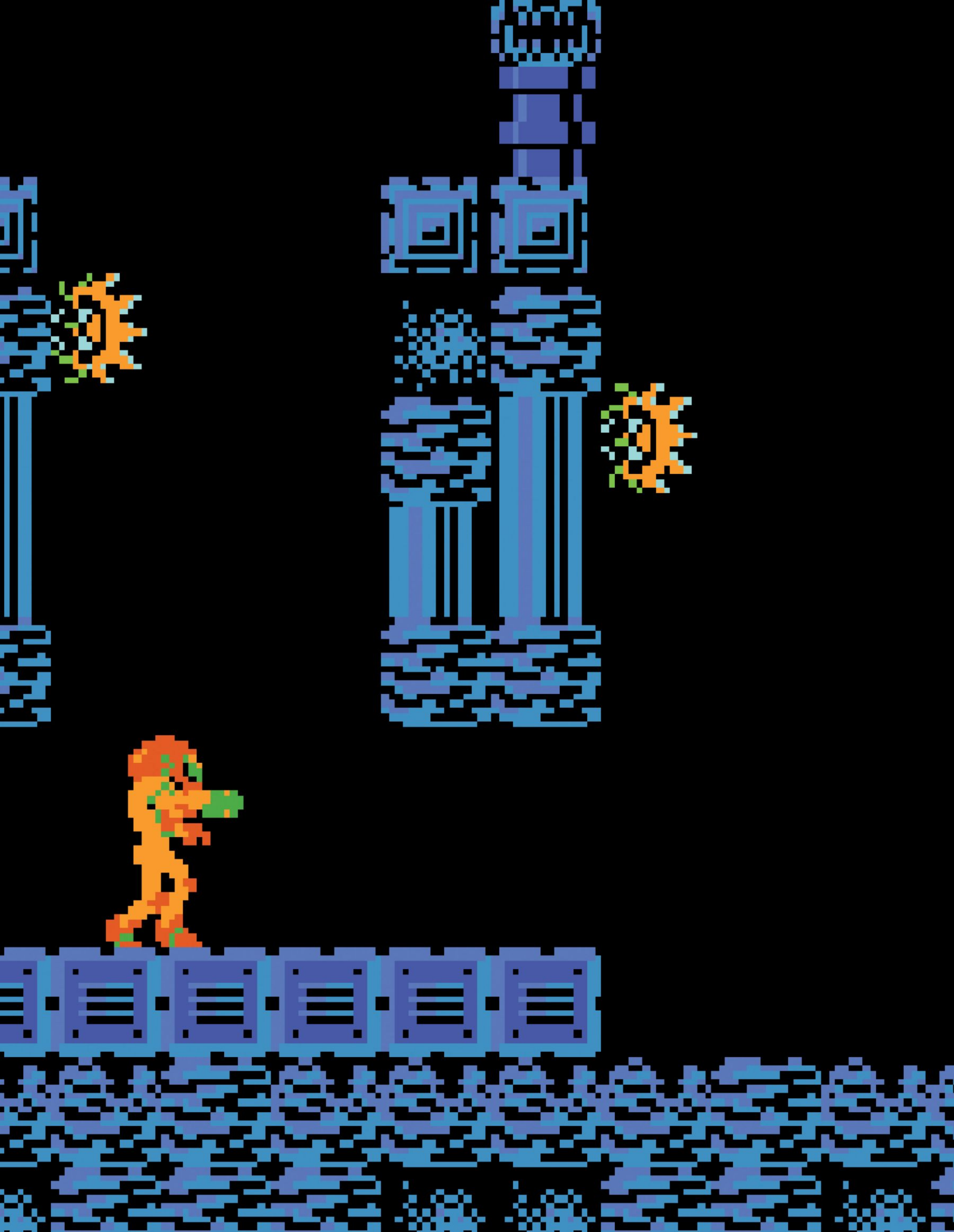
For those unaware, *Metroid* tells the tale of Samus Arun, a bounty hunter who heads to the planet Zebes to retrieve a parasitic organism called a Metroid that has been captured by Space Pirates. It's a simple plot to be fair, but it's one that's rather epic in scale due to the huge environments that make up Zebes.

One of the most interesting mechanics of *Metroid* is that Samus only starts the game with a small number of abilities, with the rest having to be earned along the way. As she explores the foreboding planet, she'll come across numerous areas that are impassable – at least until she has the right item…

The beauty of *Metroid* is its fantastic structure, which causes the player to revisit areas whenever they receive the relevant upgrade. It gives *Metroid* a wonderful sense of exploration that's virtually unmatched by any other adventure on the console, even The *Legend Of Zelda*. You'll be constantly pushing yourself to discover what's hidden around the next corner, while the solid boss encounters typically require you to exploit them with your latest power-up as well.

Metroid can be a rather sparse looking game at times, but this actually adds to the atmosphere, while the soundtrack itself is very organic and furthers the sense of dread felt as you explore the huge environments of Zebes.

Another interesting fact about *Metroid* and one that wasn't revealed unless you beat the game under a certain time was that lead character Samus was actually a girl, making her one of the earliest female characters, and still one of the most popular today.



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NES





WHAT'S IMMEDIATELY NOTICEABLE ABOUT ANY RETELLING OF THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM SAGA IS ITS RECOGNISED STATUS AS SAVIOUR OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY. WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE ON A GLOBAL SCALE, HERE IN THE UK THE NES HAD TO STRUGGLE AND FIGHT TO EARN ITS REPUTATION, NOT LEAST OF ALL AGAINST NINTENDO ITSELF. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE ACTION TOOK PLACE IN JAPAN AND THE US, THE INDUSTRY'S KNIGHT IN PLASTIC ARMOUR FACED VERY DIFFERENT BATTLES ON OUR SIDE OF THE POND TO BECOME THE LEGEND IT IS TODAY; AND IT FACED THEM ALONE

Regardless of wildly erratic release dates, mastermind launch tactics, outstanding tech-specs and bewildering global sales figures, one aspect is paramount over all others: to talk about the NES is to talk about the rebirth of the videogame industry from the fires of a devastating market collapse.

But the industry has always been very much compartmentalised, and trends have never travelled well across the oceans. While America – the feeding ground of the avaricious developer – turned its back on videogames in the early Eighties, the Japanese continued with their normal game-playing lives quite happily, prompting relative newcomer, Nintendo, to bring its flourishing coin-op into homes.

This was a more significant change for Nintendo than most gamers ever realised. Up until 1983, Nintendo would've been better described as an electronic toy manufacturer – not a software or game developer. Product ranges from lightgun clay pigeon shooting to electronic love testers were far more synonymous with the name Nintendo than any form of game mascot or living room-based entertainment.

It was only natural for Nintendo to experiment with the *Pong* craze sweeping through the Seventies, and a decent addition to the list was made in conjunction with Mitsubishi in the shape of the TV Game 6 and its unimaginatively named successor, the TV Game 15 (I'll leave you to work out the difference between the two units yourself). Although a worthwhile introduction, the two systems did nothing to persuade Nintendo that home videogames were the future, and efforts shifted organically toward the arcades. Viewing from afar the self-destructive market saturation America was suffering from with home consoles in the late Seventies, Nintendo was resolute that pay-per-play was the only way money could be gleamed from videogames.

Rather astutely, however, it deviated slightly from standard product ranges in 1980 as industry legend Gunpei Yokoi developed the immortal and extraordinarily successful Game & Watch series of handheld LCD units with the help of his friend and colleague, Masayuki Uemura (whom Yokoi had poached from electronics giant Sharp). At the same time, fellow game design prodigy Shigeru Miyamoto was putting the finishing touches on Nintendo's eminent arcade smash, *Donkey Kong*.

This new arcade machine finally broke through the cultural barrier between the East and West, establishing Nintendo as a world gaming power overnight. Realising this was hot property, Uemera was given the previously uninspiring task of getting Nintendo home gaming units firmly encamped beneath the TVs of Japan. His brief

"THIS NEW MACHINE ESTABLISHED NINTENDO AS A WORLD GAMING POWER OVERNIGHT"

Not For Your Eyes

Over the years there have been many titles which either went unreleased, were altered several times before release, or were simply never translated from Japanese to English – great games which were painfully out of our reach. Thankfully in recent years, with the advent of the internet and obsessive fan groups, it's now possible to 'acquire' various unreleased titles, along with Japan-only games which have been fan translated. Frank Cifaldi's LostLevels.org is one such repository of unreleased games, making available titles like *California Raisins* (the beta cartridge of which sold for around a thousand dollars), *Sunman*, and also the uncensored version of *Maniac Mansion*. Elsewhere you can find the official English translation of the unreleased *Earthbound Zero* (a wonderful RPG). For unofficial fan-translations, ROMhacking.net will serve all your needs with access to loads of legal NES language patches. We recommend trying *Sweet Home* – it's an amazing horror RPG by Capcom and a pseudo-prequel to *Resident Evil*.



Year released: Japan: July 1985, UK: Late 1987

Original price: Japan: 54800 Yen, US: $199.99, UK: £149.99

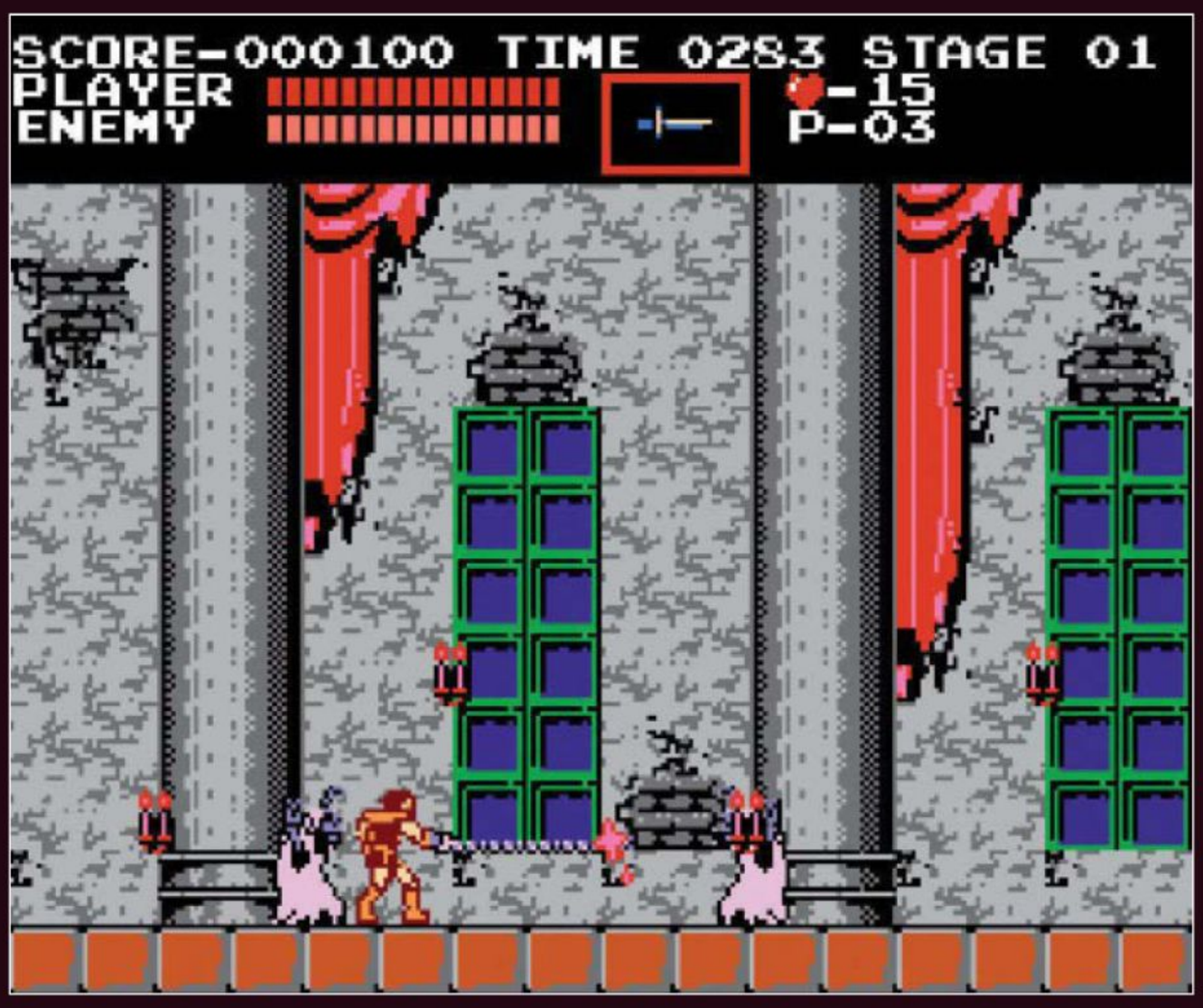
Buy it now for: £20+

Associated magazines: None

Why the NES was great… Yes it was uglier that the Famicom, and the range of games were nowhere near as impressive, but there was still plenty to love about Nintendo's 8-bit console. Beautiful chunky carts came loaded with gaming greatness, and who could resist games like *Super Mario Bros* or *Duck Hunt*?

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NES



» The humble NES *Castlevania*, which led to the brilliant *Castlevania IV*. Then the magnificent *Symphony Of The Night*. Then there was *Castlevania 64* which was… actually, scratch that last one. It was rubbish.

By the time Nintendo was drawing up designs for the Home Video Computer (as its first ROM cartridge system was designated during the prototyping stages), the MOS chip was a veritable home computing bargain, weighing in at less than $30 compared to the 68000's $179 price tag. When modified by long-lived Japanese electronics giant, Ricoh (who removed the binary decimal mode to make room for 22 extra memory registers for joypad input, sound generation, sprite based memory access and more), a deluge of game specific blood was squeezed from the revamped 'system-on-a-chip' stone.

The final few months of development in 1983 brought all the different factions of Nintendo together in a way that united the company like never before. If there was a strength within the company, it was scrutinised, redeveloped and integrated into the renamed Nintendo Family Computer, or Famicom as it quickly became known (the developmental name was still acknowledged, however, in the system's hardware ID, HVC-xxx). The revolutionary control system of Yokoi's Game & Watch handhelds was built into the joypads (what we now rather sanitarily refer to as the D-pad), Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* arcade stomper was beautifully converted for the launch, strict quality controls were built into future licensing deals and a plethora of peripherals were primed to take the bare bones base unit into the next-generation of home entertainment as soon as the competition showed any signs of panicked response.

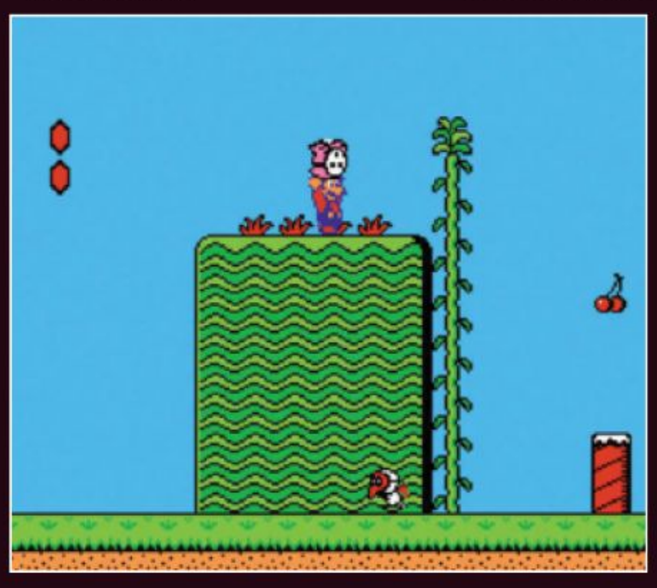
On July 15th 1983, Japanese stores rang to the sound of Nintendo based sales. But the launch was not without its problems. A glitch between an erratic chipset and their attachment to the motherboard caused consistent reliability issues, and president of Nintendo, Hiroshi Yamauchi made a bold decision to recall the entire first batch of Famicoms. The corporate danger of acknowledging

"IN AMERICA, THE MARKET HAD DISAPPEARED INTO A BLACK HOLE OF AVARICE, AND ALTHOUGH ALL THE COMPETITION HAD GONE WITH IT, SO HAD THE CUSTOMERS"

was at once simple and impossibly demanding: this new Nintendo system must be cheaper and higher quality than the closest competition (don't you just love how the Japanese refuse to pull their punches when it comes to setting targets?).

His concept was equally simple in application, yet intricate in construct. A major factor in Uemera's answer to this difficult question was his unexpected use of the revolutionary MOS 6502 CPU. An equivalent of the popular Motorola 68000, Nintendo's choice of processor was surprising not because of the capability of the chip, but simply because of its age. The MOS 6502 was designed in 1975 and had already seen considerable use in the videogame industry, primarily in a cut-down version for the Atari 2600 and at the core of both the Apple I and II computers.

» **Below left:** Originally co-developed by Fuji TV and Nintendo (with heavy Miyamoto involvement) for the Famicom Disk System, *Yume Koujou Doki Doki Panic* went on to be released as SMB2 in the West. **Right:** *Sack Of Flour* is a free homebrew project, showing that even though the NES is no longer around there are still people passionate about it.





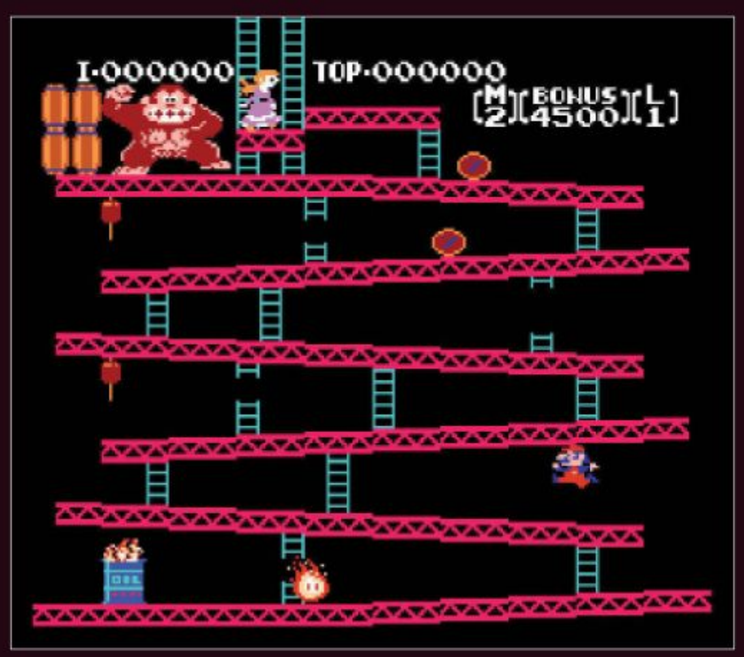
an immediate design issue with the new console was, he stated, secondary to maintaining Nintendo's good name in the long term. Apparently the game-playing public agreed, and bearing no grudge against the console's troubled birth, the second release of the Famicom (featuring an entirely new chip set batch with round controller buttons replacing the previously square, prone to sticking, ones) was met with unprecedented success.

Over 500,000 units sold within the first two months of the second Japanese release, and the Famicom was subsequently distributed throughout East Asia. Retailing at ¥14,800, Nintendo managed to shift over 19 million units within its native shore alone during the impressively long lifespan of its beloved console. But over in America, the market had disappeared into a black hole of avarice, and although practically all the potential competition had gone with it, so had the customers.

Much of the feeling around Nintendo was that the cultural divide was simply too great to bridge, and attention was better spent on local retailing. But just as he'd done with the coin-op business, Yamauchi was adamant that Nintendo was going Stateside with its games and hardware. Initial licensing and distribution talks with failing Atari quickly fell through, so the task once again fell to the beleaguered, yet proven capable, Nintendo of America.

Fresh from its successful manufacture, launch and distribution of the *Donkey Kong* coin-op, NoA attempted to reignite the American gamer's consciousness with a somewhat pitiable demonstration of the Nintendo 'Advanced Video System' at the 1984 CES show. Many toy distributors openly laughed at the attempt to sell a games console, while others rushed past in embarrassment or cast vitriolic,

» In Japan the system didn't launch with *Super Mario Bros.*, instead they received the below three titles. All were conversions of arcade games, and all three have connections to Miyamoto.







vengeful gazes at the videogame hardware that had almost ruined them the year before.It was a categorical disaster.

A stoutly traditional Japanese man, Yamauchi steadfastly refused to accept the American rejection of his console. So, for the 1985 CES show, the infinitely resourceful NoA team cleverly redesigned the machine into the Nintendo Entertainment System (renamed to remove any connotations of it being a videogame), deliberately creating a featureless, grey brick that in no way resembled a console, adding subtle nuances such as a front loading cartridge slot intended to make the system blend in with VCRs, distracting consumers from its real purpose as a videogame.

Packaged with a couple of fairly superfluous peripherals; a lightgun called the Zapper and R.O.B. the Robot (a marginally interactive remote controlled toy intended to work together with the games), the actual NES base unit was adequately camouflaged. This backdoor approach helped the system slip under the radar of many toy distributors, and as the Christmas season approached, the second phase of the American plan came into play.

At considerable peril to their already tenuous branch of the Nintendo Empire, NoA offered New York shop owners a risk free option for stocking the NES console over the commercial sales period. Nintendo itself would set up the store displays and grant owners a sale or return policy. If the console bombed over Christmas '85, the only ones to lose out would be Nintendo.

The gambit, while not tremendously successful, provided one saving grace for the nervous salesmen at NoA. Consoles didn't fly off the shelves as hoped (moving around 50,000 units), but the steady and hopeful sales reassured shop owners that videogames were once again a viable commodity, and very few actually took Nintendo up on its return offer.

Miyamoto hadn't been sat idle during the US crisis, either, and during 1985 he worked tirelessly to shoehorn his second arcade smash hit, *Super Mario Bros.* into a Famicom cartridge. As always, he was unswervingly successful, and Nintendo collectively saw its opportunity to invade the US once and for all. By October, a Western version was ready to be bundled with the NES console – a tactic designed to coincide with NoA's move to go national with its in-house distribution network.

Piracy was soon rife in Japan, with cloned Famicom cartridges and cheap knockoff hardware flooding in from all across Asia. The Famicom contained no form of software security other than a strict licensing agreement which bound third-party developers to Nintendo's command. When the Famicom was redesigned for the world markets, several measures were taken to pre-empt any piracy or unlicensed development.

Some measures were simple and a direct quick-fix to the local troubles. World cartridges were a different shape and pin out, physically prohibiting the use of Japanese games in non-Asian consoles. A secondary, and far more complex system, was also installed in the NES machines, known as the 10NES regional lockout chip. This chip required security codes (which needed a specific and critical timing system to be applied during the code transfer) to be present on the cartridges, and the only way for developers to get these codes was to ensure their game was licensed by Nintendo.

Over the years Nintendo has been often criticised for its extremely militant approach to licensing and security, and many of those claims are valid. And yet, as we look back, the edges begin to blur as to the position Nintendo was actually in at the time. The market had only recently collapsed (at least in America), due in no small part to extreme negligence of the industry, churning out five years of expensive, atrocious quality games. Although *E.T.* may have finally been one of the games that pushed gamers over the edge, it was merely the icing on a particularly unpalatable cake, and Nintendo was adamant the same would never happen to its own console – not after the hardship it had gone through in order to resurrect the market in the first place.



» *Final Fantasy*, ironically titled because Square only had enough money to publish one final game. Luckily it was a huge success.

Generation Nex

The long and celebrated life of the NES is currently being put right back on life support in the US by hardware manufacturer Messiah. Its 'new old' console, the Generation: NEX is a neat little unit (not much bigger than two NES cartridges) that accepts and plays all old Nintendo Entertainment System games, whether they're US, European or even for the Japanese Famicom.

Sporting two cartridge slots (one on the top for Famicom games and one in the established 'front loading' position for NES carts), two controller ports identical to Nintendo's proprietary connectors allowing the use of any of your old peripherals, built in wireless receivers for the additionally available wireless controllers and composite video and audio outputs, this tiny and attractive little unit is surprisingly feature packed.



"SHOEHORNING SUPER MARIO BROS. INTO A FAMICOM CARTRIDGE WAS UNSWERVINGLY SUCCESSFUL – NINTENDO SAW ITS CHANCE TO INVADE THE US ONCE AND FOR ALL"

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NES

"ALTHOUGH E.T. MAY HAVE PUSHED GAMERS OVER THE EDGE, IT WAS MERELY THE ICING ON A PARTICULARLY UNPALATABLE CAKE – NINTENDO WAS ADAMANT THE SAME WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ITS CONSOLE"



» This was the first game developed by the creator of *Pokémon*, and actually, it's rather good fun even today! Kick the tiles to knock enemies over and discover secrets.

Famicom Love

The original concept of the Famicom (being a 'family computer') was reasonably explored with some great add-ons like the Disk System, keyboard, modem and a BASIC system. Some great games came out for the FDS (Famicom Disk System) that we never got to see. NES cartridges had a functionality removed that, on the Famicom, allowed games to access external sound hardware and produce far superior in-game audio. Conversions of Famicom games that took advantage of this feature are very noticeable by their underdeveloped internal audio.

The Famicom had no lockout system which, other than making piracy easier, allowed Japanese developers like Capcom, Konami and others to add improved technology to their game cartridges and provide technically advanced games. The 10NES lockout system in our machines prevented these technical improvements from working.

The Famicom's top loading cartridge slot proved considerably more reliable over time, being less prone to collecting oxidising dust on the edge connectors and being damaged by the sheering force of a misaligned cartridge entry (oo-er)



To comply with the 10NES lockout system, third-party developers had to sign a strict licensing agreement that limited them to producing only five games a year while granting Nintendo complete discretion when it came to quality control. While the majority of developers balked at such oppressive restrictions, others (such as Capcom, whose carefully chosen first three NES titles, *Commando*, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and *1942* all sold over 1 million copies) accepted the severe stipulations and proved Nintendo's theories almost immediately.

The early successes were all the reassurance Nintendo needed to enforce its licensing agreement at all costs. Yamauchi had shown from the outset that maintaining a respected reputation was far more important to him than quick sales, and regardless of the incensed twittering of game developers eager to flood the market with mediocre games, his chokingly tight reins undoubtedly helped the console enjoy such a long life.



» *Metal Gear* didn't start out on the NES, fair enough, but it was the system Kojima wanted to develop for, and it was eventually ported – albeit in a butchered form.



» Does anyone else remember the Super Mario Bros 3 advert that had Mario's face made up of all the children in the world? We do.

Unfortunately, not all developers agreed with Nintendo's philosophy, least of all the English ones.

The story of Nintendo's Japanese and American establishment has been well told, but there are a lot of other countries with a dedicated gaming population. In truth, Nintendo could reasonably ignore any other sales avenues as long as the Japanese and Americans were living and breathing videogames, and the European introduction was reduced to nothing short of a stilted, insulting addendum to an otherwise grand plan.

Unenthusiastic distribution deals began to filter NES consoles into Europe in late '86, beginning in Scandinavia and Germany, then spreading into Spain and France before finally being brought to the UK by Mattel in the third quarter of 1987. A distinct lack of interest from Nintendo itself, coupled with Mattel's reputation as a toy company and a delay which took the console out of the technological heats, made for a hurdle that was far too high to vault in one leap.

The Sega Master System had hit the UK ground running, and while the American market may have disappeared up its own... disk drive earlier in the decade, this had created a wealth of opportunity in Britain for affordable home computers. Competing with the superior, and better established, Sega machine was one thing, but taking on the likes of the ZX Spectrum and its prolific catalogue of games on its home turf, or the astounding next-generation gaming power of the Amiga, was another entirely.

Sega claims a great deal of responsibility for ensuring the NES never gained a foothold in the European market, though in truth much of the culpability lies with Nintendo's own indifference to Europe, and the UK in particular.

Its attention was still firmly trained on the US and Japan, where attention returned to the original concept of the Famicom – the family computer. Peripherals to deliver on the promise made by the system's name were steadily released: a disk drive, cassette deck, keyboard, modem and BASIC cartridges were all developed, with varying degrees of success, to allow Japanese Famicom owners to expand the potential of their prized machines.

By the time Nintendo International was established to take over from Mattel, Sega was tearing full steam ahead with the Mega Drive. This was the first chink in Nintendo's armour since 1983, and by ignoring the European markets, the company gave Sega the opportunity to maintain its developments and plan a strategy to work its way back into the primary markets. While Nintendo threw lawsuits about the place to sustain its dominion (attempting to stop everything from Rare's reverse engineering of the 10NES lockout chip to Codemaster's Game Genie peripheral and the various attempts at releasing unlicensed third-party software), Sega embraced many of the other companies and their videogaming products, granting them a platform while shoring up its increasing market share.

Aside from the shabby marketing, the late '87 UK release date of the console would have been the perfect time to own a NES. The harsh whips of Nintendo had ensured five years of only the finest games were ready and waiting. Developers had found their programming feet, while Nintendo's internal teams had fully dedicated their elite to making first-party titles. *Super Mario Bros.* came bundled for the reasonable price of £69.99 while the westernisation of Shigeru Miyamoto's celebrated *Legend Of Zelda* (the first cartridge to contain a battery backup save game feature) landed, quite by chance, at exactly the right time to reassure UK NES users.



» Konami was generally regarded as the best of the third-party developers, creating classic after classic, like *Contra* here.

Million-sellers were becoming increasingly common, yet the company's belief in its own divine status began to push developers to question the gospel and, thanks to the massive profits Nintendo's quality regime had imposed upon them, they had the power to push the limits. Nintendo's authority was slipping.

Being abandoned in Europe had given the console the opportunity to grow on its own, unhindered by the Victorian parenting its American and Japanese cousins had known.

Third-party developers had lost their interest in purchasing the Nintendo Seal of Quality and flagrant importing began all across Europe. The few Italian NES owners discovered they were in the same retailing bracket as the better supported UK, while Scandinavians openly swapped games among themselves and the Spanish. Cartridges were even developed which fired a voltage spike through the irksome 10NES chip, knocking it out and allowing unrestricted international sales of one development.

The Famicom and the NES had a strong following, but times had changed dramatically from the post-apocalyptic wasteland the machine was born into. The system was simply unable to provide the technologically advanced arcade conversions gamers were demanding. Yet this new loose leash publishers were enjoying with NES cartridges provided a crutch, which enabled the console to enter old age more gracefully than any other system had managed before it.

It was midway through the Nineties, and although people weren't queuing up to buy NES games at midnight, neither did they resent picking up the odd Nintendo bargain even as late as 1996. By this time, the NES had once again been redesigned to account for, among other things, failing cartridge connectors which had suffered from their horizontal orientation and gathered enough oxidising dust over the years to force users to bend and twist their games to coerce reliability from the struggling components.

Another price drop to £49.99 (seeing the console actually being out-priced by one of its own games for a short while) didn't hurt the life expectancy of the old campaigner either, and as the internet began to fully emerge, fan sites, homebrew programmers, hardware hackers and dedicated gamers began to form communities in celebration of Nintendo's grandfather console. Just as before, the NES didn't break any new sales figures but, along with its games, miraculously managed to retain its original value. Even today, NES games on eBay or in a charity shop are certainly not giveaways; five quid will buy you a cartridge without a box or instructions, but little else. Not too shabby for a 25-year old format.

If anything, the impressively long life of the NES may actually have hurt Nintendo – dissuading players from upgrading to the Super NES upon demand – but it'd be hard for anyone, least of all its parent company, to resent this amazing machine for providing hundreds of thousands of hours of entertainment, billions of Yen in profit and 60 million gamers worldwide with something incredible to do with their thumbs.



» Squint. No, squint harder. In fact, squint hard enough and this almost looks like *Metroid Prime*. Almost… well, if you're a tramp drunk on meths. Otherwise probably not.



» Rare was one of the earliest British developers to make games for the NES. It was purchased by Nintendo in 1994, where it stayed until 2002.

worldmags.net



NES PERFECT TEN GAMES

For owners without the cartridge cleaning kit; here are ten of the best wedges of grey plastic you'll ever blow into



01

DUCK HUNT

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DONKEY KONG*

01 Billed as the quintessential game for the clunky NES Zapper, Nintendo's repetitive duck-murdering simulator allowed gamers to test their aim with the aid of canine-cohort, Mr Peepers. It was his job to startle a ball of petrified feathers into the air and yours to sight them in your pistol's crosshair. You had three shots per target and the later levels, which included infinitesimal clay pigeons, called for either a swift dead-aim or the cowardly act of pressing the gun barrel against the television. The game had a neat feature, which allowed duck-welfare enthusiasts to control the direction of the fleeing birds with a second pad and save them from a good buckshot stuffing.

SUPER MARIO BROS

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *F-ZERO*

02 It was the block punching, pipe-travelling exploits of two Italian plumbers that finally administered the medicine to the videogame crash' of the Eighties, ridding it of the noxious Martian antibodies of Atari's *ET*. Shigeru Miyamoto knew how to conjure up golden game icons and the Mario Bros are two of his most prolific. Placing the plumbers into a daring princess/mushroom rescue mission, inside a vivid, smooth-scrolling fantasy world, the game pioneered concepts such as level warping and head stomping. *Super Mario Bros* encapsulates everything that makes a game timeless: catchy theme, fluid gameplay, iconic characters and a hot princess.



02

RIVER CITY RANSOM

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DOUBLE DRAGON*

03 Punch-bags meet sick-bags when Alex and Ryan receive a note from evil crime-lord Slick informing them their city is being held to ransom and Ryan's girlfriend has been abducted. Welcome to *River City*, a place of tongue-in-cheek humour, cartoon violence and hard-up vomiting freshmen. Using anything they can lay their fists on, our protagonists set about the streets fighting through Slick's army of students. Their strategy: force them to 'barf' and pocket their loose change. *River City*'s unique fusion of a scrolling beat-'em-up and a subtle RPG make it a superlative NES classic.

MEGA MAN 2

» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DEVIL MAY CRY*

04 Don't let *Mega Man*'s mountainous energy bar fool you, trying to finish *Mega Man 2* is like trying to stay alive without any kidneys. This is an unforgiving platform blaster where each level demands pinpoint precision and patience. The order in which you blast through Dr Wily's levels is up to you, but don't think you can use the easier stages to stockpile lives. Each level houses a bionic-boss whose special power can be acquired. These abilities give Mega Man an advantage over another boss, so choosing your route through the game was how you maintained a healthy blood pressure.

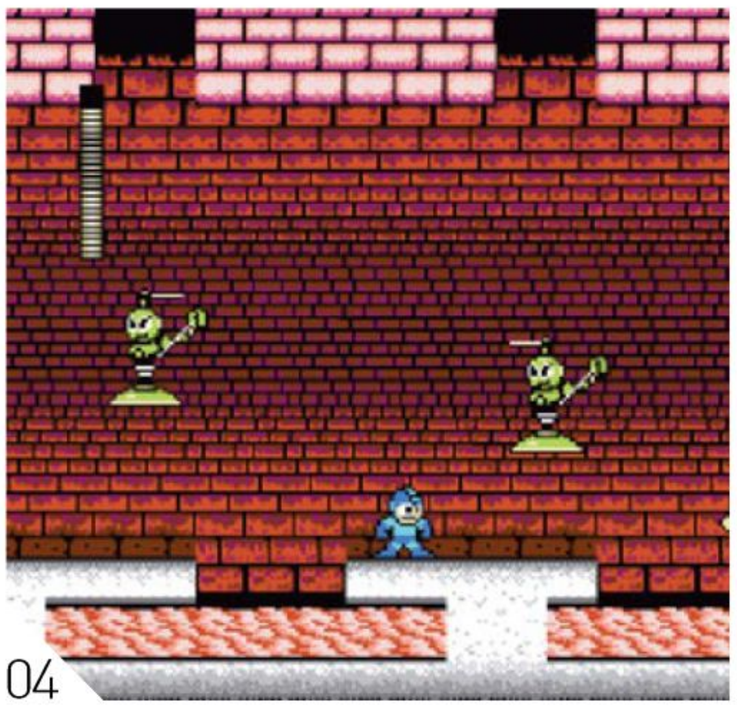
PUNCH-OUT!!

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *LYLAT WARS*

05 Nintendo's port of its popular Eighties arcade puncher was somewhat lost in translation when it appeared in its 8-bit glory. The arcade's transparent fighter was omitted and in his corner stood a pale, pint-sized pugilist on a mission to topple heavyweight hard-man, Mike Tyson. It quickly collected acclaim for its accessibility and colourful roster of cartoon boxers who were forced to sop up each blow of the games trademark playability. The NES homes the finest version of *Punch-Out!!*, still managing to pack more punch than its technically enhanced SNES sequel and arcade counterpart.



03

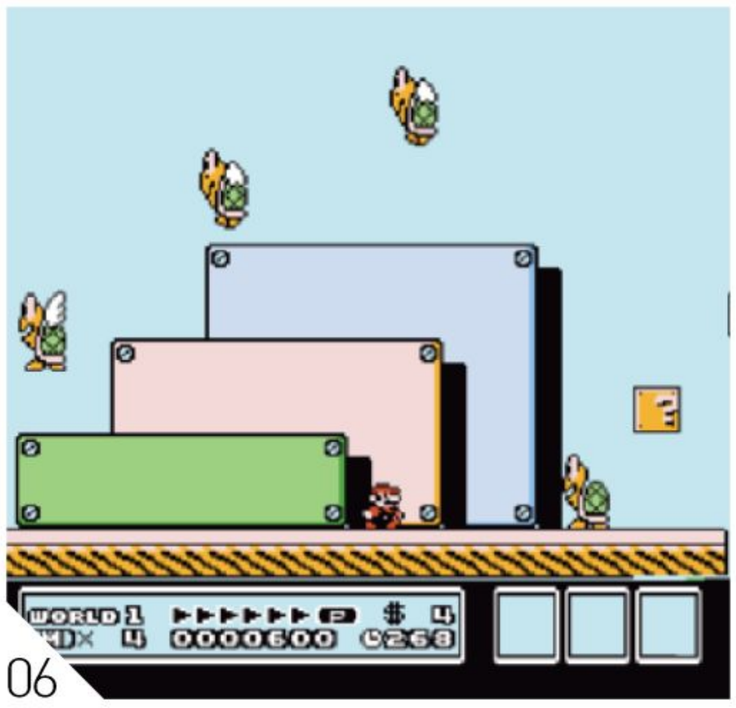


04



05





06



07


08

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *PILOT WINGS*

06 **Mario's goodbye gift to the NES is a marvel. It encapsulated all the qualities of the first game while introducing new elements now seen as essential to the series as Mario's flat cap and black moustache.** *Super Mario Bros 3* incorporated sub-bosses, multiple routes and mini-games, while embracing the notions of secrets and level warping. In fact, the game's so great, millions of Americans stood in unity to create a large image of his head using colourful T-shirts. Visible from space, it was a warning to ET to never release another game on our planet.

METROID

- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *SUPER METROID*

07 **Long before Ms Croft raided her first tomb there was another tough female playing a central role in an iconic franchise.** Donning unflattering yellow armour and forced to wear a red spaceship on her head, you really couldn't tell whether Samus Aran was man, woman or beast. But one bash of the B button, sparking her elegant flip, gave us all the proof we needed. *Metroid* is a landmark NES title, the space shooter introduced password saves, non-linear levels and multiple endings. Its dark, menacing setting housed some truly freaky inhabitants, and the Giger-style levels really helped emanates a bleak, lonely atmosphere from inside the grey box.

CONTRA

- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *METAL GEAR*

08 **It must be written into our genes that when visited by an alien it's customary to either destroy them or try to adopt them.** *Mario Bros* on steroids, the homeport of Konami's arcade hit *Contra* is considered to be the finest run-and-gun on the NES. It tells the story of two marines who are assigned the mission of welcoming an alien species by unloading an ungodly amount of ammunition into their deformed domes. The game presents some inspired character and level designs, the most memorable being the breach of an alien base, which switched the perspective from a side-scrolling blaster to a Cabal-style shooting gallery.



09

DOUBLE DRAGON 2 – THE REVENGE

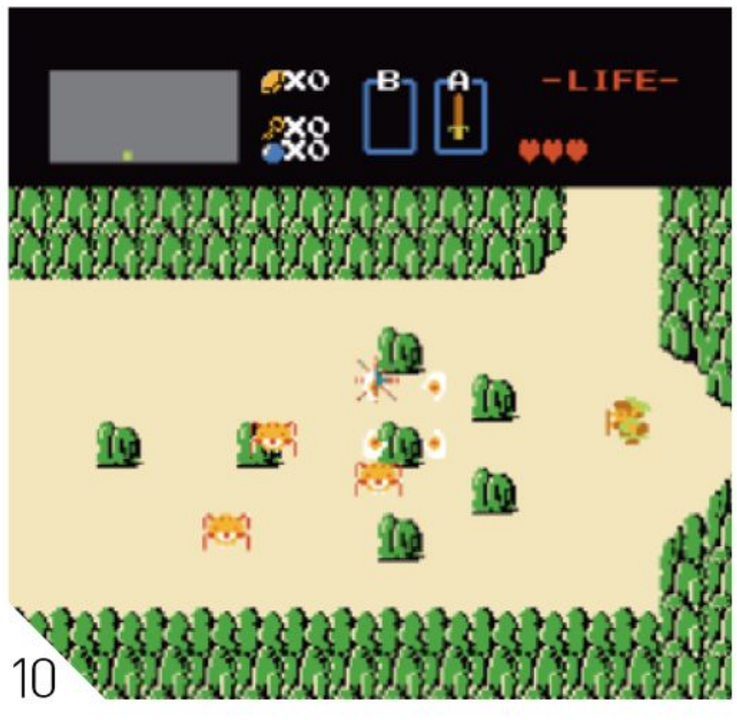
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *RENEGADE*

09 **Taking on a darker tone than its predecessor, *Double Dragon 2* still follows the theme of the Lee brothers' ill luck with the opposite sex.** After their abducted girlfriend, Marian, is callously killed by Shadow Warrior, the brothers are forced into action. It's widely considered to be the finest of the three *Double Dragon* games released on the NES, due to its intuitive controls. It also introduced a much requested two-player co-op option and iconic moves like the Whirlwind Kick and the Hyper Uppercut – which looked a lot cooler than Billy and Jimmy's usual technique of pushing an enemy's head into their groin.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *SKY SKIPPER*

10 **Sheathed inside a majestic gold cartridge, *The Legend Of Zelda*'s tale of a nefarious powermonger, an ensnared princess and an elfin boy, bound together by unlikely heroism, was a chameleon of game genres that pioneered open-ended gameplay.** Link's first quest not only popularised adventure games, it established pivotal precedents that spoke out to all platforms. It outmoded high-score tables by exposing a greater desire in gamers for exploration and completion, and encapsulated perhaps the most respected and well-loved games ever created. It was fathered by Nintendo with a proud tenderness and the NES was there to videotape the birth.



10



NES

and the rest...

There were literally hundreds of games for Nintendo's 8-bit console, ranging from the truly amazing to the terribly dire. Here are just a few of them. How many did you play?

01 DR MARIO
02 PARODIUS
03 SPY VS. SPY
04 DUCK TALES
05 IKARI WARRIORS
06 ROADBLASTERS
07 ARKANOID
08 GALAGA
09 LODE RUNNER
10 SOCCER
11 GUN·SMOKE
12 BALLOON FIGHT
13 MANIAC MANSION
14 ROD LAND
15 COBRA TRIANGLE
16 KUNG FU
17 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
18 MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT
19 XEVIOUS
20 LEMMINGS
21 BLUE SHADOW
22 THE GOONIES II
23 PUYO PUYO
24 SUPER MARIO BROS
25 THE LAST NINJA
26 DONKEY KONG
27 PIRATES!
28 SOLOMON'S KEY
29 CASTLEVANIA
30 KICK OFF
31 RAMPAGE
32 GAUNTLET II
33 BASEBALL
34 LIFE FORCE
35 ADVENTURE ISLAND
36 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II
37 SHATTERHAND
38 DOUBLE DRAGON
39 LUNAR POOL
40 RIVER CITY RANSOM
41 TENNIS
42 METAL GEAR
43 EXCITEBIKE
44 MS PAC-MAN
45 RENEGADE
46 NINJA GAIDEN
47 GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
48 CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE
49 BIONIC COMMANDO
50 MEGA MAN
51 STAR WARS
52 TETRIS 2
53 DUCK HUNT
54 HUANG DI
55 GHOSTBUSTERS II
56 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
57 ICE HOCKEY
58 SUPER MARIO BROS 2
59 TRACK & FIELD 2
60 THE ADVENTURES OF BAYOU BILLY
61 WARIO'S WOODS
62 DEVIL WORLD
63 SWORDS AND SERPENTS
64 PAPERBOY
65 RAMBO
66 PROBOTECTOR
67 FINAL FANTASY
68 CABAL
69 M.U.L.E.
70 RYGAR
71 GOLF
72 URBAN CHAMPION
73 PAC-MAN
74 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
75 ROBOCOP
76 1942
77 YOSHI'S COOKIE
78 ICE CLIMBER
79 PRINCE OF PERSIA
80 WIZARDS & WARRIORS
81 QUINTY
82 COMMANDO
83 PUNCH-OUT!!
84 RUSH 'N ATTACK
85 SIDE POCKET
86 A BOY AND HIS BLOB
87 FANTASTIC DIZZY


04

05


06


1UP 22
ROUND 1
07


1UP
08


09


10

11


I-000500 TOP-010000
12


OK! THIS LOOKS LIKE THE OLD MANSION.
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NEXT
SCORE
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BLOCK
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PLAYBALL
NINTENDO
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TRASH PICK-UP
40


Nintendo
Com 0
You 0
41


I'M GETTING SLEEPY!!
42

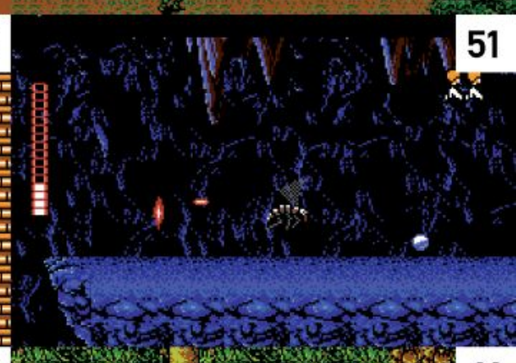

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TIME
1:30
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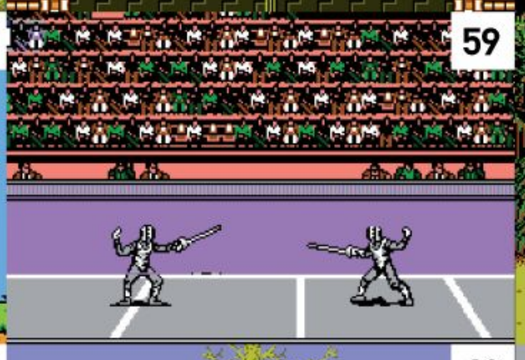

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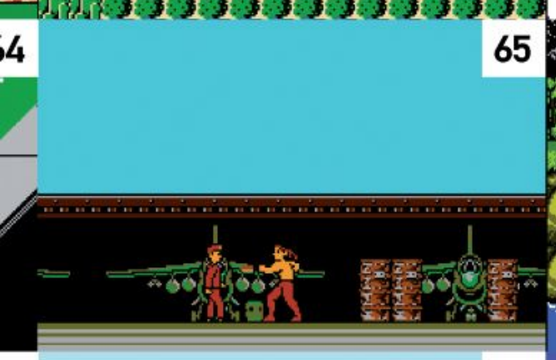
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POW
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000800
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STAGE 01
SPEED ▶ MED
HIGH 00000
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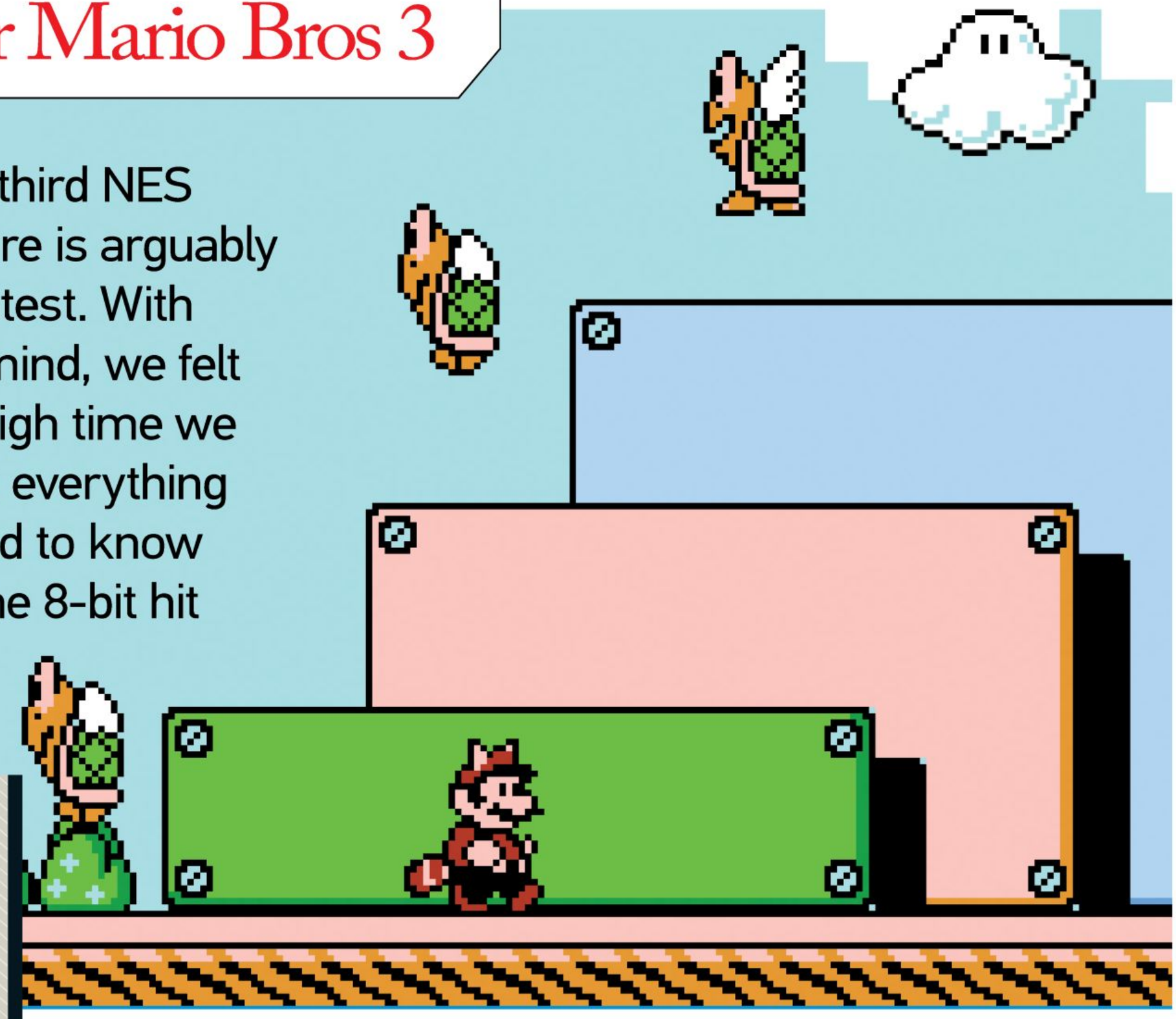

86


DIZZY
87

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Super Mario Bros 3

Mario's third NES adventure is arguably his greatest. With that in mind, we felt it was high time we told you everything you need to know about the 8-bit hit



Instant Expert

Prior to its release, *Super Mario Bros 3* was revealed to the public through a canny piece of product placement in Hollywood movie *The Wizard*

At one stage in development Nintendo considered a centaur suit for Mario. This was later dropped in favour of the raccoon suit

Although the Koopalings are all named after celebrities, their appearances were based upon seven of the programmers working under Shigeru Miyamoto

At 17 million copies sold, *Super Mario Bros 3* remains one of the bestselling non-bundle games ever released. The Virtual Console version and the GBA release have sold a further 1 million and 5 million copies respectively

The idea of *Mario 3*'s ingenious overworld map was later used again, albeit in simplified form, in *Super Mario World*, and was more accurately copied in both *New Super Mario Bros* games

Super Mario Bros 3 is one of only ten games to be preserved in the US Library of Congress's Game Canon initiative. It is the only Japanese game in the list

The idea of different 'suits' for Mario to wear, rather than simple power-ups, later resurfaced in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s bee, boo and spring suits

Whether you were wealthy enough to afford one or not when it was first released, the NES was undeniably a landmark turning point for videogames. After the primacy of the Atari 2600, the clumsy DIY feel of Spectrum and C64 games, and the daunting inaccessibility of the arcades, Nintendo's unassuming grey box came along and changed everything with one simple rule: make games fun. Not every game was great, of course, but every game that Nintendo created was easy to pick up and play, controlled with a confident slickness, presented a challenge without ever being unfair, and positioned the videogame as a wondrous window into another world filled with a sense of discovery and joy. NES games were what videogames should have been all along – it's just that nobody realised until the day they were faced with them.

The crown jewel of this era is undoubtedly *Super Mario Bros 3*. While the two previous *Mario* games had been exceptional adventures when compared to those games available on other systems of the time, *Super Mario Bros 3* was exceptional when compared to Nintendo's own achievements. It took the template laid out by the original *Super Mario Bros* and expanded it in every possible direction, resulting in a bigger, longer, deeper and even taller videogame. Its seemingly never-ending wealth of interactions epitomised the NES software catalogue and established the *Mario* series as something truly special in the world of videogames.

It might not have seemed like such a revolutionary game at first glance, since the opening few seconds were almost exactly the same as *Super Mario Bros*. The player is put in control of a diminutive Mario, with a paltry two commands – run or jump – at his disposal, the ability to eat a mushroom to grow in size, and the same old enemies – the Goomba and Koopa Troopa – to take on in the same old way. Only a fresh lick of paint indicated that this was a different game at all. But even within that first level, there are a couple of hints of the greatness to come. Around halfway through, we come across the first of many new power-ups that feature throughout the game, a leaf that illogically transforms Mario into a rather cute looking raccoon, complete with tiny little ears and a bushy stripy tail.

Even more illogically, we discover that running at high speed for long enough while dressed in the raccoon suit will cause Mario to lift from the ground and fly through the air, eventually leading to a hidden batch of coins high above the ground. And, with that, the tone is set for a game that has a new surprise around every corner and a secret treat to discover where most games would make do with the rudimentary and the obvious.

Nintendo and, more accurately, Shigeru Miyamoto, had played

Pixel Perfect

The many sumptuous sprites of Super Mario Bros 3


» Mario


» Super Mario


» Luigi


» Tanooki Mario


» Fire Mario


» Frog Mario


» Hammer Mario


» Raccoon Mario


» Bob-omb


» Bullet Bill

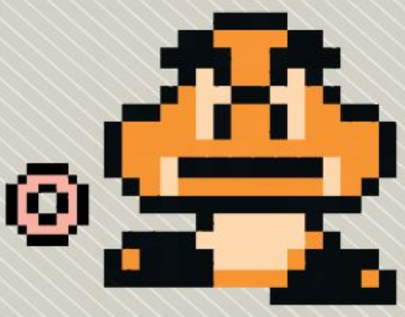

» Buzzy Beetle


» Blooper


» Boomerang Bros


» Boo


» Chain Chomp


» Goomba


» Hammer Bros


» Cheep Cheep


» Jelectro


» Dry Bones

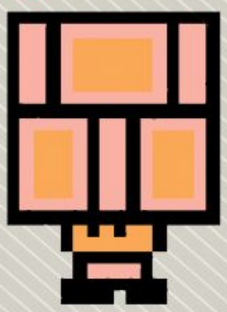

» Koopa Troopa (Green)


» Koopa Paratroopa (Green)


» Koopa Troopa (Red)


» Kuribo Goomba


» Lakitu


» Micro Goomba


» Paragoomba


» Piranha Plant


» Rocky Wrench


» Sledge Bros


» Spike


» Spiny


» Statue Mario


» Thwomp


» Iggy


» Larry


» Lemmy


» Ludwig


» Morton


» Roy


» Wendy


» Bowser

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Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"Once you start playing you want to keep going, just to see what surprises are around the next corner! I ended up playing it all night!"

- **JULIAN RIGNALL,** MEAN MACHINES, 1991

Twin Galaxies High Scores

SPEED RUN
- **NAME:** RICHARD URETA
- **TIME:** 00:11:15

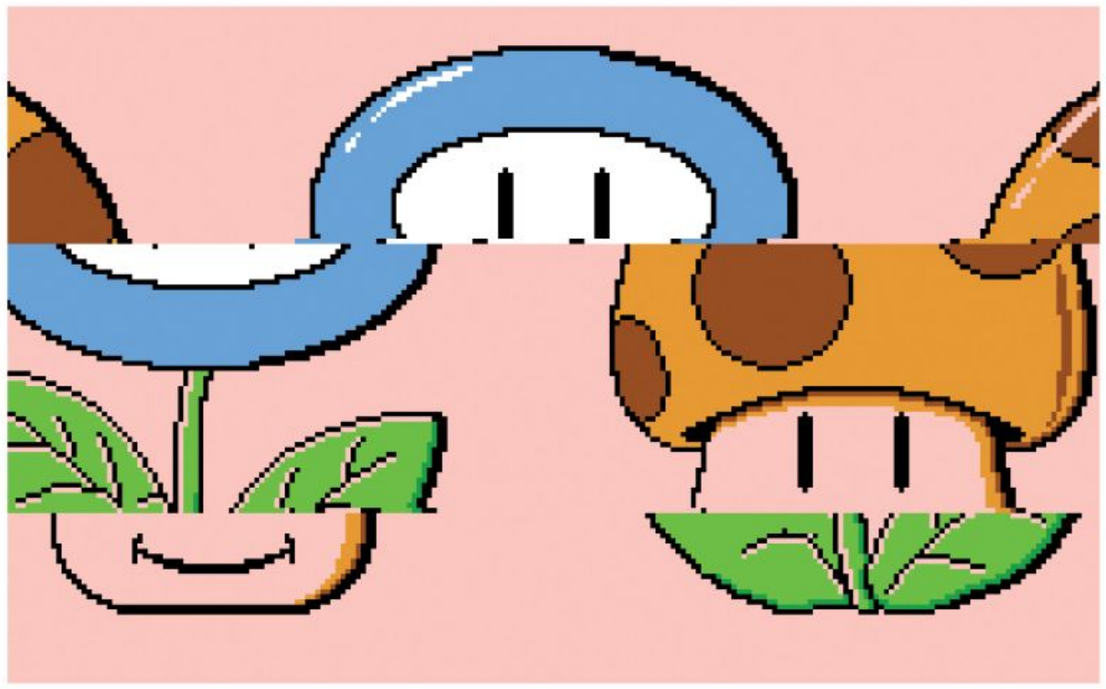
FASTEST FULL COMPLETION (NO WARP WHISTLES)
- **NAME:** KYLE GOEWERT
- **TIME:** 01:27:34

5 LIFE GAME
- **NAME:** KYLE GOEWERT
- **TIME:** 2,568,080

around with secrets before, of course. Who could forget the warp pipes of *Super Mario Bros*, accessed by running along the top of the level of World 1-2? Or the many secrets hidden behind the walls and bushes of Hyrule in *The Legend Of Zelda*? Miyamoto was famous for taking a childlike curiosity and sense of discovery and using it as inspiration for a videogame. And in *Super Mario Bros 3*, he turned that curiosity into an art form, every inch of the Mushroom Kingdom littered with secret areas and random events.

Not even the menus were safe from this playful sandbox feel. Rather than simply progress from one stage to another in *Mario 3*, the player was presented with a map screen somewhat akin to a board game, allowing them to move Mario around the board and actually *choose* which levels he would tackle next, take in some mini-game distractions, and figure out how to take a short cut or two. Take the Hammer Bros that wandered around the map screen, for example: bump into one and you'd be transported to a confrontation with two of the deadliest enemies in the *Mario* series. Most players would do everything to avoid them, but if you were brave enough to take them on and win you'd be rewarded with a random power-up that, if you were lucky, would be a hammer that could break certain rocks on the map and open up new routes to the end of the world.

And, of course, there was the now infamous Warp Whistle. Like the warp pipes of the first game, the whistle allowed experienced players to skip ahead to the more challenging later levels. But figuring out how to find those whistles was a much harder proposition. The first, for example, required the player to discover that it was possible to actually enter the background layer of the stage in World 1-3 by crouching on an unassuming white block for several seconds. Once into the background, Mario could run all the way along the stage, safe from enemy attack, and beyond the goal to a secret Toad House where he would be rewarded with a Warp Whistle.

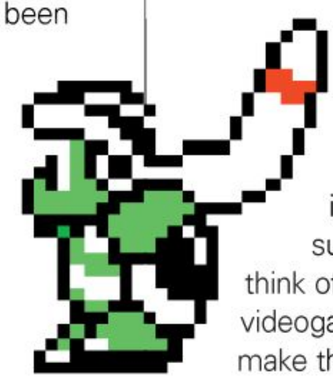


» [NES] This sliding mini-game was one of several that could earn bonuses for the player between levels.



This trick was actually one of the simpler secrets to be uncovered in *Super Mario Bros 3*, but it highlighted the constant creativity that had been poured into Nintendo's game. One that transformed a wandering Hammer Brother into an airship, for example, could only be activated by finishing a level in a time with an even number at the end while also holding a multiple of 11 coins. Such formulae were cleverly used to give the game a mysterious feeling of randomness, while others, like the Warp Whistle secret, were more about engendering a sense of exploration in the player.

Either way, these secrets and random events made *Super Mario Bros 3* a game way ahead of its time. It was a game that could be played over and over again, each playthrough offering a new surprise over the last. It was a game that offered real choice to the player, years before the branching narrative RPG became popular. And it was a game so packed with new and exciting elements to discover that some of its parts took on a near-mythical status, allowing fellow players to trade their discoveries and speculate about what might also be hidden. 20 years on, it's a game that still keeps surprising us, and we can't think of many other videogames that can make the same claim.





Power-Ups

Mario is famed for his power-ups, and Super Mario Bros 3 had some of the greatest ever seen in the whole series



»Mushroom
An old favourite. Transforms Mario into the larger Super Mario. Effectively acts as an extra life.



»Fire Flower
Another classic. This one grants Mario the ability to throw fireballs for a limited time.



»Super Star
Makes Mario invulnerable for a short period of time.



»Frog Suit
Turns Mario into a frog, granting him exceptional hopping and swimming ability.



»Kuribo
A very rare boot that we find a Goomba hopping around in. Mario can use it like a vehicle.



»Leaf
Turns Mario into a raccoon and grants him the ability of flight.



»Hammer
Transforms Mario into a Hammer Brother, with the ability to throw hammers.

Memorable Moments

We present the best bits of the best NES game Nintendo ever made

Curtain Call

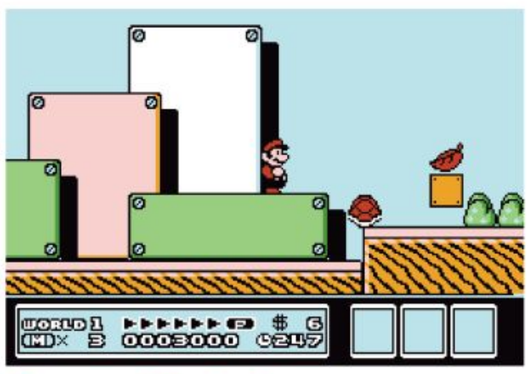
The intro to *Super Mario Bros 3* presents the entire game to the player as though it were a stage production, complete with spotlights and huge curtains. It's a weird premise that's never really explained, but it is one of the most memorable and iconic openings to any NES game.





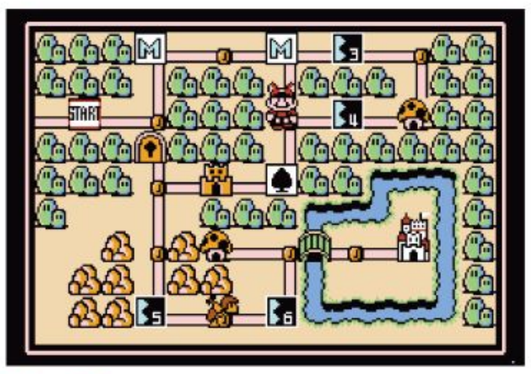
Hide And Seek

Crouch on any white block for a few seconds and Mario will fall off it and into the background layer of the stage. Sometimes it's just for fun; other times it can actually lead Mario to a very cool secret.



Question Blocked

A Question Block sits on the ground in the first stage, befuddling *Super Mario Bros* players who are only used to hitting the blocks from below. The solution: get a Koopa shell and throw it into the block. Genius.



Non-Linear

Get to a certain point in the World 1 map screen and it suddenly dawns on you that there's now a significant element of choice in *Super Mario Bros 3*. Four different options are available at this first junction alone.



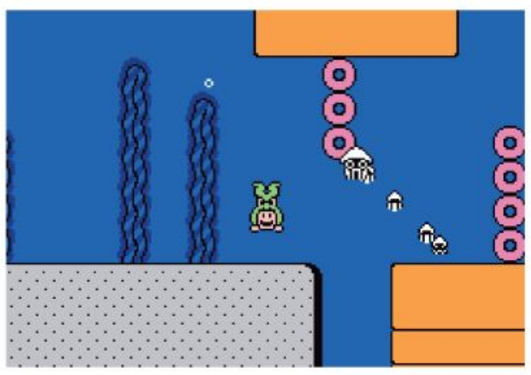
Bum Rush

Pick up some speed and hold down on a slope like this and Mario will slide all the way down on his backside, taking out any enemies he hits during his descent. It's the sort of satisfying moment that *SMB3* does best.



'King Idiot

Cut-scenes in a 2D *Mario* game? Can you believe it? These pre-boss battle scenes were pretty cool, though, always showing the King of the Mushroom Kingdom transformed into something humiliating.



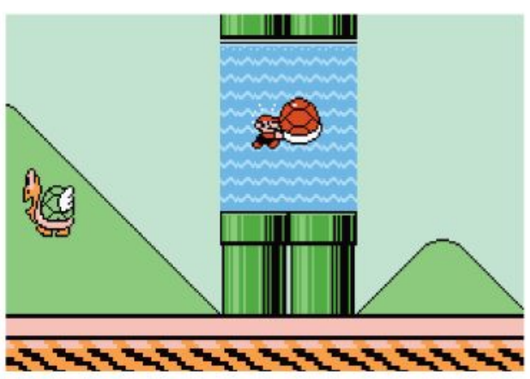
Hopping Mad

Super Mario Bros 3's Frog Suit is one of the most iconic power-ups of all time and was the stuff of legend back in the NES days. It felt so cool to mess around with, exploring underwater with fewer of the normal limitations.



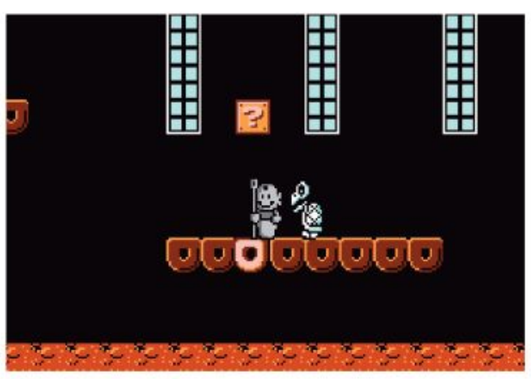
An Old Friend

Lakitu makes his return in *Super Mario Bros 3*, but we wouldn't call it a 'long-awaited' one. He's still an annoying little nuisance. His later relegation to cameraman and traffic light holder couldn't come soon enough.



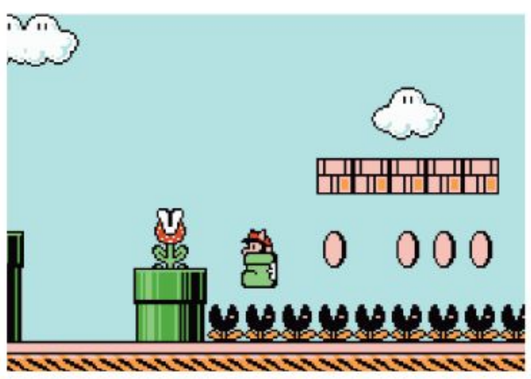
LittleBigMario

World 4's oversized level designs had a real wow factor in the NES days, even though they were really quite simple. The concept is so well-loved, though, that it was recently revived for *Super Mario Galaxy 2*.



Statue Mario

The Tanooki Suit is an enhanced form of Raccoon Mario that gives him fur all over in addition to the ears and the tail. Hold down and B while wearing the suit and Mario will turn into a statue, making him invincible.



Suited And Booted

The Kuribo Shoe is probably the rarest item in *Super Mario Bros 3*, only appearing in a couple of levels. It also has to be one of the weirdest power-ups in a *Mario* game. Do you think there's an old woman and her family in there too?

The ending to Super Mario Bros 3 isn't without its sense of humour, as Princess Peach demonstrates. Cheeky bugger!

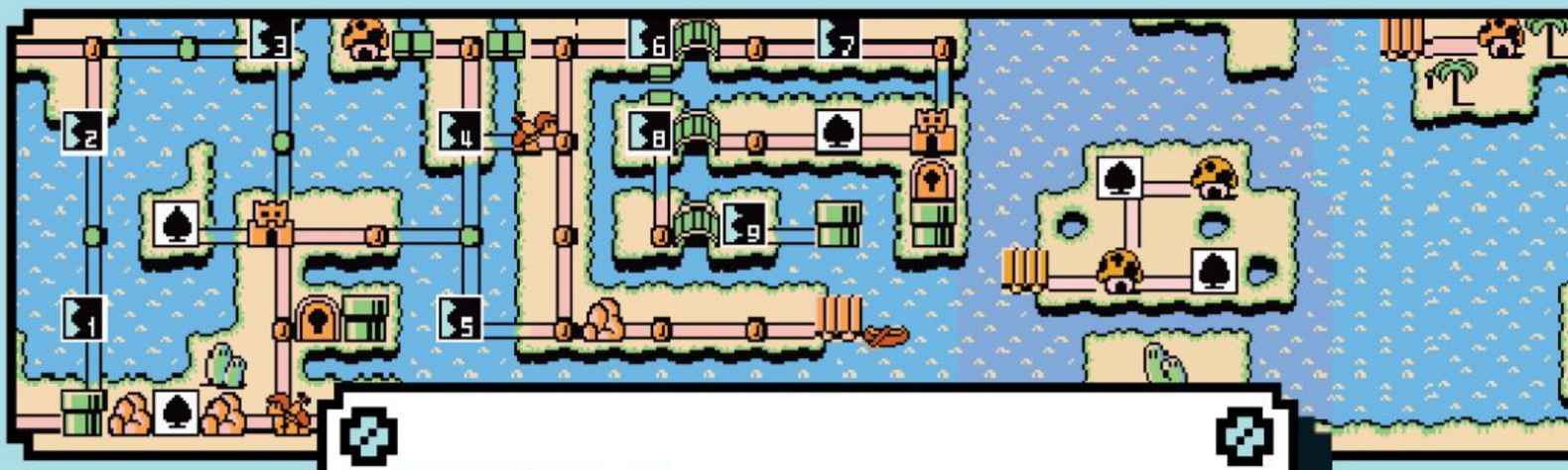


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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
Super Mario Bros 3

World Tour

The Mushroom Kingdom has been represented in many different ways throughout *Mario* history, but *Super Mario Bros 3* was the first time it was presented in so much detail. Here's how it stacked up, from interactive map screens to the levels themselves and their climactic boss battles.



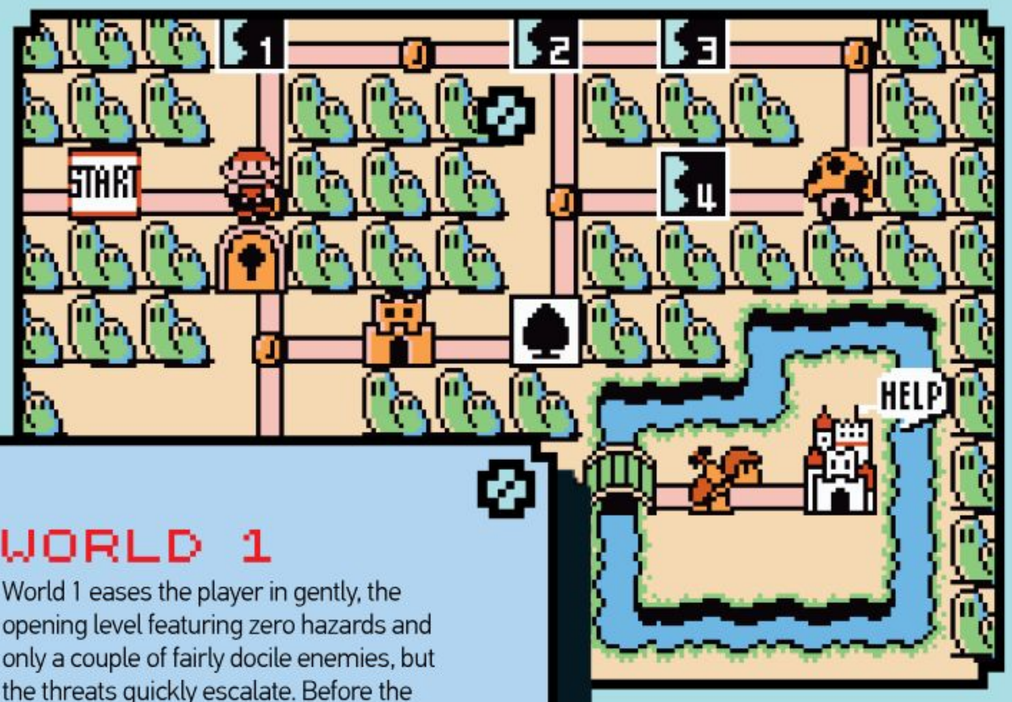
WORLD 3

The third world is almost entirely made up of water-based levels, always some of the trickiest stages in *Mario* games, especially when there's a giant fish leaping out of the depths in an attempt to swallow him whole. Thankfully, however, our hero has a new trick up his sleeve in the form of the Frog Suit, which grants him enhanced swimming and jumping abilities.



BOSS: Wendy

Bowser's only daughter awaits Mario at the end of World 3, and she's no princess, let us tell you. Like her brothers, her weapon of choice is a wand, and this one fires what look like life rings. Wendy is named after Wendy O Williams, lead singer of punk outfit The Plasmatics.



WORLD 1

World 1 eases the player in gently, the opening level featuring zero hazards and only a couple of fairly docile enemies, but the threats quickly escalate. Before the world is through you'll have contended with slippery ice slopes toward oblivion, an assault from the pesky Boomerang Bros, and a madcap dash through an airship as cannonballs shoot at you from all directions. Phew!



BOSS: Iggy

One of Bowser's seven children known as the Koopalings, Iggy is named after real-life rocker Iggy Pop. But that's not a microphone in his hand: it's a deadly magic wand that he wants to shoot at Mario. Thankfully, he's quite easy to dodge and, a trio of head stomps later, he'll be out of the game.

WORLD 2

World 2's desert landscapes throw some truly unexpected enemies at you, including a teeny tiny Goomba that hides underneath blocks of sand. One level introduces the now-customary Boo enemy, a ghost that will stop pursuing you as long as you look it in the eye. And in another stage you're even attacked by the sun itself. Weird.



BOSS: Morton

Not that much more troubling than his brother Iggy, Morton also wields a wand but is able to throw out multiple bouncing projectiles at once. Also named after a real-life musician, he takes his name from American singer and talk show host Morton Downey Jr.



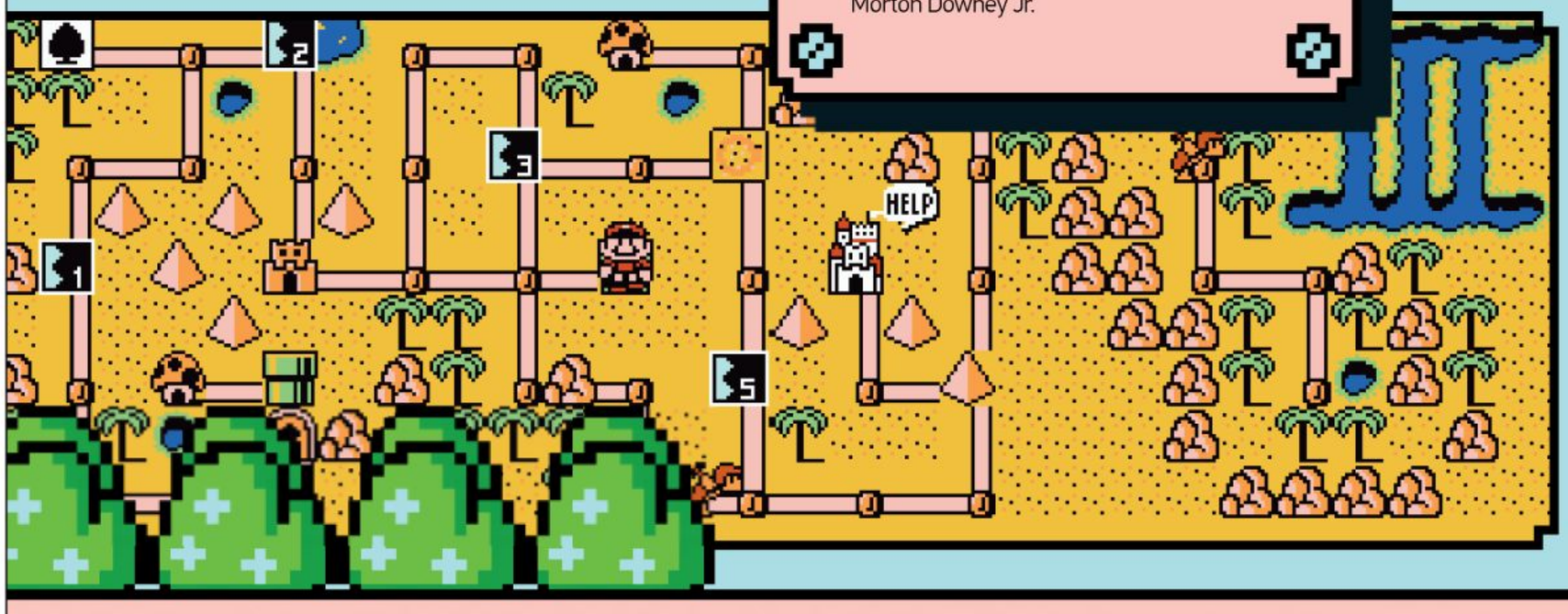
WORLD 4

The initial stages of this world seem to be a return to the simplicity of World 1's grassy plains, until you see the enemies, who are now several times bigger than ever before. Thankfully, however, lots of other things have grown in size, including the clouds, which are now big enough for Mario to safely jump onto.



BOSS: Larry

Another boss, another Koopaling, another boring old magic wand. There's not much challenge here, but World 4 itself is tough enough that you'll welcome the downtime. Larry is the only Koopaling not to be named after a musician. Instead, he's named after talk show host Larry King.



WORLD 6

World 6 is where things really start to get tough. Icy surfaces, spiked floors and multiple enemy types all crowded into the screen make it very easy for Mario to meet his demise if you don't keep precise control over him at all times. Prepare to use a fair few continues in this world.



BOSS: Lemmy

Riding around on a huge rubber ball, Lemmy causes trouble for Mario by launching several other bouncy balls at him. It's utter chaos and pretty difficult to get through in one piece. We'll forgive Lemmy, though, simply because he's named after the legendary lead singer of UK metallers Motörhead.

WORLD 5

While the first half of the fifth world takes place in familiar grassland territory, the second half sends Mario up into the air to explore the clouds. Being so high up, however, means only one thing: lots and lots of bottomless pits to fall into.



BOSS: Roy

One of the most dangerous of the Koopalings, Roy is able to stomp on the ground, sending out shockwaves that stun Mario into submission for a few seconds. Best to stay in the air, then. He's named after Roy Orbison. Of course.



WORLD 7

The penultimate world takes Mario back to his roots, with entire levels constructed from pipes. A double-edged sword: some pipes lead to beneficial secret areas while others simply house annoying enemies. Tread carefully, Mario.



BOSS: Ludwig

Second in command to Bowser himself, Ludwig is so heavy that every footstep is as powerful as Morton's stomps. He's named after Ludwig Van Beethoven, which was a source of amusement in the Mario cartoons as he tried and failed to compose pleasant classical music.

WORLD 8

Anyone who used Warp Whistles to cheat their way to the final world soon found that their skills were nowhere near up to the challenge, as Bowser's army attacks Mario with a mile-long caravan of gigantic tanks. This level, and the handful that followed, are some of the hardest in Mario's history.



BOSS: Bowser

King Koopa himself awaits Mario at the end of World 8, and he's suitably tough to beat. You can't actually hurt him, so dodge his fireballs and try to get him to stomp in the middle of the stage. If he does it enough he'll break the floor and fall into the lava below.

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THE CLASSIC GAME

MEGA MAN II



When evil scientist Dr Wily plots to take over the world using an army of colourful robots, there's only one man blue and mega enough to put a stop to his nefarious plan. Stuart Hunt pops on a blue bike helmet, dusts off his beloved NES and boots up Mega Man 2

Mega Man – he's an invention, built from machine parts by an old guy in a laboratory. He's the videogame equivalent of Pinocchio, but with the difference being that the puppet's rubbish in comparison to Capcom's titular hero. Why? Because the dummy is wooden, has a nose that prevents him from cheating on his marionette girlfriend and has a cockney, top-hat-wearing cricket for a friend. Now Mega Man, on the other hand, is a cool shade of ice-blue with overtly chunky shins, has a laser cannon where a hand lives, and boasts so much bravado he somehow manages to persuade a robotic dog to be his friend. He also goes by more than one name (Rockman, in Japan) and shifted shedloads of NES cartridges on his first videogame outing, despite them being wrapped in an artwork that baulked at his boyish demeanour and then re-imaged him as a 40-year-old virgin wearing a yellow tracksuit and looking mildly derivative with a handgun.

Since then, it's safe to say all has not been well in Mega Man's world. The motherboard hit the fan in 200X, while Megs was standing aloft a skyscraper one starry night. Was he going to jump and end it there… who can tell? Well, after the arduous mission that was *Mega Man*, perhaps the prospect of being recalled to one day face off against frustratingly hard-going gameplay and practically impossible bosses had taken its emotional toll. But then he hears a rumbling from an army of new robot nastiness forged by his old foe and megalomaniac old duffer, Dr Wily, and a new contract is rather hastily drawn up. The agreement is that Mega Man will return if Capcom agrees to include some kind of save system into the game and someone who has an actual vested interest in videogames gets to design the game's boxart.

As notoriously attractive as it was notoriously arduous, Mega Man's second outing had the remarkable ability of being both really frustrating and really appeasing at exactly the same moment in time. This bemusing feeling came by it being brilliant to gawp at – with its chunky cartoon graphics, elaborate and varied characters and quirky themed levels – but also being an utter pig to complete. *Mega Man 2* is a run-'n'-gun-cum-platform puzzle game, and was a brilliant hotchpotch that worked fantastically as a showpiece of what the NES could achieve. It was also the *Mega*



» Bubble Man is one of the easiest bosses to kill, which probably has something to with the fact he opts to hit you with bubbles.



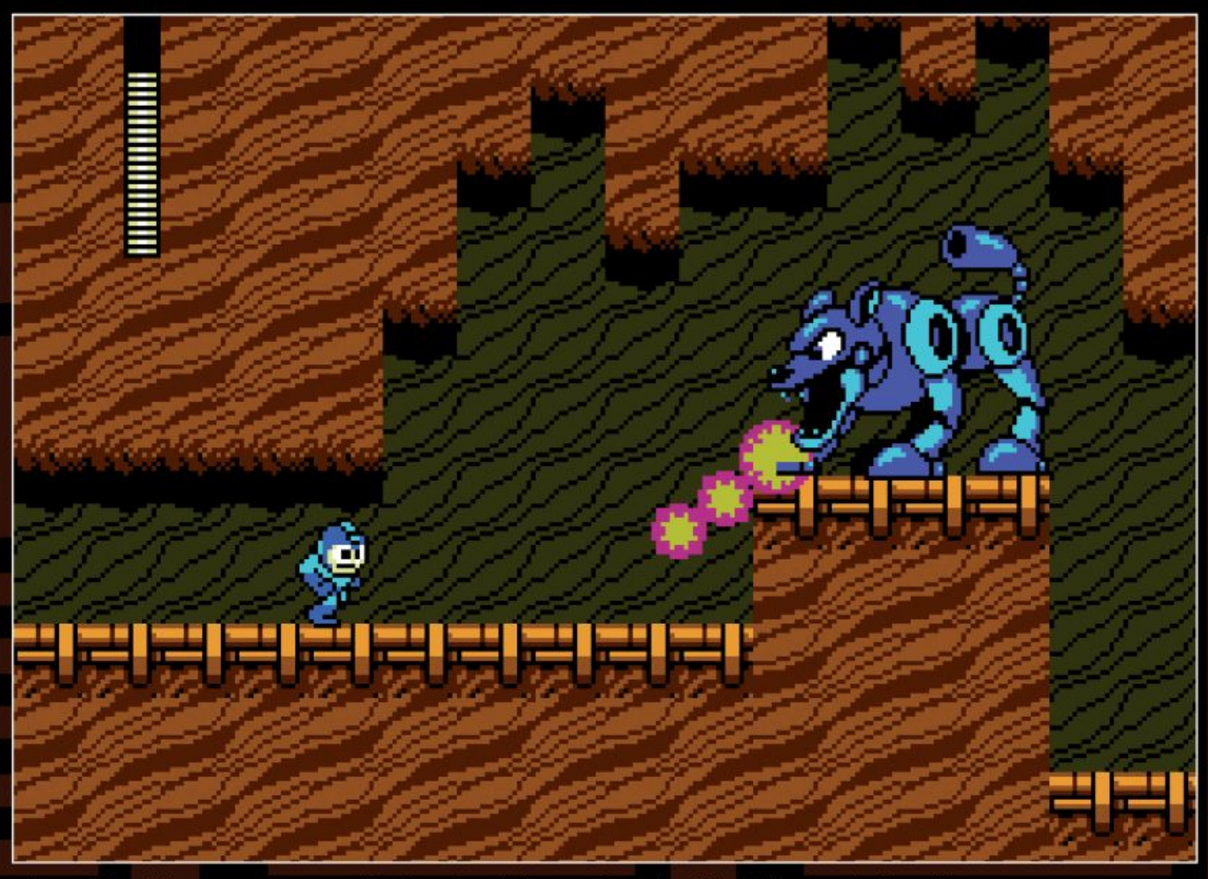
» Here's the boss roster. We would tell you the order in which you should tackle them, but it's been so long we've forgotten…

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM





» Some of the midway enemies are actually bigger than the bosses themselves. Thankfully, they take fewer hits.

Man title that launched the metal might into global stardom, paving the way for many messy offshoots and sequels inside the franchise.

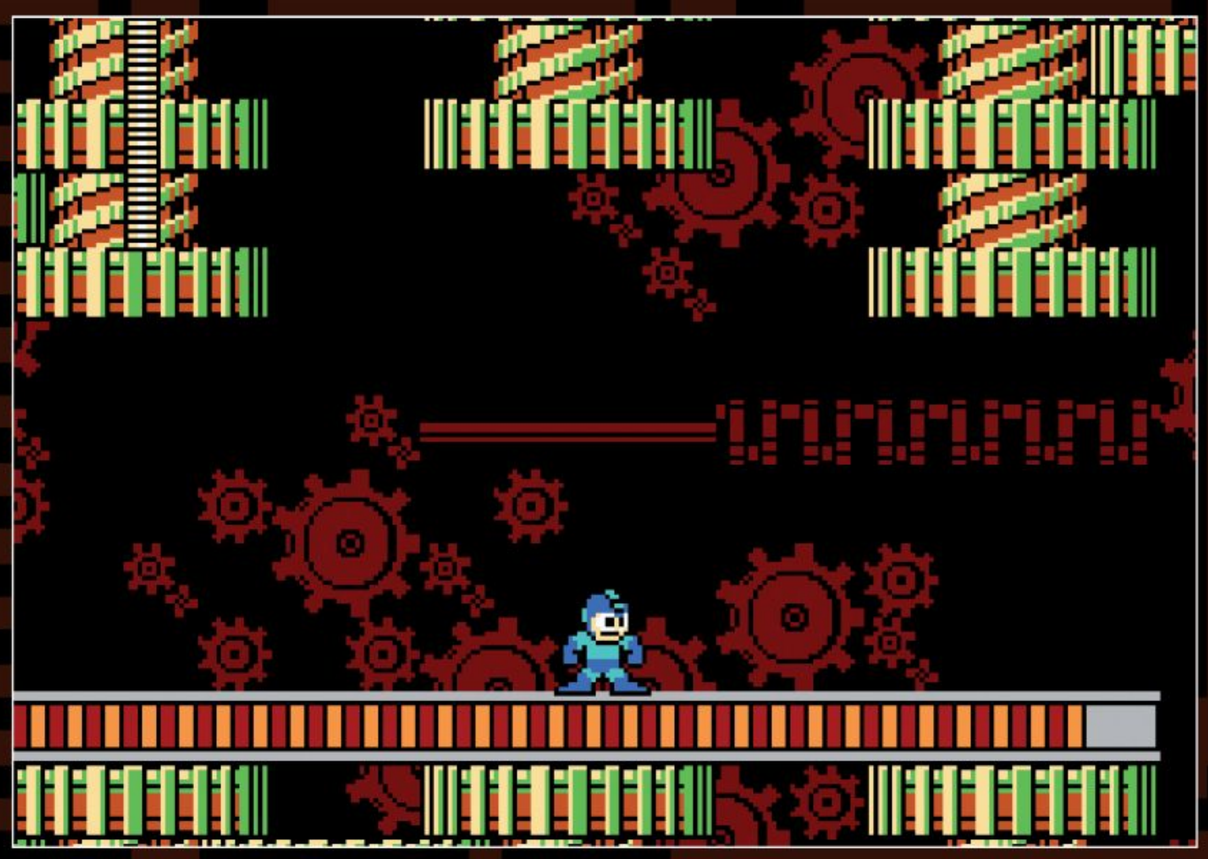
For *Mega Man 2*, all the raw elements of the first game were wholesaled over. Mega Man still had the ability to pilfer the powers of bosses and that dastardly boss-rush section also made a re-emergence. Plus, the bosses and their masochistic stages all played significance to the structure of play, as vanquishing Woodman and his potent leaf powers would have garlic-to-a-vampire properties to one of his robotic comrades. This rather large oversight by a blinkered Wily meant that the order in which you tackled the whimsically themed stages of *Mega Man 2* was quite significant in helping you prise open its heavy door of progression. On its release, however, some gamers lamented (and they do have a valid point) that, due to the sporadic themes of the bosses, this cross-referencing involved far too much trial and error and little rhyme or reason.

Mega Man 2 was also a bigger game than the first, and added two extra robotic bosses to the original's roster of six (with eight then becoming the numerical stay-in for *3* and *4*, etc). And after you've pilfered the abilities from all of the cybernetic foes in the game, it still grows in size again, leaving Mega Man, now resting on his newly acquired platform-generating powers, to traverse Wily's lair for a final showdown with his arch nemesis.

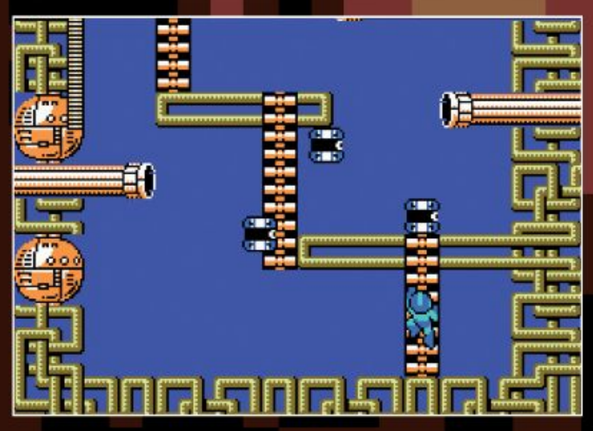
Now, while it might seem strange for us to speak so negatively about a 'classic game', stupidly thorny gameplay has always been the essence of *Mega Man* titles. In fact, it became the bread and butter of the series. That aside, the game is widely regarded as the zenith of a highly popular and successful Capcom franchise. And while poor old Mega Man himself certainly doesn't get much love on our side of the water any more, he's still undoubtedly a national hero in his home country.



» Woodman's stage is one of the best-looking levels in the game.



» Metal Man is a collector of oversized cogs. Regrettably.





» All of the stages are brilliantly themed, and look great.

"MEGA MAN'S SECOND OUTING HAD THE REMARKABLE ABILITY OF BEING BOTH FRUSTRATING AND APPEASING AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT IN TIME"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESIDENT EVIL
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, GAMECUBE, PC, SATURN
YEAR: 1996

STREET FIGHTER II
SYSTEM: TAKE YOUR PICK
YEAR: 1991

FINAL FIGHT 3 AKA FINAL FIGHT TOUGH (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1995





BETTER THE DEVIL, IF YOU KNOW HOW

If you think *Mega Man 2* was an onerous challenge, try revisiting the first game. Despite being the shortest of the six *Mega Man* games to appear on the NES, the first game is widely regarded as not only the most gruelling in the series but one of the most backbreaking videogames full stop. This was principally afforded to the fact that there was no save or password system. Another brick wall the player would hit was the ridiculously hard-going Yellow Devil (aka Rock Monster) boss, whose laborious attack routine and annoyingly high attack-ratio allowed for a large 'Game Over' window to open up. Wily gamers, however, cottoned on to a peculiar two-tiered pause option bug, which allowed multiple attacks on enemies, if timed right, and if used with a bit of flair could help topple the yellow blighter effortlessly.



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> **“As with other Nintendo games, it’s a piece of people’s childhoods. Anyone who grew up owning a NES remembers it fondly”**
>
> Jerry Momoda



DUCK HUNT

Starring a smarmy dog and scores of hapless flying wildfowl, Duck Hunt was the game that introduced many to the joys of the NES Zapper lightgun. Mike Bevan looks back at the history and enduring appeal of Nintendo's virtual hunting trip

Most gamers of a certain age will almost certainly have played *Duck Hunt*, for one simple reason – it was paired on a pack-in cartridge for the Nintendo Entertainment System along with one of the most popular and groundbreaking console games of all time, *Super Mario Bros*. But while Shigeru Miyamoto's platform classic was undoubtedly the more attention-grabbing title of the compilation, *Duck Hunt* retains the endearing nostalgia of childhood, a cartoon shooting gallery with a sniggering canine companion and the hapless quacks of animated flapping ducks brought down by the simple act of pulling a plastic trigger. The grinning face of *Duck Hunt*'s dog, fresh from rooting around in bushes for nesting gun-fodder, has become an ironic and humorous hallmark for videogaming disappointment after missing your quarry in Nintendo's lightgun shooter. And 30 years on, he's set to make a comeback in the latest instalment of the *Super Smash Bros* fighting game franchise with a feathered friend in tow. It seems all these years later, the ducks are striking back.

Although most people may know *Duck Hunt* from the *Super Mario Bros* compilation cart, it was in fact the debut pack-in title for the North American NES launch in 1985, when it came bundled with *Gyromite*, a platform game that worked with Nintendo's Johnny Five-alike robot R.O.B. Coupled with its later appearance as a pack-in for various NES bundles alongside *Super Mario Bros* and *World Class Track Meet*, that's an awful lot of copies of *Duck Hunt* out in the wild.

Produced by renowned Nintendo designer Gunpei Yokoi, creator of the Game & Watch and Game Boy handheld systems, *Duck Hunt* was in fact a digital reincarnation of his earlier electromechanical toy, a Kôsenjû ('light ray gun') game of the same name. Released in 1976, the product used a small mirror-projection device to project white duck silhouettes onto a wall. The ducks would 'fall', accompanied by a loud quack, ▶

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» Sadly there are only ever two ducks on screen at any one time. It's still tricky, mind.



» One of the modes available allows you to shoot at skeets, instead of the usual ducks.

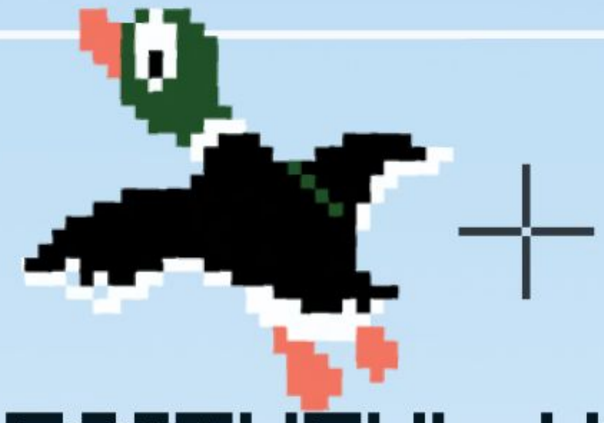


» Contrary to popular belief, there are actually three different coloured ducks in *Duck Hunt*.



when the player hit them with the shotgun-shaped lightgun provided. In fact, despite the absence of a pastoral background or your ubiquitous hunting dog, the basic game mechanics were very similar to the future NES version. However, the relatively high retail price of 9,500 yen (around £75 adjusted for inflation) meant it was an expensive novelty back in Seventies Japan.

The version of *Duck Hunt* that most of us are familiar with was launched on the Japanese Famicom console in April, 1984. It was one of three initial titles for Nintendo's new Famicom Beam Gun peripheral, along with the Wild West-themed *Wild Gunman*, and the police-training style shooter *Hogan's Alley*. In North America a version of the game was released for Nintendo's VS arcade system the same year, prior to its home release in 1985. Former Nintendo market-research analyst Jerry Momoda remembers *Vs Duck Hunt* well. "VS System games were an inexpensive two-chip update [of existing Famicom titles] with new cabinet graphics," he says. "They were a welcome alternative for operators who had plenty of old cabinets. Operators could quickly change games on location with little downtime, and keep locations fresh with new titles. The VS



FAITHFUL HOUNDS

More videogames featuring doggy heroes



STAR PAWS
VARIOUS

■ Based on an abandoned concept that was dreamt up by *Manic Miner* creator Matthew Smith, *Star Paws* resembled a sort of *Road Runner* in space. As Captain Roger Pawstrong it was your job to capture delicious but fiendishly wary Space Griffins and dispatch them to Earth. The C64 version featured a great soundtrack by composer Rob Hubbard.



SLEEPWALKER
AMIGA

■ Released in aid of the BBC's Comic Relief charity, this game saw players controlling Ralph the dog and protecting his sleepwalking master. Ralph had to neutralise various hazards in his owner's path as he careered ever-onwards, taking care not to wake him up. It also featured small cameos from comedians Lenny Henry and Harry Enfield.



SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD
PC DOS

■ This was the first outing for Steve Purcell's unlikely detective duo – a six-foot fedora-wearing dog and a hyperkinetic 'rabbity-thing'. It's an all-American road trip involving robot scientists, a frozen Bigfoot and the world's biggest ball of twine, and formed the basis for Telltale Games' modern episodic series of adventures.



PARAPPA THE RAPPER
PLAYSTATION

■ Wonderfully quirky and unmistakably Japanese, *Parappa* introduced us to the peculiar tale of a funky paper-thin canine, his sunflower girlfriend, and a karate-practising onion, among other things. A precursor to the many popular rhythm-based games that followed, it also spawned a guitar-focused sequel *UmJammer Lammy*.

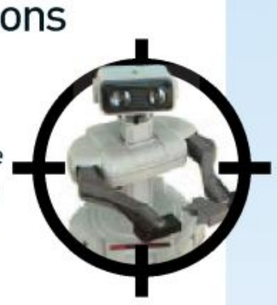


OKAMI
VARIOUS

■ *Okami* puts you into the paws of a snow-white wolf called Amaterasu, tasked with exploring a watercolour-like medieval Japan. You'll need to master the game's innovative 'brush stroke' techniques to solve puzzles and strike down enemies, while colouring in the beautifully dreamlike game world resembling a children's drawing book.

PERIPHERAL VISION

Other games featuring notable or peculiar hardware add-ons



GYROMITE NES

■ Aka *Robot Gyro*, it was designed for use with the Robotic Operating Buddy (R.O.B.) for NES. It's a two-player puzzle platform game, the second player using R.O.B. to move on-screen gates and pillars by manipulating a pair of gyroscopic spinning tops.



MARIO CLASH VIRTUAL BOY

■ Amazingly, there were no proper Mario games on Nintendo's failed console. What there was, however, was this fun effort that has Mario flinging shells at enemies on distant ledges while avoiding enemies and hazards found on his own platform.



YOSHI'S SAFARI SNES

■ One of the few fun times to be had with Nintendo's clunky Super Scope lightgun, it's an odd hybrid that sees you trundling along a highway blasting Bowser's minions, jumping obstacles and fighting ridiculous-looking bosses.



RESIDENT EVIL 4 VARIOUS

■ For its survival-horror masterpiece, Capcom released a bloody-looking chainsaw-style controller. The PS2 version even made little revving noises as you ran around decapitating zombies. Sadly, the shape of the controller was a bit awkward.



OUT RUN 3D MASTER SYSTEM

■ While *Space Harrier* deserves a mention, we're actually going to go with *Out Run 3D*. The animation is a little choppy at time, but the impressive visuals and new track designs certainly make up for it. Highly recommended.

» Each level starts with your faithful hound sniffing out ducks, before leaping into action.



» *Duck Hunt* is effectively a remake of one of Gunpei Yokoi's earlier games.



» The dog's name is rumoured to be Mr Peepers, but we've found no hard proof of this.



"The first [arcade gun] version was black and looked like a .357 Magnum, so much that it was too realistic for American street locations"



System and PlayChoice were very successful and Nintendo's last official coin-op games. Our guns were imported from Japan. The first version was black in colour and looked like a .357 Magnum, so much that it was too realistic for American street locations and could be mistaken for a real gun. They were made of pliable rubber over a metal core, and as such didn't last long in American arcades…"

While the arcade version of *Duck Hunt* was for the most part very similar to the console release, there were a couple of notable differences. The cabinet was set up with a couple of lightguns with players taking turns to play, and the game alternated between duck and skeet shooting rounds. And, as perhaps could be deduced from the cabinet marquee, which depicted *Duck Hunt* dog cowering from a hail of bullets, it was possible to shoot more than just the ducks. There was an added bonus round in which our canine pal popped up among the feathered targets and could be blasted by 'mistake', a misdemeanour for which he'd rightfully scold you at the end of the segment. To the future disappointment of many a NES *Duck Hunt* player that longed to zap that annoying grin off the mickey-taking hound, this little Easter Egg was unfortunately nowhere to be seen in the console version. While ▶

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JERRY MOMODA

At Nintendo of America in the Eighties, Jerry helped to test and promote new arcade and console products



What's your personal history with the console and arcade versions of *Duck Hunt*?
I was hired by Nintendo in 1982, and was fortunate to be the one to communicate with Japan on games in development. No one wanted to touch the console industry in America after the crash of 1983. The VS [Arcade] System served as a bridge leading up to the North American NES release in 1985. Both *Duck Hunt* and *Hogan's Alley* were first released for the coin-op VS System in 1984. The VS System was simply a coin-operated version of the Japanese Famicom console.

Was the arcade version of *Duck Hunt* as popular as the home version?
It was designed to be a Famicom/NES title, from the simplicity of gameplay and the graphics. *Duck Hunt* was bundled along with *Super Mario Bros* in some configurations of the NES console, so it reached way more players. It's a better fit for the console player base. *Duck Hunt* and *Hogan's Alley* both had instant but not long-lasting appeal in arcades.

And in the arcade version you could actually shoot that pesky dog?!
Everyone wanted to shoot [it] because it mocked players. And so it played an antagonist role as it taunted players by laughing at them. For obvious reasons, being able to shoot the dog was removed from the NES version. This was designed to be good, clean, family fun – a Nintendo trademark. In *Hogan's Alley*, shooting people (though animated) probably affected its marketability.

How important do you think the cartoon-like graphics were in drawing people in?
In the home market I think it had a lot of appeal. For the players it targeted, cartoon-like graphics had a strong appeal. The warm, vibrant colours used in *Duck Hunt* gave it a whole different feel than games like *Hogan's Alley*. Naturally, parents don't mind as much if little Johnny is going cartoon duck hunting versus shooting at humans in a realistic war, zombie, crime or space game.

Why do you think *Duck Hunt* is still so fondly remembered today?
As with other Nintendo games, it's a piece of people's childhood. Anyone who grew up owning a NES remembers this game fondly. Being a pack-in, nearly everybody owned the game. It's a conversation piece that people can share. The same way they talk about *Super Mario Bros*...

TWEETY BIRDS

Ten more videogames starring various feathered friends

PHOENIX
ARCADE

■ For some reason several early arcade shoot-'em-ups had you shooting at flocks of kamikaze birds in space, notably Nintendo's *Space Firebird* and this offering from Centuri/Taito. Though highly derivative of *Galaxian*, it had a certain charm, especially the stage with eggs hatching into larger winged baddies, and the final mothership which players had to chip away piece by piece in order to destroy the core.

PENGO
ARCADE

■ If you like the idea of squashing cute blobby monsters with ice blocks, accompanied by a rendition of synth instrumental classic 'Popcorn', then *Pengo* is the game for you. The aim is to defeat Pengo's arch-enemies, the Sno-Bees, by flattening them with the movable parts of the maze. Your diminutive penguin can also stun enemies by wobbling the side of the screen, or win by pushing three 'diamond' blocks together.

JOUST
ARCADE

■ *Joust*'s unique concept of making simple physics your weaponry made it stand out in Eighties arcades, plus the fact that it was one of the first co-operative two-player games. As a pair of knights mounted on an ostrich and a stork, it was a matter of hammering the flap button to gain altitude then using gravity to come down on top of enemies mounted on buzzards, knocking them from their steeds.

FLICKY
ARCADE

■ This attractive arcade game was designed by Yoji Ishii, who later went on to create the colourful shoot-'em-up *Fantasy Zone*. The game sports a great degree of character, particularly in the form of Flicky himself, a cute blue bird tasked with rescuing a number of yellow chicks from the clutches of some mean pussycats. The way they follow you around in a little line across the scrolling stages is simply adorable.

▶ Nintendo was happy enough to let as shoot at defensive poultry, discharging virtual slugs at the family pet was it seems a step too far for domestic duck-hunters.

For the Western release of the NES lightgun, the famous Zapper, the Dirty Harry-style Japanese Beam Gun was remodelled as a futuristic, and somewhat less realistic virtual weapon. Inside the Zapper was a simple sensor which responded to changes in luminosity on the screen. In *Duck Hunt* and other Nintendo Zapper titles, pulling the trigger caused the screen to black out and display white boxes around the targets, just for a fraction of a second. The Zapper detected this change in intensity of light along with whether you were near enough centred on the boxes to score a hit on a duck. And that's why when you played *Duck Hunt* you'd occasionally sense the odd flickering effect, although it wasn't annoying enough to spoil the fun. The way the Zapper worked also meant that pointing it at a light-bulb wouldn't do you any good if you wanted to cheat, although sticking it right up near the screen might have helped, if kind of defying the point of the game. The timing issues of the Zapper hardware unfortunately means that *Duck Hunt* won't work on modern LCD TVs.



» While you can shoot the dog, you can't kill him. Nintendo isn't that mean.



CHICKIN CHASE

COMMODORE 64

■ In this curious Firebird budget title you play a lone rooster in a henhouse. It's down to you to make sure the inmates are laying plenty of eggs by, erm, fertilising lady chickens, while fending off pesky foxes, weasels and snakes. Mess up and the farmer's wife will come chasing after you with a rolling pin and dispatch you to the cooking pot. Ouch. We bet Foghorn Leghorn never had to deal with this sort of thing.



ANGRY BIRDS

VARIOUS

■ Who'd have thought that a game involving catapulting rotund wildfowl at pigs in towers would take over the world? With over two billion downloads across multiple platforms to date, *Angry Birds* is the most successful mobile gaming app franchise ever created, and the biggest thing to come out of Finland since Nokia phones. We're still not sure what those poor piggies did to make those birds so mad, though.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

SNES

■ Anyone who's played a *Zelda* game will no doubt have tried to wallop the domestic chickens (or 'Cuccos') that populate the land of Hyrule at some point. However, *A Link to the Past* introduced an amusing feature where persistent hen-botherers were mobbed by an angry flock of killer poultry, meeting an undignified end beneath dozens of pointy beaks.



THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

ARCADE

■ Taito's cute platform game follows the adventures of Tiki the oddly yellow Kiwi, whose girlfriend and kiwi chums have been kidnapped by leopard seal Wally. Armed with a bow and arrow, he sets off to free them, negotiating balloon rides, spiked mazes, whales and punk teddy-bears on his way. A NES version, programmed by Software Creations, was released by Ocean.



FINAL FANTASY VII

PLAYSTATION

■ First popping up in *Final Fantasy II*, the Chocobo has since become one of the mascots of Square's flagship RPG series. In *FFVII* they take on the appearance of a cross between an ostrich and Woodstock from the Peanuts cartoon strip, and can be bred, raced and ridden across the game world. You can even get hold of a summon spell that drops an enormous fat Chocobo on top of your enemies...



ROAD RUNNER

ARCADE

■ Meep meep! Everyone's favourite cartoon bird made his arcade debut in Atari's take on the famous Looney Tunes shorts. Players take control of the Road Runner (Accelleratii Incredibus) as he zooms through the desert evading Wile E Coyote (Carnivorous Vulgaris) and his various backfiring Acme inventions. Along the way he has to negotiate traffic and scoff plenty of bird seed to avoid becoming dinner.



Duck Hunt comes with three different modes – game A gives you three bullets per duck to shoot at ten targets that rise consecutively from the thicket, the trickier game B gives you the same number of bullets to tackle two ducks flying up at a time, while game C substitutes clay pigeons for wildfowl. Game A also gives you an option for a second player to control the flight path of the ducks in a bid to put off player one, which can lead to a few hearty chuckles. Each mode continues at an increasing difficulty level until players reach round 99, when the game resets to a bugged round 0, featuring spectral ducks that are impossible to hit, echoing *Pac-Man*'s famous 'kill screen'. Another interesting fact about *Duck Hunt* is that its character designer (and the artist behind that famous doggy), Hiroji Kiyotake, went on to create Samus Aran of *Metroid* fame.

And in the latest instalment of *Super Smash Bros*, the snickering mutt is back on Nintendo's latest console, after being on the videogame 'bench' for 30 years. He comes complete with a duck on his back, and special moves that pay homage to other Zapper games including *Wild Gunman* and *Hogan's Alley*. You might not have been able to hit him with your Zapper back in the day on the NES, but now at least you might be able to slap him about a little bit. ✱

DONKEY KONG

NINTENDO PROVES WHY IT'S THE KING OF KONG



- **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
- **YEAR:** 1983
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES



HISTORY

It's amazing to think that by the time *Donkey Kong* finally arrived on the NES numerous other systems had already found great success with Nintendo's hit arcade game.

Before the NES version arrived, *Donkey Kong* already existed on the likes of the Atari 2600, ColecoVision and Intellivision. It's important to remember that these versions were all released before Nintendo's own console had even been released, so it's hardly surprising that Nintendo wanted a slice of the profits. It's also not surprising to learn that *Donkey Kong* was one of the first games to be released on Nintendo's Famicom (as it was known in Japan) and while it's not the most perfect of ports, it's arguably the best version of the game that was around at the time.

It may be missing an entire level from the arcade game (the cement stage in case you're wondering) but *Donkey Kong* on the NES remains an astonishing port of its arcade parent. This is largely down to the visuals, which do an amazing job of capturing all the character of the original arcade game. The sprites are suitably chunky and there's very little flicker, allowing you to get sucked into the absorbing gameplay in your quest to beat Kong.

Sure there's the odd cutscene missing here and there, but what *Donkey Kong* does have is playability and plenty of it. Jumping barrels, climbing ladders, removing pegs – it's all here and it's all rather awesome. Nintendo's 8-bit console was a huge success with sales of over 60 million and it's all thanks to classic conversions like *Donkey Kong*, which did a great job of highlighting the power of Nintendo's console compared to its competitors. It might not have been complete, but that didn't matter to gamers, who hungrily lapped it up, along with the numerous sequels that were released on the machine in later years.

Interestingly, Nintendo did finally create a complete NES version of *Donkey Kong* in the form of *Donkey Kong: Original Edition*. It wasn't released on the NES though and is instead available as a Virtual Console exclusive. Download it now.

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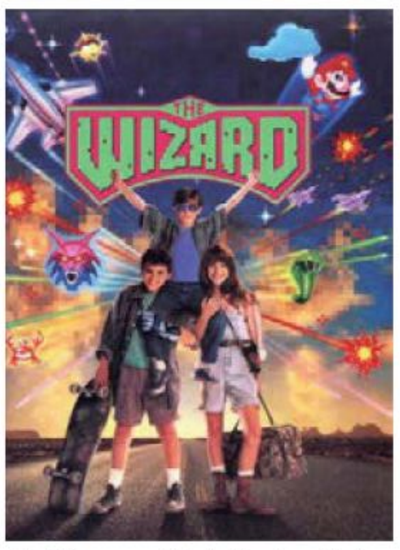
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THE WIZARD





We know what you're thinking. Films aren't videogames, so why are we featuring them in this bookazine? What is the world coming to, we hear you cry? Ah, but 1989's The Wizard is a film ABOUT videogames, especially NES videogames. So permit us to take you behind the scenes of this misunderstood classic



» Fred Savage and Mario. Together at last.

The Wizard is very much a guilty pleasure. When the film was released it was panned by critics and flopped at the box office, yet many people still talk about it in hushed, almost revenant tones over 15 years after its release. Although many critics will tell you that it's nothing more than a Nintendo advert masquerading as a 100-minute feature film, just as many people will talk excitedly about Power Gloves, _Ninja Gaiden_ and _Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles_ when asked to give their opinion on this much-maligned popcorn flick. Here at Retro Gamer we fall firmly into the latter camp. _The Wizard_ had a profound effect on us, not only because it was the first place we saw _Super Mario Bros 3_ in action, but because it's actually pretty good, too.

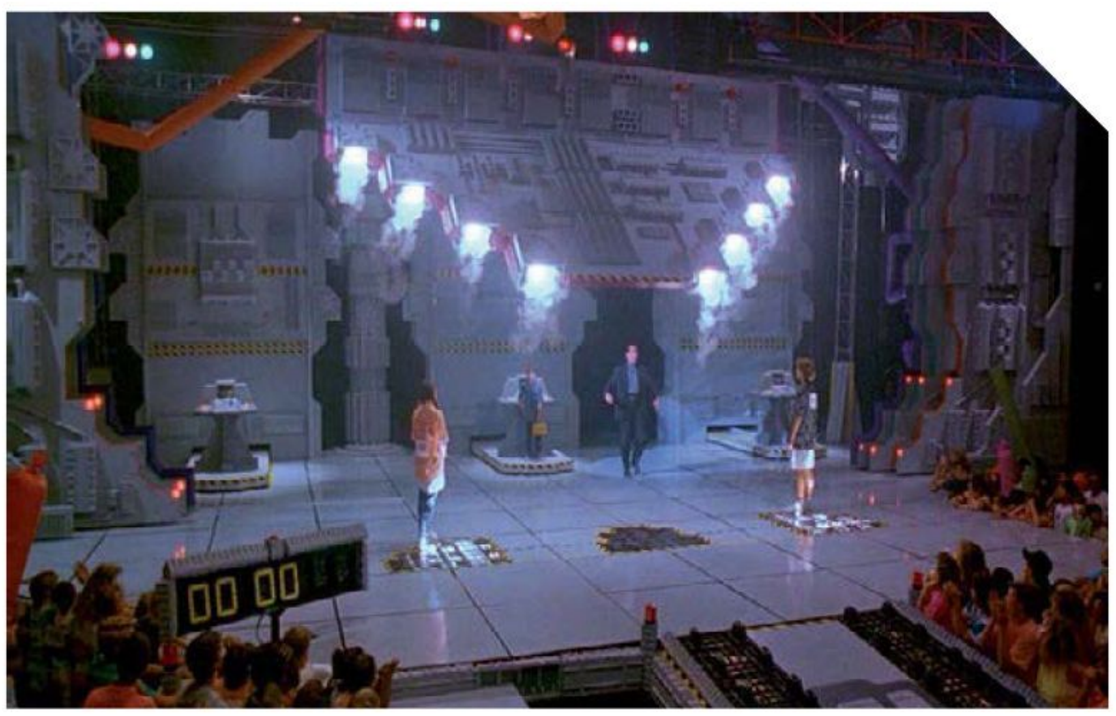
Ironically for a film that has an awful lot to do with interactive entertainment, director Todd Holland isn't a huge fan of videogames. "When I was selling myself to Universal Studios to direct the film, I basically said that I hated videogames, so I'm the perfect director for it," he reveals. "If I can make these things interesting to me then I can make them interesting to anyone." Universal obviously agreed because within the space of a weekend Todd was at the helm of the new film. "I read the script on a Thursday, interviewed for the job on Friday, got the job and was prepping the film on Monday."

Todd found that he had little time to get settled before the cameras started to roll. "We were shooting five weeks after I got the job, which is an incredibly short prep for any feature," he comments. "The rush was all about Fred Savage's TV schedule for _The Wonder Years_. He had certain weeks off to shoot the film and therefore we had to start on time." Child star Savage was, at the time of Todd's employment, the only actor attached to the project and the new director quickly began to assemble the rest of the cast. "I hired casting director Mali Finn – later to become very famous for casting all _The Matrix_ films, _Titanic_ and dozens of other brilliant movies," explains Todd about the important piece of hiring. "I met with Beau and convinced him, and then once I had met with Beau I was able to convince Christian Slater because he was interested in working with Beau, having done a film with his brother, Jeff."

Slater had just come off the back of the uncompromisingly bleak teen movie _Heathers_ and was slowly beginning



» Todd: "Universal thought: Fred Savage and Nintendo – two things kids love. Let's put them together and make lots of money."



» Todd: "I concocted the Video Armageddon concept with a production design as close to *Aliens* as I could on my budget."

to turn into a serious Hollywood star. Todd is full of praise for the actor, who remains hard at work in the industry today. "Christian was terrific," he remembers. "He liked to have fun in his time off and slept so late that he had to be shaken awake by a production assistant every morning because no alarm clock could wake him. But he was hard-working and a real team player. He and Beau really were great together."

Beau Bridges is a severely underrated actor accustomed to plying his trade in the shadow of his more famous brother Jeff. Beau had become a vital member of the cast and helped to create the film that Todd ultimately wanted to make. "Beau is the consummate pro," explains Todd. "He was the big movie star in our cast and really raised the bar for everyone. Beau always understood how I wanted the film to work on an emotional level. There were a lot of complex emotional layers suggested in the script, but the trick was to make it all real and keep it at the right level for a family film about videogames. No one was smarter than Beau about finding that level."

Although Slater and Bridges are unquestionably two big Hollywood names, at the time of production Fred Savage was easily the biggest star to be associated with the film. Given the fact that he's long since faded from the spotlight, it's easy to forget just how famous he was at the time. "Everywhere we went while shooting, everyone recognised him," remembers Todd. "People lined the streets in Reno, Nevada as we drove in and girls were screaming Fred's name and hooting and waving. Fred was 12 years old – he turned 13 while we were shooting – and I was always stunned by the grace with which he handled all of that attention."

"PEOPLE LINED THE STREETS IN RENO, NEVADA AS WE DROVE IN AND GIRLS WERE SCREAMING FRED SAVAGE'S NAME AND HOOTING AND WAVING. HE WAS ONLY 12 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME" TODD HOLLAND

The casting of Savage's love interest – teenage runaway Haley – caused Todd some headaches. "Universal had a Texas beauty queen-type that they really wanted," he remembers. "She really wasn't up to the role acting-wise. I had a fantastic young actress, whose name I cannot recall, that Universal felt wasn't cute enough. So we were at an impasse. Then seemingly out of the blue Mali Finn found this young girl named Jenny Lewis. Jenny was terrific, such a gifted actress and a great kid." Industry experts will sarcastically comment that one of the unwritten rules of Hollywood is to never work with kids, but Todd is very positive about his two young leads. "I had a really good time working with Jenny and Fred," he remembers. "Jenny had a very natural style that was very intuitive. Fred was more cultivated, having had years delivering 'emotional truth' day after day on *The Wonder Years*. Their blend of styles was very effective."

However, arguably the most moving performance came from the nine-year-old Luke Edwards, who played the titular videogame 'wizard' Jimmy. "Luke did a great job," comments Todd. "It was not an easy role. The backstory of his character was complex and quite frankly, dark. This was a boy whose twin sister had drowned before his own eyes. Savage's character is his half-brother, but they're separated after his Mum's second marriage ended in divorce. That's quite a mess for a nine-year-old actor to process, so I just tried to keep things simple and help Luke find the end result, without necessarily understanding the entire emotional context of the scene."

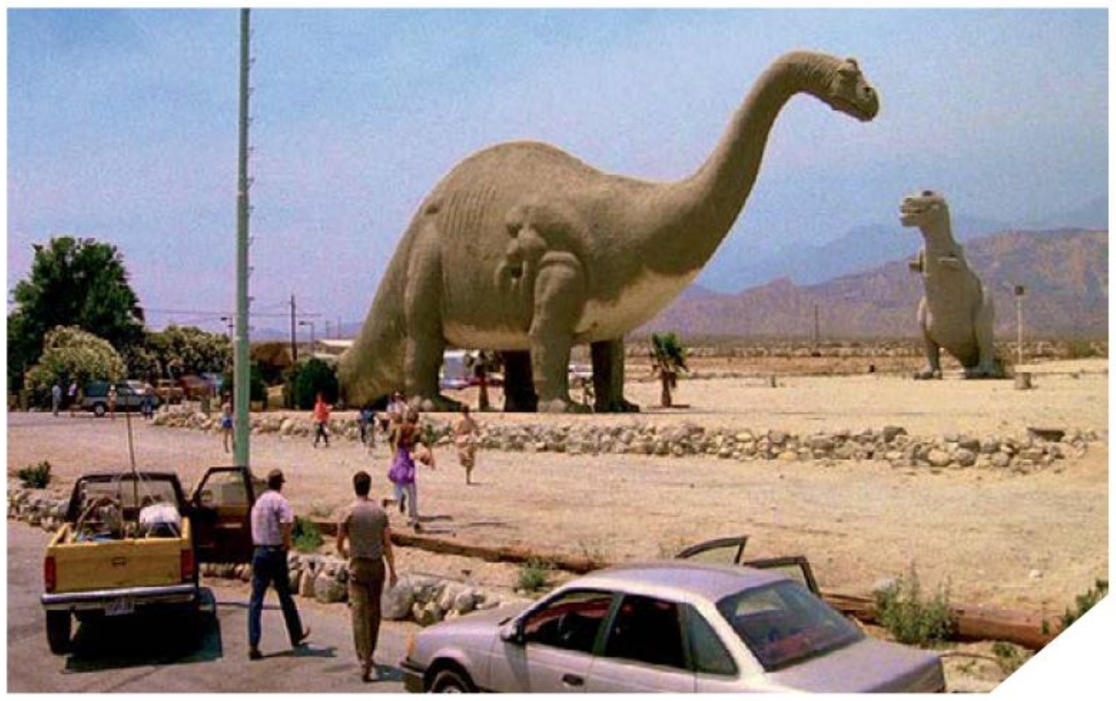


» Todd: "I still love the image of the that last giant door opening and little Jimmy appearing when you thought all hope was lost."

» The infamous Power Glove scene – villain of the piece Lucas Barton gives a demo of the controller with *Rad Racer*.



» The Palm Springs dinosaurs, which provided the backdrop for the emotional finale of the movie.

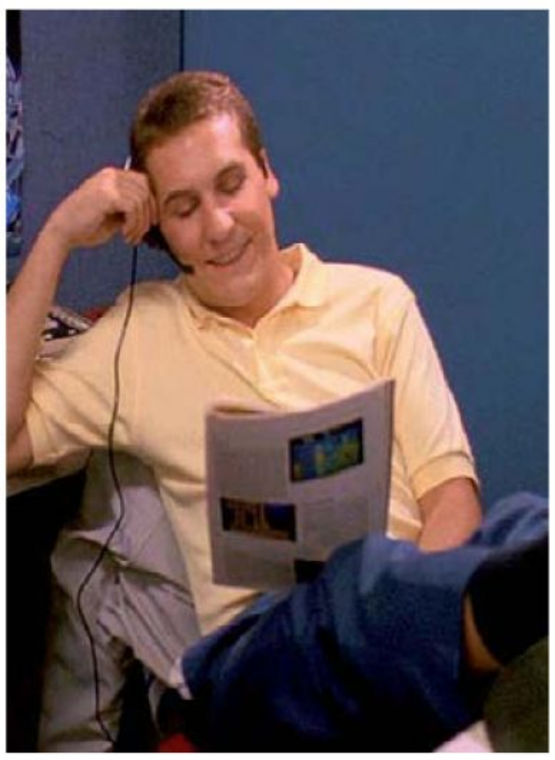


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HIT THE ROAD

The Wizard is essentially a road movie, and for Todd that meant scouting for shooting locations. This in itself was quite a task given the distance the script dictated they should cover. "The small town in the film where the main characters live was Fallon, Nevada. What was hilarious is that in the prep stage of the film, we went to Fallon and I wandered over to the general store of sorts, with these old locals hanging out on the porch. I smiled and said 'Hello', and one old guy speaks up and the first words out of his mouth are, 'Scouting locations, are ya?' I did this double take because I realised how film savvy these folks really were. From Fallon we travelled to Reno, shooting roadwork all along the way. That was what made the film so exhausting to scout – you couldn't sleep in the van because every piece of road between one location and the next was another possible location."







» Yes, that is Toby Maguire on the left. Todd: "I had no idea he was in the film until years later. I just wish I'd kept his number!"

Amazingly, Nintendo was refreshingly 'hands off' with the film-making process, but as Todd explains, this was more to do with the era than anything else, "Those were more innocent times and it was still news to have a movie embrace such commercial elements. Today, no one even blinks at *Transformers* being a wall-to-wall General Motors commercial. We expect on–screen characters to be drinking Coca-Cola and using Apple computers, just like we expect Jack Bauer to dial on his Nokia-brand phone. That's just the way everything is done now, but that kind of product placement was news back then."

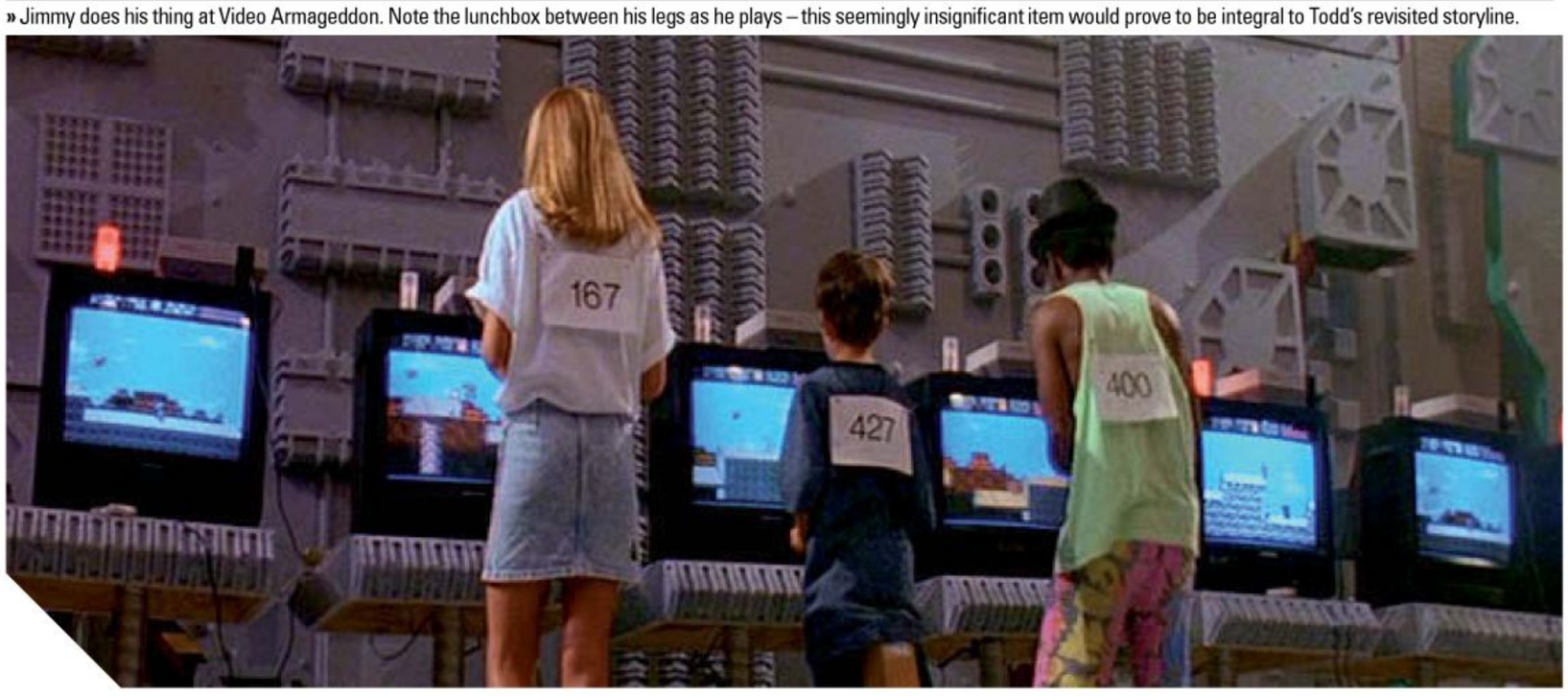
Regardless of this, Todd is keen to point out that he received plenty of assistance from the Japanese videogames giant. "Nintendo co-operated fully," he remarks. "Naturally they had products they wanted to promote, like *Super Mario Bros 3* and the Power Glove. It wasn't like we had to say yes, but we weren't complaining either. Those products fitted nicely into our script. We were, after all, making a 'videogame' movie, so, much like those General Motors cars in *Transformers*, we were a good fit with Nintendo. They certainly never told us to change the script in any way."

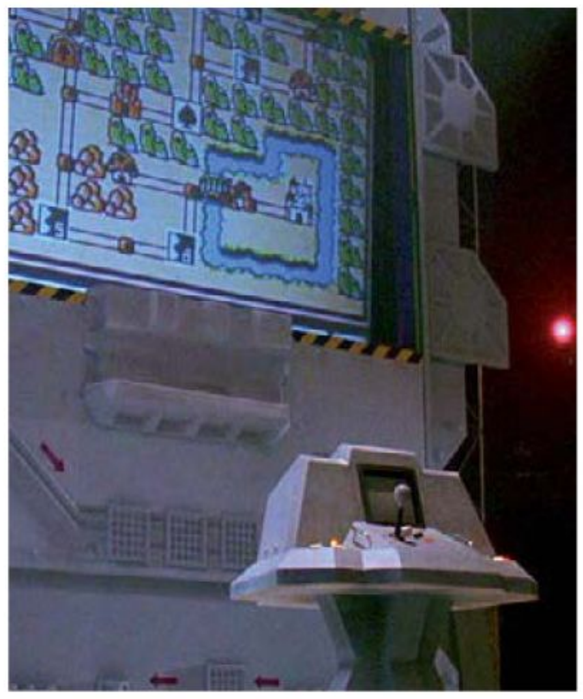
Arguably the most famous scene in the entire movie involves the infamous Power Glove controller, and the immortal line – "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad" – delivered by the film's odious villain Lucas Barton. Although it is now widely regarded as one of the most derided peripherals in the history of videogames, there wasn't a gamer on the face of the planet that didn't desire one after watching *The Wizard*. "It was a no-brainer to put the Power Glove into the spotlight, especially to empower our slick villain and put our heroes at a disadvantage thanks to his greater skill, knowledge and experience," Todd says about the decision to use the now maligned peripheral. "While Nintendo never told us to feature the Glove, they did send a representative to the set to watch over it, as it was very top secret at the time. They also made sure we presented it in the proper light."

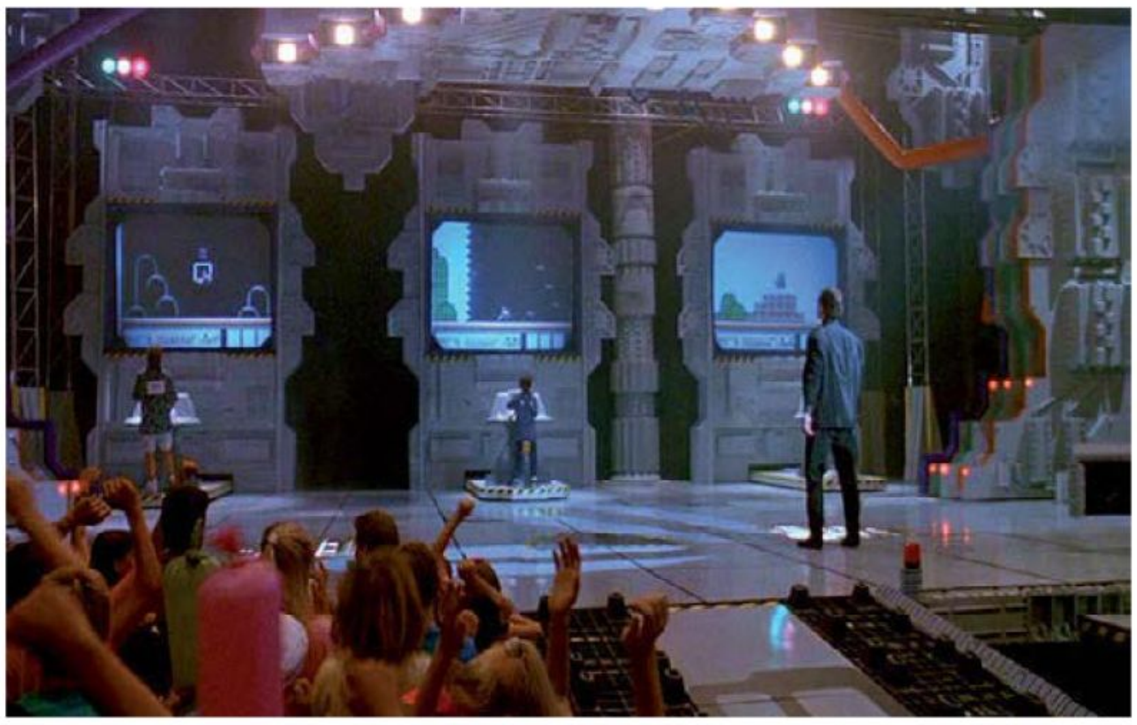
As is the case with all feature films, it wasn't smooth running all of the time. In fact, Todd had several major issues to deal with during the production of the movie – the script being the most concerning. "The script was way too long," explains Todd. "I argued with the studio that we were shooting way too much footage – more than we could ever possibly use – and that just makes everything harder and is incredibly wasteful. But I was a young nobody. I lost the argument and was told flat out by Universal to shoot the entire script." Todd had the last laugh, but it was a hollow victory. "The first assembly of all the footage was two-and-a-half hours long. I ended up cutting an hour out of the film for my director's cut just to reach a length suitable for a family film."

"NINTENDO HAD PRODUCTS IT WANTED TO PROMOTE, LIKE SUPER MARIO BROS 3 AND THE POWER GLOVE, THAT FITTED NICELY INTO OUR SCRIPT" TODD HOLLAND

» Jimmy does his thing at Video Armageddon. Note the lunchbox between his legs as he plays – this seemingly insignificant item would prove to be integral to Todd's revisited storyline.





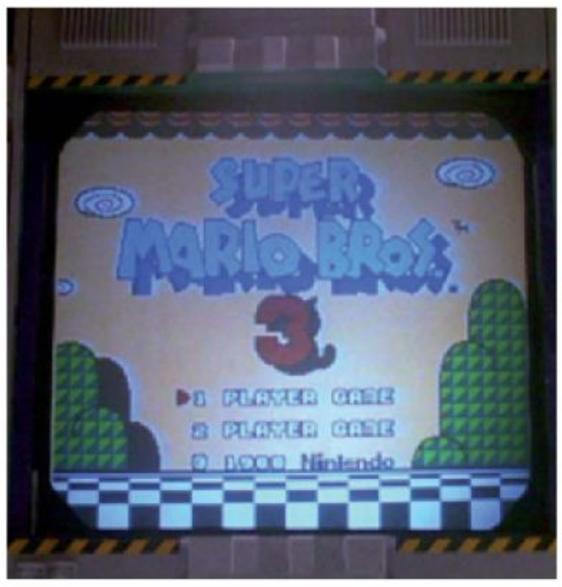


» Todd: "The Video Armageddon interiors were all shot at Cal Arts University in their big modular auditorium."

The quality of the script also created problems. "I liked it when I first read it," recalls Todd. "But I always wanted more. I pushed for a lot of changes. In the original script, Jimmy wanders for no reason and he never says anything to anyone. I wanted Jimmy to have a secret purpose. All he really wanted was to take his dead sister's remains – that lunchbox full of her stuff and pictures of their family – back to the last place he could remember them all being happy together. I decided that that place would be these full-scale replica dinosaurs on the freeway outside Palm Springs. The family would learn the truth, and come to a new understanding and appreciation of Jimmy as a deeply wounded boy desperately needing to do one last thing for his dead sister in order to find closure for his grief. And from this emotional catharsis, all their wounds as a broken family could begin to be rebuilt."

Todd's proposed rewrite was tentatively approved but it wasn't the end to the tension that surrounded the production of the film. "My relationship with the producer and Universal fell apart," he laments. "I'd argued too loudly and from there it all went downhill. It was one fight after another. There was enormous mistrust all around. I had lost all support with the writer, producer and studio."

This mistrust led to many on-set battles and eventually culminated in the final scene being hastily reworked by Todd. By this stage Universal had expressed doubts about the script rewrites and had informed the director that much of his new material would be cut once filming had been completed. Amazingly, the poignant and moving final scene, where Jimmy puts the memory of his dead sister to rest, was written by the director the night before it was shot and never got the approval of the producers or the studio. "I had the only copy of the revised text – because I had written it the night before – and so I just told each of the actors what to say in rehearsal. That is what we shot and that is the ending of the film as it exists today." The gamble paid off as test audiences reacted extremely positively to the more emotional plot line and the tear-jerking final scene inside the hollow



» *The Wizard* was the first place that many gamers saw *Super Mario Bros 3* in action.

interior of the Palm Springs dinosaur. "There was never another attack on that storyline after my first director's cut preview of the film," comments Todd with a wry grin.

Sadly, for all Todd's effort and despite the considerable pulling power of both Fred Savage and the Nintendo brand, the film wasn't the financial success that Universal had hoped for. "It cost $6 million to make, a low budget even then," says Todd. "It made $13 million at the box office, but everyone was expecting that 'Fred Savage/Nintendo – how can we lose?' equation to pay off big time, so $13 million was a huge disappointment. I couldn't get a job for seven months after that."

His film may have been critically attacked and flopped at the box office, but Todd nevertheless harbours fond memories of making the *The Wizard*. "I loved my cast," he says with a smile. "We really had fun together." But does the director still maintain his indifference to videogames? "I asked for an Xbox 360 last Christmas as I was really hooked on the TV ads for *Gears Of War*, but I'm really busy with work and I have to confess I never have time to play, so I totally suck at it."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Fred Savage (Corey Woods) – Now working as a fully fledged director of film and television productions. Savage's directorial movie debut was 2007's *Daddy Day Camp*.



Luke Edwards (Jimmy Woods) – Still working as an actor, Luke has appeared in numerous television roles as well as 2003's *Jeepers Creepers 2*.



Jenny Lewis (Haley) – After leaving the acting profession in 2001, Lewis now fronts the successful American indie-rock band Rilo Kiley.



Beau Bridges (Sam Woods) – Since 1989 Beau has appeared in more films and television shows than you've had hot dinners, and is still well worth watching.



Christian Slater (Nick Woods) – Slater has struggled with alcohol and drug problems over the past decade. One of his recent films was the lamentable *Alone In The Dark*.



Todd Holland (Director) – Holland continues to direct movies and television shows, and has been involved with *Malcolm In The Middle, The Larry Sanders Show* and *Friends*.

» Todd Holland chews the fat with Christian Slater and Beau Bridges during the amusing motel scene.



» Due to Nintendo's involvement, the majority of the games shown in the film were NES releases.

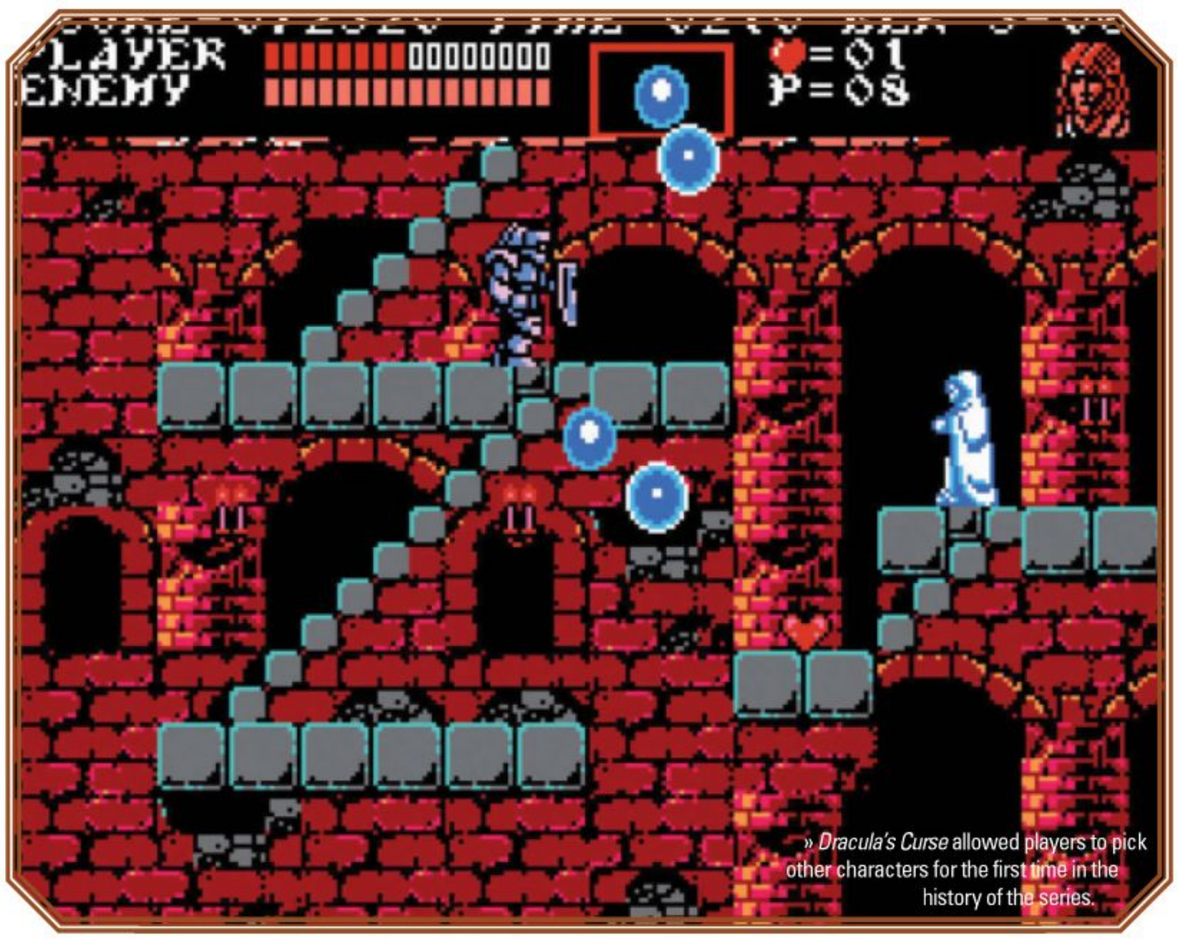


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The History Of Castlevania

KONAMI'S SUPERNATURAL FRANCHISE IS WELL RESPECTED BY NES OWNERS AROUND THE WORLD AND WITH GOOD CAUSE. JOIN US THEN, AS WE SINK OUR TEETH INTO THE HIT SERIES





» *Dracula's Curse* allowed players to pick other characters for the first time in the history of the series.



» [*Curse Of Darkness*] Ayami Kojima's lush artwork really helps set *Castlevania* apart from other videogame series.

When Bram Stoker penned his classic horror novel *Dracula* in 1897 it's unlikely that he could have foreseen the incredible impact it would have on contemporary popular culture. Since its publication the book has gone on to become one of the most significant pieces of literature ever written and has inspired numerous movies, TV series and comic books, as well as establishing an entire horror genre. However, not in his wildest dreams could Stoker have anticipated that his seminal work would also provide the foundations for one of the most enduring videogame franchises of all time: *Castlevania*.

Although Konami's classic series features Stoker's legendary vampire antagonist and even goes as far as to tie itself in with the tumultuous events of his novel, the main focus is the seemingly unending duel between the forces of good and evil: namely the bold and courageous Belmont clan and malevolent Count Dracula himself. At the last count the series has spawned over 30 different entries across a myriad of consoles, home computers, portable devices and mobile phones, making it one of Konami's most successful franchises. It's also received a much-needed reboot in recent years courtesy of MercurySteam and its rather excellent *Lords Of Shadow* trilogy (alright, its first two *Lords Of Shadow* games).

As is the case with many classic Japanese videogame series, *Castlevania*'s genesis took place on the Nintendo Famicom (known as the Nintendo Entertainment System in the West). Released in September 1986 for the Famicom's Japan-only 'Disk System', the first game *Akumajo Dracula* (which is one of the many Japanese titles for the series and roughly translates as 'Demon Castle Dracula'), didn't really do a great deal to set itself apart from the flood of similar platform action titles available on the 8-bit machine at the time. However, it did boast one vital ingredient that other, more kiddie-friendly games lacked – atmosphere. From the foreboding visuals to the mean and moody soundtrack, *Akumajo Dracula* was as tense and spooky as any 8-bit videogame possibly could be. It was also an incredibly challenging game, with Simon Belmont – the game's protagonist – famously unable to jump off the many staircases that were dotted throughout Dracula's dusty abode.

Shortly after its Disk System debut, *Akumajo Dracula* was ported to the popular MSX2 home computer. Konami had a history of supporting this platform, with titles such as *Metal Gear 2*, *Snatcher* and *Hyper Sports* all appearing on it, so conversion wasn't that much of a surprise at the time. However, it's worth noting that the MSX2 version marks the European debut of the franchise (the MSX series of machines had quite a following in this region at the time), although it was published under the title *Vampire Killer*. In all honesty the MSX2 edition isn't a port in the strictest sense; it actually featured new areas and was structured differently, with emphasis placed on exploration rather than out-and-out bloodletting.

Given the success of the Disk System version, Nintendo decided to release *Akumajo Dracula* in cartridge format in 1987. In the same year *Akumajo Dracula* made the leap from East to West and was retitled *Castlevania*, with a European release following in 1988. The timing of the Western publication was perfect – the NES was effortlessly dominating the American market and this meant that quality games were likely to find a massive (and highly lucrative) audience. *Castlevania* was no exception to this and sold impressively, quickly establishing itself as a NES classic.

Konami's next move was a brave one. At a time when most developers would slavishly stick to a blueprint once it had been proven successful, the developer decided to make the inevitable sequel quite different from its predecessor. *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* continued the tale of the first game but adopted a very different structure. Instead of being strictly level-based, the player was expected to traverse Transylvania in search of Dracula's scattered body parts – a task that will help lift the curse that Dracula had placed on Simon immediately after their bloody encounter in the previous outing.

"THE SERIES HAS SPAWNED ALMOST 30 DIFFERENT ENTRIES ACROSS A MYRIAD OF PLATFORMS"

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Rogue's Gallery


AKMODAN II
Super Castlevania IV
1991


BALORE
Aria Of Sorrow
2003


BEEZLEBUB
Symphony Of The Night 1997


BEHEMOTH
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


DOGETHER
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


MECHA KNIGHT
The New Generation
1994


FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER
Castlevania 1987


GALAMOTH
Kid Dracula
1991


CREAKING SKULL
Aria Of Sorrow
2003


GRANFALLOON
Symphony Of The Night 1997


KARASUMAN
Symphony Of The Night 1997


STONE GOLEM
Super Castlevania IV
1991


MANTICORE
Aria Of Sorrow
2003


MEDUSA
Super Castlevania IV
1991


MINOTAUR
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


OLROX
Symphony Of The Night 1997


FLOATING SKULL
Super Castlevania IV
1991


ROWDAIN
Super Castlevania IV
1991


SIR GRAKUL
Super Castlevania IV
1991


SKULL KNIGHT
Dracula's Curse
1990


SLOGRA
Super Castlevania IV
1991


TALOS
Harmony Of Dissonance 2002


WEREWOLF
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


WHITE DRAGONS
Castlevania 64
1999


WYVERN
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


SEA SERPENT
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


GAIBON
Super Castlevania IV
1991


THE GARDENER
Castlevania 64
1999


GOLEM
The New Generation
1994


HELLHOUND
The New Generation
1994


HELL GARGOYLE
The New Generation
1994


HIPPOGRYPH
Symphony Of The Night 1997


DRACULA
Castlevania
1987


DEATH
Castlevania
1987


ELIZABETH BARTLEY
The New Generation
1994


SHAFT
Symphony Of The Night 1997


GILLES DE RAIS
Castlevania 64
1999


CARMILLA
Simon's Quest
1988


SUCCUBUS
Symphony Of The Night 1997


COUNT BRAUNER
Portrait Of Ruin
2006


ADRAMELECH
Circle Of The Moon
2001


BONE GOLEM
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


CERBERUS
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


WARLOCK
Vampire's Kiss
1995


CYCLOPS
Dracula's Curse
1990


DANCING GHOSTS
Super Castlevania IV
1991


DOPPELGANGER
Dracula's Curse
1990


HEADLESS KNIGHT
Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood 1993


LIVING ARMOR
Harmony Of Dissonance 2002


MAGIC ARMOR
The New Generation
1994


NECROMANCER
Circle Of The Moon
2001


THE HYDRA
Super Castlevania IV
1991


BIG PEEPING EYE
Harmony Of Dissonance 2002


QUEEN OF MOSS
The New Generation
1994


DRAGON SKELETON
Castlevania Chronicles
2001


SKULL SORCERESS
Vampire's Kiss
1995


GLASS KNIGHT
Haunted Castle
1988


VAMPIRE BAT
Castlevania
1987

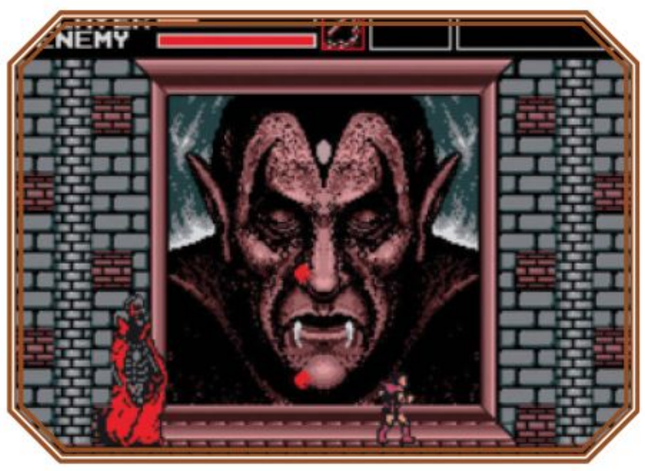

ANGEL MUMMY
Belmont's Revenge
1991


BIG GOLEM
Aria Of Sorrow
2003



» This artwork is taken from a little-known 3DO M2 arcade fighter called *Battle Tryst*.







Again, like the original game *Simon's Quest* was released in Japan on the Famicom Disk System under the title *Dracula II: Noroi No Fuuin* (which translates as 'The Accursed Seal' in English), but a standard cartridge release followed in the West. *Simon's Quest* was part-RPG, part-action platformer, with items to purchase, non-player characters to interact with and even an innovative real-time 'day and night' system, where enemies were stronger (not to mention more abundant) in darkness and weaker when in the sunlight. Although the game showcases some neat ideas, it hasn't aged particularly well and the unusual gameplay comes across as clunky and poorly realised when set against its more illustrious forebears. Nevertheless, it remains a significant title in the lineage and pre-dates the semi-RPG overtones that would be adopted for the more recent entries.

Sensing that its vampire-killing franchise had legs, Konami decided that it would produce an arcade edition that would benefit from the considerable technical prowess that coin-munching machines boasted at the time. Sadly, while the resultant *Haunted Castle* certainly looks better than the 8-bit games that sired it, the gameplay is pretty dismal, with annoying enemies and bland action. As a result it remains something of a curiosity, but the connection with *Castlevania* was enough to ensure that it was granted a Japan-only budget release in 2006 on the PlayStation 2.

After this minor hiccup Konami turned its attention to Nintendo's latest piece of hardware – the portable Game Boy. Released in 1989, *Castlevania: The Adventure* (known as *Legend Of Dracula* in its native homeland) was one of the first games for the fledgling portable and to be brutally frank, it shows. Graphically it's rather basic and the gameplay is slow and plodding. Ironically, of the key staff behind this lacklustre instalment was none other than Masato Maegawa, who would later break away from Konami to form Treasure, the legendary creator of such classic titles as *Gunstar Heroes* and *Ikaruga*.

The series returned to its NES roots with the next chapter of the Belmont saga. *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* (*Legend Of Demon Castle* in Japan) took the core gameplay of the original game and essentially augmented it with additional characters, branching level progression and some seriously impressive presentation. Easily the best *Castlevania* release for the 8-bit Nintendo, the game remains a firm favourite even today and is generally regarded as one of the finest entries in the entire canon. It's a must play and remains great fun.

With the release of the 16-bit SNES in 1991, Konami decided to revisit the original game and 'reboot' it using the fearsome technological capabilities of Nintendo's new hardware. At the time it seemed foolish to not focus on creating a title that added to the rapidly expanding *Castlevania* storyline, but when the game finally appeared such petty criticisms were forgotten. Despite a rather slow opening level, *Super Castlevania IV* is arguably one of the finest SNES games in existence – quite a feat when you consider it was also one of the first to be published for the machine. Although Simon Belmont was once again the centre of attention of the tale, the level design was entirely different from that witnessed in the NES edition, with all-new enemies and stages that took advantage of the Super Nintendo's innovative features. Who could forget the smoothly scaling Golem boss and the rotating cylinder room? As if all this graphical trickery wasn't enough, the game also boasted a hauntingly beautiful soundtrack that literally blew away anything heard in rival SNES games at the time.

Elsewhere, *Castlevania*'s handheld adventures continued apace with the sublime *Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge*, produced for the Game Boy in the same year as *Super Castlevania IV*. Here, Konami redeemed itself for the previous portable title with a game that surely ranks as one of the finest on the monochrome handheld. The music is of particular note, with the usually grating sound chip of the Game Boy being made to sing some seriously catchy and toe-tapping tunes.

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Although the success of the *Castlevania* series was built on the NES, Konami was slowly but surely coming around to the idea of branching out to other platforms. With the first 16-bit *Castlevania* reaffirming Konami's talent, the company's next move was eagerly awaited. Thankfully it didn't disappoint. *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* was released for NEC's PC-Engine Super CD-ROM in 1993 and although it removed some of the embellishments that had been so well received in *Super Castlevania IV* (the lack of multi-directional whipping being the most notable), what it added was considerable; the branching level progression from *Dracula's Curse* made a welcome return, only this time it offered much more in the way of replay value. The CD-ROM storage medium was used to grant the game a gorgeous anime-style introduction and the soundtrack remains a distinguished masterpiece. Amazingly, due to a petty disagreement between NEC's US distribution arm TTi (Turbo Technologies, Inc) and Konami, the game was never released outside of Japan and only very recently made its Western debut as an unlockable bonus in the 2007 PSP remake *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*.

"VAMPIRE'S KISS IS NOW MUCH SOUGHT AFTER"

Having taken the franchise to NEC's hardware, Konami then turned its attention to Nintendo's main rival Sega. *Castlevania: The New Generation* (known as *Castlevania: Bloodlines* in North America and *Vampire Killer* in Japan) proved that Konami was a talent to be reckoned with, no matter what hardware the company coded on. Not wanting to open up a can of worms here, but even the most ardent Sega fan would admit that the SNES generally played host to the more polished games of the 16-bit era. However, *The New Generation* was something of a revelation; not only did it sport tremendously detailed visuals, but it also featured sprite scaling and other effects that were typically not seen on the Mega Drive – here was a title that could truly give *Super Castlevania IV* a run for its money.

As the 16-bit era drew to a close, a semi-sequel to *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* was published for the SNES in 1995; sadly it's something of a disappointment. *Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss* (*Castlevania: Dracula X* if you're American) ditched the branching levels and replaced them with strictly linear ones. Also, the stage design was changed almost beyond recognition, with several amendments coming across as particularly amateurish. Despite its relatively poor critical reception, *Vampire's Kiss* has gone on to be something of a collector's item, largely due to the low print run coming at the end of the SNES's life span, and now sells for a pretty penny.

It's around this time that the enigmatic Koji 'IGA' Igarashi joins our tale. A long-time Konami employee, he would come to work on what is arguably the most important (not to mention popular) entry in the entire history of the *Castlevania* series – *Symphony Of The Night* – and would eventually become the producer of the entire series. Ironically for a game that has since passed into videogame legend, this 32-bit instalment was initially met with intense sceptism and even mild derision. When the first screens were published, many critics balked at the primitive 2D visuals and accused Konami of being too conservative to bring the series up to date in an era that was becoming rapidly obsessed with all things three-dimensional. What these early screens didn't illustrate was the massive sea change that had occurred in terms of gameplay; no longer was the world of *Castlevania* restricted to linear or merely 'branching' levels. The structure of this new game echoed that of the oft-misunderstood



» *Castlevania* will even get a mention from Psycho Mantis if you play *Metal Gear Solid* on the PlayStation with a *Castlevania* save on your memory card.

Simon's Quest, with the player being free to explore each nook and cranny of Dracula's fortress at will, providing they possessed the necessary items and equipment.

Because *SOTN* borrowed many elements from Nintendo's SNES hit *Super Metroid*, the game has, over time, been branded 'Metroidvania'. However, *SOTN* also brought many other ideas to the table. The most striking was the fact that for once, a Belmont descendant was not the main character of the story. Dracula's half-vamp, half-human son took centre stage and proved to be one of the most popular and enduring leads the series has ever seen. The game also introduced many RPG-style concepts, such as experience points, weapons, armour, spells and restorative items. Despite some rather puzzling reviews (the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* was particularly harsh on the 'outdated' visuals and gameplay), *SOTN* swiftly established itself as a true classic of the 32-bit generation, being granted platinum status in the US and earning itself a 'Best of' re-release in Japan. It's worth noting that the European release was nothing short of a disaster, with Konami struggling to shift the initial small shipment of PAL copies. As a result the game is now quite rare in this format and worth a fair few bob these days, especially if you have the limited edition artwork book and soundtrack CD. A Japan-only Saturn conversion was also produced but although it featured additional levels and another playable character, it was afflicted by crippling slowdown and lacked many of the clever visual flourishes of the PlayStation original.

It's paradoxical that after releasing what is generally regarded as being the finest game in the series, Konami then proceeded to produce several distinctly underwhelming titles. *Castlevania Legends* on the Game Boy was the first title to be developed post-*SOTN* and even went as far as to include new poster boy Alucard as an end-of-level opponent, but it was an insipid effort that contained none of the invention and brilliance of its 32-bit forebear. However, while this fairly incongruous release did little to dent the enthusiasm of the *Castlevania* fan base, the next game in the lineage would leave a lasting scar that for some fans has not healed even to this day.

Taking into consideration that many established videogame franchises were being dragged kicking and screaming into the realm of 3D during this period, it was obvious that the same would happen to *Castlevania* at some point. During the development of *SOTN*, a full-3D adventure was announced for Nintendo's upcoming N64 console, with a few basic promotional movies showcasing the weirdly angular characters and the kind of action they'd be indulging in. However, the development time was a protracted one and when the game eventually limped out onto store shelves in 1999 it was a pared-down experience compared to what had been promised. Instead of offering four different characters, as was hinted in the trailer, it only contained two – Reinhardt Schneider (your typical Belmont-style whip-carrying hero) and Carrie Fernandez (a young girl with magical powers). However, a lack of playable protagonists was the least of *Castlevania 64*'s problems. The transition from 2D to 3D hadn't exactly been a smooth one and it was clear that Konami had experienced some difficulty in keeping the traditional gameplay intact. The combat was dull, the auto-aiming unpredictable and the visuals weak. To make matters even worse several sections of the game degenerated into tiresome platforming assault courses where the 3D camera steadfastly refused to track the action correctly and one wrong move would send you plummeting back to the start. It was clear that Konami simply hadn't had enough time to make the game as good as it possibly should have been, and this

Vampire Killers

Simon Belmont
Arguably the most famous member of the Belmont lineage, Simon has appeared in more adventures than any other character (although technically five of his six entries are the same story retold). Kicking things off in 1691, he later defeated Dracula a second time in 1698.



John Morris
John Morris is connected to Bram Stoker's original *Dracula* novel – his father was Quincy Morris, who dies in the final epic confrontation with Vlad in Transylvania. Astonishingly, he's descended from the Belmonts and is therefore rather tasty with a whip.



Richter Belmont
A close second to Simon in the popularity stakes, Richter has starred in *Rondo Of Blood* and *SOTN* – two games that are etched into the consciousness of every *Castlevania* fan. His blue tunic means you're unlikely to lose sight of him when he's in the thick of things.



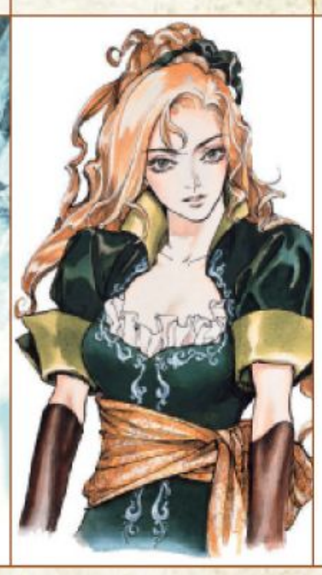
Alucard
Although he made a playable appearance in *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*, Alucard became a big fan's favourite thanks to his leading role in the most popular game in the series, *Symphony Of The Night*. It was a brave move by Konami to have a vampire in the starring role, but it paid off beautifully.



Soma Cruz
A high-school exchange student, Soma is transported to Dracula's Castle in the events of *Aria Of Sorrow*. He later learns that his fate is entwined with that of Dracula. Seeing as he comes from the year 2035, he sports rather more up-to-date attire than his fellow *Castlevania* heroes.



Maria Renard
Fans of the series thought Konami had gone soft when it added the cute Maria as an unlockable character in *Rondo Of Blood*, but her reappearance in *Symphony Of The Night* (she's playable in the Saturn version) has endeared her to purists. She's Richter's sister-in-law.



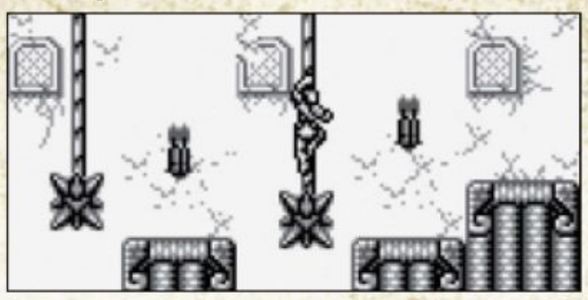
Leon Belmont
Technically the father of the vampire-hunting Belmonts, Leon was the first to take up the whip and face off against the forces of darkness. He also makes use of a magical gauntlet in order to save Sara, who was cruelly kidnapped by a nefarious fellow named Walter.



Handheld Horror



Castlevania: The Adventure (Game Boy)
One of the very first Game Boy games, *Castlevania: The Adventure* is a decidedly average release that is ultimately unsuccessful in transferring the excellent gameplay of the NES original to the small screen. It's slow, frustrating and graphically disappointing, and one for die-hard *Castlevania* completists only.



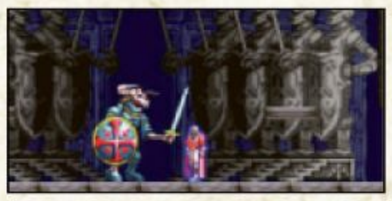
Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge (Game Boy)
Compared to the previous GB title this is a complete turnaround. Not only are the graphics excellent and music some of the best you'll hear on Nintendo's handheld, the gameplay is fantastic and the sheer variety on offer is nothing short of staggering.



Castlevania Legends (Game Boy)
Sadly Konami was unable to match *Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge* with this lacklustre sequel. The first game in the series to showcase a female Belmont, *Legends* feels like a throwback to *Castlevania: The Adventure*, with uninspired level design and monotonous action. Alucard makes an appearance as an end-of-level boss.



Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon (GBA)
Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon is a fairly successful attempt at bringing the gameplay of *Symphony Of The Night* to the small screen. The game is hugely enjoyable and offers plenty of challenge, however, the graphics are a bit dark so it's highly recommended you play this on a Game Boy Advance SP or DS.



Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance (GBA)
More *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*-style action here, but this time Konami included improved graphics and far more detailed locations (at the expense of decent music, however – much of what is here could pass as Game Boy tunes). It's still not as deep as *Symphony Of The Night* but comes highly recommended regardless.



Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow (GBA)
Third time lucky for the Game Boy Advance; *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow* is the first title on the machine to truly give its inspiration – *Symphony Of The Night* – a real run for its money. Boasting hundreds of different items, an innovative 'soul' collection system and one of the best plots in *Castlevania*'s long history, this is a real winner.



Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow (DS)
A direct sequel to the brilliant *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow*, this Nintendo DS title takes much of what made the Game Boy Advance game so good and merely improves on it. A throwaway touch-screen spell system can often be annoying, but ultimately this is an excellent entry in the series and comes very highly recommended.



Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin (DS)
Following on from the events shown in the Mega Drive game *Castlevania: The New Generation*, *Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin* once again adheres to the 'Metroidvania' blueprint, but the game introduces some new ideas of its own, as well – the ability to travel to different locations through paintings being the most notable.



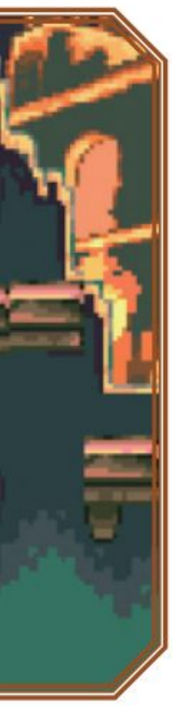
viewpoint was given credence when a semi-sequel quickly appeared in the same year under the title *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness*. Essentially the game that *Castlevania 64* should have been all along, it reinserted the missing characters that had been so cruelly removed during the development of the first game and generally polished things up. Sadly, it still suffered from many of the same flaws that had hampered its predecessor and was proof enough to some fans that *Castlevania* belonged in 2D; to force the vampire-hunting epic to adopt a 3D perspective was, in the eyes of many, pure sacrilege.

Thankfully, it seemed that Konami was thinking the same thing, at least for a while. The next entry was *Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon* – the first of three 2D 'Metroidvania' titles for Nintendo's shiny new Game Boy Advance. Playing like a pared-down version of *SOTN*, this new game did much to restore faith in the series and was followed by two more GBA entries. *Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance* featured improved visuals but didn't really better *Circle Of The Moon* in the gameplay stakes; that fell to the third game – *Aria Of Sorrow* – which was hailed as a masterpiece comparable to *SOTN* itself. It also marked the first time that the franchise entered the future – 2035 to be exact – although thankfully Dracula's castle wasn't populated by laser-gun-wielding zombies in spacesuits.

After returning to glorious 2D form with the GBA releases, Konami again felt confident enough to dabble in 3D. *Castlevania: Lament Of Innocence* was released for the PS2 in 2003 and attempted to unify the gameplay of *SOTN* with the 3D combat of Capcom's stylish *Devil May Cry*. The result wasn't a total write-off by any means, and even the most hardened 3D cynic would have to admit that it was all quite enjoyable, but big mistakes were made in the construction of the game. The level design was featureless and repetitive, with many of

Timeline

- **CASTLEVANIA** (NES, 1987)
- **CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST** (NES, 1988)
- **HAUNTED CASTLE** (ARCADE, 1988)
- **CASTLEVANIA: THE ADVENTURE** (GB, 1989)
- **CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE** (NES, 1990)
- **SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV** (SNES, 1991)
- **CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE** (GB, 1991)
- **AKUMAJO DRACULA** (SHARP X68000, 1993)
- **DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD** (PC-E, 1993)
- **CASTLEVANIA: THE NEW GENERATION** (MEGA DRIVE, 1994)
- **CASTLEVANIA: VAMPIRE'S KISS** (SNES, 1995)
- **CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT** (PLAYSTATION, 1997)
- **CASTLEVANIA LEGENDS** (GB, 1998)











the larger levels simply repeating textures and room designs. Mindful of the issues raised by fans over *Lament Of Innocence*, producer Igarashi set about crafting the next 3D adventure in the series. *Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness* again used a 3D viewpoint but this time Igarashi attempted to accommodate more of the gameplay elements made famous by the 'Metroidvania' titles. Although some pretty decent concepts were featured, the game felt as empty as its predecessor and *Curse Of Darkness* was yet another ultimately unsuccessful attempt to take vampire slaying into the third dimension.

Thankfully, the disappointment of the home console versions was negated by the uniformly excellent Nintendo DS releases. *Dawn Of Sorrow* was a direct sequel to the GBA release *Aria Of Sorrow* and once again sees the player stepping into the shoes of exchange student Soma Cruz. *Portrait Of Ruin* swiftly followed in 2006 and attempted to tie itself in with the events of the Mega Drive title *Castlevania: The New Generation*, with the lead character Jonathan Morris being the son of the aforementioned John Morris. Eric Lecarde, the second playable character in *The New Generation*, also makes a cameo appearance. The portable fun didn't end there, though; in 2007 Konami finally answered the prayers of fans in the West by releasing a PSP remake of *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood*. Featuring new 2.5D visuals and gorgeous artwork by *Castlevania* veteran Ayami Kojima, *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* also contained the original game and *SOTN* as unlockable extras.

There was more Castlevania goodness to come in the form of a third DS title, called *Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia*. It's something of a deviation from the norm, adopting a female lead character (who isn't a Belmont, as far as we can ascertain at this stage). It's another 'Metroidvania' offering, which certainly pleased fans. Less impressive was *Castlevania Judgment* – a 3D fighting game for the Wii that's best described as okay. To say *Judgment* has divided opinion among fans is like saying that passing wind in the face of a complete stranger is bad manners; the general consensus at the moment seems to be that Konami is one can short of a six pack. Things got back on track with the highly enjoyable *Castlevania: The Adventure ReBirth*, which was a Wii exclusive and saw the series returning to the adventuring roots of the earlier NES games. The return to the past didn't last for long however, and *Castlevania Puzzle: Encore Of The Night* soon turned up on iOS in 2010. It was an okay puzzle game that was styled around the immensely popular *Symphony Of The Night*. Another interesting addition to the series was *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*, which also came out in 2010. It's a highly enjoyable co-op game that shrinks the characters down in size so that they can explore huge mazes and tackle the gigantic bosses found within.

2010 was also the year Konami unleashed the excellent *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow* on gamers, a stunning adventure that was heavily styled on the excellent Super Nintendo game. It featured involvement from Hideo Kojima and boasted an impressive voice talent that included Patrick Stewart and Robert Carlyle. The adventure focused on Gabriel Belmont, but also revealed the origins of Dracula. A 3DS game, *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow - Mirrors Of Fate* followed in 2013 and was later converted to home systems. It's a pity then that 2014's *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow* 2 was a terrible mess of a game that left many fans cold thanks to weak gameplay mechanics and poorly implemented stealth sections. It was fun to play as Dracula though…

The series now lies dormant, waiting for another developer to take on the challenge of resurrecting it for another series of games. Hopefully, it won't be too long a wait…

Canned Castlevanias

Just like any other popular game series *Castlevania* has had a few false starts during its history, the most famous being the much-hyped Dreamcast epic *Castlevania: Resurrection*. Announced when Sega's 128-bit super console was first launched, this 3D action title featured a zany time-travelling storyline and even went as far as to place a scantily clad Sonia Belmont – previously seen in the terrible Game Boy title *Castlevania Legends* – as one of the lead characters. However, there have been other canned titles – apparently a 2D adventure was in development for Sega's 32X that never saw the light of day, although it's rumoured that many of the sprites were carried over to *SOTN*. Speaking of *Symphony Of The Night*, a conversion was apparently underway for Tiger Electronics' oft-derided game.com handheld, but development was halted when the plug was pulled on the underperforming hardware.

CASTLEVANIA 64 (N64, 1999)



CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS (N64, 1999)



CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES (PLAYSTATION, 2001)



CASTLEVANIA: CIRCLE OF THE MOON (GBA, 2001)



CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE (GBA, 2002)



CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW (GBA, 2003)



CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE (PS2, 2003)



CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW (DS, 2005)



CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS (PS2/XBOX, 2005)



CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN (DS, 2006)



CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA (DS, 2008)



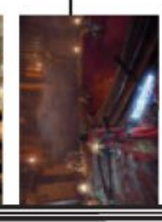
CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DESPAIR (VARIOUS, 2010)



CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW (VARIOUS, 2010)

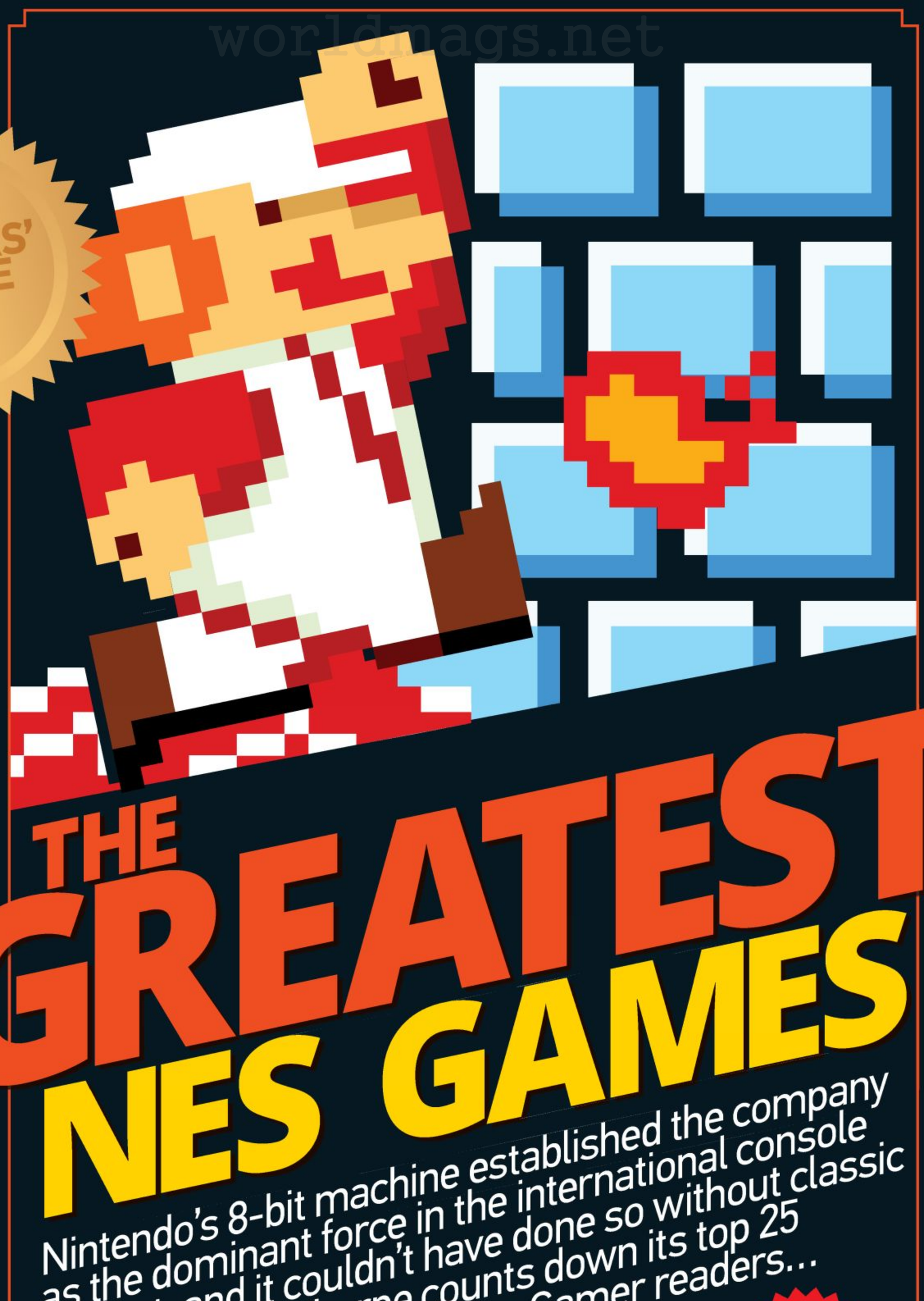


CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2 (PS3, 2014)



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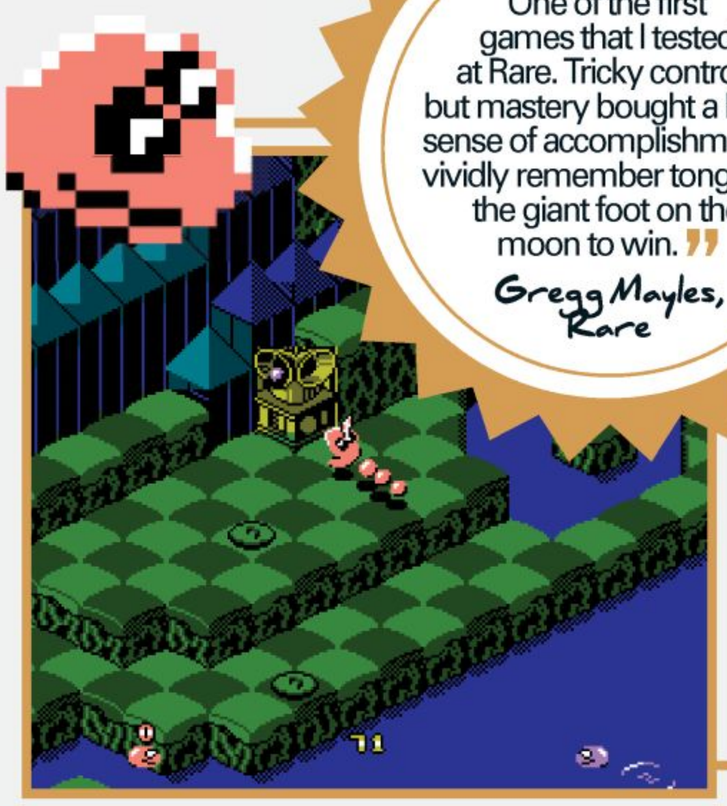


THE GREATEST NES GAMES

Nintendo's 8-bit machine established the company as the dominant force in the international console market, and it couldn't have done so without classic software. Nick Thorpe counts down its top 25 games, as voted for by Retro Gamer readers...

Original Nintendo Seal of Quality





> One of the first games that I tested at Rare. Tricky controls but mastery bought a huge sense of accomplishment. I vividly remember tonguing the giant foot on the moon to win.
>
> Gregg Mayles, Rare

SNAKE RATTLE 'N' ROLL

DEVELOPER: Rare **YEAR:** 1990 **GENRE:** Platform

25 **Born from an** experimental drive to create a small NES cartridge, *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* sees players chasing down and eating Nibbley Pibbleys in order to grow their snake, in order to tip the level's scales and open the door to the next stage. Rare's isometric action game is a tricky one to categorise – but that's not a bad thing, as it's a unique experience. Be sure to try the simultaneous two-player mode, too!

BUCKY O'HARE

DEVELOPER: Konami

YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** Platform

24 **The spotlight might** not have shone on *Bucky O'Hare* for long, but Konami ensured that he got a very good licensed platform game while it did. It's similar to *Mega Man* in structure, with Bucky seeking to rescue his crew members from the Toad Empire across a variety of planets, which can be tackled in any order. Arriving late in the life of the NES, *Bucky O'Hare* provided some of the most attractive visuals on the system alongside some pretty strong gameplay.

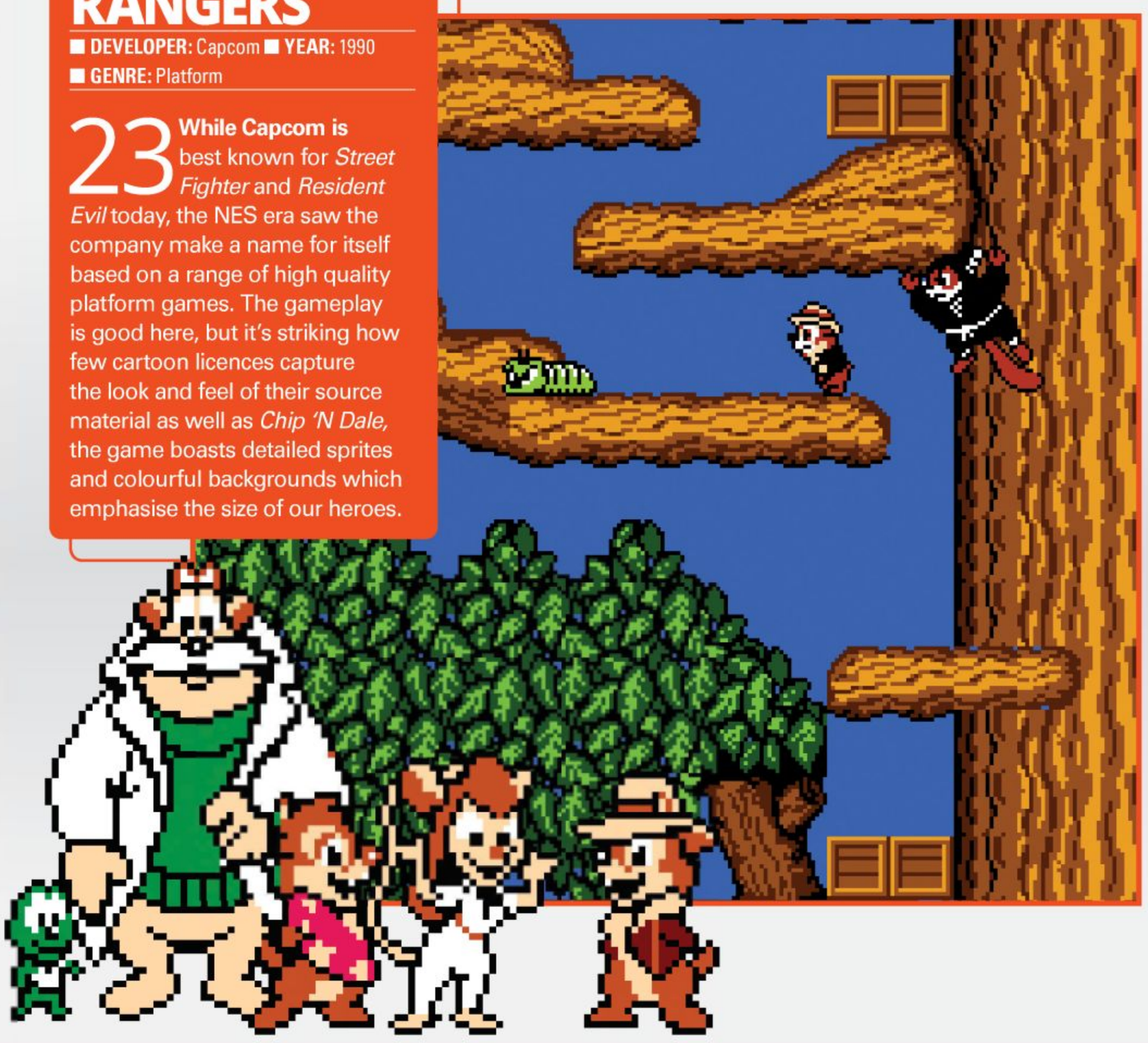


CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS

DEVELOPER: Capcom **YEAR:** 1990

GENRE: Platform

23 **While Capcom is** best known for *Street Fighter* and *Resident Evil* today, the NES era saw the company make a name for itself based on a range of high quality platform games. The gameplay is good here, but it's striking how few cartoon licences capture the look and feel of their source material as well as *Chip 'N Dale,* the game boasts detailed sprites and colourful backgrounds which emphasise the size of our heroes.





EXCITEBIKE

DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1

YEAR: 1984 **GENRE:** Racing

22 **One of the** interesting things about the NES is that the machine had a very long shelf life, with over a decade between its Japanese release as the Famicom and the final officially licensed games in the mid-Nineties. With so much time for developers to extract the best performance from the machine and all of the additional chips utilised over the years, it's easy to expect that the console's early releases would be overshadowed by the more complex games – but that's not the case, as games like *Excitebike* show.

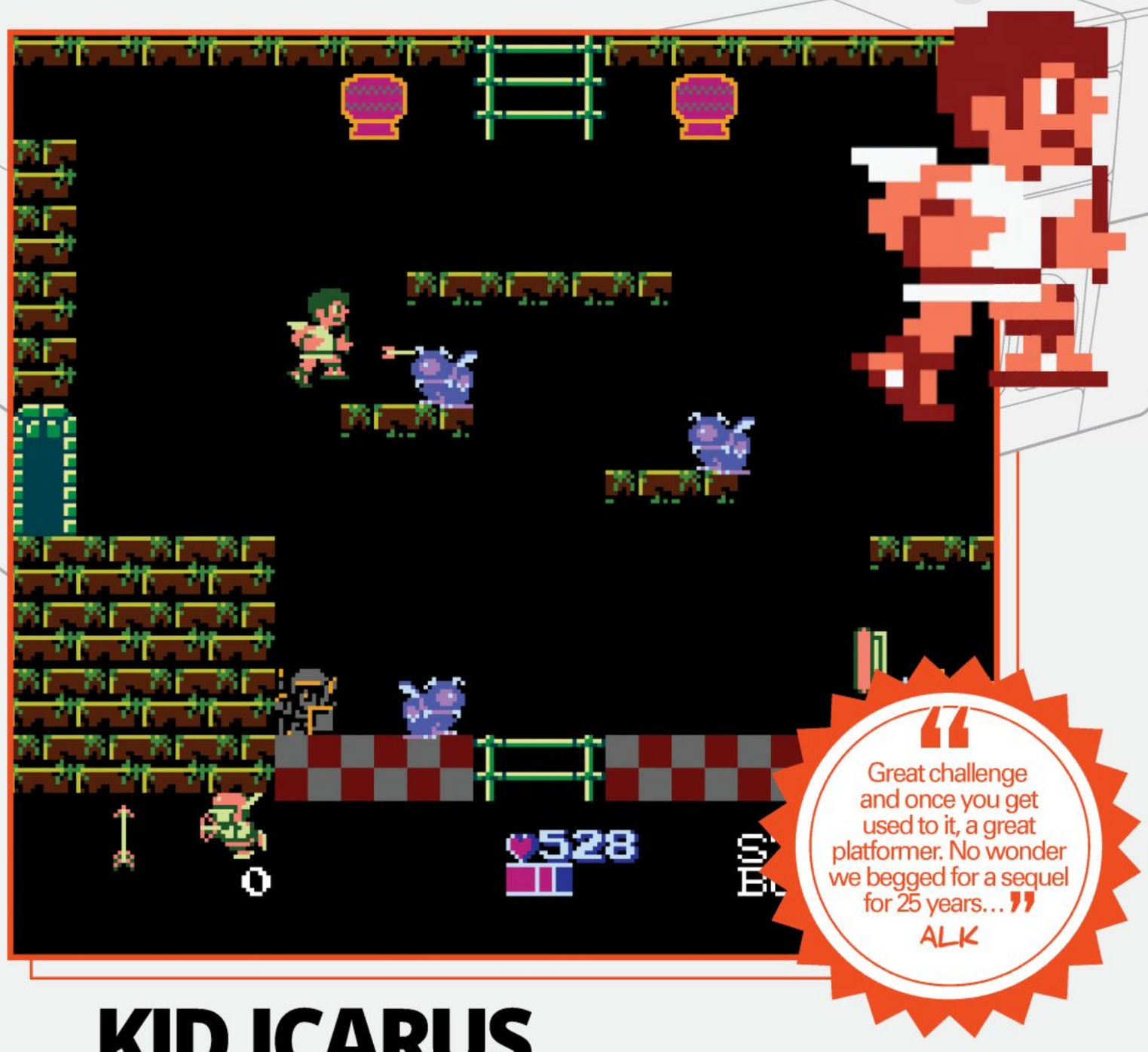
Excitebike is a simple game. Either alone or with computer controlled riders, your goal is to beat target times on each course in order to progress. This is complicated by obstacles including grass, mud patches, barriers, and the ever-present ramps, which require players to correct their landing angle as they fall – a simple challenge, but one which remains challenging to consistently perform over a long period. Falling off your bike will cost you valuable time, as will overheating the bike by overusing the high speed button. As the game goes on, the courses become more complex, with high angle ramps and fewer clear stretches on the track.

> Typical Nintendo, simple as anything, but hard to master, and it is so much fun.
>
> adippm82

The main thing that set *Excitebike* apart from other NES games was the inclusion of a level editor. While the option to save and load these creations was never available to the West as it required the Japan-only Famicom Data Recorder add-on, the mode extended the game's life considerably once they'd exhausted all of the pre-designed stages. While *Excitebike* might not have been the flashiest game in many players' NES collections, the combination of this mode and the compelling gameplay meant that it was often revisited.



worldmags.net



"Great challenge and once you get used to it, a great platformer. No wonder we begged for a sequel for 25 years..." ALK

KID ICARUS

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D1 ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

21 **Right from the** start, *Kid Icarus* is a game that just *feels* different from its platforming contemporaries. In other games you'll typically traverse a stage from left to right, but *Kid Icarus* starts you off by sending you on a skyward journey, with a playfield that wraps horizontally across the screen – when Pit walks off the right edge, he'll appear on the left. It's a feeling of difference that permeates the game, as while the game offers items and upgrades, it never crosses over into RPG territory. For many years this was one of Nintendo's forgotten properties, with only a Game Boy sequel to continue its lineage, until Pit's adventures were continued in the shooter *Kid Icarus: Uprising* on the Nintendo 3DS.



DOUBLE DRAGON

■ **DEVELOPER:** Technos ■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up

19 **The hit beat-'em-up** came to the NES, but rescuing Marian from the clutches of Machine Gun Willy wasn't quite the same proposition as in the arcades. For a start, the simultaneous two-player mode is nowhere to be found, and enemy numbers are limited. Further, stages received some interesting redesigns and all but the most basic fighting moves were gained through an experience system. Despite these changes, *Double Dragon* remained a compelling and challenging beat-'em-up that retained enough of the arcade essence to be truly worthy of the name. Multiplayer fans can also check out Mode B, which features larger character sprites in one-on-one battles and it even allows players to control enemy characters – an interesting novelty, to say the least.

RIVER CITY RANSOM / STREET GANGS

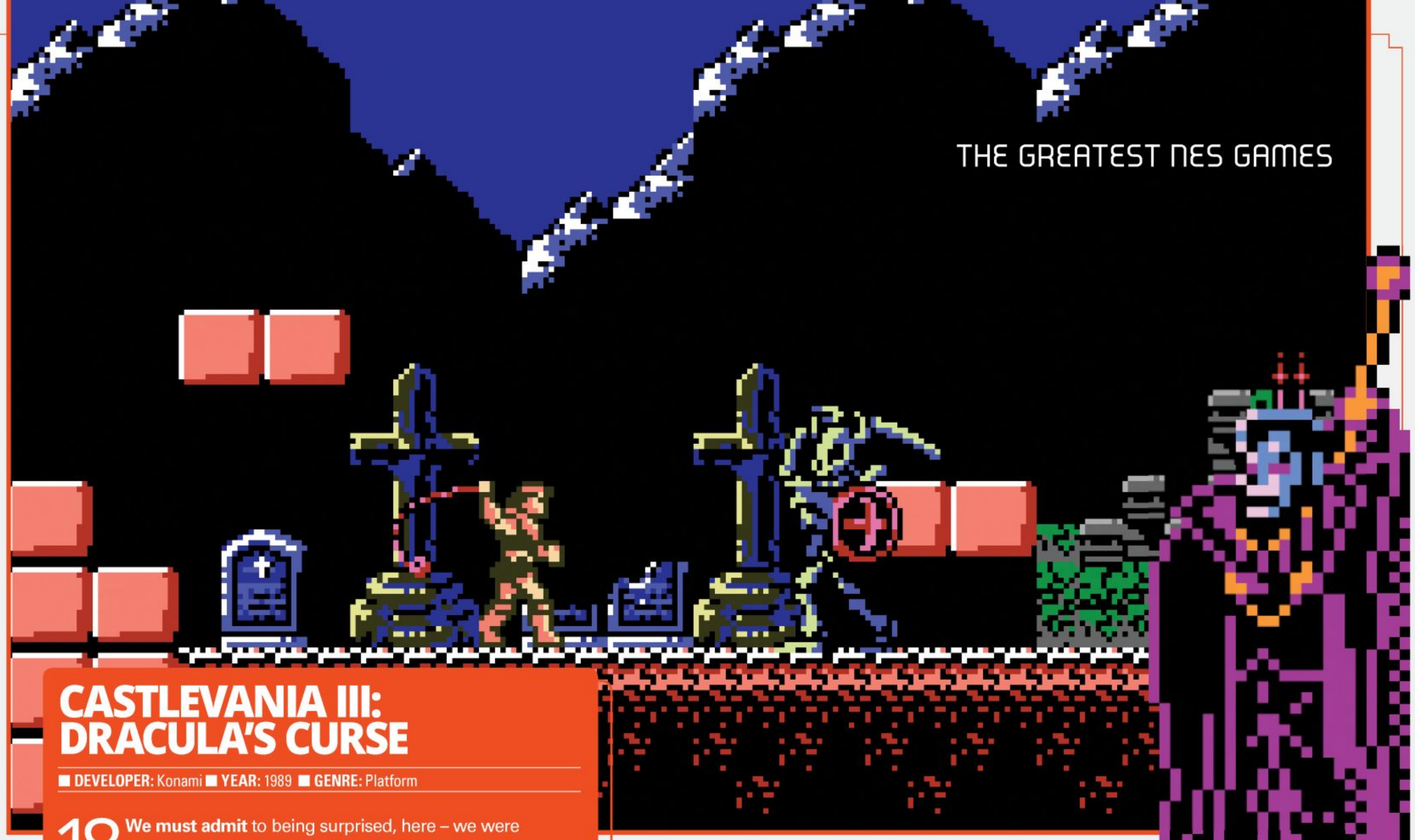
■ **DEVELOPER:** Technos

■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up

20 **Following arcade success** with games such as *Renegade* and *Double Dragon*, beat-'em-up innovators Technos returned with a NES title that took the genre in a more console-focused direction. As well as beating up all manner of weirdly-named gangs like The Squids and The Generic Dudes, players can learn moves, develop stats, and even buy items. *River City Ransom* wasn't a huge success when it arrived in North America and it didn't fare a great deal better when it was released in Europe as *Street Gangs*, but the game's reputation has grown, thanks to a loyal cult following, earning its place in your top 25.







CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

18 **We must admit** to being surprised, here – we were expecting this brilliant platformer to appear much higher in your ranking. The last of the major *Castlevania* games to appear on the NES was a prequel to the events of the first game, starring Simon Belmont's ancestor, Trevor Belmont, as he attempted to defeat Europe's most notorious vampire.

The game left the RPG elements of *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* and returned to the platform action template of the original game. However, new improvements included a non-linear level structure, additional playable characters with their own unique abilities (including *Symphony Of The Night* star, Alucard) and a more challenging second quest for players that have finished the game. In part thanks to the use of the expensive MMC5 chip, *Castlevania III* boasts some of the most impressive visuals on the system, and the action is accompanied by an excellent soundtrack.







FAXANADU

■ **DEVELOPER:** Hudson Soft ■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

16 **We hear your** cries, dear readers! *Faxanadu* is a game that you've highlighted as being something of a forgotten gem, and its appearance in the top 25 is testament to your strength of feeling on this matter. The player is cast as a wanderer who returns to his home town only to find it in a state of severe decline, and being attacked by dwarves. The high fantasy setting is aided by the fact that *Faxanadu* doesn't utilise the cartoonish look that many NES games adopted, giving it a more mature impression.

The game itself is a side-scrolling action-RPG of the kind that will be familiar to players of games such as *Zelda II* and *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*. *Faxanadu* includes many of the key trappings of the RPG genre, with a protagonist whose capabilities grow with experience, a wide range of non-player characters to chat to, and full inventory options, but combat and exploration are handled in a traditional platform game fashion. Give it a go if you haven't yet played it – with prices hovering around £10, it won't break the bank and you wont regret it.

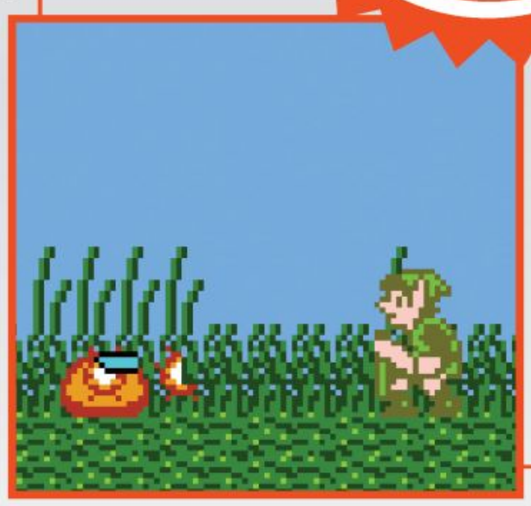
ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

17 **Despite huge sales** of over 4 million copies, the first *Zelda* sequel hasn't always received a huge amount of love over the years. However, lots of you hold the opinion that it is unfairly maligned and we're inclined to agree. *Link's Adventure* retained the first game's top-down viewpoint for overworld exploration, but the meat of the gameplay was found in side-scrolling combat sections. Additional RPG elements were also introduced in *Zelda II*, including experience levels, a magic system and more extensive interaction with the non-player characters you found in towns.

Players have come down hard on *Zelda II* for departing so heavily from the gameplay of the original title, and future 2D *Zelda* games stuck much more closely to the top-down action of the first game. However, it highlights Nintendo's willingness to experiment as a game developer – a commendable quality, even if it doesn't always guarantee popular results.

> "I know people think it's the black sheep of the *Zelda* series, but it should be given a chance 'cos it's a great game."
> SpockIOM



DUCKTALES

DEVELOPER: Capcom
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** Platform



15 **Capcom offered an** excellent choice of licensed Disney platformers on the NES, and you guys liked *DuckTales* the most. We love Scrooge McDuck hopping around on his cane, and the structure which requires you to obtain items in various stages to progress is very cool.

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory
YEAR: 1993 **GENRE:** Platform



14 **Players that kept** their NES hardware deep into the 16-bit era were rewarded with this incredible platformer. It wasn't the hardest game to complete, but the ability to copy enemy attacks offered a twist on the platform genre which ensured that we remained interested throughout.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4
YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** Platform



13 **While this *Mario*** game wasn't always a *Mario* game and feels slightly different as a result of that, the fact remains that it's still an excellently designed platformer. Being able to control Peach and Toad was very cool, and Luigi became distinct from his brother with his floaty jumps.

RC PRO-AM

DEVELOPER: Rare
YEAR: 1987 **GENRE:** Racing



12 **This racer** is one of Rare's earliest hits on a Nintendo platform, and features radio-controlled cars battling to take victory across 24 tracks. We mean it when we say battling, too – these little cars pack some firepower, with bombs and missiles available to take out rivals.

MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!!

DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D3
YEAR: 1987 **GENRE:** Fighting



11 **Taking the action** of Nintendo's arcade boxing series and taking it to the home consoles, *Punch-Out!!* knocked players out with memorable characters and compelling mechanics. Best of all, Tyson himself put in an appearance.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DEVELOPER: Konami **YEAR:** 1989 **GENRE:** Platform

10 **If there was** one thing that kids couldn't get enough of in the late Eighties and early Nineties, it was this quartet of pizza-loving crime fighters, and Konami sensibly snapped up the videogame rights early. The result was a brilliant, strong platformer, although one which had the incredible ability to frustrate players – in particular, the infamous underwater bomb disarming stage is one of the most frustrating levels in any videogame ever.

While the game was popular internationally, UK-based Nintendo fans have a particular fondness for the game as its placement in a NES bundle over Christmas 1990 meant that it was the first game many players owned. The presence of the Turtles drove up desire for the NES, and even helped it briefly overtake Master System sales in the UK.

> "The game that made me want a NES. I remember recording the ad for the Turtles box set and watching it every day."
> RodimusPrime



DUCK HUNT

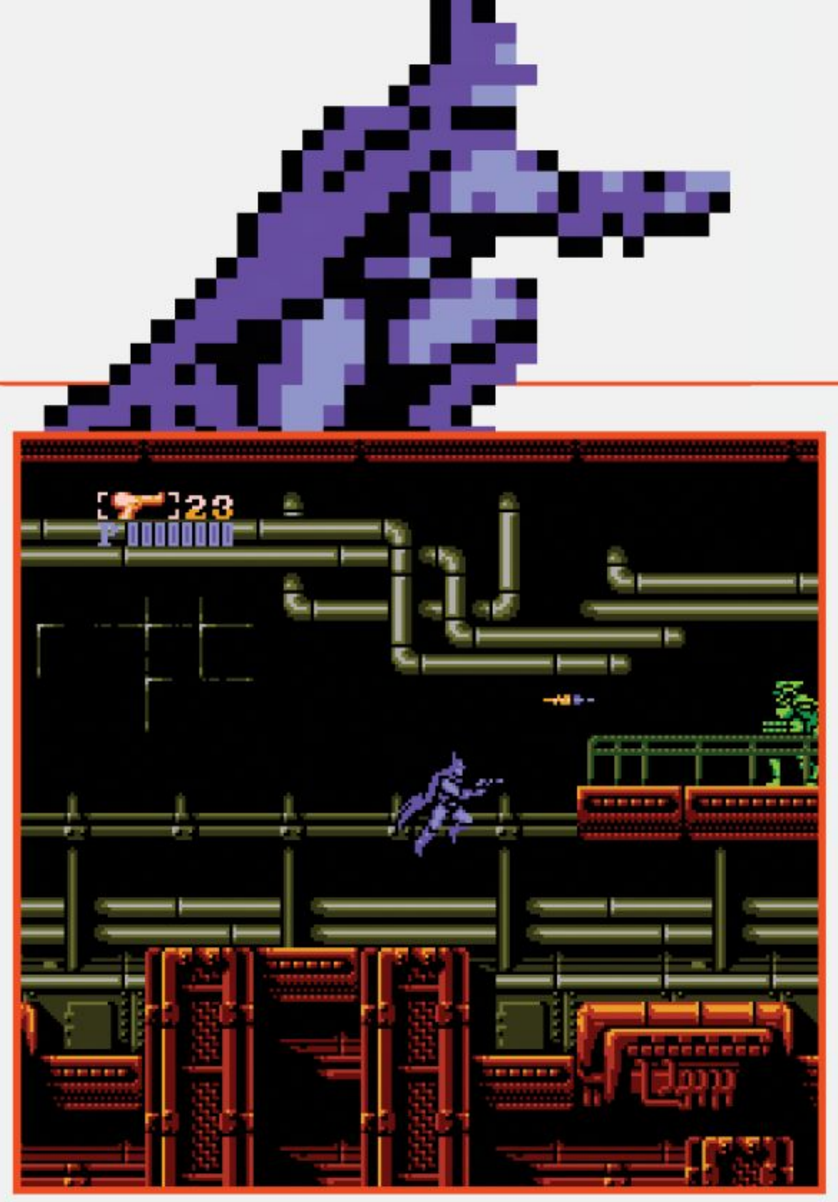
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
YEAR: 1984 **GENRE:** Lightgun Shoot-'em-up

9 **Packed in with** all but the basic NES console bundles, *Duck Hunt* was a cornerstone of many gamers' NES experiences and was the only Zapper title to make your top 25 list. What makes *Duck Hunt* so memorable is its simple yet captivating gameplay – one or two ducks fly out and you need to shoot them down, ideally with as few misses as possible. There's also the clay pigeon game in Mode C, in which discs fly into the distance.

But let's be honest, it's all about bagging birds – and of course that pesky dog. He certainly adds character, proudly displaying your hits when you make them and mocking you when you fail to do so. Our canine companion's sniggering definitely triggers some of our more violent urges, but try as we might, we can never take out our frustrations on him by just blasting him away. That is true sadness, there.

> "This is a great little game, introducing many a fresh keen-eyed marksman to the joys of the lightgun."
> Jim Bagley, SpecialFX



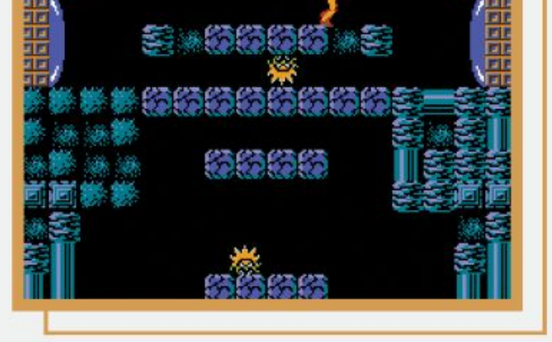


METROID

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

7 **At its heart,** *Metroid* is a simple game – a platform-shooter in which Samus Aran seeks to recapture the dangerous Metroid organisms, set on the planet Zebes. However, it introduced many players to a new style of platform game, in which exploration was key and new abilities enabled access to additional areas. This template is so closely associated with *Metroid* that it co-named the Metroidvania subgenre, along with the *Castlevania* series which later adopted this style.

While the action is all well and good, *Metroid*'s best bits are the memorable twists which stick in the memory long after you've beaten the game. The revelation that Samus Aran is a female protagonist might have lost its shock factor, but its importance remains. As for the other twist – well, don't put your pad down after Mother Brain has been defeated…



CASTLEVANIA

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

6 **Konami's developers rarely** seemed more at home than when they were working on the NES, coming up with hits such as *Castlevania*. Borrowing some thematic cues from Capcom's *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, the game casts you as Simon Belmont, a vampire hunter out to kill Dracula. Each stage pits you against all manner of supernatural villains, but is well-designed to fit the crumbling castle theme and offers strong level design. The game is visually strong and offers memorable tunes, while tight control enables precise platforming and offers the use of secondary weapons such as axes and crucifixes, rounding off an excellent package.



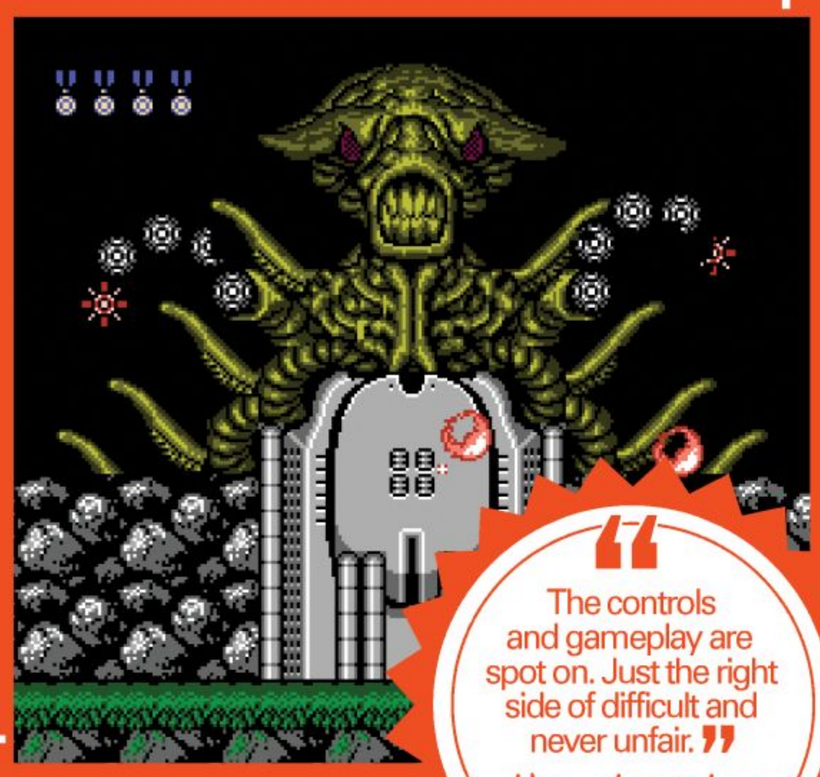
BATMAN

■ **DEVELOPER:** Sunsoft ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

8 **The caped crusader** has had a number of videogame incarnations over the years, but few have accompanied a peak interest in Batman like this one, which followed in the wake of the 1989 film starring Michael Keaton. The videogame was themed after the film and took the form of a platformer which allowed you to fight the likes of Killer Moth, Firebug and, of course, the Joker as you sought to clean up Gotham. The game has since achieved recognition on its own terms, with one company even releasing an action figure in NES colours.

While Batman's weaponry was present, one of the coolest features in *Batman* was actually the ability to leap off walls with a secondary jump. Rarely seen at the time, this feature enabled our hero to ascend through narrow vertical passages and save himself from otherwise fatal situations.



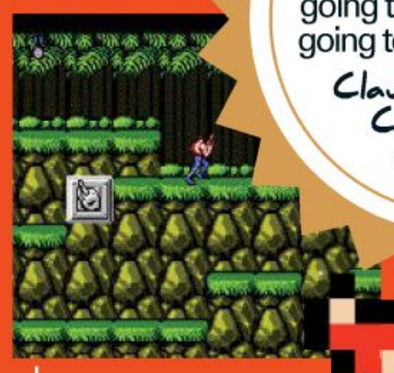


CONTRA / PROBOTECTOR

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Run-and-gun

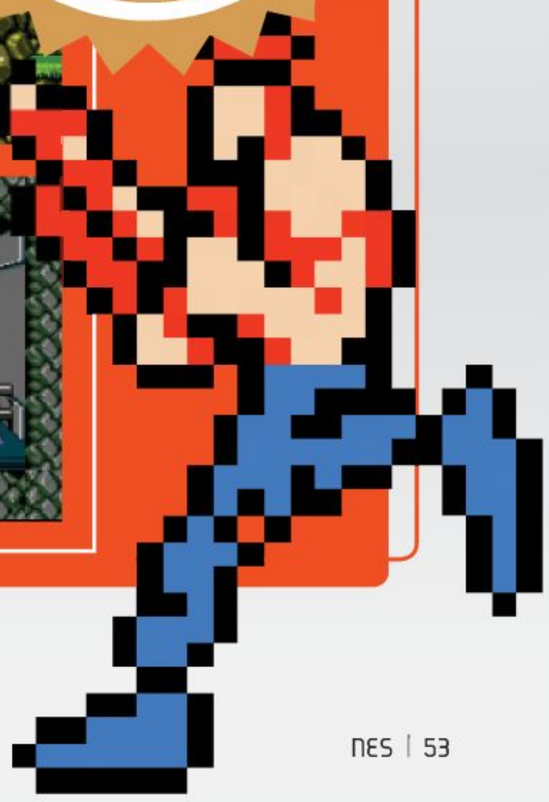
5 **This classic run-and-gun** is your favourite arcade conversion for the NES. *Contra* is a great example of Konami at the height of its powers. While the NES version of *Contra* makes a few changes from the coin-op, the game still offers the key things that make it so appealing: frantic action and a very stiff challenge. Though the game was renamed for Europe and censored in order to circumvent German censorship laws, the gameplay shone through.

> "The controls and gameplay are spot on. Just the right side of difficult and never unfair."
>
> theantmeister

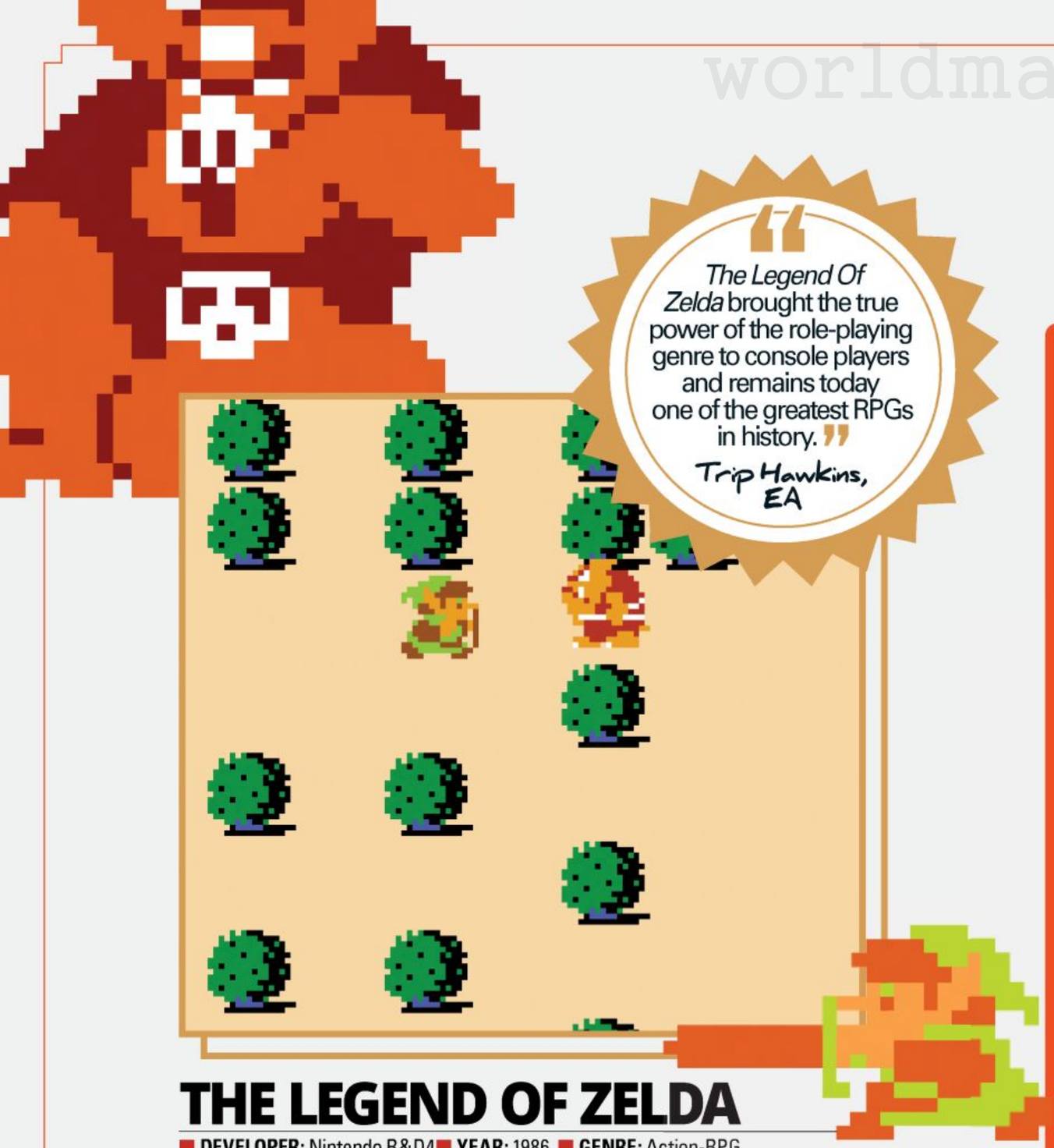




> "Me and my brother would play it and we'd be like 'who's going to be Arnie, who's going to be Stallone?'"
>
> Claudio Sanchez, Coheed and Cambria



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> *The Legend Of Zelda* brought the true power of the role-playing genre to console players and remains today one of the greatest RPGs in history.
>
> Trip Hawkins, EA

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

4 **From the second** you start Link's first adventure and set off towards the cave, the game starts sinking its hooks into you with the most lo-fi rendition of the now-familiar theme music – and just as later *Zelda* games can trace their elaborate scores back to Koji Kondo's chip music, they can do the same with their game design. The original *Legend Of Zelda* exemplifies the excellence of the core *Zelda* formula – a mixture of exploration, puzzles, and combat that draws you into the game until you're determined to see it through to the end. Plus, who doesn't love those beautiful gold cartridges?



> Nigh on perfect controls, great weaponry and a very fair difficulty make this the stand out title for the NES.
>
> ArchaicKoala



MEGA MAN 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Capcom
■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

3 **After almost three** decades of *Mega Man* games, it's easy to forget that the first one was not a tremendous financial success for Capcom. As a result, the company didn't give the green light for a sequel immediately – the development team was permitted to work on *Mega Man 2*, but was also required to work on other projects simultaneously. As a result, it was common for staff to work very long hours making the game, often staying in the office well past their regular working hours. *Mega Man 2* was a real labour of love.

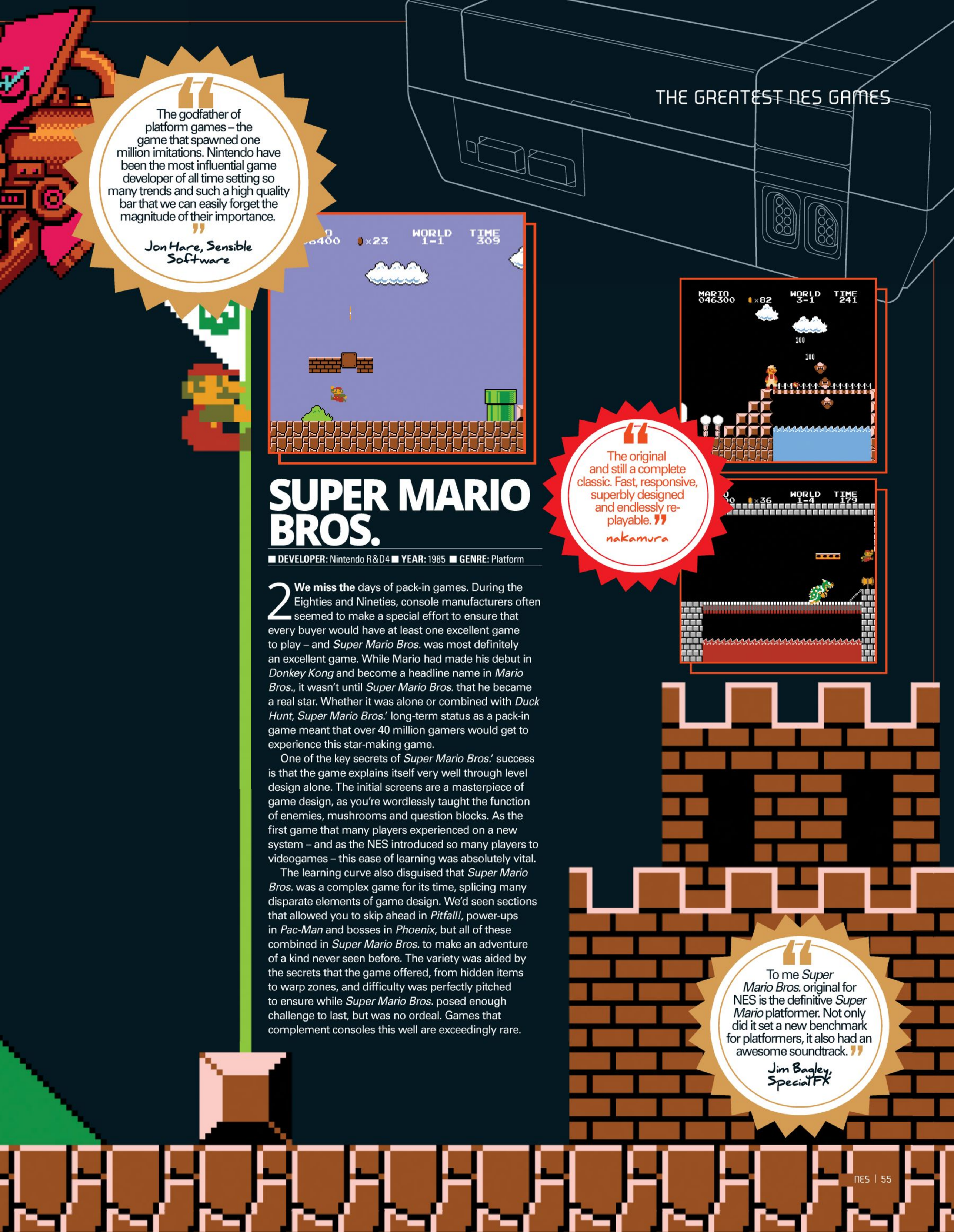
For teams developing sequels, it can be tricky to work out what is broken and in need of fixing, and what is better left alone. Capcom trod that fine line carefully and reaped the rewards. Elements that were preserved from the original game include its platform-shooter set up and its non-linear structure, in which a player chooses a stage based on which Robot Master they'd like to take down. As before, once you've downed a boss you'll gain access to their weapon, some of which are more effective than others.

However, it's the improvements which make *Mega Man 2* the best of its series. Not only is it superior to its predecessor, the brutal difficulty level of the first game has been toned down. The game is still no pushover, but its challenge is more likely to cause fun than frustration – which is a good job since the game has eight Robot Masters, up from six in the first game. *Mega Man 2* went on to sales success and established the blue bomber as a star, a richly deserved outcome for one of the best NES games ever.





> Anytime I'm feeling frustrated or depressed, or I'm lamenting the industry, all I have to do is load up *Mega Man 2*. I revert to being eight again, and I can't help but be happy, and smile.
>
> Jaime Griesemer, ex-Bungie, Halo 3 lead designer



> The godfather of platform games – the game that spawned one million imitations. Nintendo have been the most influential game developer of all time setting so many trends and such a high quality bar that we can easily forget the magnitude of their importance.
>
> Jon Hare, Sensible Software

> The original and still a complete classic. Fast, responsive, superbly designed and endlessly re-playable.
>
> nakamura

SUPER MARIO BROS.

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

2 **We miss the** days of pack-in games. During the Eighties and Nineties, console manufacturers often seemed to make a special effort to ensure that every buyer would have at least one excellent game to play – and *Super Mario Bros.* was most definitely an excellent game. While Mario had made his debut in *Donkey Kong* and become a headline name in *Mario Bros.*, it wasn't until *Super Mario Bros.* that he became a real star. Whether it was alone or combined with *Duck Hunt*, *Super Mario Bros.*' long-term status as a pack-in game meant that over 40 million gamers would get to experience this star-making game.

One of the key secrets of *Super Mario Bros.*' success is that the game explains itself very well through level design alone. The initial screens are a masterpiece of game design, as you're wordlessly taught the function of enemies, mushrooms and question blocks. As the first game that many players experienced on a new system – and as the NES introduced so many players to videogames – this ease of learning was absolutely vital.

The learning curve also disguised that *Super Mario Bros.* was a complex game for its time, splicing many disparate elements of game design. We'd seen sections that allowed you to skip ahead in *Pitfall!*, power-ups in *Pac-Man* and bosses in *Phoenix*, but all of these combined in *Super Mario Bros.* to make an adventure of a kind never seen before. The variety was aided by the secrets that the game offered, from hidden items to warp zones, and difficulty was perfectly pitched to ensure while *Super Mario Bros.* posed enough challenge to last, but was no ordeal. Games that complement consoles this well are exceedingly rare.

> To me *Super Mario Bros.* original for NES is the definitive *Super Mario* platformer. Not only did it set a new benchmark for platformers, it also had an awesome soundtrack.
>
> Jim Bagley, SpecialFX

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"Seriously, this has to be the most impressive game to ever fit on a cartridge. There's so much gameplay, so much challenge packed into this cartridge… I can't tell you how addicting it was. I did finish the game and what a tour de force it was back in 1990. This game's inspiration is what started Id Software – we replicated the first level as a test and sent it to Nintendo!"

John Romero, id Software



5 reasons why it's great

1 Items like the Super Leaf gave Mario new abilities such as flight, enabling new level designs.

2 It offers a huge amount of content, with dozens of stages for players to tackle and master.

3 Even the level selection screen exudes character, thanks to its framing as an animated map.

4 If there's a argument against hopping around in a shoe, we have never heard it.

5 It perfected the *Mario* model, providing the template for every 2D *Mario* adventure since.

"An astounding sequel – so much so that the later games have to be considered evolutionary after this revolutionary leap."

ArchaicKoala

"Remains for me the pinnacle of 2D platform gaming. Imaginative, infuriating, wonderful, frustrating, joyful, tearful and ultimately entirely rewarding and magical. I kept the NES on for a week to prevent loss of progress."

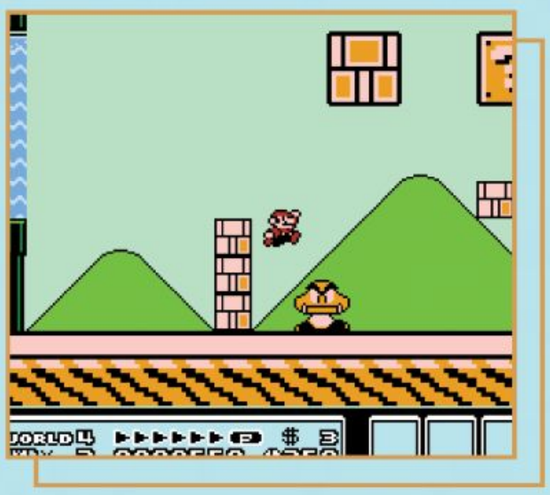
Gregg Mayles, Rare





SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Platform



For Nintendo R&D4, developing *Super Mario Bros. 3* must have been a tough task. It would have been absurd to expect the development team to take an already-beloved classic and improve upon it in every single aspect. It is to the credit of Shigeru Miyamoto and his team that they didn't just attempt it, but managed to succeed in doing so.

The Japanese version of *Super Mario Bros. 2* (known internationally as *The Lost Levels*) had been a very small upgrade over its predecessor, with slightly improved visuals and a few new hazards (such as the Poision Mushroom), and primarily offered more challenging stages for players that had mastered the original game. Contrast this with *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which offered all-new visuals, new music with additional sound effects, a variety of new enemy types, new power-ups, new blocks – if you could name something in the original *Super Mario Bros.*, Nintendo had managed to identify and implement a fantastic new spin on it in their new game.

These new elements allowed for some incredibly clever level designs too, from the floating platform challenge of stage 1-4 to the complex cannon arrangements of the airship levels. Many stages take new mechanics, implement them in every way you can think of, and then add a few you had missed just for good measure. Even something as simple as the introduction of sloped surfaces allowed for a new move and new opportunities for fun, as Mario could slide downhill on his backside and take out enemies with his momentum alone. What is truly amazing is that the high quality, inventive level designs are so consistent, given how numerous they are – the game's eight worlds feature an astonishing 90 stages.

With the American audience whipped into fever pitch by pre-release footage in the movie *The Wizard*, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was always going to do well. Even so, the game was an unprecedented commercial success, becoming the best-selling non-bundled NES game – and along with its predecessor, one of only two such games to exceed the 10 million mark. The game has been ported and remade often and continues to perform remarkably, selling over 3 million copies when remade for the Game Boy Advance, and another million as a Virtual Console game on the Wii.

Super Mario Bros. 3 is a game that contains just about everything that a fan of platform games could want. If you want a game with tight, responsive control, that's covered. If you want variety, the game offers dozens of levels, many enemies and an array of interesting power-ups. If you want clean, attractive visuals and timeless tunes, this classic beast of a game has them. If there is such a thing as a perfect videogame, *Super Mario Bros. 3* is the closest that the NES ever got to delivering it.



> "In 1991 as a birthday treat my Dad took me to the World Of Commodore show and offered to buy anything I wanted. We left empty handed and instead bought *Super Mario Bros. 3*."
>
> Steve Lycett, Sumo Digital





BATTLETOADS™

Battletoads pushed the NES hardware and introduced a street-wise anthropomorphism that became a Rare trademark. Rory Milne asks ex-Rare artist Kevin Bayliss about the toads' challenging but fondly remembered debut

THE MAKING OF: BATTLETOADS



» The Battletoads' ship, the Vulture, lowers Rash down to planet Ragnarok as his mission begins.



» Battletoad Rash swings into action as he descends towards the Dark Queen's planet.



» It's "Bye, Bye, Blackbird!" as toad trumps raven in a sheer vertical drop.

Like *Donkey Kong Country*, *Battletoads* marked a pivotal point in Rare's journey. In the same way that *DKC* was Rare's last hurrah for the SNES – although not its last SNES title – *Battletoads* was Rare's swansong of sorts for the NES – although not its final NES effort. Both games were, though, the culmination of everything that Rare learned about the intimate workings of Nintendo's earliest consoles. And while Rare's later SNES and NES games innovated in terms of gameplay, they had little scope to improve technically on their iconic predecessors or, indeed, to squeeze more into their carts.

"Yeah, it was really *full*, if you know what I mean," agrees Kevin Bayliss, *Battletoads*' co-designer, "there wasn't a lot more we could cram in. We were constantly measuring the size of the code and graphics to ensure that it would fit on the cartridge that we had aimed it to be released on. *Battletoads* was really rammed in there!"

Of course, long before getting the game to fit its cartridge, concepts and characters would have to be developed, which was an aspect of *Battletoads*' design that would be very much influenced by the family-friendly guidelines that Rare worked to at the time. "Sideways scrolling arcade-style games were very popular around the late Eighties and early Nineties," Kevin remembers, "and as Rare had previous experience with that genre with some of the Ultimate titles, we decided to try one for NES. I was a huge *Double Dragon* fan at the time, and when Tim Stamper had okayed the idea of putting together a beat-'em-up style game he asked me to come up with some characters for it. Rare wasn't really known for making violent games, and Nintendo had a policy for limiting violence, ensuring that certain things were portrayed in a certain way. So we took the more fun-styled cartoon approach, rather than the more graphic and serious look of some of the other popular beat-'em-up games of the time. Enter the Battletoads!"

With a genre and direction chosen, Kevin got on with the task of developing the characters that would inhabit the *Battletoads* world ready for Tim to digitise and pass on to the game's coder Mark Betteridge, as Kevin explains. "I was heavily involved in creating the character designs, based on ideas that one of our writers, Guy Miller, was putting together working alongside Tim. I think apart from one or two, the designs of the characters were all drawn by me. I was mainly responsible for concept artwork and a little in-game artwork. I gave Tim sketches each day, and he'd then squeeze my designs into sprites. At that time, we were still tracing sketches on grids, and boxing sprites into as few characters as possible. You can recognise Tim's style when you look at how the toads, enemies and props compare to the Ultimate games. He was very clever at making graphics fit within a certain memory capacity due to his experience with Ultimate; there was an art to it I guess. We thought it would be fun to enlarge the fists upon impact when players hit their opponents. This really seemed to work on the tiny sprite characters, and so we expanded upon that by enhancing their limbs with power-ups, which gave the game a unique look, and it of course also became one of the main features of the characters themselves. Backgrounds were also heavily put together by Tim, as he was far more experienced in putting that kind of stuff together. He worked very closely with Mark Betteridge – the software genius behind a lot of Rare's earlier titles – while I churned out concept work, logos and front-end story graphics."

Having established a production line for *Battletoads*' visual components, the small team could start developing the game's ▶



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP / PLATFORMER

TOAD PROFILES



NAME: Rash
STYLE:
Too cool for school

■ A flamboyant extrovert, Rash has fast fighting moves to match his fast mouth. He may be the smallest of the toads, but that helps to make him the most agile.



NAME: Zitz
STYLE:
Brains over brawn

■ Leader of the Battletoads, Zitz is a tactical genius. He isn't as fast as Rash or as tough as Pimple, but he's good with gadgets – think James Bond with warts.



NAME: Pimple
STYLE:
Bull in a china shop

■ He's not the brightest, but Pimple's brute force comes in handy when the toads go into battle. Plus, he's dating a Princess, so he must be doing something right.

worldmags.net



BATTLETOADS HISTORY

A quick overview of the series. How many have you played?

BATTLETOADS
NES 1991

■ It all began on the NES, of course, but the brawling, platforming and multi-genre stages of the Battletoads' first demanding outing were ported to various other consoles as well as the Amiga.



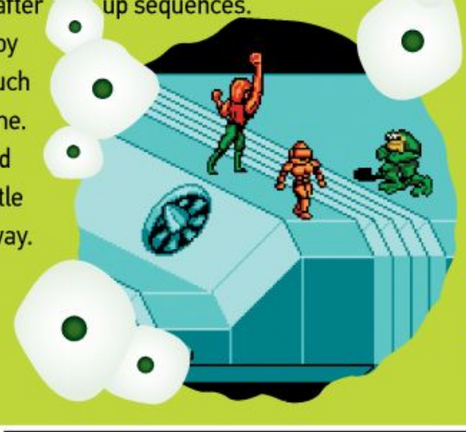
BATTLETOADS
GAME BOY 1991

■ Although released just after the NES original, Game Boy *Battletoads* was pretty much a completely different game. A few NES stages survived in adapted form, but the title essentially went its own way.



BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM GAME BOY 1993

■ The Battletoads teamed up with the characters that inspired their creation for this sequel, and while it spanned several genres – much as its predecessor had done – the follow-up offered a few more sustained beat-'em-up sequences.



BATTLETOADS IN BATTLEMANIACS
SNES 1993

■ Although an original game, *Battlemaniacs* was heavily inspired by aspects of the first *Battletoads* title. Its visuals, plot and bosses were new, however, and its gameplay was reworked to show off the Super Nintendo hardware.



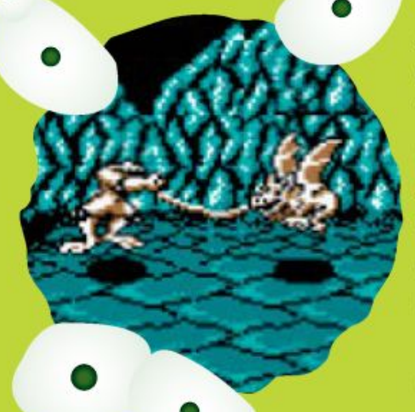
BATTLETOADS IN RAGNAROK'S WORLD GAME BOY 1993

■ Confusingly, this impressive system exclusive delivered exactly what might have been expected of Game Boy *Battletoads* – a stripped down version of the NES original with graphical concessions and fewer levels and bosses.



BATTLETOADS
ARCADE 1994

■ *Battletoads* undeservedly flopped at the arcades, despite being a high-quality scrolling fighter that refined the franchise's formula. The coin-op is predictably the best-looking *Battletoads* title released and favours brawling over other genres.



» An actual rat race, as Rash races a ratty opponent to defuse a bomb.





» This bruiser is called Robo-Manus – the bigger they come, the harder they fall, though.

▶ design and storyline. "We all worked together on that team on a day-to-day basis," Kevin recalls, "but when it came to the game design and concepts for levels, that was really Tim and Mark. The game design was the first thing that was tried and tested. Story came afterwards. But once we had the first few levels rolling along and playing nicely, we continued to expand upon the story too. This story then gave us other ideas to work into the game, so we were soon developing the story and the game simultaneously."

The structure the team had put in place allowed the *Battletoads* project to quickly gain momentum, and a game-defining decision was soon made on the title's difficulty. "Mark had developed some editors for creating levels, and I think that Tim worked with him on putting those together," notes Kevin, "I remember that a lot of work went into making it seriously hard and precise. Some of it was crazy hard but that's the way it was intended to be; extremely challenging. I would often hear Mark scream when he was testing his own software if he failed to get past his own levels, but I don't think he made it *too* hard. I guess we just wanted value for money, and for the game to last. We'd always try to vary the levels so that you got a break from one particular style or genre within the game. It made it more refreshing to play over periods of time and a lot more challenging in general. The story would often help to play a part in creating those subgenres and added to the variation. I remember watching Tim draw all of the sections of the Dark Queen's tower, which Mark cleverly animated to achieve the 3D effect. It worked really well, and I learned a lot of tricks from Tim by watching him create those kinds of effects. I thought it looked amazing when I saw it working."



As *Battletoads*' visuals, design and gameplay evolved, another equally important aspect of the game was addressed – one that required an additional team member, as Kevin recollects. "My friend Dave Wise would come up with new music for each level – as far as I remember, that was pretty much the way it went for most games. The levels didn't really come to life until we had music and effects. I remember always looking forward to Dave appearing with a new disc that held the music to the next level. Once that was incorporated we'd sometimes switch the odd level music around to a different level, because sometimes tunes felt *right* on other levels. But usually, Dave would go away after looking at a level's graphics and a brief demo of the gameplay, and then he'd write a piece for the level. A lot of the sound effects were created by Mark – using some software he created to generate sounds."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1994

GOLDENEYE 007
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1997

BANJO-KAZOOIE
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1998

Serious hours were being put in to *Battletoads* and the team's collective efforts were reaching fruition, and so work was started on the title's box art, but thought was also being given to documenting the game's visuals for future reference and to help with the marketing of the game. "I designed the box artwork, but Tim airbrushed and produced it." Kevin reveals, "It was the second design. I did one with the three toads on the front up-close, but it went off to focus groups and it didn't grab the kids' attention, so we did a redesign. I inked up a picture, and as Tim was so good



» Yes, that spaceship – the Dark Queen's Gargantua – is eating the toads' ride!

with the airbrush he did a fantastic job of the one we ended up with. We also made a style guide containing all of the characters within the game, we wanted as much of the concept illustrated on paper as possible. The style guides were used for reference when working with Nintendo. Putting them together also allowed us to present visually to the companies that became involved in marketing. I was busy working on the style guide and some of the other graphics for the game, but I wouldn't say that I spent anywhere near as many hours working on the game as Mark did. As usual, he practically lived at Rare when he worked on the game and got really into the thick of it."

Of course, before marketing *Battletoads*, the task of in-house testing the finished product remained, with the general feeling at Rare being that they had produced a title that was tough but fair. "I think Mark always wanted it to be difficult," Kevin admits, "It was never impossible, but always just required practice and of course some skill. The NES controllers were bulletproof little pads that were actually really responsive and could take some serious shit, but the game was tested on many controllers to make sure it was possible to play *right*, and it was, but you had to put in the practice. As a fighting game enthusiast I preferred the brawling levels. I could never complete it, but then there's nothing worse than a game that is too easy!"

On its release, the idea that *Battletoads* might be too easy was either skilfully concealed in the glowing reviews that the game received or, far more likely, was simply not considered. Just as importantly, the impressive sales that the title enjoyed confirmed that NES gamers' appreciation for *Battletoads* matched the fevered enthusiasm shown by the videogames press. Further games in the series were now a formality, but *Battletoads* would also have a second less obvious legacy. "*Battletoads* became a template in some way," Kevin reasons, "perhaps *Battletoads*, when you think about it, was a changing point for Rare, and a lot of the game's elements echo throughout many of the company's later titles. Eventually it became kind of a trademark I guess, and future Rare games were often varied in the same kind of way as *Battletoads*."

Battletoads may be far from a template for Rare's current output, but like many gamers, Kevin feels that the seminal scrolling brawler stands up against anything that Rare or anyone else was producing at the time. "Most of the games we produced were top quality," Kevin beams, "some titles were stronger than others, but we learned as the company grew about what people wanted in a game. We always, always tried to make sure they were just fun to play, and that they would give a challenge to anyone who picked them up. When I see *Battletoads*, I see a lot of game rammed into that NES cart, and compared to a lot of the other games that were out at the time it offered a lot more. It looked great, sounded and played fantastic and it set the path for more *Battletoads* games, which proved its success. It's definitely one I'm proud of being a part of."



» A spirited game of snowballs? Nope, these icy spheres are deadly, so duck, toad!

Many thanks to Kevin Bayliss for making this article possible.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGHTERS

Other animals with distinctly un-animal-like behaviour

MIYAMOTO USAGI

SPECIES: Rabbit

MEMORABLE APPEARANCE:
Samurai Warrior: The Battles Of Usagi Yojimbo



■ The creation of writer/artist Stan Sakai, Miyamoto Usagi appears in Dark Horse Comics' *Usagi Yojimbo* – which translates as "rabbit bodyguard". Usagi is a ronin who wanders ancient Japan on a warrior's pilgrimage. Beam Software skilfully adapted Usagi for the C64 in *Samurai Warrior* – an ambitious action-adventure.

LEONARDO

SPECIES: Turtle

MEMORABLE APPEARANCE:
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Turtles In Time



■ Rare likely wouldn't have been too upset by the similarity between Kevin Bayliss's *Battletoads* designs and the hugely successful *Ninja Turtles*. Leonardo is the de-facto leader of the Turtles and was considered the most rounded fighter in their Nineties videogames, the best of which was probably Konami's *Turtles In Time*.

PRINCE LEON

SPECIES: Lion

MEMORABLE APPEARANCE:
Brutal: Above The Claw



■ Based on his 'Powerchord' special attack, Prince Leon of Kenya was something of an aspiring rock star. He featured in GameTek's anthropomorphic versus fighter series *Brutal*. The Sega 32X's *Above The Claw* was the most polished entry in the franchise, but the other *Brutal* games all featured pretty similar gameplay.

COLD SHADOW

SPECIES: Duck

MEMORABLE APPEARANCE:
Maui Mallard In Cold Shadow



■ Donald Duck used to moonlight as a detective/ninja. No, seriously, there was even a combat platformer called *Maui Mallard In Cold Shadow* where Maui Mallard was Donald's hapless detective cover for a ninja persona – Cold Shadow. 16-bit Disney titles typically impressed, and Cold Shadow's outing fit that trend.

PSYCHO FOX

SPECIES: Fox

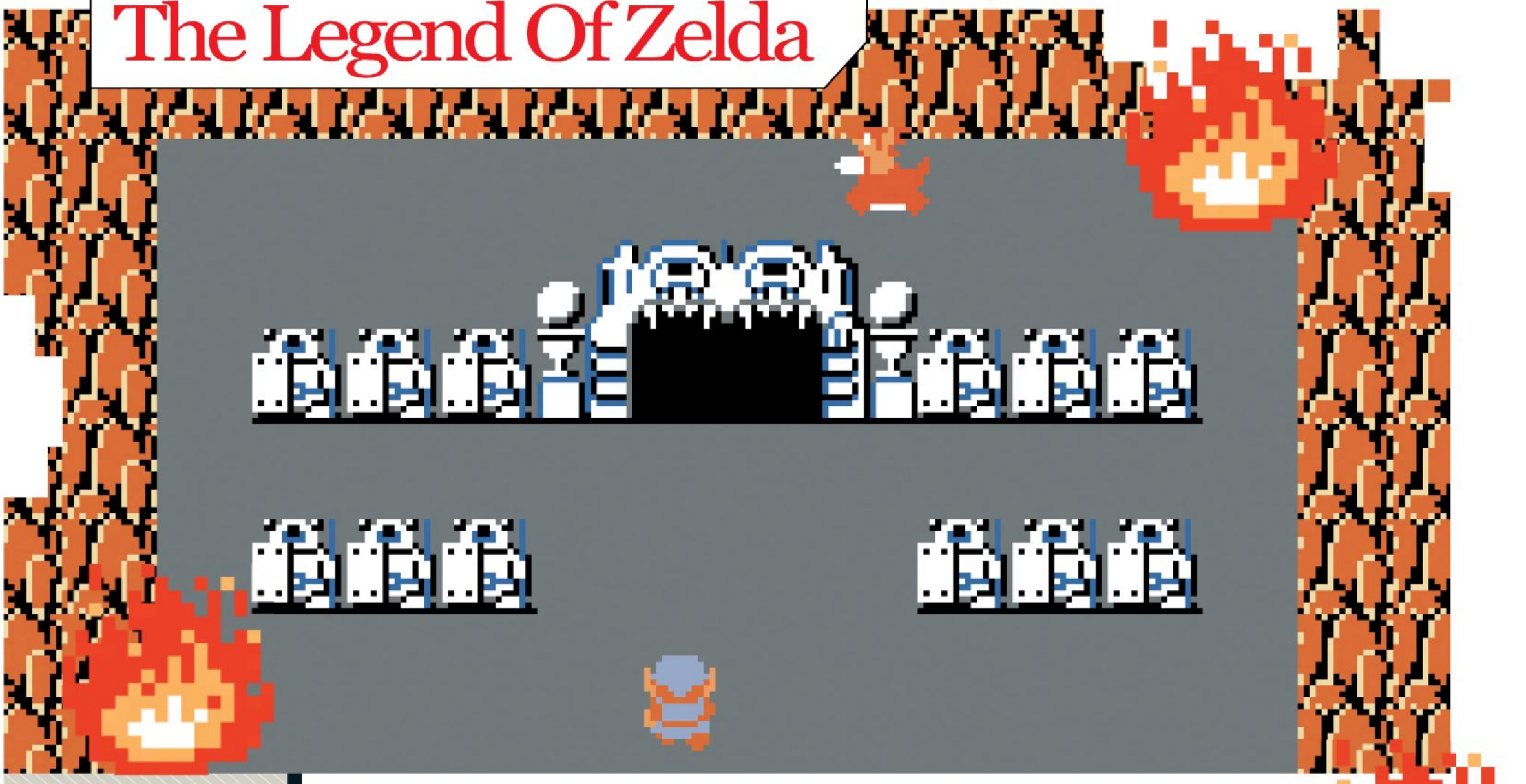
MEMORABLE APPEARANCE:
Psycho Fox



■ He's often likened to Mario, apparently because his one game was on Sega's answer to the NES – the Master System – and because said outing was a colourful platformer. Psycho Fox's most un-Nintendo-like move was taking out opponents by punching them in the face! Well, he was called *Psycho* Fox.

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The Legend Of Zelda



Instant Expert

The Legend Of Zelda is the most non-linear adventure in the series. You can tackle the dungeons in almost any order you like, and the game can be finished without ever collecting the sword.

The Legend Of Zelda was the first NES title to sell over a million copies and went on to sell 6.5 million in total.

Though the map for *Zelda*'s third dungeon resembles a Nazi swastika, it is actually the much more innocuous manji, an ancient religious symbol used by Japanese Buddhists, which is the reverse of the infamous emblem and is common in Eastern philosophy.

Link is an unusual hero in that, in the first game and canonically throughout the series, he is left-handed. Perhaps by coincidence, the word 'links' is German for 'left'.

Complete *The Legend Of Zelda* and you can play a second quest with different dungeon layouts and item placements. If you want to skip straight to it, enter your name as 'ZELDA' at the start.

Princess Zelda is named after Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of novelist Francis Scott Fitzgerald.

When *Zelda* arrived in the US and Europe it was ported from disk to cartridge and became the first console game to include a battery to store save data.

Ashley Day argues that Nintendo's seminal adventure game isn't just an important piece of history but a game that's still great to play today. Discover one of Nintendo's greatest adventures

You really have to hand it to Miyamoto and his band at Nintendo. To make one of the greatest and most important videogames of all time, in the shape of *Super Mario Bros,* was one thing. But to repeat the same trick just a year later, and in a completely different genre, is just incredible.

In fact, there isn't even a year between *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*. There was only five months between the Japanese release dates of each game, yet the latter represents a giant stride from the former in terms of game design. Where *Mario* was brilliantly simple, placing you at the start of a linear journey and merely asking you to move a little plumber to the right, *Zelda* offered a world of possibility by comparison.

Starting off in the middle of the vast land of Hyrule, it put you in control of a left-handed elf-like boy named Link, with three possible exits standing before him, and then… did nothing. No instructions, no dialogue, no hints. Just the promise of adventure and an invitation into the unknown. Which way should you go? Well that was entirely up to you, and that was the entire point of the game. There was an ultimate goal, of course – to collect the eight scattered pieces of the Triforce of Wisdom in order to defeat the evil Ganon and rescue the eponymous Princess Zelda – but it was the open nature of how you approached this task that really made *The Legend Of Zelda* so compelling.

It's a well-known story that Miyamoto's inspiration for *Zelda* came from his childhood memories of exploring the Japanese countryside without a map and the pleasure that he got from discovering places he had no previous knowledge of. The goal of the *Zelda* project was to capture that childlike fascination with the unknown, the sense of wonder that the world can provoke when everything around you is so new and unusual. And that project also happened to fortuitously coincide with the development of the Famicom Disk System, Nintendo's Famicom add-on that side-stepped the rising cost of ROM chips and allowed developers to create much bigger games than before.

The Disk System's rewritable media also allowed for game progress to be permanently saved without the need for cumbersome passwords, and this was a crucial technological advantage that allowed Nintendo to further distinguish its console games from those of the arcades. Coin-operated arcade games were still the dominant form of videogaming in 1986 and were focused very much on short-term challenge, cyclical and repetitive gameplay, and the thrill of chasing a high score. But Nintendo wanted its games to be something different; something you played over a long period of time, returning to like a good book to enjoy an ever-evolving experience; a journey, rather than the same few seconds over and over again.

This is very much how the modern videogame can be described 25 years

Pixel Perfect

Some of Zelda's familiar characters make their debuts

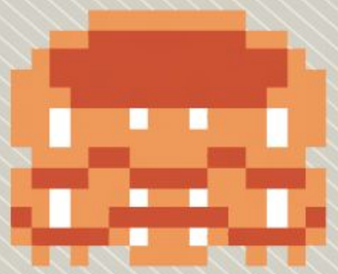

» Darknut


» Digdogger


» Zola


» Link


» Lanmola


» Like Like

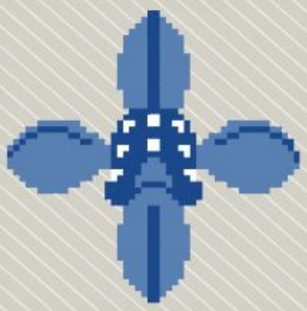

» Octoroc


» Tektike


» Peahat


» Gel


» Aquamentus


» Manhandla


» Gleeok


» Leever


» Bubble


» Gohma

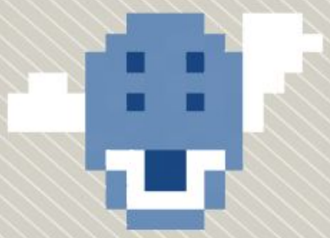

» Old Man


» Stalfos


» Vire


» Shopkeeper


» Moldorm


» Patra


» Moblin


» Pols Voice


» Rope


» Zol


» Wizzrobe


» Fairy


» Ghini


» Old Woman


» Gibdo


» Goriya


» Keese


» Ganon


» Magical Key


» Wall Master


» Power Bracelet


» Lynel


» Zelda


» Dodonga


» Flame


» Armos

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO... The Legend Of Zelda

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"The Legend Of Zelda is a massive arcade adventure packed full of dragons, imprisoned princesses, traps and pitfalls"

- COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES, 1987

Twin Galaxies High Scores

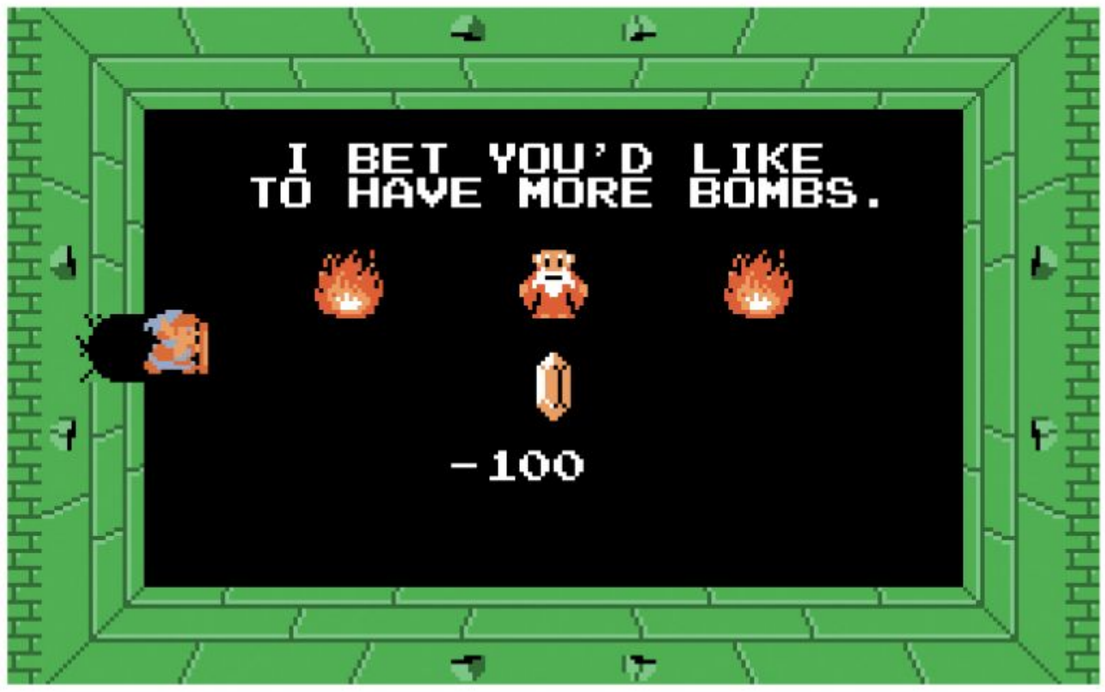
SPEED RUN (QUEST 1)
- **NAME:** RODRIGO LOPES
- **TIME:** 00:31:37

SPEED RUN (QUEST 2)
- **NAME:** RODRIGO LOPES
- **TIME:** 00:39:59

EXTREME CHALLENGE (COMPLETE GAME WITHOUT SWORD, DON'T KILL OVERWORLD ENEMIES)
- **NAME:** MARLON D MORROW
- **COMPLETION:** 100%

on, of course, but *The Legend Of Zelda* was one of the first games to truly offer that kind of deep, long-term experience. And it did it very well indeed. So many early videogames can be credited as the first to do one thing or another, but *Zelda* did it all, establishing the rules of the modern adventure game and in such style that, alongside its sequels, it remains brilliantly playable a quarter of a century later, while Nintendo's competitors are still playing catch-up.

It's not just the tantalising nature of Hyrule's open world that makes *Zelda* so appealing. It's the way Link's ever-increasing inventory and abilities open up new routes through that world, ensuring that it rewards progress with a steady stream of surprises and discoveries right up to the end. There's the contrast between the freedom of the overworld and the tightly focused structure of the dungeons beneath the ground. There's the way each weapon Link acquires has more than one obvious use, forcing you to experiment and be creative with the way you play. And, of course, there's the wealth of secrets that permeate the world, not just rewarding the player but encouraging them to dig deeper, play harder and uncover hidden treasures that make you feel like the best player in the world. It's a deeply personal feature that makes you feel special for finding those secrets and personalises the experience, even though those secrets are, in reality, accessible to everyone.



» [NES] More high explosives can never be a bad thing.

With 25 years under its belt, the *Zelda* series has since gone from strength to strength, and many people have a favourite entry in the series that isn't the first one. *A Link To The Past*, *Link's Awakening*, *Ocarina Of Time* and *Majora's Mask* could all legitimately lay claim to the title of Greatest *Zelda*, but there's something pure about that first game that sets it apart from its successors. Right from *Zelda II* onward, the series began to change. It still retained the core features of an overworld, a series of dungeons and an expanding bag of tricks, but it also lost something along the way. As the series has become increasingly preoccupied with telling a story, you could argue that it has also limited itself, weighing its opening moments down with unnecessary dialogue and lengthy tutorials that actually distance you from Link instead of doing the opposite.

The Legend Of Zelda's real brilliance is that it has the confidence to just drop you into its world and leaves you to explore for yourself, experimenting with its mysteries and discovering secrets without any real hand-holding. Instead of simply telling you a story, it allows you to live the story; its events are driven by your decisions and actions. It feels unique, it rewards those who jump in at the deep end to go see what they can find, and it's a quality that the *Zelda* series would do well to recapture.

Power-ups

Some of The Legend Of Zelda's pick-ups have endured throughout the series' history, while it never quite happened for others...



»Bait
This meat is bought from a shop and used to feed any Goriyas that block your path.



»Bombs
The bomb can be used to hurt just about any enemy but can also be used to open secret entrances.



»Boomerang
The boomerang has two distinct uses. One violent to damage enemies; the other practical, as it can retrieve distant objects.



»Bow
The bow is the only thing that can kill Ganon, at least once you've acquired the silver arrows for it.



»Candle
This can be used to light your way, but it can also be used to burn bushes, sometimes revealing secrets.



»Ladder
This item allows you to cross small sections of river to take short cuts and is essential for some dungeons.



»Magic Book
An optional item that upgrades the wand so that it can shoot fireballs, making candles redundant.



»Magic Wand
It's a wand! What more do we have to tell you? It uses your magic energy to shoot beams.



»Potions
Potions come in two varieties: blue and red. Blue restores some of your life while the red replenishes it all.



»Raft
Allows Link to get around the waterways of Hyrule. He can embark or disembark the raft at any dock.



»Rings
These, much like every other magic item, can be found in two colours. Each increases Link's strength.



»Shield
The wooden shield just repels ordinary attacks. The magic shield, however, can block fireballs.



»Swords
There are three swords – Wooden, White and Magical – each one more powerful than the last.



»Whistle
A single-use item that is essential for beating Digdogger, the boss of the fifth dungeon.

Memorable Moments

We present the best bits of the best NES game Nintendo ever made

Signature tune

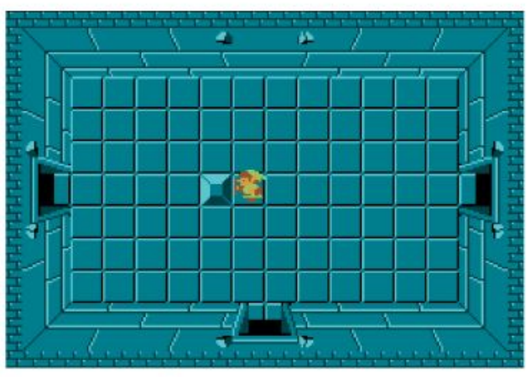
The now-iconic *Zelda* theme slowly plays and builds up speed as a waterfall pours down the title screen. Koji Kondo's composition is yet another classic, leading to his involvement in every game in the series up until *Ocarina Of Time*.





Good advice

One of the few pieces of dialogue is also the most memorable. Though you can play the whole game without the sword, the old man's advice is right. You'll do much better with it, and what's a *Zelda* game without a sword?



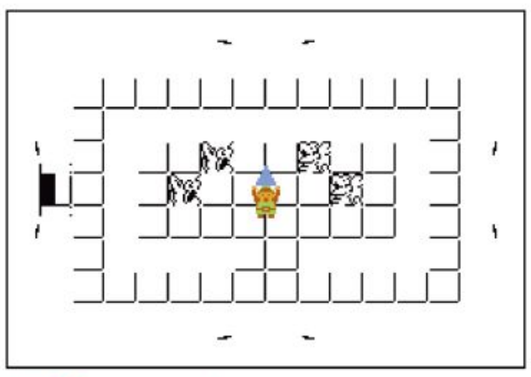
Secret exit

Finding secrets is one of *Zelda*'s greatest pleasures, not to mention one of its inspirations, and here's one of the earliest. A door without a keyhole is opened by pushing a seemingly ordinary block to the left.



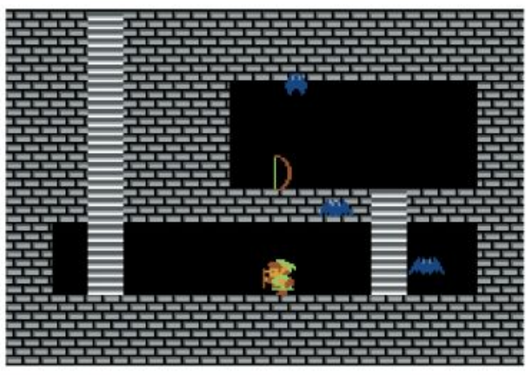
Fairy godmother

Find an enclosed pool and a fairy will pop out and rejuvenate Link's health with a swirl of hearts. It's another feature that has cropped up time and again through the series, with the fairies' abilities and applications expanding.



Triforce get!

Link finds his first piece of the Triforce and holds it above his head in a way that has now become an identifiable characteristic of the little elf boy. The Triforces of Wisdom and Power appear in the original, with Courage debuting in the next.



Side story

Some dungeon screens switch perspective to a side view, a trick that was adopted wholesale for *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* and would return for some brief sequences in the Game Boy's *Link's Awakening*.



Hard to swallow

The brilliant Dodongo boss is defeated by getting him to eat and swallow a bomb, causing him some nasty indigestion when it explodes in his belly. A similar boss, King Dodongo, became an iconic sequence in *Ocarina Of Time*.



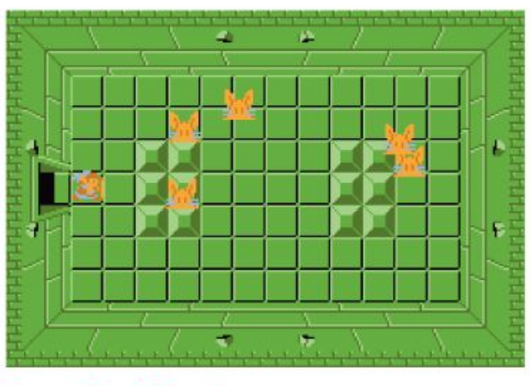
Hidden stairs

Another great secret. Touch a statue and it will come to life to attack you. Some statues stand over stairways that lead to secret underground rooms, tempting players to engage them in combat in the hope of some reward.



Boss hog

The final showdown with Ganon reveals him to be some kind of grotesque demon pig, much more monstrous than the human reinterpretation in *Ocarina Of Time*. Recent games tend to give him a hideous second form.



Loud noises!

In the Japanese release of *Zelda* you can shout into the Famicom microphone to hurt Pols Voice enemies. But you can't in the NES release. So in Japan it's a memorable moment. Over here it's barely even a regular moment.



Feeding time

This Goriya isn't having a moan; it's actually his stomach rumbling. Feed him the meat and he'll let you pass. The first time a *Zelda* enemy defies expectations of simply being sword fodder and not the last.

Zelda's ending is fairly typical for adventure games, until it reveals that there's a whole new quest to play through



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The Versions Of Zelda

There have been many more versions of the original Legend Of Zelda than you probably think. Here's every one and the differences between them

BUY SOMETHIN' WILL YA!

PROTOTYPE (1985, ESTIMATED)

A prototype version of the original Famicom Disk game, only recently discovered in late 2010. The prototype differs from the real thing in several ways, most notably that it's a lot easier thanks to a higher distribution of rupees and slightly different enemy arrangements. The disk image is available to download from **www.lostlevels.org**.



FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM (1986)

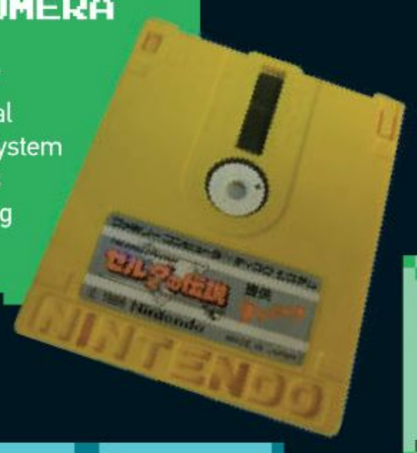
The first official release of the game was titled *The Hyrule Fantasy: Zelda No Densetsu* and was a launch title for the Famicom Disk System. This release used the extra capabilities in the FDS to play sounds not present in the NES cartridge version. It also used the microphone built in to the second controller of the Famicom. Blowing into it was a secret way to kill the sound-sensitive Pols Voice enemy, which was technically impossible on the standard NES.



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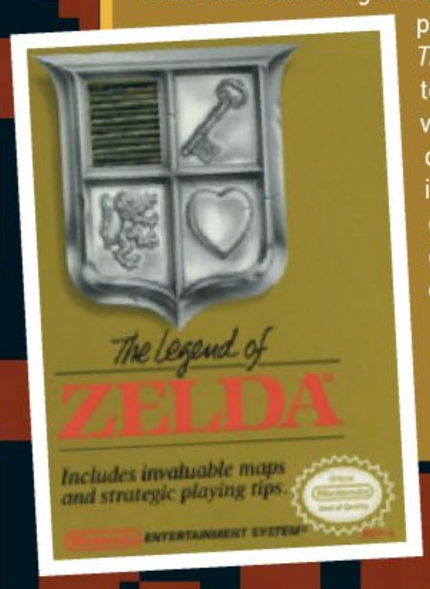
ZELDA NO DENSETSU: TEIKYOU CHARUMERA (1986)

Made to promote Myojo Foods' charumera noodles, this special release of the Famicom Disk System game is identified by a different label design and is considered a rare Famicom collector's item, selling for around £180 in Japanese retro stores.



NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM (1987)

As well as translating the game into English, the US and European release of *The Legend Of Zelda* was the first to arrive on cartridge. Though the Famicom Disk System had been introduced to reduce the cost of ROMs, the add-on never made it outside Japan so Nintendo used a new type of chip. The MMC1 (Memory Management Controller) used bank-switching to make bigger games possible and allowed *The Legend Of Zelda* to be released worldwide. And boy did Nintendo milk it, releasing the game on a special gold cartridge and cutting a window into the packaging so that everyone could see for themselves. Classy.



FAMICOM CARTRIDGE (1994)

Zelda eventually got its Japanese cartridge release in 1994, eight years after the disk release and a staggering eleven years after the launch of the Famicom console. The game is virtually the same except that it's renamed *Zelda No Densetsu 1*, given that the second, third and even fourth *Zelda* games had been released by 1994.



BS ZELDA NO DENSETSU (1995)

A 16-bit remake of the original *Zelda*, broadcast on the Super Famicom's Satellaview add-on between August 1995 and January 1997. As well as the advanced graphics, *BS Zelda No Densetsu* also made use of the hardware's SoundLink feature to provide a live narration throughout the broadcast quest.



BS ZELDA NO DENSETSU MAP 2 (1996)

Basically the same game but based on the second quest from *The Legend Of Zelda*, this *BS Zelda* is much more elusive and was broadcast one time only in March 1996.



GAME BOY COLOR REMAKE (2000, CANCELLED)

In 1999, Yoshi Okamoto of Capcom negotiated a deal to develop six new *Zelda* titles for the Game Boy Color. Flagship worked on the remake for a year but encountered a number of problems. One was that the GBC's resolution was too different to that of the NES, meaning the game had to be redrawn to fit the more narrow screen, and another was that the team wanted to rebalance the game to make it less difficult. The remake was eventually scrapped in 2000 as Flagship changed direction. At Miyamoto's request, the studio started work on three interlinked games in the 'Triforce' series, named *Mystical Seed Of Wisdom*, *Mystical Seed Of Power* and *Mystical Seed Of Courage*. This idea proved too ambitious, however, and had to be downgraded to the two games that were eventually released: *Oracle Of Ages* and *Oracle Of Seasons*. The latter evolved directly from *Mystical Seed Of Power*, which was developed off the back of the remake project, and you can still find similarities between *Seasons* and *The Legend Of Zelda* today.



ANIMAL CROSSING (2001)

Both the Nintendo 64 and GameCube editions of *Animal Crossing* allowed players to enjoy a series of NES games in their virtual homes. *The Legend Of Zelda* was one of those games although, weirdly, it was buried in the code and couldn't be accessed without using cheat devices.



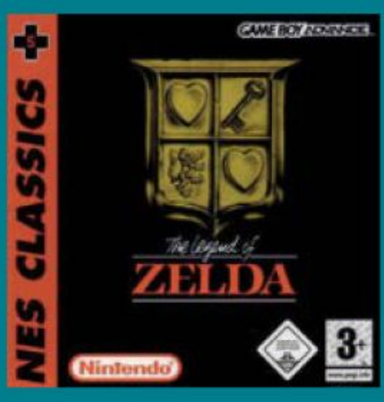
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: COLLECTOR'S EDITION (2003)

A promotional GameCube disc that was never officially sold but given away to Nintendo customers to promote the upcoming release of *The Wind Waker*. The disc includes emulated versions of *Zelda II*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *Majora's Mask* and, of course, *The Legend Of Zelda*, which featured a new translation that corrected some of the 'Engrish' in the original NES version, as well as changing the name of Gannon to the more canonical Ganon.



NES CLASSICS: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (2004)

In 2004 Nintendo released a series of Game Boy Advance games called Famicom Minis, which re-created favourite Famicom games on yellow cartridges that came packaged in tiny, cute boxes. When the series came to Europe and America, it was re-envisioned to evoke nostalgia for the NES and sadly lost the cute boxes, but we did get some cool NES games. This version was reformatted for the GBA's wide screen and featured the same new translation as the GameCube remake.



VIRTUAL CONSOLE (2006)

The Legend Of Zelda was one of the first big Nintendo games to be distributed on the Wii's Virtual Console service. Sadly, the European version ran in 50Hz as part of Nintendo's ludicrous policy of remaining faithful to the version each territory remembers, despite the fact that it used the updated 2003 translation.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MASTERPIECE DEMO (2008)

Nintendo's all-star Wii fighting game *Super Smash Bros Brawl* contains a Vault section that celebrates the history of the playable characters that appear in the game, and the Vault includes a selection of Masterpieces – timed demos of old games so that you can go hands-on with history yourself. With five *Zelda* characters, three of them different versions of Link, appearing in *Brawl*, it's only natural that *The Legend Of Zelda* appears on the disc.



3D CLASSICS EDITION (201X)

When the 3DS was first shown off at E3 2010, one of the tech demos was a series of 'Classic Games' redrawn to take advantage of the 3D display, and one of the games in that showreel was *The Legend Of Zelda*. Nintendo has since confirmed plans to sell downloadable '3D Classics' through the 3DS's eShop service, starting with *3D Excitebike*. *The Legend Of Zelda* hasn't officially been confirmed, but given that *Ocarina Of Time* has been remade for the system, and that Shigeru Miyamoto has expressed interest in giving similar treatment to *A Link To The Past*, it's easy to assume that the original *Zelda* will appear in 3D pretty soon.



KID ICARUS

ALMOST THE PITS



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **YEAR:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES



HISTORY

There are some who regard *Kid Icarus* as an unsung hero of the NES. But while I'd be the first to admit that the game looks and sounds pretty – thanks to it running from the same guts as *Metroid,* and having that sublime Tanaka music. For me, it's ruined somewhat by some frustrating little design flaws.

Kid Icarus still demonstrates that good ol' Nintendo template; creating a videogame based on three central characters: a good God, a bad God, who's been turned into an evil medusa by the good God, and an unlikely hero with a stupid name.

Essentially trying to cram platform, shooting and RPG elements into one game and, for the most part, succeeding, *Kid Icarus* sadly seems to undo some of that greatness by throwing up a troupe of brilliantly drawn, but annoyingly cheap enemies that make you want to rip the cart from your NES and kick it at a furnace.

Pit, your angelic hero, has to face off against an army of skeletons that will absorb a ridiculous amount of arrows, silly sporadic squids that miraculously appear from the base of the screen at the most maddening of moments and plenty of stupid drops that kill your character outright. But thanks to its levelling up and shopping elements, the further you get in the game the easier it gets.

For the quest, Nintendo has bestowed us one measly life, which was probably its attempt to impart this jarring sense of realism. But when you're playing a videogame about an angel quashing a bunch of flying eyes and eggplants with arrow heads, surely it's all pointless.

The game isn't a complete tool, however, as when you die, you can always fall back on its 24-digit, case-sensitive password system. Nintendo would soften the blow though by putting it to use on some brilliant cheat codes. Just input '8uuuuu uuuuuu uuuuuu uuuuuu' if you want to see the game's final *Parodius* stage – and see a fully powered Pit take to the skies and face off against a giant eyeball and its pet dragon.



♥151

MAY I HELP YOU?

WE HAVE EVERYTHING.

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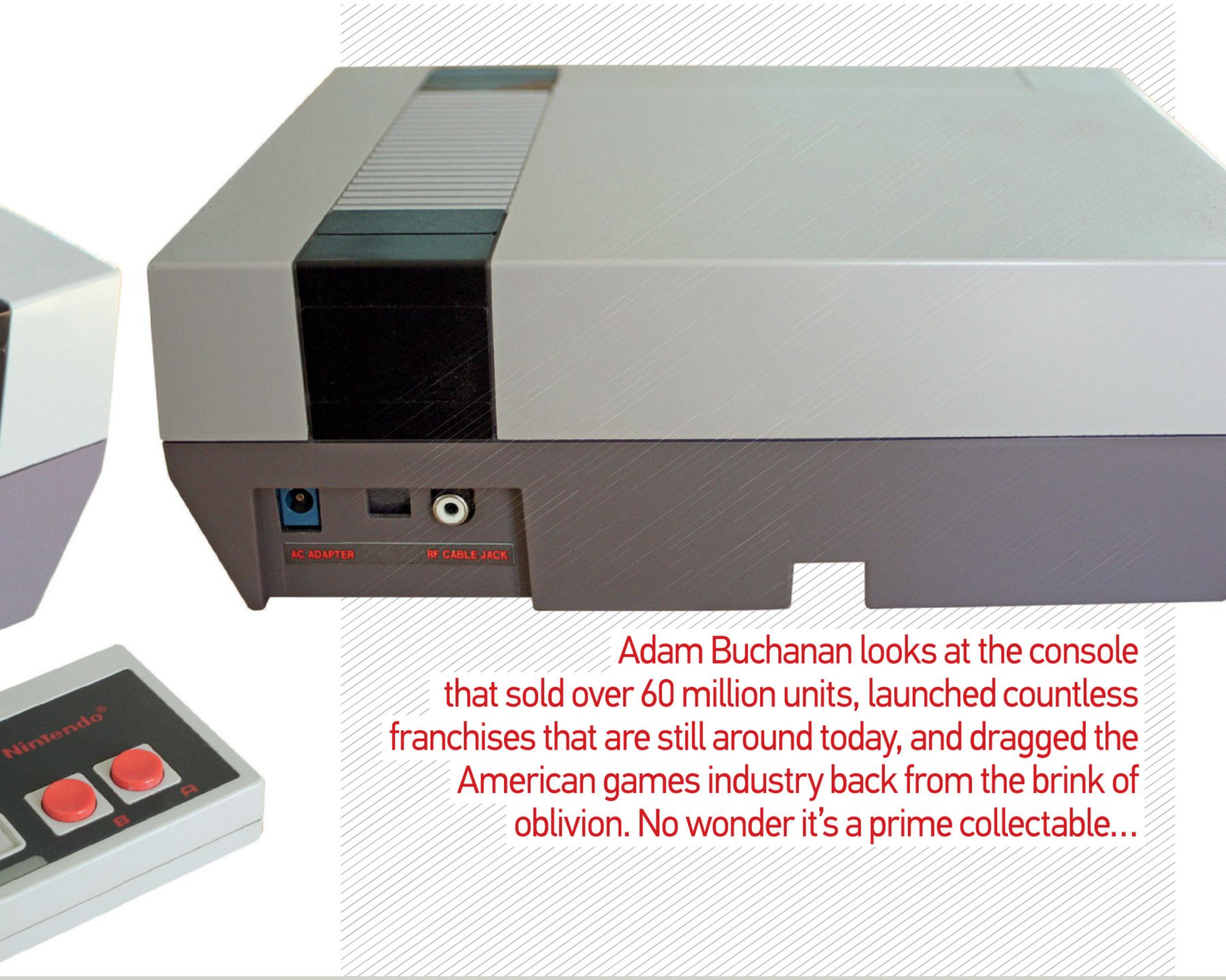
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Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™
NES VERSION

The Collector's Guide



NINTENDO ENTERT



Adam Buchanan looks at the console that sold over 60 million units, launched countless franchises that are still around today, and dragged the American games industry back from the brink of oblivion. No wonder it's a prime collectable...

» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo » **Models:** NES/Famicom » **Launched:** 1983 (Japan, as Famicom), 1985 (US), 1986 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

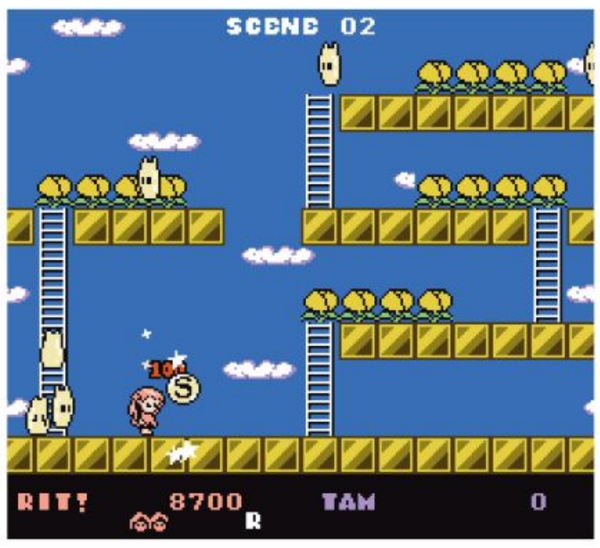
AINMENT SYSTEM

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Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™ NES VERSION

The Collector's Guide





» There are numerous hardware bundles out there, from *Super Mario Bros 2* to the ever-popular *Super Mario Bros* and *Duck Hunt* combo.



» With its roots in 8-bit micros and their open publishing models, Codemasters wasn't initially keen on bending to Nintendo's control.



Why it's collectable

In 1983, Nintendo unleashed one of Japan's finest products to date. The Family Computer (Famicom) was the latest 8-bit console to be released, and it would become the bestselling system available by the end of 1984. Upon its US launch, the rebranded Famicom, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), refuelled the country's dying videogame industry. Homeward bound, however, what did Europeans have to get excited about with the iconic console? It certainly wasn't the lack of localised releases, nor the fact that Nintendo really took its time delivering what the rest of the world was already talking about…

Prior to the console's European release, gamers had been drowning in an ocean of low-quality software. Atari had exhausted the 2600 with just about everything its dated hardware could handle, while home computers began to suffer from a heavily saturated market of homemade releases. Nintendo was aware of these issues and proceeded to offer gamers the lifeline they had been crying out for. Not only did the NES sail in with state-of-the-art visuals and a stunning audio chip, but also Nintendo's Seal of Quality. This restricted developers to no more than five games for the system per year, ensuring that focus was placed on quality, not quantity.

With such a huge focus on hosting software of the highest merit, it comes as a real surprise how many games were made available. An incredible tally of over 1,000 cartridges were distributed for the Famicom. A large majority of these, among a wealth of exclusive additions, went on to make up the 700-plus games in the American NES library. Europe, however, had to make do with just shy of 350 licensed releases. This deficiency of cartridges in PAL territories encompassed several big losses, including *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest* and even the sixth outing of *Mega Man*. Despite a diminished selection, adoring fans from all over the world have begun to home in on the handful of exclusive PAL localisations attainable. To name a few, these include a solid port of the arcade classic *Rodland*, the elusive Metroidvania title *Ufouria*, and Konami's take on a Biblical game with *Noah's Ark*.

In order to aid gamers wanting a better grip on the on-screen action, countless peripherals, which took gaming in previously unimaginable directions, began to see mass manufacture. While many of these offered little functionality in the way of gameplay, some have since become an integral part of game culture. ROB (Robotic Operating Buddy), a mechanical being who took commands as player two, and the Power Glove, a garment-turned-control-pad that supposedly placed precision into the palm of your hand, have both become highly desirable items, despite their limited usability. While these are the premium offerings, the NES has its fair share of laughable accessories. The bizarre Laserscope headset, for instance, was intended for use on flight simulation games, requiring the player to self-consciously shout 'Fire' every time an enemy flew into sight. Overall, the arrival of the revolutionary console brought along many ambitious





» *Mega Man 6* was never released in PAL regions, making a complete series collection frustratingly impossible to obtain.

» The Famicom is one of the most cloned systems ever, with hundreds of variants found on dodgy market stalls around the world, even today.





Did you know?

■ In 1987, Bandai released a floor mat controller for the NES known as Family Fun Fitness. This primitive attempt to keep gamers fit saw the arrival of two compatible games, before Nintendo bought the rights to the technology and rebranded it as the Power Pad. Prior to this acquisition, the American version of the second compatible game, *Stadium Events*, was only available during a brief seasonal period. So few copies sold that growing demand to secure *Stadium Events* today has given rise to some hefty prices. In 2010, a factory-sealed copy fetched $41,300 at auction. European collectors, however, can rest easy, as the PAL version is not as rare and commands only a fraction of this astonishing price.

accessories that wouldn't even advance beyond the drawing board if pitched today.

If the thought of shouting at your TV isn't enough to entice you towards Nintendo's creation, maybe the import side of the system can win you over, with many Famicom-exclusive add-ons and releases available. For example, the Famicom Disk System attached itself underneath the console, introducing a new disk-based media format upon which software could be supplied. One of the most notable and exclusive arrivals on this new medium, which missed out on a cartridge release in Japan, was *Bubble Bobble*. The list of unusual additions continues with the likes of a keyboard combined with software to program your very own games, 3D glasses, karaoke systems, and even a modem to bring the vintage hardware online.

While the majority of these obscurities were limited to Japan, the UK also had its fair share of intriguing, albeit unlicensed, additions. British software developer Codemasters released a handful of games for the NES, all of which were released without an official licence. Without the authentic development hardware, an unauthorised method to bypass the system's security was crafted, allowing games like *Dizzy* and *Cosmic Spacehead* to make their Nintendo debuts. Codemasters later went on to ruffle Nintendo's feathers further by manufacturing an unofficial cheat cartridge known as the Game Genie. This device was quickly accused of being a violation of copyright law by Nintendo, resulting in lawsuits arriving on Codemasters' doorstep. Much to everyone's surprise, the company managed to win the courts over and was allowed to continue selling the device. While Codemasters would later gain Nintendo's permission to release games on its consoles, it enjoyed a free ride on the back of the NES's success for many years.

As we reminisce over Nintendo's 8-bit console and how it previously held the record for the bestselling system of all time, it's only natural to assume that items are readily available. While this statement might hold true for the likes of *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*, acquiring a complete PAL NES library is a collector's worst nightmare, due to many publishers deciding to limit which games were released in each country. To put this into perspective, you'd need to cruise to Spain to grab *City Connection*, go globe-trotting towards Australia to secure *Aussie Rules Footy*, enjoy the sights of Scandinavia while seizing *Mr Gimmick*, stop by France for *Lethal Weapon* and then return to the UK to locate *Mario Is Missing*. To make matters worse, *Phantom Air Mission* and *Snowboard Challenge*, two incredibly elusive Spanish exclusives, are rarities that could put the infamous American gold Nintendo World Championships cartridge to shame. If anything, the PAL NES collection could be the hardest of them all to obtain.

With all of this in mind, it has to be said that although the PAL NES library holds an incredible amount of depth and enjoyment within, it is by far the most daunting. Should you be able to look beyond the challenges ahead and have the finances to foot the bill, you'll be set for one of the most thrilling retro gaming hunts you could ever imagine.

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THE PERIPHERALS



» ROB has since made cameos in games as varied as *Kirby's Dream Land 3*, *Pikmin 2*, *Mario Kart DS* and *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

» ROB's complicated-looking accessories don't make him appear particularly accessible to play with.

Robotic Operating Buddy

If there is anything Nintendo is known for, it's innovation. The Japanese gaming giant has always known how we want to enjoy our games, years in advance. Although the masterminds there are usually on the money, they have occasionally missed the mark and quietly swept it under the carpet. Sadly, ROB falls into this category of tried and tested gimmicks.

The Robotic Operating Buddy was Nintendo's big idea for 1985. Understanding the limitations of videogames being two-dimensional forms of entertainment, Nintendo released the Family Robot, as it was known in Japan, to break down the fourth wall. Once it was placed somewhere in front of the TV, this unusual character would await commands from the on-screen action. Up, down, left, right, open and close were the motions to which this mechanical being would respond – more than enough for Nintendo to sculpt a game around it.

Gyromite was the first title released under the 'Robot Series' label to utilise this new hardware. Our new robotic friend was set to become our second player, once equipped with the vast array of gear included. This attire consisted of a pair of gripping gloves, two spinning gyroscopes, an attachment to hold the second control pad and press the A and B buttons, a motor to spin the gyroscopes, and two empty trays to deposit the inactive gyroscopes. This abundant selection of robot accessories, in turn, would supposedly create the new experience we had all been waiting for.

Despite the complicated setup, the idea behind the robot's input was dead simple. *Gyromite*'s gameplay required you to manipulate elevating red and blue pillars, which could only be achieved by input from the second control pad. As the supporting controller was firmly lodged in one of the robot's attachments, it was up to you to send the right on-screen commands to ROB to clear your path. This was accomplished by rotating the robot in the direction of the gyroscope spinner, closing his grip on a gyroscope, moving back around to the attachment holding the control pad, and then lowering the spinning gyroscope onto one of the coloured concave buttons. Upon doing so, the weight of the gyroscope would press down on the lever, forcing the attachment to press a button on the second control pad and making the matching coloured pillar on screen traverse in the opposite direction. Although this process was straightforward enough, getting the commands to ROB was the hard part. Roaming enemies on the screen made you think twice about pausing your movement to communicate beyond the television.

Although Nintendo did release another game under the Robot Series (*Stack-Up*), the Robotic Operating Buddy became a short-lived one-trick pony. Whether this was down to the lack of directions in which to expand gameplay or simply due to poor sales, ROB has lived to tell his tale by not only becoming a cult icon, but also by making various cameo appearances in Nintendo games through the years.

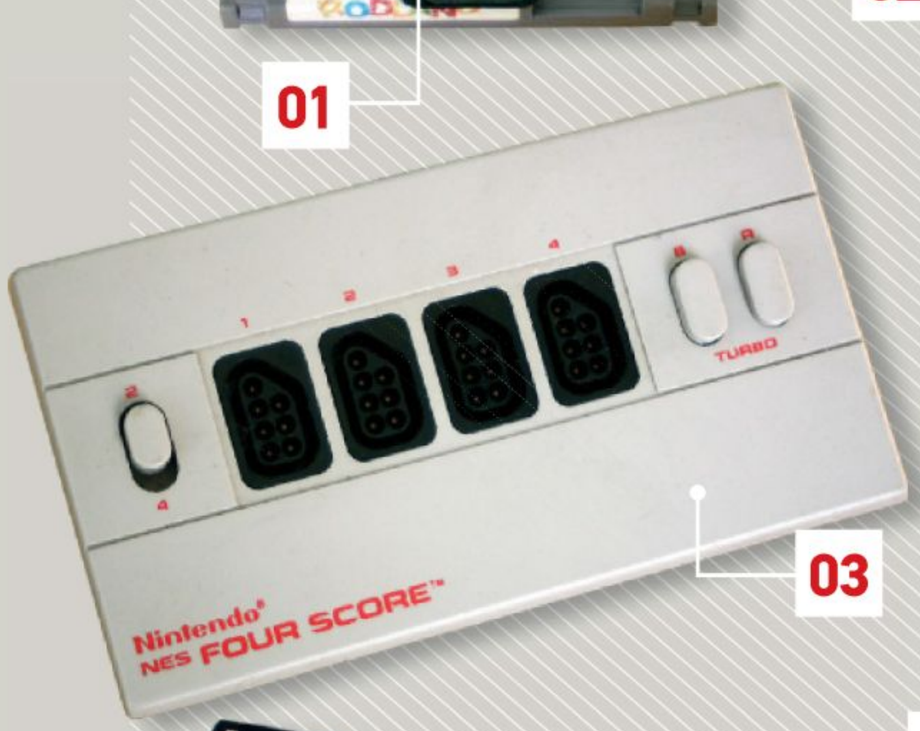
...AND THE REST



01



02



03



04

05



06



07



01. Game Genie

■ Galoob's efforts to blow NES games wide open with memory-hacking cheats were met with a legal battle with Nintendo over what the console manufacturer considered a violation of copyright law. As Nintendo eventually lost the case against the Game Genie, gamers have since been enjoying the unauthorised offerings of Mario's moonwalking ability and Link's never-ending supply of rupees.

02. U-Force

■ Although motion controls didn't begin to materialise in a big way until 2006, Brøderbund took a stab at creating a futuristic hands-free controller in 1989. This device used perpendicular infra-red sensor panels to relay the player's physical movement to the NES. Despite a forward-thinking approach, the U-Force would only recognise the occasional interaction before becoming a bargain bin special.

03. Four Score

■ Long before the Nintendo 64 sported a wealth of controller ports, the NES had its very own party-hosting device. With a selection of games supporting Nintendo's much earlier answer to multiplayer gaming, the Four Score doubled up the available controller ports, despite an inconceivable tangle of wires.

04. NES Advantage

■ With countless arcade games being ported to the NES, it made perfect sense to bring the true coin-op experience home. The Advantage arcade stick was Nintendo's answer to tactile controls with an authentic feel, without the need for a pocket full of change.

05. Family Fun Fitness Pad

■ In the days before *Wii Fit* branded videogames as a healthy activity, Bandai attempted to get us off our backsides and on our feet. Using similar technology to the later *Dance Dance Revolution* mat, the Family Fun Fitness Pad, renamed the Power Pad in the US, took a real beating from the bundled *Track & Field*-style games in *Athletic World*.

06. Turbo Touch 360

■ Where control pads are concerned, the Turbo Touch 360 is quite possibly the worst of all time. Despite being backed by a promising ad campaign, promoting its touch sensor for "effortless movement in all directions", you'd be lucky to get any response out of this technology.

07. Power Glove

■ "Now you're playing with power." At least that's what they hoped you'd think as you slipped on the Power Glove. This wearable control pad relied heavily on ultrasonic speakers to read your arm's movement, albeit very poorly. Even after an obtrusive placement in the film *The Wizard*, this accessory failed to succeed.

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The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Super Mario Bros 3

■ Arguably the greatest *Mario* game to date, *Super Mario Bros 3* raised the bar on previous outings and revolutionised the platform genre.

Mr Gimmick

■ Underestimating the cutesy appeal of *Mr Gimmick* will be your first mistake in this challenging platformer. Underneath that adorable exterior is one of Sunsoft's finest yet trickiest creations.



The Legend Of Zelda

■ Link's first outing paved the way for one of the greatest series of all time, and it also became a benchmark for many other adventure games to follow.

Street Gangs

■ More commonly known today by its American title of *River City Ransom*, the cast of the *Kunio-kun* series returned in a no-holds-barred RPG brawler.

Mega Man 2

■ With a rewired circuit and a host of upgrades available, the blue bomber had returned! *Mega Man 2* not only packed a punch in gameplay, but left behind one of the greatest soundtracks to date.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Super Mario Bros 2

■ After Nintendo USA deemed the Japanese sequel to *Super Mario Bros* too difficult, *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic* was redesigned to feature characters from the *Mario* series. Although not a true *Mario* game, *Super Mario Bros 2* was a fantastic platformer in its own right, only made better by the arrival of the plumbers.



DuckTales

■ Despite being created for the youth of yesteryear, *DuckTales* is still one of the most enjoyable NES platformers today. While this could be said for the majority of Capcom's output under the Disney brand, Scrooge McDuck's money-pilfering adventures have stood the test of time thanks to the clear inspiration from the *Mega Man* series.



Ufouria: The Saga

■ While many would turn to *Metroid* for their non-linear side-scrolling explorations, little do they know that they're overlooking another shining example under the Sunsoft name. When Bop-Louie's friends suffer from amnesia after stumbling into a large chasm, it's up to you to restore the memories of the residents of Ufouria.



Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse

■ After an embarrassing first sequel riddled with frustrating dialogue boxes and time-consuming transitions between day and night, *Castlevania III* rectified any issues. The third and final *Castlevania* game on the 8-bit system was a more than memorable title with plenty of challenges within.



Punch-Out!!

■ The 1987 boxing simulator re-imagined the sporting genre by introducing a more tactical yet arcade-based approach. Button-bashers were quickly penalised and made to focus on mastering Little Mac's sweeps and blows. That said, using these skills against the cameo appearance of Mike Tyson was a challenge in its own right.

TOP IMPORT GAMES



Dragon Warrior IV

■ In an attempt to shake up the RPG genre, *Dragon Warrior IV* introduced a handful of disjointed chapters, which would eventually unite for the grand finale.

Final Fantasy

■ With Hironobu Sakaguchi giving everything he had towards one last effort in the games industry, his work paid off as his creation laid down the foundations for many more adventures.

The Krion Conquest

■ What do you get if you sprinkle a dash of magical power upon the *Mega Man* series? *The Krion Conquest*. This release was by no means shy in showcasing its admiration for the blue bomber.

Crystalis

■ Although *The Legend Of Zelda* stole the limelight for the action-adventure genre, SNK's *Crystalis* came astonishingly close to taking centre stage away from Link.

Bubble Bobble Part 2

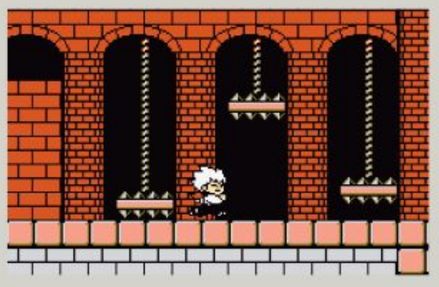
■ Never released in the arcades, this attempt to offer the dino duo a sequel was an awe-inspiring hit featuring strikingly bright visuals and an enhanced take on the original.

IMPORT THESE NEXT



Yume Penguin Monogatari

■ While most games encourage gobbling up any leftover food, the aim of *Yume Penguin Monogatari* is to lose as much weight as possible to win back your significant other. Although incredibly easy, the platformer combined with a few shmup levels is a refreshing change from the fast-paced action we all indulge in.



Akumajo Special: Boku Dracula-kun

■ Known as *Kid Dracula*, this adorable Famicom platformer is, in fact, a relatively obscure parody of the *Castlevania* series. Instead of assuming the role of Simon Belmont, you must take control of a super-deformed Dracula and throw the dinosaur Galamoth off your throne.



Bio Miracle Bokutte Upa

■ Unfairly dubbed as 'Baby Mario' by countless online sources, Konami's sickeningly adorable adventure has much more to it than its perceived attempt to explore the plumber's early days. With nearly every level resembling, or at least containing, various edible elements, you'll find your stomach rumbling as you progress.



Super Mario Bros 2

■ Although it was suggested to be too complex for anyone outside Japan, the true sequel to *Super Mario Bros* became a Japan-only secret – at least until the arrival of *Super Mario All-Stars*. In all fairness, the increase in difficulty between the two games was rather considerable and incredibly daunting, justifying the decision from above.



Moon Crystal

■ Taking the best mechanisms from Jordan Mechner's *Prince Of Persia*, the little-known platform adventure *Moon Crystal* not only offered solid gameplay but beautiful animation by 8-bit standards. Despite being a potential bestseller, the product of the previously unknown developer, Hect, remained a Japanese exclusive.

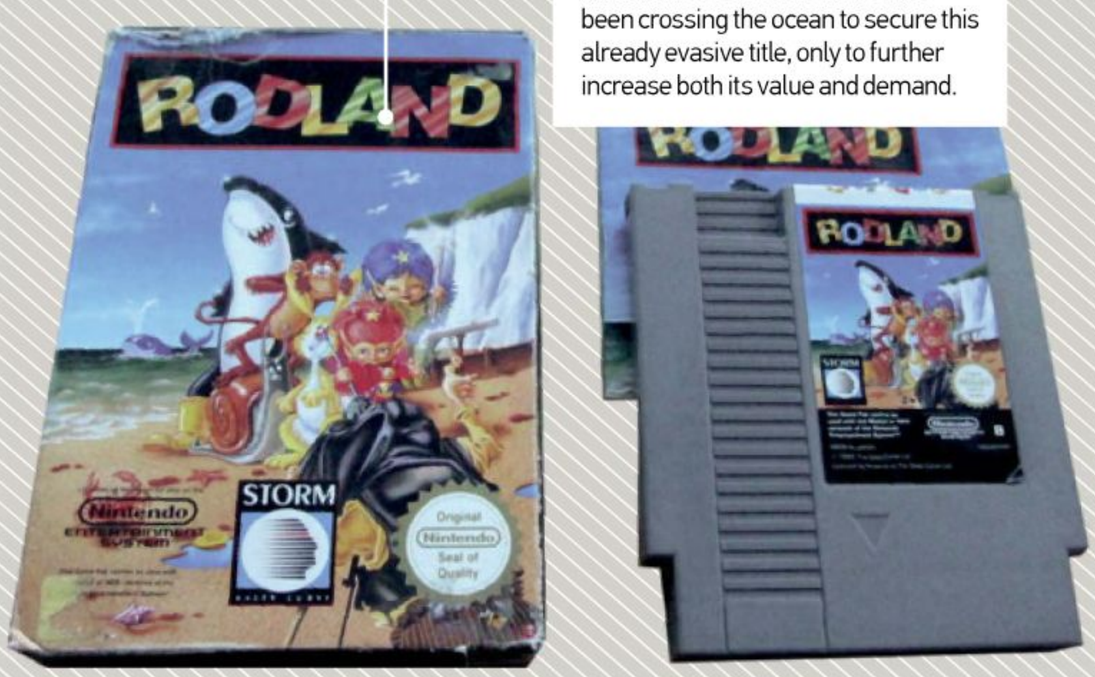
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The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Rodland

■ Having skipped a release in America, US collectors have since been crossing the ocean to secure this already evasive title, only to further increase both its value and demand.



Phantom Air Mission

■ With a stupidly limited release in Spain, this unplayable and almost laughable attempt at bringing flight simulation to the NES was quickly forgotten.



Snowboard Challenge

■ Also hailing in very limited numbers from Spain, the European localisation of *Heavy Shreddin'*, titled *Snowboard Challenge*, made next to no impact on gamers whatsoever.



RC Pro-Am II

■ While many of the rarest videogames often attract flies, *RC Pro-Am II* stands out as a fantastic Scandinavia-exclusive sequel to one of the best NES racers.



The Trolls In Crazyland

■ Although the popular fluorescent-haired dolls could once be found in every child's grasp, their 1992 outing on the NES has since become a considerable rarity.



GET THESE NEXT



City Connection

■ If the trend of Spanish exclusives is becoming too much, look away now. *City Connection* is yet another scarce addition to the list of Spain's finest offerings. The arcade port of this bizarre car-based platformer follows the original very closely, leaving many PAL gamers puzzled as to why it wasn't sold in greater quantities.



Solomon's Key 2

■ Anyone who had grown fond of the original *Solomon's Key* was in for a surprise once the follow-up arrived. Tecmo decided to reinvent the series with a prequel by dropping the block-mastering gameplay for that of a puzzle involving the elements. Germany, Scandinavia and Spain are where this oddity can be found.



Super Mario Bros & Tetris & Nintendo World Cup

■ While you wouldn't expect a common game bundled with the NES to be here, this is a secret among die-hard collectors. There was an extremely rare boxed version released, which has quickly become the most expensive piece of Nintendo-branded cardboard around.



Darkman

■ The movie adaptation of the 1990 superhero film was developed by the British studio Ocean, only to find itself released exclusively in Spain. Going by the rest of its extensive catalogue, *Darkman* was far from one of Ocean's better offerings, perhaps explaining why this elusive release was never sold on the turf where it was developed.



The Flintstones: The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak

■ Americans were unlucky in that *The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak* was limited to a rental release, but Europeans have faced just as much difficulty in locating retail versions. Those hoping to obtain Fred Flintstone's second adventure need to look towards Italy and Scandinavia.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL NES game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection





What makes it so special?

■ The Miracle Piano Teaching System included a standalone electronic keyboard that could interact with the NES. The bundled tutoring cartridge offered a more enjoyable game-led approach to learning the piano, guiding you from nursery rhymes all the way to one of Beethoven's symphonies.



What makes it hard to find?

■ Upon release, the Miracle Piano held a retail price of £249. This price tag was too much for gamers and an octave too high for budding musicians. As very few hybrid pianist-gamers were willing to make this investment, the revolutionary product from The Software Toolworks got left behind.



Why is it so expensive?

■ With only a handful of gamers making a purchase in 1990, few remain in circulation. This limited number, however, is only half the problem, as the mandatory cables and original packaging are often missing. The majority of these elusive items are firmly lodged in collectors' shrines.

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Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™
NES VERSION

The Collector's Guide

THE PAL NES GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN



A Boy And His Blob: Trouble In Blobolonia

- Action In New York
- Addams Family, The
- Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt, The
- Adventures Of Lolo
- Adventures Of Lolo 3
- Adventures Of Rad Gravity, The
- Airwolf
- Aladdin
- Alpha Mission
- Anticipation
- Arch Rivals
- Asterix
- Astyanax
- Athletic World
- Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes
- Aussie Rules Footy
- Balloon Fight
- Banana Prince
- Barker Bill's Trick Shooting
- Batman Returns
- Batman: Return Of The Joker
- Battle Of Olympus, The
- Battletoads
- Battletoads & Double Dragon
- Best Of The Best Championship Karate
- Bionic Commando
- Blaster Master
- Blue Shadow
- Blues Brothers, The
- Boulder Dash
- Boy And His Blob: Trouble In Blobolonia, A
- Bubble Bobble
- California Games
- Capcom's Gold Medal Challenge '92
- Captain America And The Avengers
- Castlevania
- Castlevania II: Simon's Quest
- Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse
- Championship Rally
- Chevaliers Du Zodiaque: La Legende D'Or, Les
- Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers
- Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers 2
- City Connection
- Clu Clu Land
- Cobra Triangle
- Darkman
- Days Of Thunder
- Déjà Vu
- Devil World
- Die Hard
- Digger T Rock: The Legend Of The Lost City
- Donkey Kong
- Donkey Kong 3
- Donkey Kong Classics
- Donkey Kong Jr
- Donkey Kong Jr Math
- Double Dragon
- Double Dragon II
- Double Dragon III
- Double Dribble
- Dr Mario
- Dragon Ball
- Dropzone
- Duck Hunt
- DuckTales
- DuckTales 2
- Dynablaster
- Eliminator Boat Duel
- Elite
- Excitebike
- Faxanadu
- Flintstones: The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak, The
- Galaga
- Galaxy 5000: Racing In The 51st Century
- Gargoyle's Quest II
- Gauntlet II
- Goal! 2
- Golf
- Goonies II, The
- Gradius
- Jack Nicklaus' Major Championship Golf
- Guardian Legend, The
- Guerilla War
- Gumshoe
- Gun.Smoke
- Gyromite
- Hammerin' Harry
- Hogan's Alley
- Home Alone 2: Lost In New York
- Hoops
- Hudson Hawk
- Ice Climber
- Ikari Warriors
- Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
- Indy Heat



Gauntlet

- Iron Tank
- Isolated Warrior
- Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu
- Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper, The
- Jimmy Connors Tennis
- Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja
- Jungle Book, The
- Jurassic Park
- Kick Off
- Kid Icarus
- Kirby's Adventure
- Konami Hyper Soccer
- Krusty's Fun House
- Kung Fu
- Legend Of Prince Valiant, The
- Legend Of Zelda, The
- Lemmings
- Lethal Weapon
- Life Force: Salamander
- Little Ninja Brothers
- Little Samson
- Low G Man
- Maniac Mansion
- Marble Madness
- Mario & Yoshi
- Mario Bros
- Mario Is Missing
- Mega Man
- Mega Man 2
- Mega Man 3
- Mega Man 4
- Mega Man 5
- Metal Gear
- Metroid
- Mighty BombJack
- Mighty Final Fight
- Miracle Piano Teaching System, The
- Mission: Impossible
- Mr Gimmick
- NES Open Tournament Golf
- Nigel Mansell's World Championship
- Noah's Ark
- North & South
- Operation Wolf
- Pac-Man
- Panic Restaurant
- Paperboy
- Parasol Stars: Rainbow Islands II
- Parodius
- Phantom Air Mission
- Pinball Quest
- Popeye
- Predator
- Prince Of Persia
- Prisoners Of War
- Probotector
- Probotector II: Return Of The Evil Forces
- Punch-Out!!
- Puzznic
- RC Pro-Am

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.

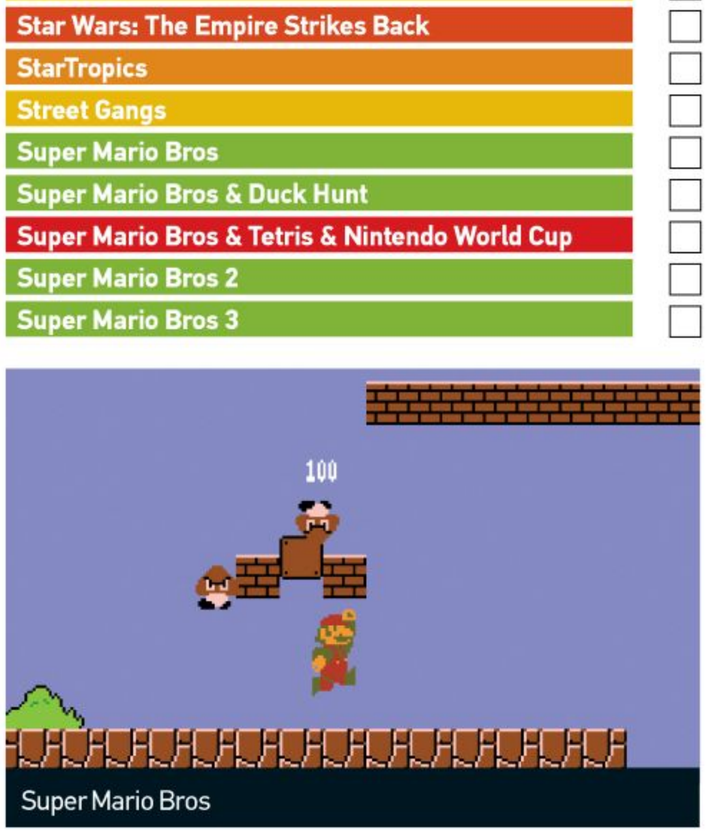
RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

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.

- RC Pro-Am II
- Rackets & Rivals
- Rad Racer
- Rainbow Islands
- Rampart
- RoadBlasters
- RoboCop
- RoboCop 2
- RoboCop 3
- Rockin' Kats
- Rodland
- Rollergames
- Roundball
- Schöne Und Das Biest (Beauty & the Beast)
- Schtroumpfs, Les (Smurfs, The)
- Shadow Warriors
- Shadow Warriors II
- Shadowgate
- Shatterhand
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons: Bart vs The Space Mutants, The
- Simpsons: Bart vs The World, The
- Simpsons: Bartman Meets Radioactive Man, The
- Skate Or Die
- Slalom
- Smash TV
- Snake Rattle 'N' Roll
- Snake's Revenge
- Snow Brothers
- Snowboard Challenge
- Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warship
- Solomon's Key
- Solomon's Key 2
- Solstice: The Quest For The Staff Of Demnos
- Spy vs Spy
- Stack-Up
- Stadium Events
- Star Force
- Star Trek: 25th Anniversary
- Star Wars
- Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- StarTropics
- Street Gangs
- Super Mario Bros
- Super Mario Bros & Duck Hunt
- Super Mario Bros & Tetris & Nintendo World Cup
- Super Mario Bros 2
- Super Mario Bros 3



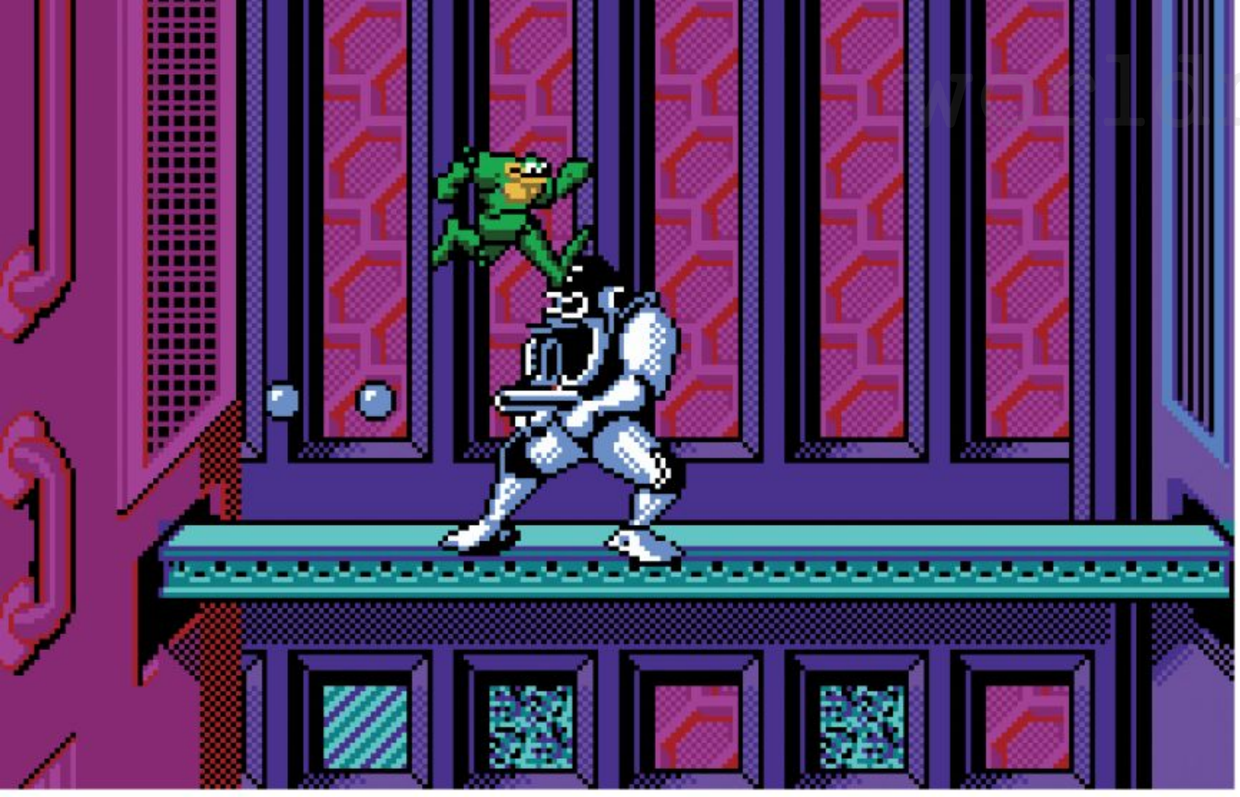
Super Mario Bros


Wizards & Warriors

- Super Turrican
- Swamp Thing
- Swords & Serpents
- Tecmo Cup Football Game
- Tecmo World Cup Soccer
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles II: The Arcade Game
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: Tournament Fighters
- Tennis
- Terminator, The
- Tetris
- Tetris 2
- Time Lord
- Tiny Toon Adventures
- Tiny Toon Adventures Cartoon Workshop
- To The Earth
- Top Gun
- Top Gun: The Second Mission
- Total Recall
- Track & Field II
- Track & Field In Barcelona
- Trog!
- Trojan
- Trolls In Crazyland, The
- Turbo Racing
- Ufouria: The Saga
- Ultimate Air Combat
- Urban Champion
- Volleyball
- Wario's Woods
- Werewolf: The Last Warrior
- Wild Gunman
- Willow
- Wizards & Warriors
- Wizards & Warriors II: Iron Sword
- Wizards & Warriors III
- World Champ
- World Wrestling
- Wrath Of The Black Manta
- Wrecking Crew
- WWF King Of The Ring
- WWF WrestleMania
- WWF WrestleMania Challenge
- WWF WrestleMania: Steel Cage Challenge
- Xevious
- Yoshi's Cookie
- Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link
- Zen: Intergalactic Ninja



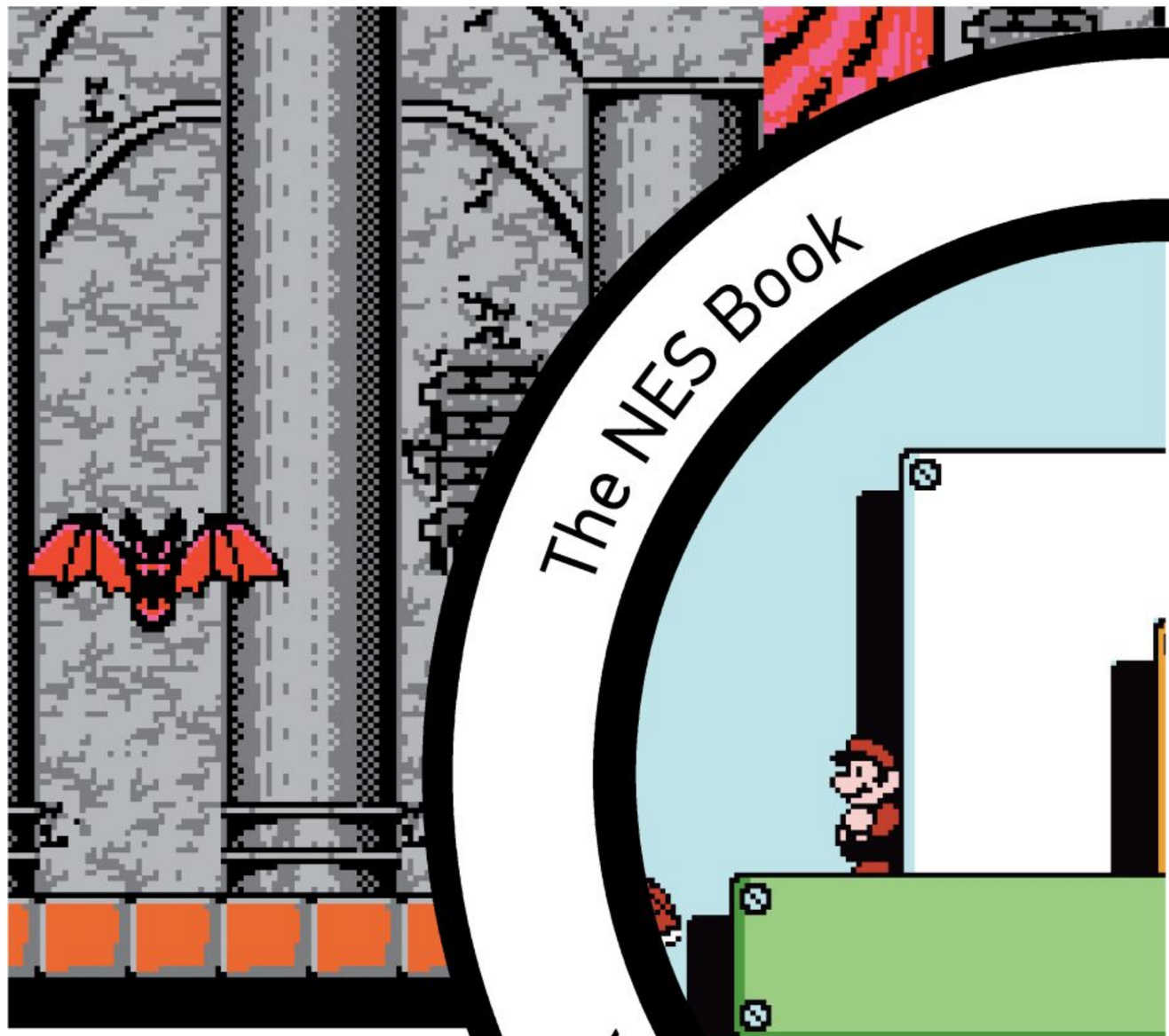
The Legend of Zelda



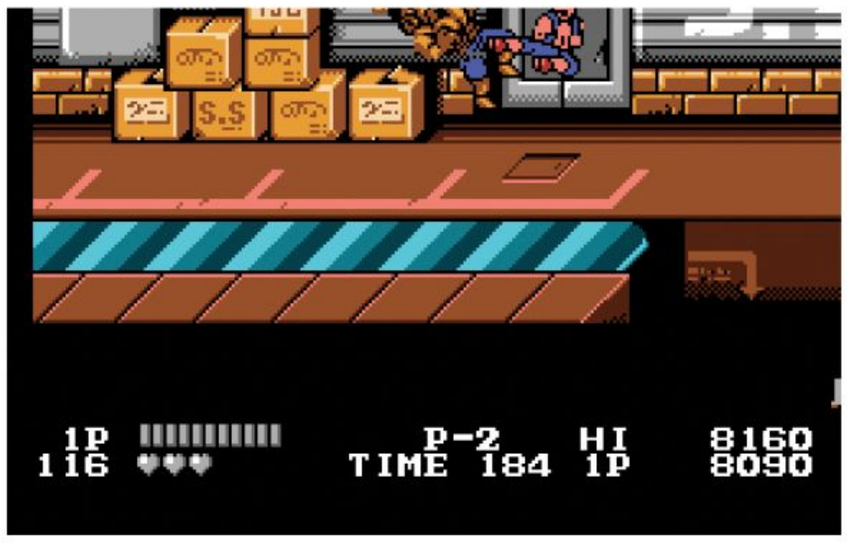



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The Master System Book



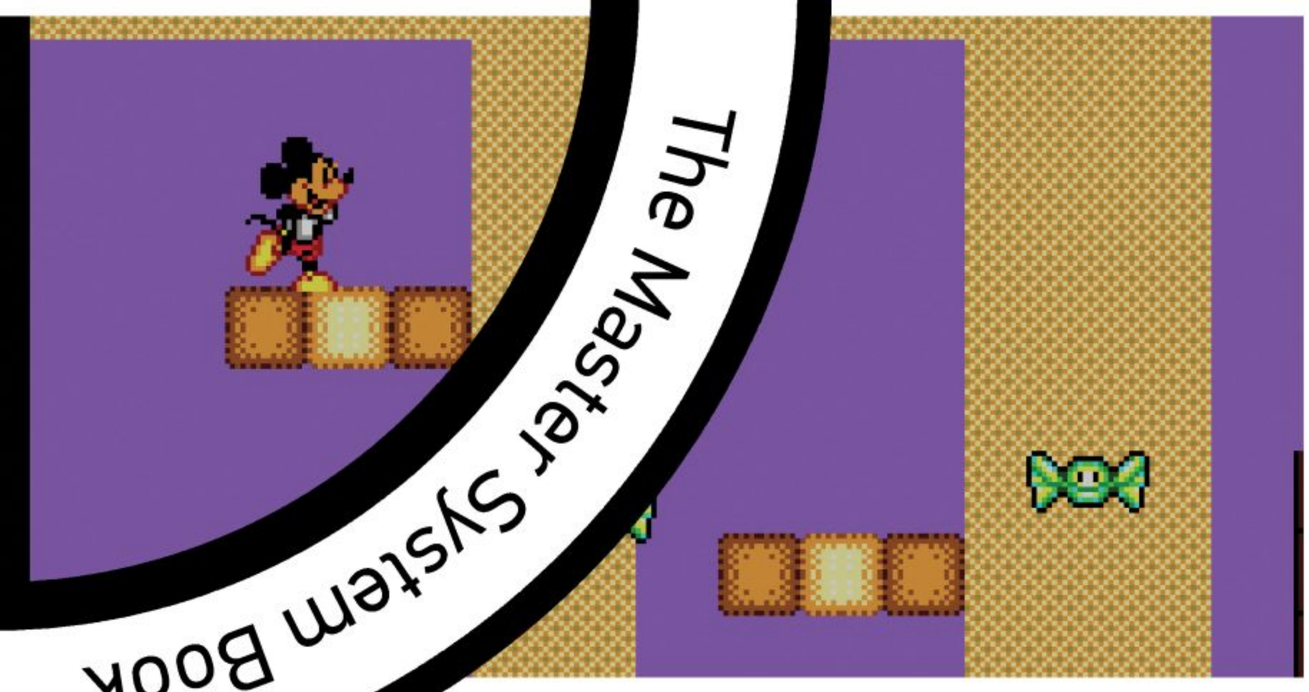


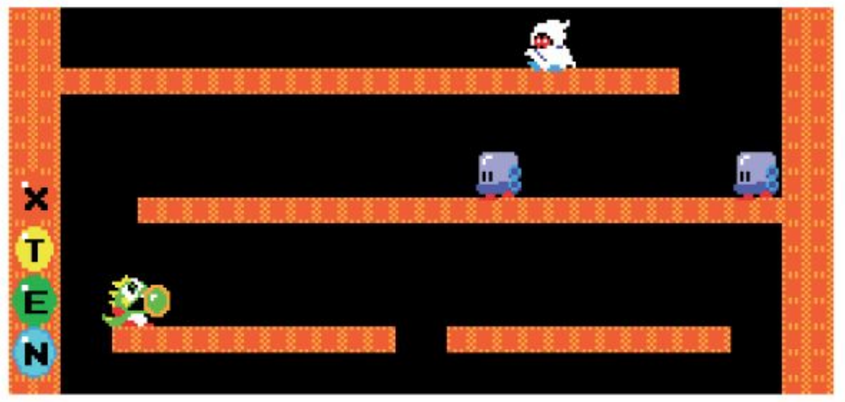


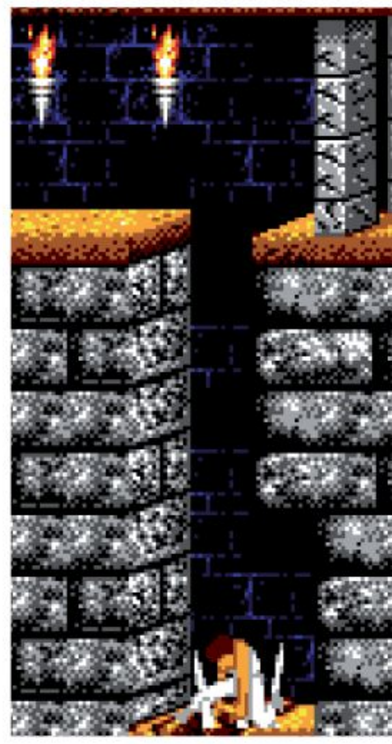


















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OLD!

For all players

The Master System

The Sega Book

From the makers of retro* GAMER



Legendary games • The hardware revisited • The epic story

Welcome to

The Master System Book

Sega's Master System is a misunderstood console that doesn't get the love it deserves. This misplaced loyalty for Sega's machine could be down to the fact that it never secured the same success in Japan and America as it did in Europe, or it could be down to people simply not realising how good a console it actually was.

In addition to featuring some extremely impressive arcade conversions in the form of *Space Harrier*, *Operation Wolf*, *Shinobi* and *Bubble Bobble*, it also delivered plenty of original content as well. *Phantasy Star*, *Zillion*, *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* and *Castle Of Illusion* were just a few of the original games that harnessed the power of Sega's 8-bit console, while it's technology would be largely used to form the inspiration of Sega's handheld, the Game Gear. Characters such as Alex Kidd, Wonder Boy and Asterix all had success on the console, as did Sonic The Hedgehog, who often had completely original games that were wildly different to the Mega Drive counterparts.

To celebrate Sega's console, we've not only selected our very best features, but also added several new ones, making this an essential tome for anyone that loved Sega's machine.



In association with retro GAMER magazine

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The Master System Book

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Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
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Facebook: www.facebook.com/ImagineBookazines

Publishing Director
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Printed by
William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by
Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
Tel 0203 148 3300 www.marketforce.co.uk

Distributed in Australia by
Network Services (a division of Bauer Media Group), Level 21 Civic Tower, 66-68 Goulburn Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia Tel +61 2 8667 5288

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ISBN 978 1785 460 180

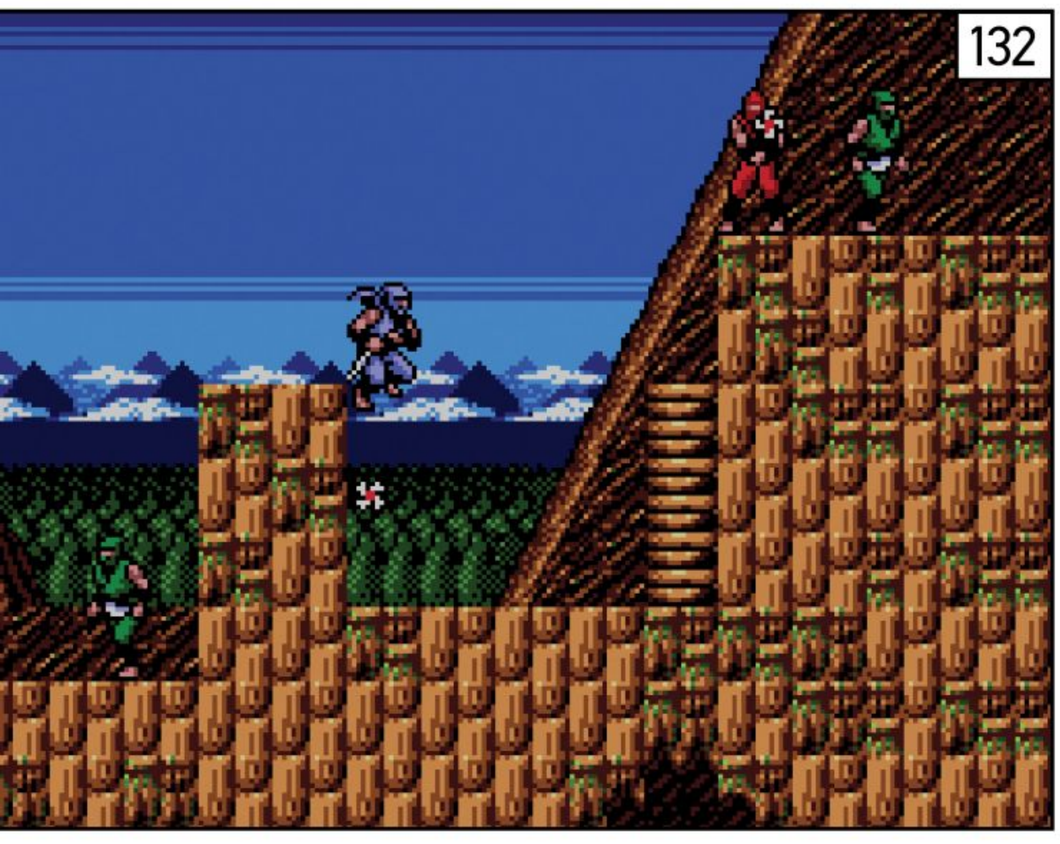
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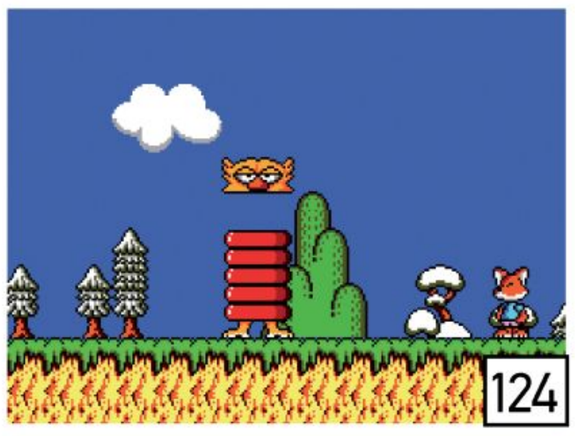
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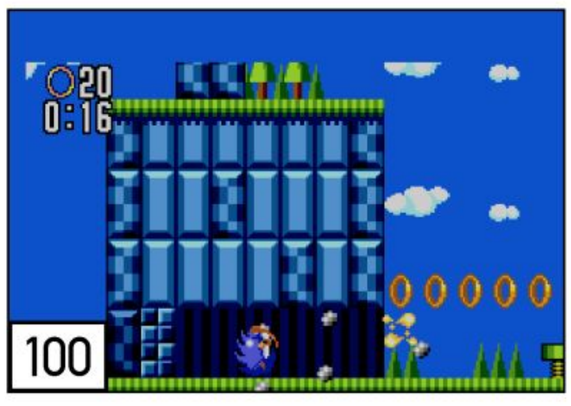




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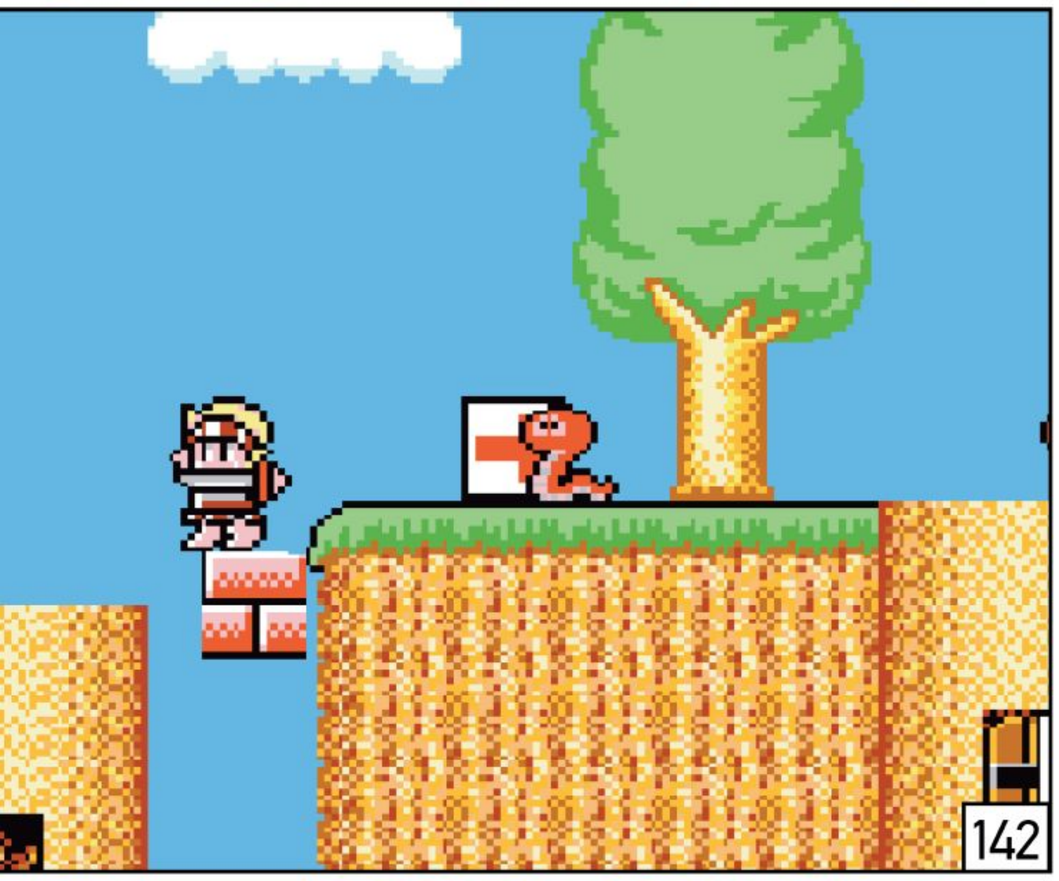
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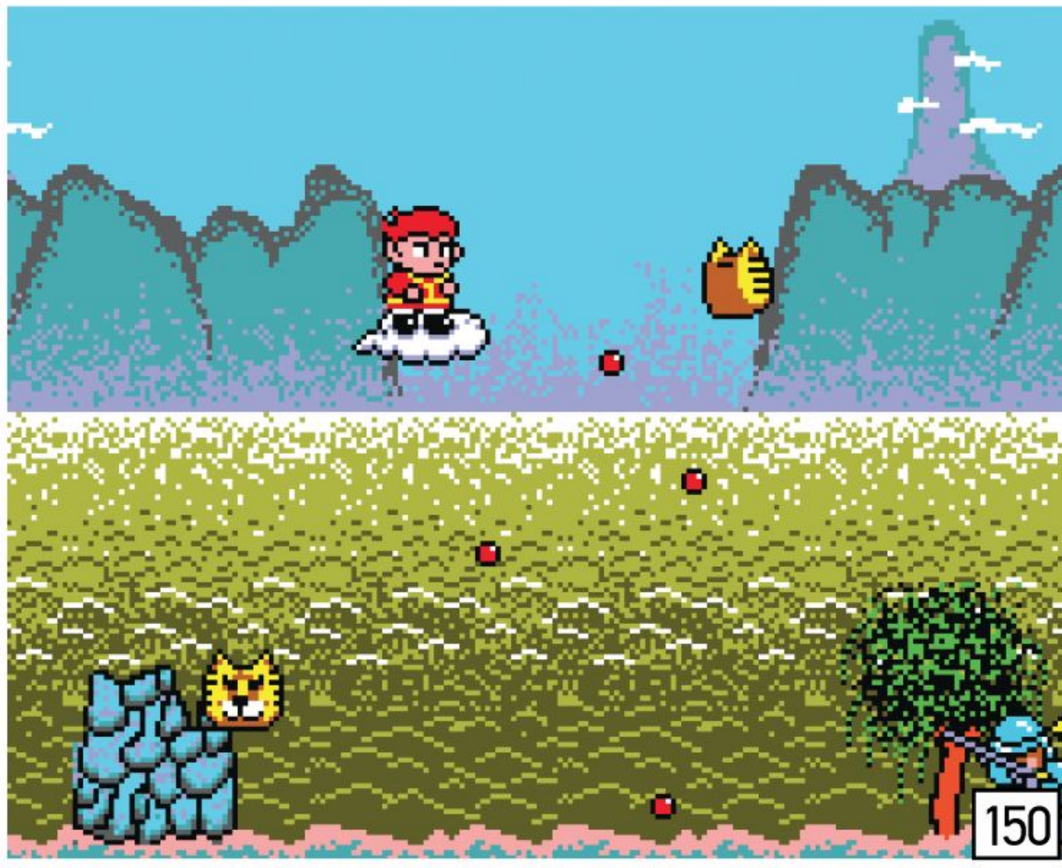




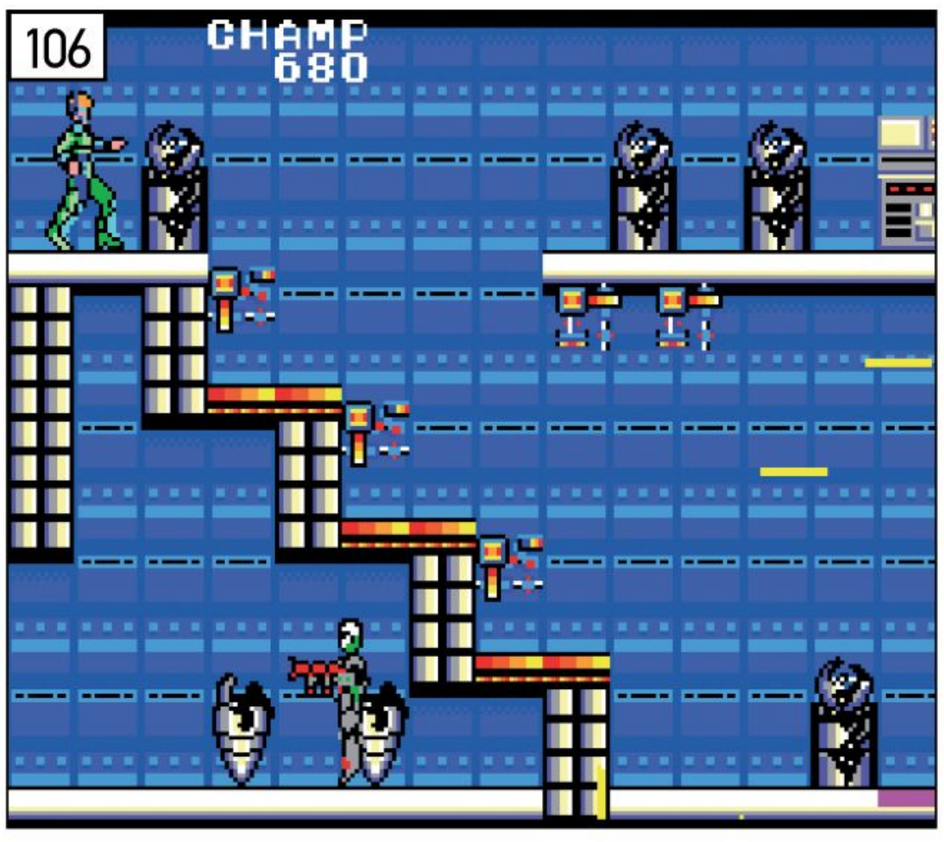














OPERATION WOLF

SET PHASERS TO FUN!



- **PUBLISHER** SEGA
- **YEAR:** 1991
- **GENRE:** ARCADE ACTION
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MASTER SYSTEM



HISTORY

With Sega having so many classic arcade games of its own, it perhaps surprising to learn that some of the Master System's best conversions were actually of non-Sega games. Nevertheless, *Bubble Bobble*, *The New Zealand Story*, *R-Type*, *Gauntlet* and *Klax* are just a few of the gems that were a massive improvement over Sega's own arcade conversions (which were still very good) and should be in every Master System owner's collection. If we were held at gunpoint however and was forced to chose just one arcade conversion for Sega's 8-bit console, we'd easily pick the excellent *Operation Wolf*, as it's everything you want from a great arcade port.

Virtually everything about the Master System conversion of Operation Wolf is absolutely stunning, making it an amazingly accurate representation of the original arcade game. It sports fantastic chunky visuals that effortlessly capture the style of Taito's, while the music is also of a very high standard. All the coin-op levels are included and there is plenty of chaotic action onscreen, ensuring the gameplay remains fast and frantic throughout. Best of all though is the fact it uses the Master System's lightgun, which allows for some extremely accurate shooting. You can even use the second control pad to activate grenades, ensuring you're never troubled by the many tanks and helicopters the game throws at you (we recommend you trigger rockets by hitting the second pad with your feet).

While it's possible to play with a standard joypad, it's nowhere near as much fun, due to the fast, erratic nature of the cursor. It's still playable, but games like *Operation Wolf* lose something when you're not using the proper peripherals. Yes there's very little depth to it and it won't take too long to complete, but that doesn't matter when it's offering so much fun. If we wanted to be really picky we could make the argument that you don't get as many larger soldiers running directly in front of you like in the arcade original, but that's just us being super picky. *Operation Wolf* is a fantastic Master System port that makes the NES alternative look very silly indeed.



200

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Year released: 1986 (US), 1987 (UK and Japan)

Original price: £99 (Core Pack)

Buy it now for: £15+

Associated magazines: Mean Machines, Computer+Video Games

Why the Master System was great: With a far brighter colour pallette than Nintendo's NES and some superb arcade conversions, the Master System proved to be a cracking purchase if you were a die-hard Sega fan

MASTER SYSTEM

SEGA MAY NOT COMPETE IN THE HOME-CONSOLE ARENA ANY MORE, BUT ITS MASTER SYSTEM ARGUABLY PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN INTRODUCING MANY GAMERS TO THE CONCEPT OF THE 'HOME ARCADE'. WE TAKE A FURTIVE LOOK AT ONE OF SEGA'S FIRST FORAYS INTO THE DOMESTIC HARDWARE MARKET



The Sega Master System is something of an enigma. One of the most powerful home consoles of its time, the machine is barely worthy of a footnote when it comes to deconstructing the history of the American and Japanese gaming industries. It sank almost without trace in these two key territories, failing to make even a dent in the seemingly impregnable armour of Nintendo's NES (or Famicom). However, in other parts of the world – most notably Europe and South America – it was a tremendous success, winning hordes of fans and establishing Sega's reputation as a first-rate purveyor of arcade smash hits in the process.

Founded in 1940, Sega (an abbreviation of 'SErvice GAmes') initially gained renown for its unique brand of automated coin-operated arcade games. Having plenty of experience in the field of amusements, the company was perfectly poised to compete when 'true' arcade titles like *Pong* and *Space Invaders* started to appear. Thanks to games like *Future Spy* and *Zaxxon*, Sega soon garnered a reputation as something of an expert when it came to arcade thrills and spills.

As the Eighties began to unfold, the videogame industry seemed unstoppable. Encouraged by the sterling performance of its coin-op division, and the sheer amount of money American company Atari seemed to be making from the VCS/2600, Sega decided to enter the home entertainment arena. Released in 1983, the SG-1000 was Sega's first attempt at cracking the console market. However, it was not the triumph the company had hoped for. To make matters significantly worse Atari managed to successfully flush the US home videogame market down the toilet in the same year, causing the first worldwide videogame crash. Sega's assets were hit badly in the ensuing fallout, but salvation came from American David Rosen (who had previous ties with Sega) and Japanese businessman Hayao Nakayama. These two men stopped the firm from collapsing into the gaping hole created by Atari's poor management.

After a period of stabilisation, Sega was purchased in 1984 by Japanese corporation CSK and subtly re-christened 'Sega Enterprises'. Despite the abject failure of the SG-1000, plans were made for a successor in the shape of the updated SG-1000 'Mark II'. Sega, like fellow Japanese company Nintendo, knew that although the

INSTANT EXPERT

A clone of the SG-1000 Mark I was produced by Telegames that could also play ColecoVision software.

The Master System possessed a pair of 3D Glasses that simulated depth of vision by using a shutter system on the right and left lenses.

The Power Base converter allows you to play Master System games on a Mega Drive console, although it acts only as a 'pass through' device, as all the necessary hardware to run Master System software is already included inside the 16-bit machine.

The first SG-1000 did make it out of Japan, albeit in small quantities. It was distributed in Italy and Spain, as well as a few other countries.

The Japan-only computer SG-3000 is actually a SG-1000 Mark II with a built-in keyboard. A keyboard could be added to the SG-1000 to bring it in to line with the SG-3000.

Tec Toy released several games in Brazil, like *Street Fighter II* and *Dynamite Headdy*, long after the Master System had ceased to be a force elsewhere in the world.

The Brazil-only Master System Compact uses a wireless RF signal to connect to the television. A pink version was also released called the Master System Girl.

The final commercial Japanese release for the Master System/Mark III was 1989's *Bomber Raid*.

Built-in software was often a feature of Master System hardware, with games such as *Hang On*, *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, *Sonic The Hedgehog* and the famous 'hidden maze game' (turn on the machine without a cartridge in the slot and press up and both buttons at the same time) all being included inside different variants of the console.

Sega first used Opa-Opa from *Fantasy Zone* as its mascot, but Alex Kidd was soon drafted in as a replacement. Kidd was popular – there was even a Japanese board game based on his exploits – but he too would be dropped in favour of a certain blue hedgehog.

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MASTER SYSTEM



» Some early titles were released in both cartridge and card forms, with the latter usually being sold at a budget price. As games became bigger the card format was eventually dropped due to insufficient memory.



» The SG-1000 and SG-1000 Mark II – the Japanese forefathers of the Master System.

crash of 1983 had damaged confidence in the videogame industry, it had created a void that simply begged to be filled – in Japan at least. The Mark II struggled to shift units at retail, but this hardware would eventually evolve into 1985's SG-1000 'Mark III' – bar a few technical differences this was the Master System in all but name.

It was around this time that Sega's rivalry with Nintendo – which would later bloom into a full-scale war when the Mega Drive and SNES arrived on the scene – became apparent. Sega's machine was more powerful than Nintendo's, but when the Mark III and Famicom went head-to-head in Japan the former was given a rather humiliating beating by the latter. Nintendo's popular console trounced Sega's technically superior hardware thanks to a wealth of third-party support. Developers were infamously forced to agree that they would not publish their NES titles on rival hardware, which left Sega in a rather tight predicament – it could only rely on its own home-grown arcade titles for so long. The solution was to obtain the rights to 're-program' the games of other developers (a process that PC-Engine creator NEC also indulged in, ironically converting many of Sega's key arcade hits to its own 8-bit format), but even this strategy wasn't perfect – many of the licensed titles were distinctly lacklustre compared to the 'cream of the crop' that the NES enjoyed.

Undeterred by the underwhelming performance of the Mark III on home soil, Sega decided to release the hardware in the US, where it was radically re-styled and rebranded as the impressive-sounding 'Master System'. Released in 1986 (a year after Nintendo performed the same trick with the Famicom, which became the big loveable slab of grey plastic known as the NES), the Master System found itself in a similar predicament to the one experienced in Japan. Nintendo had spent the previous year busily promoting its new console and had snapped up key developer support from Capcom, Konami and Taito. Again, Nintendo requested that developers keep their games 'NES exclusive', and given the unassailable position the console enjoyed, few had the will to defy this request. Despite possessing technically superior hardware, Sega had, unfortunately, come to the party too late, with the Master System also crippled by a meagre software library. Compared to the multitude of third-party developers that supported the NES, Sega was only able to call upon the allegiance of two in the US: Activision and Parker Brothers.

By 1988, Sega's Japanese overlords had decided that enough was enough. Keen to offload the under-performing console, the questionable decision was made to sell the US distribution rights to toy firm Tonka. While the company was the indisputable king of the bright yellow plastic digger, it, sadly, had no experience whatsoever of effectively selling a cutting-edge electronic entertainment system. Tonka immediately made some puzzling choices regarding software choices and vetoed the localisation of several key titles (many of which were selling like hot cakes elsewhere in the world). Compared to the stunning collection of software available on the NES, the result was something of a foregone conclusion. Despite Tonka taking over the distribution duties, the Master System continued to perform poorly and was all but ignored by American gamers.

A rather pointless Japanese release of the Master System hardware followed in 1987, with the console being treated with the same level of disdain as its predecessor – unsurprising when you consider it was effectively the same machine that had been released to general apathy in 1985. It was eventually discontinued in Japan two years later. Any other company would have capitulated in the face of such a dismal performance, but Sega wasn't about to give up without a fight. Carefully scanning the globe for possible conquest, the stubby finger of fate fell on Europe – the one region where Nintendo's influence had yet to be felt. Nintendo had released the NES in Europe towards the end of 1986, but poor promotion coupled with a lofty price point meant that the market penetration enjoyed by the machine was decidedly unimpressive. Sega saw the opportunity and pounced.

Ably distributed by UK company Mastertronic (previously famous for releasing budget games for the 8-bit home micros), the European variant of the Master System was unleashed in time for Christmas 1987. Spurred on by adverts that promoted the console as 'an arcade in the home', and supported by a range of killer coin-op

> "ANY OTHER COMPANY WOULD HAVE CAPITULATED IN THE FACE OF SUCH A DISMAL PERFORMANCE, BUT SEGA WASN'T ABOUT TO GIVE UP WITHOUT A FIGHT"

Bundle of Joy

If you thought the current confusion over Xbox One and PS4 bundles was a new occurrence in the console industry, think again. Back in the late-Eighties, the Master System was produced in three different packs: the 'Base' System (think 'Xbox One Core' and you're on the right track), the 'Plus' system (which added the all-important Light Phaser) and the 'Super' System (which was the same as the 'Plus', but also added the short-lived 3D Glasses). Although the existence of these different bundles undoubtedly resulted in several youngsters feeling inadequate when they got the 'Base' unit for Christmas, the peripherals that were included with the more expensive packs were not convincingly supported. The Light Phaser only enjoyed a handful of games and the 3D Glasses were dropped altogether when the Master System II hit the market – the lack of a card slot meant the remodelled console could not support the unique add-on.





» *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a big success on Sega's 8-bit console.



» Sega's 8-bit console received some great ports, including the excellent *Out Run*.

OTHER VERSIONS – WHEN ONE MACHINE ISN'T ENOUGH...

SG-1000 Mark III

Only released in Japan, this was the precursor to the Master System and is almost technically identical, although the FM sound chip in the Master System was an optional extra with the Mark III. Because it faced off against Nintendo's Famicom in Japan, it didn't sell particularly well and was swiftly dropped when the Mega Drive hit the market.



Master System (Mk I)

The 'classic' machine. The attractive casing features a slot for card-style games and also allows you to use the 3D Glasses. Although it's possibly the most well-known design in fan circles, it's actually harder to track one of these down in the wild than you'd imagine; because of this, second-hand prices are on the rise.



Master System II

A revision that allowed Sega to manufacture the machine more cheaply, the Master System II lacks the card slot that the original machine had. The design isn't fantastic but it's a lot smaller than its predecessor. This is probably the most common variant of the console in the West and can be found with ease at most car-boot sales.



Game Gear

Released to compete with the Game Boy, it was essentially a portable Master System. Many of the games were ports of home titles and the machine was even able to play Master System carts thanks to the 'Master Gear' converter. The Game Gear was battery hungry and suffered from a blurry screen – two factors that resulted in its downfall.



COMMUNITY – SEGA WEBSITES TO WATCH

Sega 8-bits
www.smstributes.co.uk/
One of the best Master System websites, here you'll find heaps of content including reviews, forums, hints on where to purchase a system and even regular competitions. A clean, neat and easy-to-navigate design rounds things off nicely. Highly recommended if you find yourself bitten by the Master System bug.

Master System Museum
http://alexkidd.com/
Although it's not updated particularly often, this is an excellent site for information and features a design that compliments that of the original Mk I console. It's also packed with loads of reviews and represents a handy one-stop resource for fans of the machine.

SMS Power
www.smspower.org/
The home of a group of Master System fans dedicated to preserving and documenting the history of their beloved system. The site has been around since 1997 and continues to perform valuable work in regards to keeping the memory of the console alive. Check out the excellent scan archive!

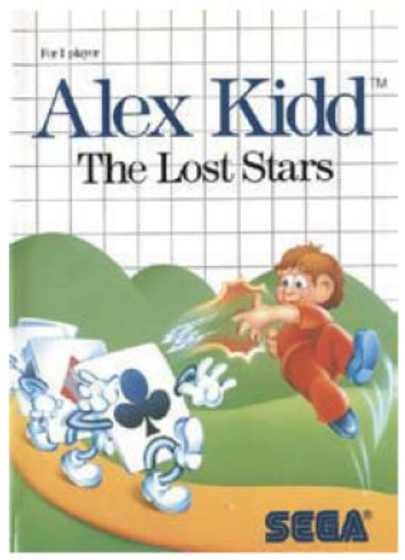
Master System Junkyard
http://segams.blogspot.com/
A blog that takes a rather wittier look at Sega's classic console than the other sites here. Within the Junkyard you'll find links to a variety of amusing content, and unlike the vast majority of Master System fan sites out there, this looks to be getting regular updates – which is nice.



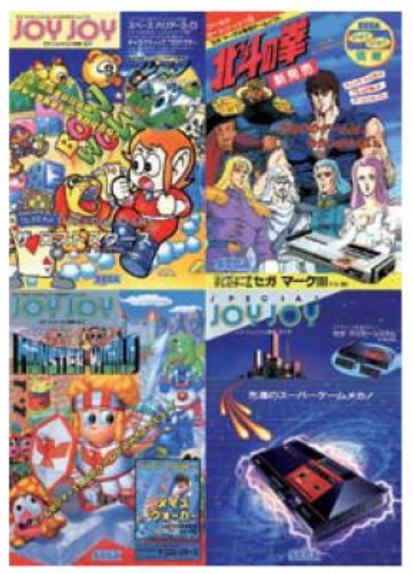





» The box art for the Master System was superb and lovely to look at. This is *Alex Kidd And The Lost Stars*.



» Conversely, the box art for many western releases was pretty poor…



» These promotional booklets were bundled with Japanese releases.



» A 'Card Catcher' was needed to play card games on the Japanese SG-1000 Mark II.

classics such as *Hang On*, *OutRun*, *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*, the Master System quickly mopped up the market share Nintendo had been too slovenly to secure. Gamers weaned on the Spectrum and C64 suddenly saw the attraction of owning a home console – rather than playing bumbling, half-arsed conversions of their favourite arcade hits by Western companies only concerned with cashing in on popular titles, fans could indulge in highly accurate ports produced by Sega itself. "The Master System raised the bar in terms of arcade-style home gaming," explains Neil West, former editor of *Sega Power* magazine. "The hardware was a leap forward from the home computer systems we'd all been used to." It was with the Master System that many UK gamers experienced instantaneous loading – an astonishing revelation after years of waiting for tapes to load on the home computers.

Such was the success of the machine that Mastertronic soon found that the Master System was accounting for nearly its entire yearly turnover. Such spectacular performance attracted the attention of Richard Branson's Virgin, who eventually acquired the firm (which was renamed Virgin Mastertronic) and, therefore, the European distribution rights to Sega's hardware and software. It was a timely intervention and a shrewd business move as the Master System's successor was on the horizon and it would prove to be even more successful.

When the Mega Drive/Genesis was released, it spelt the end for the Master System in the US and Japan, despite a remodelled alternative appearing in the shape of the Master System II. Sega reacquired the US distribution rights for its products, from Tonka, and set about promoting the new-look Master System, possibly in the hope that the frenzied public interest in the 16-bit Genesis would somehow trickle down to its 8-bit stable mate. Sadly, it wasn't to be, and the final game to be published in the US was *Sonic The Hedgehog* in 1991. Compare this to Europe, where the Master System II was a big success and helped the format cling on to its significant market share. As the Mega Drive started to gather momentum, Sega Europe wisely kept the 8-bit console ticking over with a drip-feed of quality titles like *Streets Of Rage II*, *Mercs* and *Sonic 2*. Support finally died away in the mid-Nineties.

Another market where the Master System enjoyed almost unchallenged success was Brazil. Traditionally a region where console technology trails that of the US, Europe and Japan, the machine was released in 1989, but remained wildly popular well into the following decade, marketed with impressive skill by Tec Toy (see **Retro Gamer** 30 for more info). The company even went as far as to release a wireless variant of the Master System hardware, dubbed 'The Compact'.

When you consider this rather sketchy history, which saw the Master System fail catastrophically in two of the three key worldwide markets, it begs the question: is the console really worthy of a reassessment? The answer is simple. Without this criminally undervalued machine, Sega would not have enjoyed the considerable success it had with the Mega Drive. The Master System allowed Sega to experiment with arcade conversions, original IP and even create a mascot in the form of the loveable monkey-boy Alex Kidd. Without the Master System we also wouldn't have *Phantasy Star* – one of Sega's most well-known and best-loved franchises. Developers like Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima cut their teeth on Sega's 8-bit hardware. Although it couldn't boast the sheer volume of classic titles possessed by Nintendo's NES, the Master System is still worthy of praise. Those gamers willing to stick with their machines back in the late-Eighties were treated to a commendable selection of games including *Wonderboy III: The Dragon's Trap*, *Psycho Fox*, *Power Strike* (aka *Aleste*), *Golvellius*, *Phantasy Star* and many, many others.

The fact that Sega was so dominant in the coin-op arena also meant that the machine played host to some commendable ports, as Neil West reveals, "The console came at a time when Sega enjoyed huge influence and power in the coin-op world, which meant a lot of games were available for conversion." Although it could be argued that the promise of 'an arcade in the home' wasn't fulfilled until the advent of the Mega Drive, the Master System nevertheless created a solid foundation to build on and gave gamers an insight into the fascinating world of Sega. This was a company that in the proceeding years would scale the heights of the world videogame industry, only to fall from grace in spectacular fashion almost as rapidly. In that respect, the Master System serves as a remarkable historical piece – with this much-maligned console, Sega tentatively tested the waters it would ultimately flounder in.



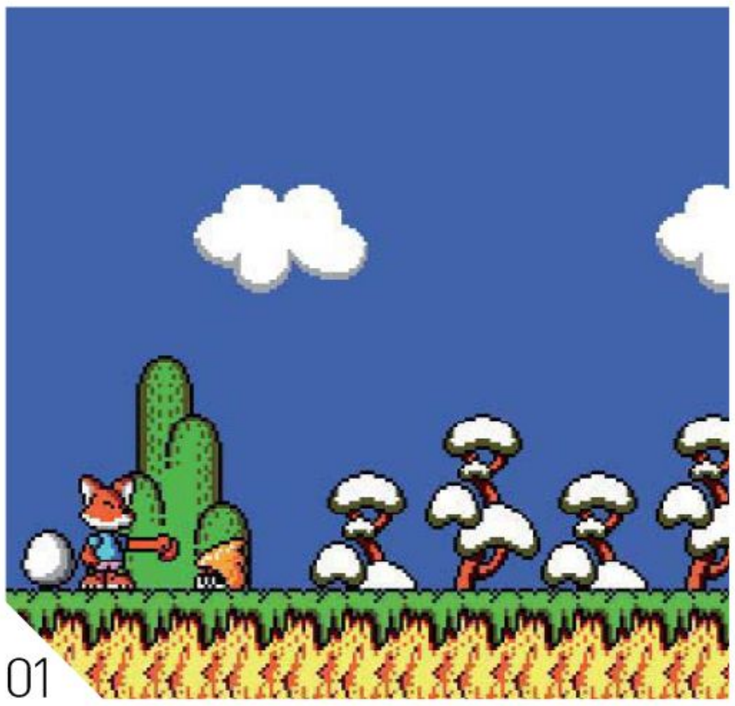
» Towards the end of its life the Master System played host to some ambitious conversions – some far more successful than others.

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MASTER SYSTEM

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It was home to the ugliest game cartridges, was cased in the most god-awful package design that you could imagine, but boasted some cracking games nonetheless. Don't believe us? Then why not take a look at the ten Master System games that we can't possibly be without



01



02



03



04

PSYCHO FOX

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** VIC TOKAI
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BLOCK GAL

01 It's not the greatest platformer ever made, but it was one of the few Master System titles that became synonymous with the system. And any game about a fox battling a god has to make it on to some kind of list. Apparently the prequel to the awesomely entitled *Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure* (which would later become known as *DecapAttack in the West*), Psycho Fox is a wonderfully vivid platform adventure that's quite a bugger to master. Boasting *Mario*-style warping and the funniest attack in any videogame ever; a punch which looks a little like Psycho Fox is continually getting enamoured and knocking things out with something that resembles a hairy slowworm chewing on an apple. We'll let you guys fill in the blanks.

ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** VIRTUA RACING

02 The coolest videogame character ever was doing the heavy-fringed, shell-suited look long before the words 'our' and 'kid' were annoyingly put together. Living inside the Master System II, this game would be hailed as the greatest freebie in videogame lore (until Christmas NiGHTS was given away with a magazine many years later), and by default became the console's quintessential platformer. Big-fisted Alex Kidd must traverse imaginative worlds to compete in the Paper, Scissors and Stone World Cup. He's up against competitors that have had intense plastic surgery to make themselves look like a piece of paper, a pair of scissors and a fleshy rock, in the hope it will give them an edge in the competition. Jerks.

OPERATION WOLF

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPACE HARRIER

03 Taito was faced with the very difficult decision of which direction to steer this project in. It could either take the veterinary-arcade simulator route with an emphasis on saving wolves, or create a game about one man with a gun taking on a coconut shy of angry soldiers while helping to liberate terrified hostages. Taito decided to roll with the latter option – the correct decision, we reckon. With the Master System's chunky Light Phaser controlling your shooting and a second pad providing the trigger for your grenade attacks, playing the game while sitting on a tumble dryer – thus replicating the sensation of the arcade cab's recoil – all made for a really great home conversion of this warfare classic. Quite possible the Master System's finest arcade conversion.

CALIFORNIA GAMES

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** EPYX
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

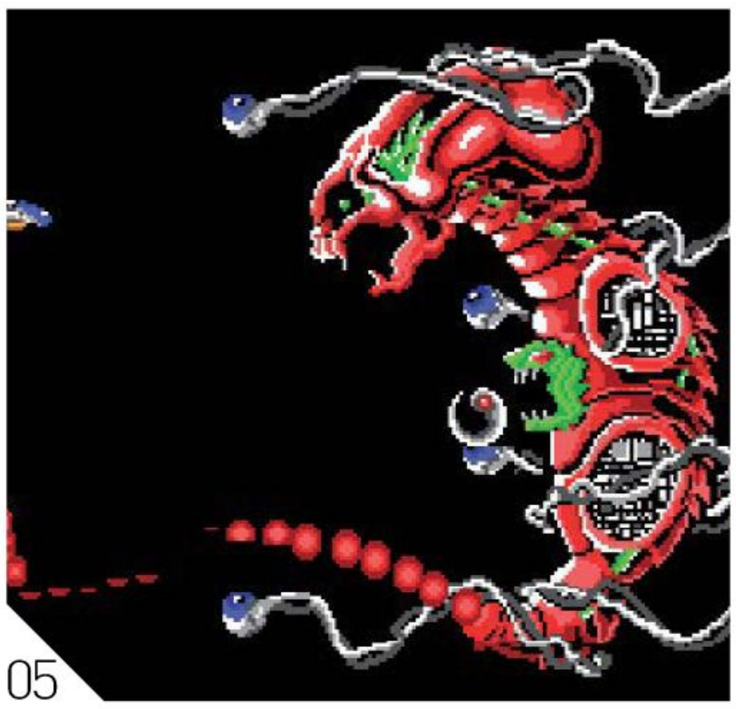
04 The 8-bit consoles weren't really renowned for their fantastic sporting titles, and the Master System had some of the worst examples on any system. If anyone has ever been unlucky enough to play any of the machine's 'Great' series of sports titles (*Great Football*, *Great Soccer*, Great juxtaposition of the word Great) you'll know exactly where we're coming from. And don't even get us started on *Basketball Nightmare*. However, you may well remember the Earth tilting slightly on its axis after the release of Epyx's brilliant *California Games*. While playing through the game's six events had a tendency to make you feel like one of those annoying kids from *Saved By The Bell*, in its own goofy way it offered a nice slice of sun-kissed sporting action, and it looked fantastic to boot.

R-TYPE

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IREM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** IN THE HUNT

05 The force is strong in this conversion. Irem's classic side-scrolling blaster is still one of the finest examples of the genre. Apart from the annoying flickering of the enemy characters, the Master System port offers an incredibly faithful reproduction of the game's stunningly bleak Giger frames and its myriad of bullet-spewing enemies. *R-Type* is teeming with memorable sections, but arguably the most iconic is the encounter with the game's first boss, Dobkeratops. When those lights faded and you encountered death's alien glare in the form of an ugly looking giant shrimp, you knew those Bydo boys weren't the type of evil intergalactic federation to just roll over and hand you the keys to their demise. A utterly fantastic conversion that even boasts its very own secret level.



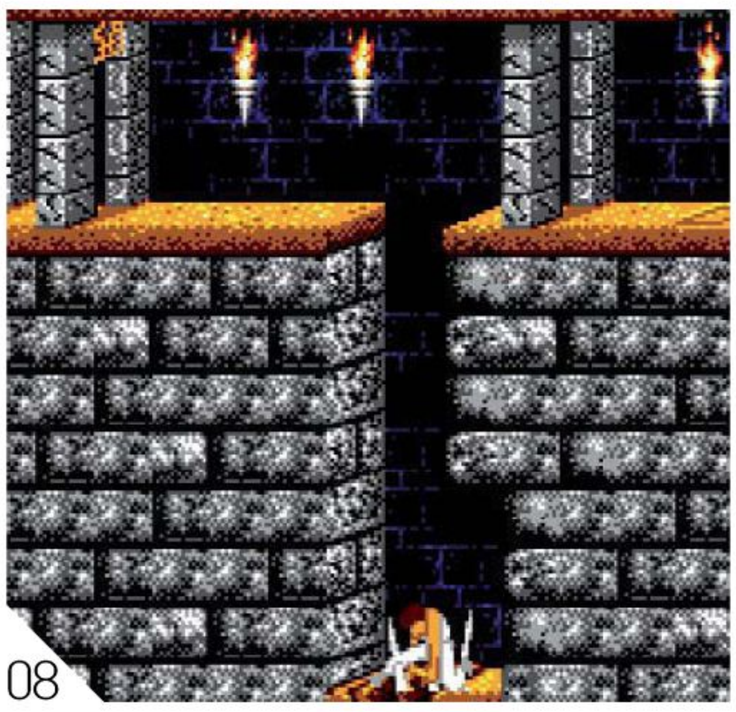

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BAKU BAKU ANIMAL

» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPACE HARRIER

06 **Yes, it's another tried and tested take on *Tetris*, but Sega's excellent *Baku Baku Animal* was a puzzle game that finally gave those faceless regimented sprites a touch of character.** The falling tiles were made up of either types of food or animal faces, and the aim was to simply bunch the falling groceries together and get the corresponding animals to consume them. So the dogs were grouped with the bones, the monkeys with the bananas, the rabbits with the carrots and the pandas with the, well, we're sure you get the idea. It's an incredibly enjoyable little puzzle game that is also extremely addictive. It certainly cocks a leg and whizzes over the Mega Drive yawn-fest that is *Columns*. Arguably the Master System's best puzzler.

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** WESTONE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND

07 **Regarded as the best in a long and highly convoluted myriad of multi-titled games, *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* was another addition to this stable of run-'n'-jump-cum-adventure-type outings.** This one is the most finely tuned in terms of gameplay and despite its length it somehow maintains a great pace throughout. Within its first few minutes you enter a castle, blind some cyclops, uncover a strange dungeon and battle a dinobot that turns you into a dragon with its last dying breath. After that you're turned into a variety of different animal, which gradually allows you to explore the huge game world. A great adventure that ever Master System fan needs to own.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BRØDERBUND
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

08 **You have 60 minutes to find a way through this Persian rat-maze to try and stop the evil Grand Vizier Jaffa from marrying your girlfriend and fooling around with her on a giant, rotating heart-shaped bed.** This will be no easy feat, however, as the route is precarious and the pitfalls are plenty. But with a game so fluid and colourful, seeing your Arabian protagonist drop a thousand feet and hit the ground like a sack of potatoes was one of the most charming-looking deaths on the Master System. This conversion – like all the rest – looks great. The only bad point to be found is the Master System's doughy D-pad isn't really a fan of precision. It's still a cracking platformer though and is arguably one of the greatest on the System. If only it wasn't so hard.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** OUTRUN

09 **Up, down, left, right, A, B, C, Start, sadly proved impossible to perform on the Master System's cumbersome control pad, but the most well-known level-select cheat ever wasn't the only thing that was altered for the Master System port.** Due to the graphical 8-bit chasm that presented itself, *Sonic*'s first (and second, for that matter) outing on the system was a complete redux of its 16-bit sibling. However, the Master System version was all the better for it and proved to be a stunning platformer in its own right. It also meant that those who owned both a Master System and a Mega Drive would be treated to two slightly differing classic *Sonic* adventures. Now surely that can only ever be seen as a very good thing?

PHANTASY STAR

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RISTAR

10 **Sega's freshman RPG epic would smite its first winged-eyeball on the Master System. There's a tiring amount of features, strategy and powering-up in the game, and the 3D tunnel effects were dazzling.** *Phantasy Star* was a more than worthy sparring partner to Miyamoto's prevalent *Zelda* and Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series, mainly because it chose a setting that was instantly at odds with the generic fantasy worlds of *Zelda* and *Final Fantasy*. It's a beautifully constructed game, boasting a fantastically epic planet-hopping storyline polarised around one girl's quest to seek revenge for the untimely death of her nosey brother. However, unlike Sega's sophomore retribution epic, the original *Phantasy Star* doesn't pick up its football and disappear home in the 89th minute.



MASTER SYSTEM

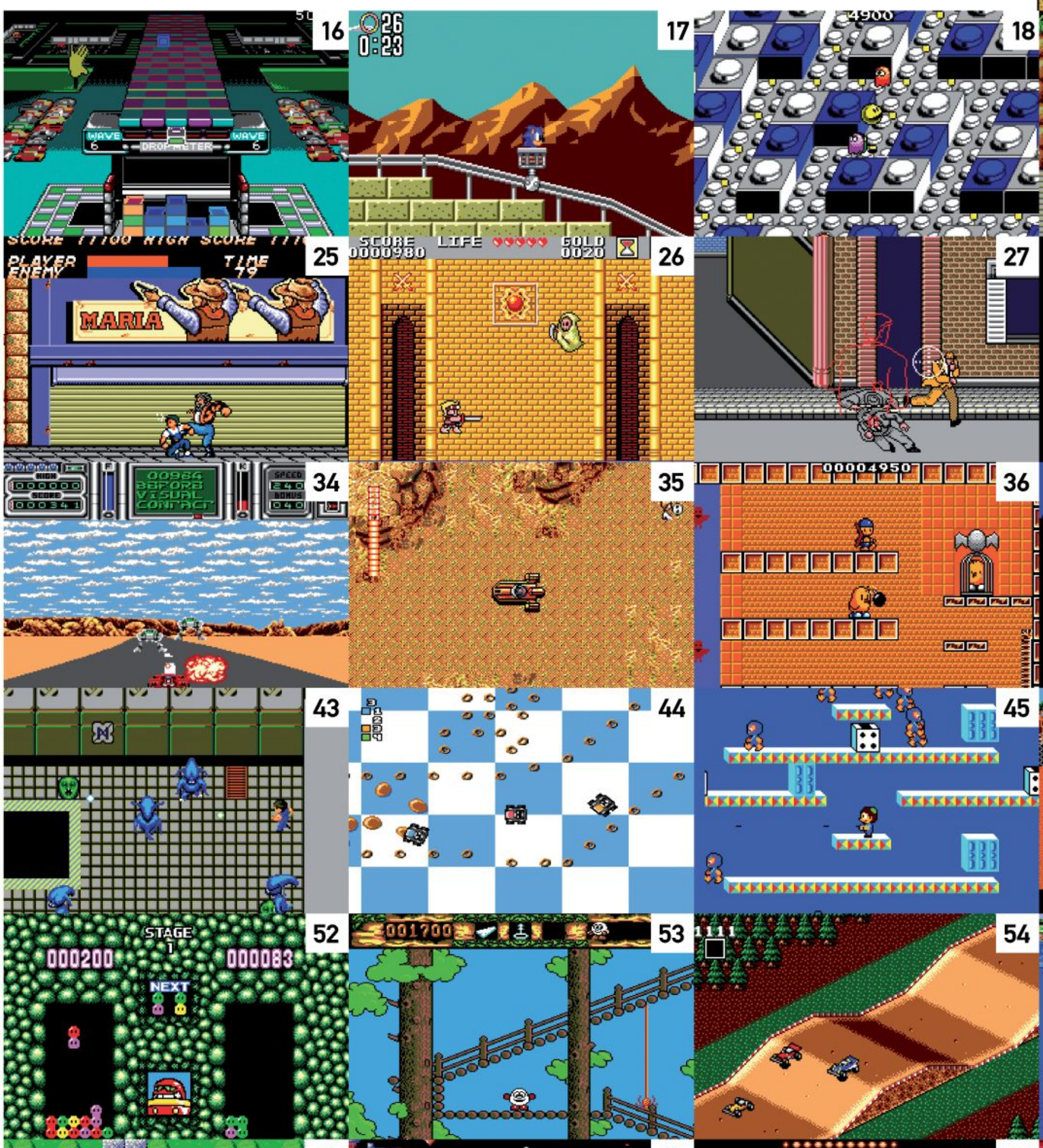
and the rest...

IT MAY HAVE BEEN UP AGAINST THE OVERWHELMING POWER OF THE NES, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP THE MASTER SYSTEM FROM HAVING ITS OWN SHARE OF CLASSICS AND STINKERS









01 LEMMINGS
02 SHINOBI
03 GALAXY FORCE
04 CLOUD MASTER
05 MORTAL KOMBAT
06 PAPERBOY
07 WONDER BOY
08 ALEX KIDD: THE LOST STARS
09 BLACK BELT
10 DESERT STRIKE
11 FANTASY ZONE
12 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
13 DICK TRACY
14 POPULOUS
15 CHASE HQ
16 KLAX
17 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
18 PAC-MANIA
19 DOUBLE DRAGON
20 ALF
21 CHOPLIFTER!
22 CHUCK ROCK
23 MARBLE MADNESS
24 PSYCHO FOX
25 VIGILANTE
26 WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND
27 DEAD ANGLE
28 ARCADE SMASH HITS
29 THE CYBER SHINOBI
30 JURASSIC PARK
31 PENGUIN LAND
32 BUBBLE BOBBLE
33 ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD
34 FIRE & FORGET II
35 STAR WARS
36 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
37 RAMPAGE
38 BAKU BAKU ANIMAL
39 CAPTAIN SILVER
40 HEROES OF THE LANCE
41 JAMES POND II: CODENAME ROBOCOD
42 BANK PANIC
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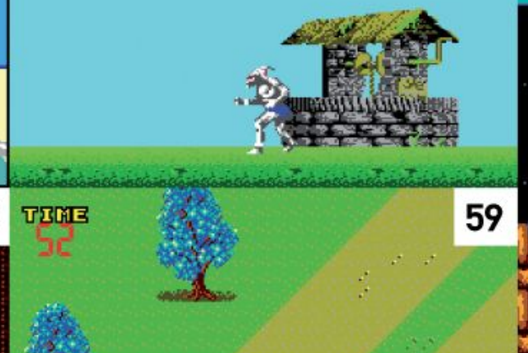

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THE HISTORY OF SONIC ON THE MASTER SYSTEM

While Sega's speedy hedgehog is generally remembered as a 16-bit superstar, his appearances on Sega's 8-bit platform were just as memorable. We take a look at the unique Sonic offerings available to Master System owners…



"SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 101"

■ Sonic's core offering is platform games, in which the goal is to clear stages en route to a showdown with the nefarious scientist Dr Robotnik, who enslaves animals in robotic shells. Collecting gold rings protects him from death, while grabbing Chaos Emeralds is required to see each game's best ending.

If there was one thing that Sega craved at the beginning of the Nineties, it was star power. Despite boasting good conversions of some extremely popular arcade games, its Master System had struggled on the world stage for a variety of reasons, one of which was that it lacked a true competitor to Nintendo's marketing juggernaut Mario. The plumber's family-friendly appeal was backed with some classic videogames, whereas Sega's mascot Alex Kidd had suffered from uneven game quality and some truly horrendous artwork. While the recently-introduced Mega Drive was doing better than the Master System had, it was still finding its identity. Worryingly for Sega, even in places where the Master System had done well, it was clear that the brand was far from invincible. The UK distributor of the NES had struck a deal to bundle *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* with NES consoles in 1990, and over Christmas that star power allowed the Nintendo console to outsell the Master System for the first time. Other strong Sega territories were in much the same position, with an Australian Nintendo advertising campaign pointing out that the only way you might see turtles on a Master System would be if live ones started crawling on it.



» Power-ups were hidden in some pretty clever places, like this floating extra life.



» Later scenes got trickier, with hazards to negotiate including the Caterkiller.

By this time, Sega had recognised its deficit in the superstar department and was actively working to address it. A company-wide character design contest had been put into place, with the winner being a small hedgehog by Naoto Ohshima, who was best recognised beforehand for his work on Master System games such as *Phantasy Star* and *SpellCaster*. Sonic was to be a speedy critter, an attribute designed not only to position him as an alternative to Mario, but to emphasise the raw processing power of the Mega Drive. But even as Sonic Team got to work on making the game that would sell the Mega Drive, Sega recognised that Sonic could do good work on its 8-bit platform too. The company didn't have the capacity to develop ▶

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Five Firsts

The things you didn't know originated in Sonic's 8-bit outings



PINBALL FLIPPERS

■ While everyone remembers Casino Night Zone on the 16-bit version of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for its pinball elements, fairly few know that the 8-bit version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was in fact the first game in the series to actually include them – they appeared exclusively in the game's later special stages.



SONIC CD'S THEME SONG

■ Go back to *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and listen closely to Green Hills Zone's theme, and you may just recognise it as a rendition of *Sonic CD*'s opening theme, You Can Do Anything. Mecha Green Hill Zone in *Sonic Chaos* runs it back, using a remixed version of the tune.



TAILS

■ That's right – as *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* arrived on 8-bit platforms before the 16-bit outing could hit the shelves, the game served as the debut of Sonic's vulpine sidekick. He wasn't playable in this outing, but when Master System owners finally got to control him they'd experience another first...



EXCLUSIVE FINAL STAGE

■ In the Mega Drive games, owners of *Sonic 3* who plug their cartridges into *Sonic & Knuckles* can access the exclusive final stage Doomsday Zone, if they have enough emeralds. A neat idea – and one which originated in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, with the Crystal Egg Zone.



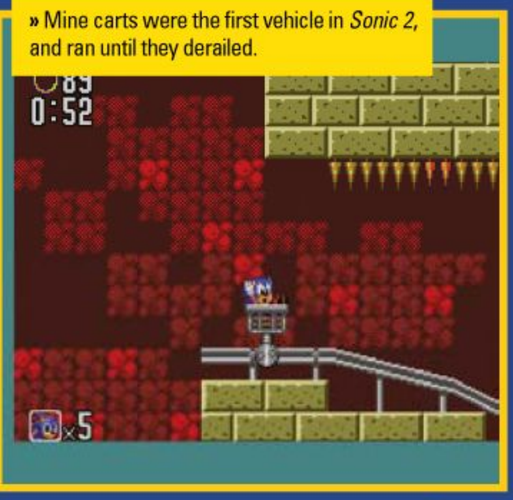
TAILS' FLIGHT

■ While it was possible to see Tails fly on the Mega Drive, it was in *Sonic Chaos* that players were first able to control Tails while he was in flight. Perhaps for that reason, it controls a little differently to usual – you need to press up and jump to lift off, and Tails can hover without the player's input. Give it a try.

▶ the game internally however, and instead entrusted the game to brand new developer Ancient.

The choice of a rookie company to handle a game featuring Sega's brand new hero might seem like an odd one, but it was made on a sensible basis. The team had been formed by the family of Yuzo Koshiro, who had established a relationship with Sega as a freelance composer on the Mega Drive hit *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. The Master System game was developed in tandem with the Mega Drive game, but it proved to be far from a simple conversion job. While the Master System game shares its character designs and some stage designs with the Mega Drive game, a conscious decision was made during development to differentiate the game from its 16-bit counterpart – unused fragments of code in the game show that work had started on the inclusion of enemies and music for Marble Zone, a Mega Drive stage which ultimately didn't appear in the Master System game.

» Mine carts were the first vehicle in *Sonic 2*, and ran until they derailed.



» Later stages became punishing endeavours, with plenty of hazards to avoid.



While this meant more work for Ancient, it was a treat for players. The 8-bit version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* might have shared the most identifiable stage themes with the Mega Drive game – the Green Hill, Labyrinth and Scrap Brain Zones – but all three had new layouts and bosses. Three new stages also came in the form of the Bridge, Jungle and Sky Base Zones, and proved Ancient's aptitude for adapting the source material. The Master System couldn't hope to replicate the impressive speed and loop-de-loops that the Mega Drive version relied upon, but it's arguable that a stronger traditional platformer emerged because of those limits. Finding Chaos Emeralds required exploration of stages, and level design was more varied – the game's forced-scrolling stage in Bridge Zone, vertical ascent stage in Jungle Zone and maze stage in Scrap Brain Zone didn't have equivalents in the Mega Drive game. It was a little tougher too, thanks to the lack of rings in boss stages.

Sonic's Master System debut came in October 1991, roughly four months after the Mega Drive game had been launched to critical and commercial success, and met with similar reception. *Computer & Video Games*' 90% review advised readers to buy the game and "watch your mates' jaws drop, even if they have got Mega Drives." Sega Pro's Les Ellis was no less effusive in his praise, awarding the game 96% and declaring it "as close as you are going to get to the perfect game." *Sonic The Hedgehog* proved to be a last hurrah for the Master System in North America, a territory in which the console had struggled to gain a foothold, and is now a rare collectors' item. In Europe however,

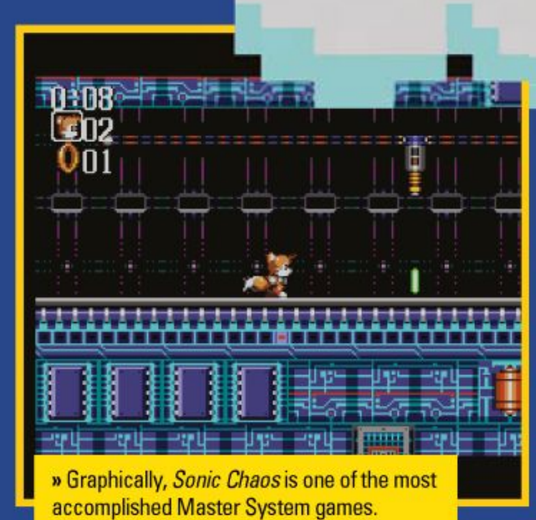
it gave the machine a new lease of life. Soon after release, it replaced *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* as the built-in game for the Master System II, and helped to sell the hardware to younger and budget-conscious audiences for years to come.

Sega was quick to capitalise on the success, and quickly put a sequel into production. For Sonic The *Hedgehog 2*, development duties passed from Ancient to fellow young company Aspect. With the change of developer came a change of approach – while the Master System games would now employ additional aspects of the Mega Drive games such as destructible walls leading to secret areas and the iconic loop-de-loops, they were totally distinct entities in terms of story and game design. It was freedom which Aspect relished, and as early as 1991 the company was leaving its stamp on the series with the introduction of new elements, most notably the mine cart and hang glider vehicles.

In *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Robotnik has kidnapped Sonic's new friend Tails, and it's your job to rescue him. To aid in your task, Sonic is able to pick up a small number of dropped rings after he is hit, a welcome ability brought over from the Mega Drive games. However, Sonic's second 8-bit outing is widely regarded as being one of his most difficult, and not without reason. Mid-stage checkpoints are eliminated and while boss stages still don't give you rings, there are usually pre-boss hazards such as spikes, and the bosses themselves are tougher due to their nasty habit of launching you backwards into projectiles upon being hit. As if that wasn't enough, the Chaos Emeralds are now harder to obtain too, and missing just one during the game means you'll miss the final Crystal Egg Zone.



» This looks like a bountiful scene, but rings are just far too abundant in *Sonic Chaos*.



» Graphically, *Sonic Chaos* is one of the most accomplished Master System games.

That high level of difficulty didn't seem to put off critics or fans when *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* arrived in October 1992, shortly before the Mega Drive game. Critics praised the improved visuals, with *Mean Machines Sega*'s Jaz Rignall noting the use of "brilliant sprites that wouldn't look amiss on the Mega Drive" in a 95% review. *Computer & Video Games* wasn't pleased that Tails was your buddy in distress rather than a playable character, but awarded the game 93% while also reserving praise for the improved visuals. The game hung around the Master System charts near-permanently afterwards, eventually being included in an official Master System II bundle alongside the built-in version of the first game.

With another success behind them, a third game was put into production under the guidance of Aspect, which had secured a long-term place in charge of the major 8-bit Sonic games. *Sonic Chaos* brought yet more of the 16-bit experience to Master System gamers, adding the iconic spin dash technique for both Sonic and the newly-playable Tails. Further, the game had

"Brilliant sprites that wouldn't look amiss on the Mega Drive"

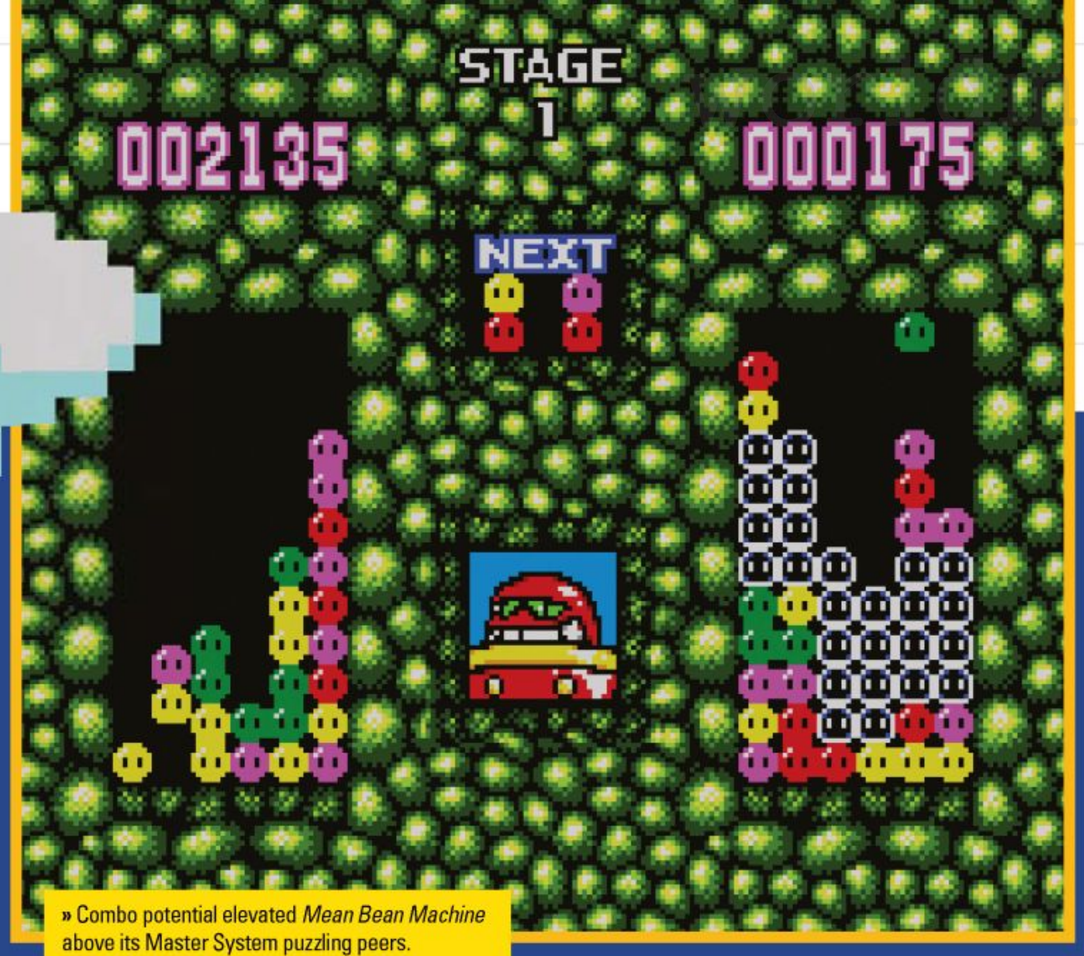
Jaz Rignall on *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*



One That Got Away

Sega's handheld platform of the early Nineties, the Game Gear, shared most of its hardware and many of its Sonic games with the Master System. However, owing to its greater worldwide popularity, the Game Gear also had a number of exclusive titles – the two *Sonic Drift* racing titles, two spin-off titles starring Tails and *Sonic Labyrinth*, a slower-paced isometric adventure. None of these were a tremendous loss to Master System owners, but missing out on 1994's *Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble* stung. The Aspect-developed platformer was a direct sequel to *Sonic Chaos*, and featured the 8-bit debut of Knuckles as well as a new character, Nack. While it received a mixed critical reception much like its predecessor, Master System owners envied Game Gear-owning friends.

In recent years fans have produced their own conversion patch for the game, which converts the Game Gear game for the Master System. Colour entries are adjusted from the wider Game Gear format to the Master System's small palette and the screen resolution is increased, moving the heads-up display to match. This allows the game to be played almost as if it were a native Master System game. However, it's not quite perfect – there are various graphical issues throughout, with most being minor but noticeable issues of corruption and garbage data. Still, if you're looking for a way to enjoy the game as it arguably should have been released, there's no better way.



» Combo potential elevated *Mean Bean Machine* above its Master System puzzling peers.

▶ implemented new obstacles from those games, such as the corkscrew loop which provides a solid surface only to players running at speed.

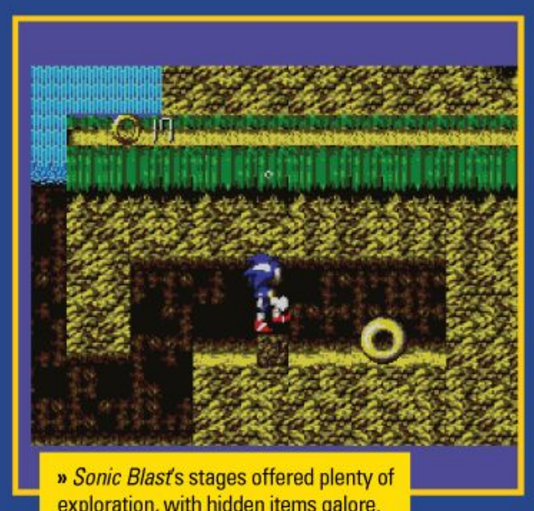
The additions weren't all cribbed from the Mega Drive games, though. Sonic's rocket boots made their debut in this game, allowing the already-speedy critter to dash through the air at incredible speeds, often skipping much of the stage. Meanwhile, the pogo spring allowed for unlimited vertical travel so long as Sonic didn't get hit. As well as their appearances in the game's main stages, these power-ups would be particularly important in special stages, which returned after an absence in the previous game. These were generally based around gimmicks, such as a stage based entirely on rocket boots and a pipe maze, and for the first time on the Master System awarded Chaos Emeralds for successful completion.

The special stages were tough, but this is something of a contrast to the rest of the game, which was significantly easier than both of its predecessors. Part of this was welcome change – while the bosses were not significantly more aggressive than before, they were far more manageable due to the inclusion of rings in their stages for the first time, and the challenges leading up to them were significantly fairer. However, the rest of the game suffered from an abundance of rings – as 100 were needed to enter special stages, regular stages were jam-packed with rings without the enemy count being similarly increased. Entering a special stage also counted as completion of the regular stage, making things even easier.

The result of this was that when *Sonic Chaos* arrived in the autumn of 1993, critical reception was for the first time somewhat mixed, with responses ranging from slightly positive to very positive. *Sega Pro* considered that the game didn't do enough to innovate over previous titles and was altogether too easy, awarding the game 69%. At the opposite end of the scale, *Sega Force Mega*'s Nick Roberts praised the new power-ups and high quality visuals, awarding the game 93%. Not that this hurt sales at all – *Sonic Chaos* immediately jumped to the top of the UK Master System charts ahead of rival platformer *The Jungle Book*, itself a strong contender during the gift-giving season. The game remained there for almost three months consecutively before



» Sonic's sprite was rather tiny in *Sonic Spinball*, even by 8-bit standards.



» *Sonic Blast*'s stages offered plenty of exploration, with hidden items galore.



Spot the Difference

The features that helped 8-bit Sonic stand alone

CHAOS EMERALDS

■ While the Mega Drive games featured special stages that held the Chaos Emeralds, the first two Master System games hid them in levels instead. Even when *Sonic Chaos* put them in special stages, those stages were more like standard platforming stages than the gimmick-focused 16-bit equivalents.



END POST BONUSES

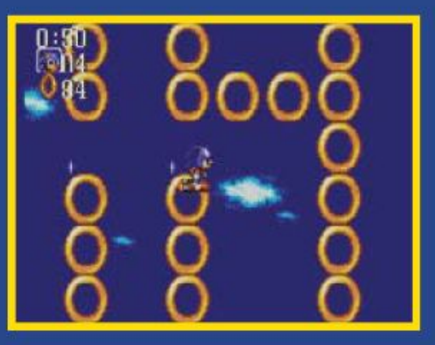
■ On the Master System, passing the end post didn't just mean completing a stage – it could also mean a valuable bonus. Rings were a fairly common bonus, but if you satisfied some obscure conditions that varied from game to game, you might even find yourself earning an extra life.



"These games offered rolling logs, gigantic bubbles and more"

MODES OF TRANSPORT

■ While Sonic could ride various types of moving platform in the early Mega Drive games, the Master System games offered up rolling logs, gigantic bubbles, hang gliders and more. The difference was that these modes of transport gave players much more control than any of the 16-bit vehicles.



EASY COME, EASY GO

■ Losing rings in Sonic games on the Mega Drive was a pain, but not the worst thing in the world – the first 32 would scatter to be gathered back up later. The first Master System game doesn't let you reclaim lost rings at all, and subsequent games were much stingier than those on the Mega Drive.



DEADLY DUELS

■ Neither of the first two Sonic games on the Master System give you rings during boss fights – one hit means that it's all over. Even *Sonic Chaos* briefly reprises this concept– Robotnik's final attack of the game will kill you regardless of how many rings you have, so it's an intense do-or-die situation.



finally being dethroned by the official Winter Olympics tie-in, and would remain a strong seller well into 1994.

Unfortunately for Master System owners in Europe, *Sonic Chaos* was the last of Sonic's 8-bit platform outings to reach the region. That didn't necessarily mean that players were out of luck though, as two spin-off titles carried audiences through to the machine's discontinuation. The first of these to arrive was an oddity of the Sonic series, in that it didn't even feature the speedy blue hero. *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* was a puzzle game, featuring Sonic's arch-nemesis in his new look from the *Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog* cartoon series, trying to enact a plot to process the beans of Beanville into robotic slaves using his titular machine.

If you think that sounds like the least obvious idea for a Sonic spin-off, we're with you – and in fact, the game wasn't conceived as a Sonic spin-off at all. *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* was Sega's Western branding for Puyo Puyo, itself a puzzle spin-off of the Japanese RPG *Madou Monogatari*. But while this wasn't strictly a Sonic game, it was far from a bad game – the colour-matching puzzle gameplay offered more strategic depth than the likes of *Columns*, and the Puzzle mode featuring pre-defined problems kept players occupied for hours. Critical reception was positive, with *Sega Pro* awarding 90% and *Sega Power* going higher at 92%, but production was limited and the game didn't make a dent on the charts. As a result, Master System copies of *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* are now prized by collectors.

The very last Sonic game to reach European Master System owners was *Sonic Spinball*, a conversion of the Mega Drive spin-off of the same name. In this game, Sonic mounted an assault on Robotnik's latest fortress – but this being a deadly pinball contraption, our hero found himself being shot all over the place to capture Chaos Emeralds and defeat enemies in such glamourous locations as sewers and boiler rooms. After years of Sonic forging his own path in the 8-bit world, level design was surprisingly faithful to the Mega Drive version.



» Knuckles brought his moves from Mega Drive games, including wall-climbing.

The 8-bit version did feature one significant difference from its 16-bit sibling, to be found in the bonus stages.

Sonic's Mega Drive bonus stages had always been flashy hardware showcases, and *Sonic Spinball*'s pseudo-3D tables were no different. The Master System version replaced these with platforming challenges instead, bringing Sonic too close to his comfort zone. Unfortunately, *Sonic Spinball* was never popular with critics on the Mega Drive, and the Master System version suffered from small sprites and slower gameplay. Critics were unimpressed ahead of the game's release in 1995, when the Master System was extremely close to discontinuation. The combination of a late release and poor reviews meant that the game didn't sell well.

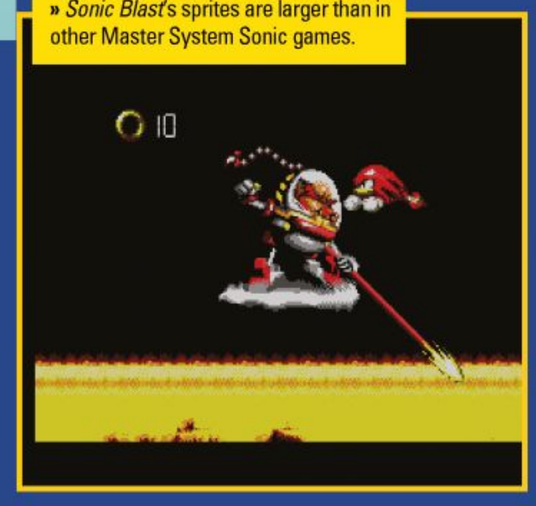
Like *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, *Sonic Spinball* is now a rarity, often fetching £50 - £75 on online auction sites.



» *Sonic Spinball*'s level designs were very close to the Mega Drive version.

While *Sonic Spinball* wasn't a tremendous end for European Master System owners, it wasn't the end at all for Brazilian Master System owners. As international support dried up, local distributor Tec Toy still had an audience eager for Master System software and began converting Game Gear games in order to keep supplying it. Only one Sonic game received this treatment – *Sonic Blast*, another major platform game from Aspect. This starred Sonic and Knuckles, and offered advances from Mega Drive games. Sonic could perform double jumps, while Knuckles retained his skill for gliding and climbing walls. More surprisingly, the game opted to utilise pre-rendered character sprites, an approach that had served the likes of *Donkey Kong Country* well but seemed bold on an 8-bit platform.

Key staff from Aspect's previous Sonic games didn't work on *Sonic Blast*, and this shows. The game did offer positive aspects, including expansive stages and plenty to find within them. For the first time, poor control response and slow gameplay were issues. Beyond that, additional issues were introduced in the conversion process. Visuals were simplified for the Master System's palette of 64 colours, and pre-rendered sprites looked a lot better when drawing from the Game Gear's palette of 4,096 colours. While increased screen resolution made huge sprites less problematic, bosses and special stages weren't correctly re-coded to use the whole screen, leading to odd situations such as projectiles being visible but unable to harm your character. While *Sonic Blast* is not the pinnacle of Sonic's quality on the Master System, its obscurity and rarity ensure that it often sells for over £100 – a real achievement for a disappointing game.



» *Sonic Blast*'s sprites are larger than in other Master System Sonic games.

Looking at Sonic's time on the Master System, what stands out is how carefully Sega approached multiple platforms and their different capabilities. While Sonic Team delivered flair on the Mega Drive, Ancient and Aspect brought a unique vision of the mascot tailored for 8-bit hardware. Ultimately, that's what made Sonic an excellent hero – when the right people determined the challenges, he could adapt to overcome them. Sonic might have been conceived as the saviour of the Mega Drive, but his Master System outings made him a hero for every Sega gamer.

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THE CLASSIC GAME

ZILLION

Compared to the big three 8-bit home-micros, and also Nintendo's NES, Sega's Master System, which is from the same era, may seem a little underloved. But we are here to champion the machine's best games, regardless of a system's popularity. Zillion was hailed as a classic by all those who played it; if only more people had played on a Master System!

IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

The Master System, much like the Game Boy, is not a machine from which it is easy to choose Classic Game coverage. There are countless titles, of course, but it's always the same few which are mentioned again and again (*Phantasy Star* for example has already been covered as part of the series). Furthermore, considering the dominance of other companies' hardware at the time, even if a third of all SMS owners hailed a single game as the greatest on their machine (a one-to-three attachment ratio being nearly unprecedented), that number of people would still be comparatively far lower than even those praising an average selling NES game, for example. This has resulted in several great SMS games being doomed to anonymity amongst the masses simply because not enough people owned the native hardware originally. Unless you were part of the secret club of Master System owners, and also lucky enough to have *Zillion*, you will not realise that it's a classic game.

Looking at the drab cover art, featuring a computer monitor, you wouldn't think it, but *Zillion* was a revelation compared to the mostly simplistic titles released alongside, and is also the antithesis to the hand-holding of modern titles. It sits in that strange region of gaming we remember fondly, as something which broke new grounds, but due to the current climate will never be made in quite the same way again. When starting you're introduced to ten symbols which need to be inputted at computer terminals throughout the game; typing four of the same symbol results in a specific reaction but costs one ID card (shutting off laser barriers and gun turrets, activating warps, etc), while opening doors requires a combination of four symbols, but doesn't use up cards. These ID cards need to be scavenged from item pods found in each room, and are of a limited supply, while the pass codes for doors are randomly generated – they are only revealed, individually, from certain item pods in the specific rooms.

It's not an easy dynamic to explain, but the result is a game which respects the player and assumes they have intelligence. While a modern action/adventure title will keep lists of learned things, requiring only a menu selection to activate, *Zillion* forces you to write everything down, as you're playing, and thanks to the randomisation of door codes, each and every time you play. It might not sound compelling, but it heightens the atmosphere and also satisfaction of solving things.

Then there's the *Metroid* connection (we mean the first *Metroid*, released in 1986). *Zillion* requires the accumulation of ID cards, levelling and weapon increasing power-ups, items which improve vision, plus two additional characters with their



» Opa-opa (from *Fantasy Zone*) makes an appearance as an item which levels you up. Here we also see life-restoring bread, and the gun power-up.

ZILLION SITS IN THAT STRANGE REGION OF SOMETHING WHICH BROKE NEW GROUNDS, BUT DUE TO THE CURRENT CLIMATE WILL NEVER BE MADE IN QUITE THE SAME WAY AGAIN

own particular traits. Gradually these characters increase in power, enabling them to see where traps are, take more damage, and also fire the more powerful blasts. The sense of accomplishment when levelling up energy or your Zillion Blaster weapon, thereby allowing stronger capsules to be broken into and the game to progress further, is exactly as it is in *Metroid*. Every success feels like a triumphant victory over some unseen and antagonistic agent (in this case, the brains of Kotaro Hayashida, the game's main planner). *Zillion* also features a single, massive, retraceable, maze-like map which is slowly explored. Most strikingly, this reveals the same predilection for lengthy vertical passages (including elevators) interspersed with lengthy horizontal tunnels. The *Metroid* similarities are unmistakable, but maybe it's too easy to make comparisons only to *Metroid*, since *Zillion* perhaps also shares an equal amount of binary DNA with *Impossible Mission*. There are the same elevator shafts and tunnels, plus rooms which require the examining of various fixtures (item pods, as opposed to furniture), and also the need to assemble separate pieces of code.

While it is very much like the two aforementioned games, enough to entice fans to check it out, *Zillion* is also entirely unlike them when it comes to styling and atmosphere; it is a rare title which despite clearly borrowing ideas from elsewhere, still manages to make itself unique. The opening is atop a green planet surface besieged by Terminator-esque cyborgs, and there is much excitement had battling past them to reach the one elevator



» This is a good screen: both side-characters rescued, a healthy stockpile of ID cards, plus two out of the five floppy disks found.

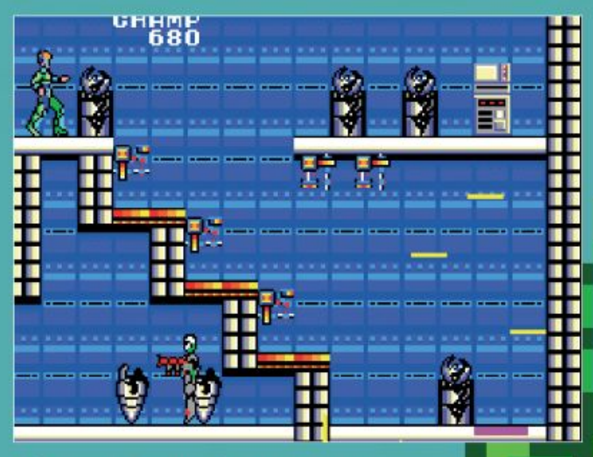
which travels beneath the surface. There's also some expertly placed tension since, for example, disabling a laser forcefield is only temporary; if you don't rush past when it's down, grab what you need and then get out immediately, you will lose much health and perhaps even die. Elevators meanwhile are loose fitting affairs, with no precise placement for stopping – allowing one to be lowered to just below the enemies' line of fire, before shooting back with impunity. While at first enemies can only shoot whilst standing, later foes do so whilst lying down and also upwards (making for some tense encounters). The goal is to eventually find five incredibly well-hidden floppy disks, containing some kind of top secret data, input a detonation code to destroy the alien base, before finally making your escape.

As no doubt shown, it's a difficult game which requires patience, thinking, and also dexterity – but mainly patience. In truth, it's likely that few had the necessary skills back in the day to complete it,



» This secret room can be found by venturing back inside the opening space craft.

especially with no save ability and guides only being available through magazines, but once you've absorbed and fully understood the code system in place, it is a joy to play even if you don't actually reach the end.



» Once you've rescued Champ, the game's difficulty ramps up even further. There are cyborgs and auto-guns everywhere. It's gonna be tough.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FANTASY ZONE
ARCADE
1986

PHANTASY STAR (PICTURED)
MASTER SYSTEM
1987

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP
MASTER SYSTEM
1989



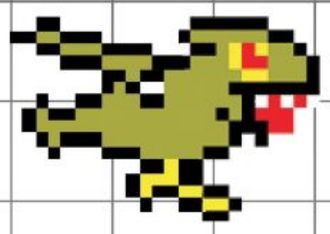
ORIGINS AND FOLLOW-UPS

Contrary to what many incorrect online sources say, the first *Zillion* SMS title was not developed by Tatsunoko Production. Tatsunoko Production in fact created the original anime TV series (31 episodes, running at 30 minutes each), and later an OVA movie. The overall storyline involved the genocide of humanity by aliens and three teenagers wielding the titular Zillion weapons, who all stand against this. The two games (since there was a sequel), were actually developed by Sega. The mistake comes from Tatsunoko Production's name being first on the title screen, but some quick cross-referencing proves that all those who worked on the first *Zillion*, were also employed by Sega on several other in-house titles (including the renowned Tokuhiko Uwabo, who did the music for *Phantasy Star IV*). Another case closed, by Retro Gamer.



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The Story of ALEX KIDD



Alex Kidd might not have gone the distance as a mascot for Sega but he did for the Master System. Stuart Hunt looks back on the life and games of Sega's 8-bit underdog – or perhaps should that be undermonkey?



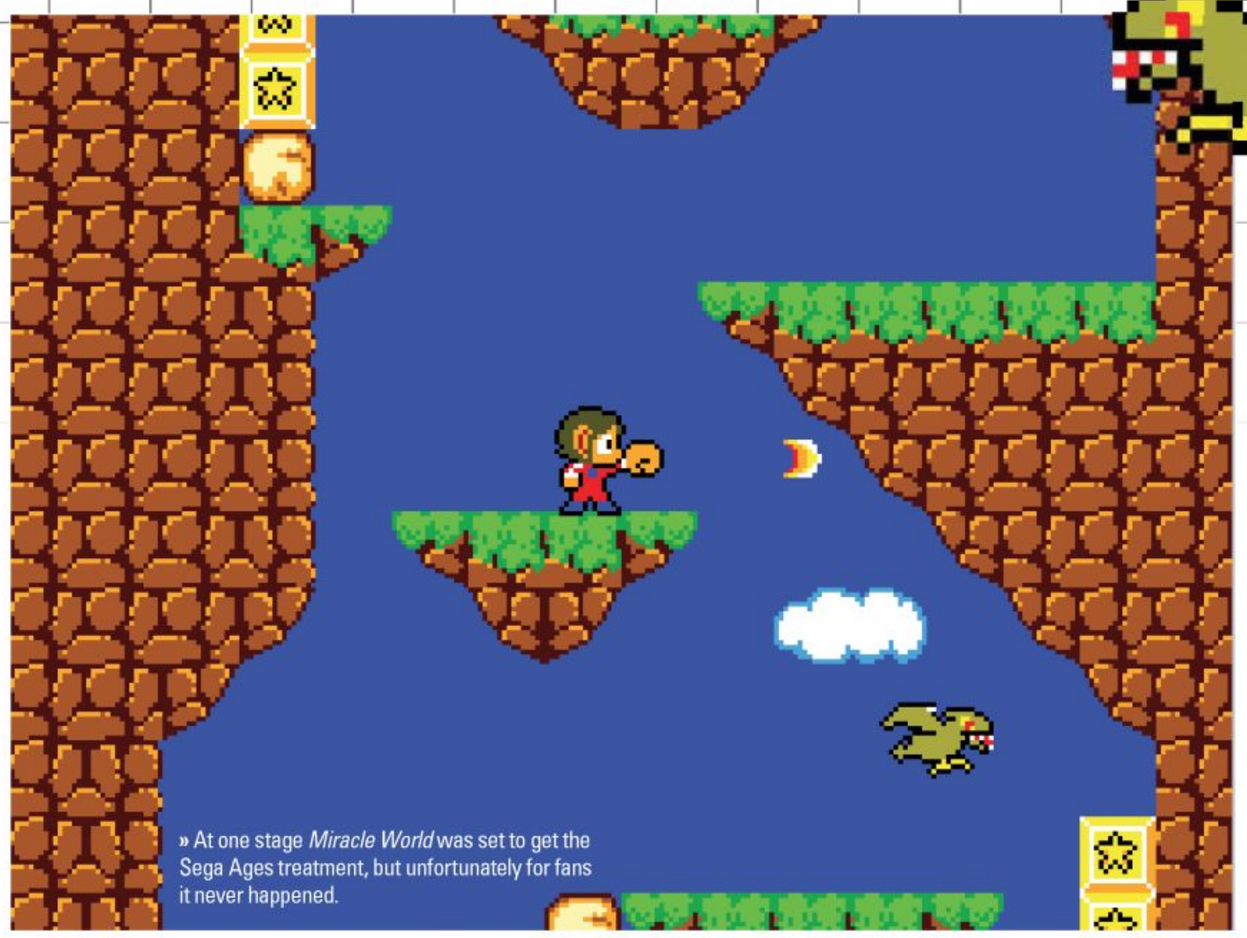
The Kameo Kidd

Alex has popped up in plenty of different Sega games over the years...

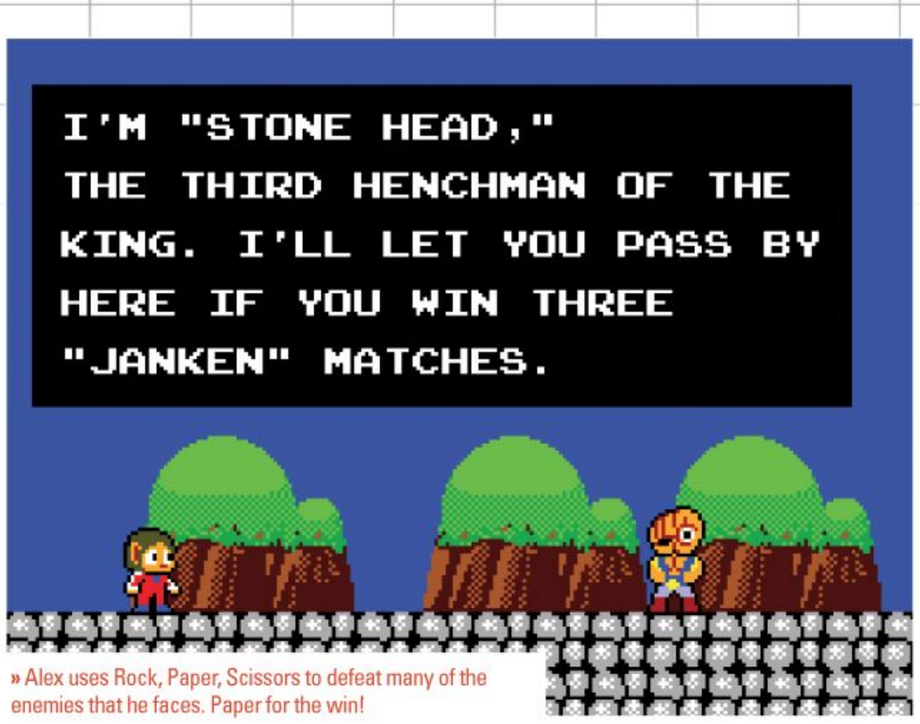


ALTERED BEAST

■ The names of Alex and girlfriend Stella are chiselled onto gravestones. Spooky prediction of Alex's death as Sega mascot or a knowing Sega poking fun?



» At one stage *Miracle World* was set to get the Sega Ages treatment, but unfortunately for fans it never happened.

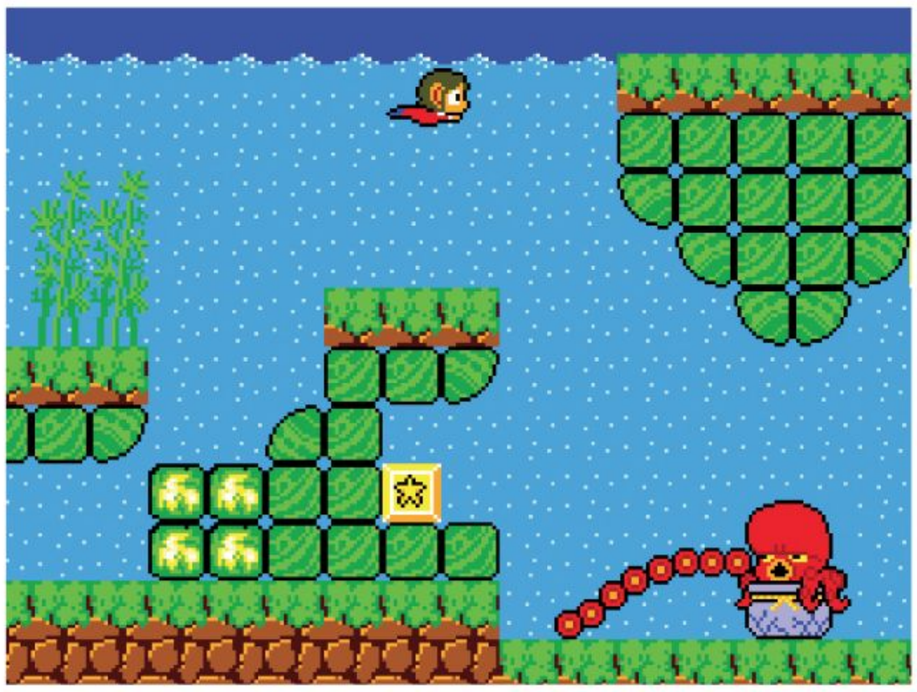


» Alex uses Rock, Paper, Scissors to defeat many of the enemies that he faces. Paper for the win!

Though it took Sega three goes to finally settle on Sonic as its mascot, Opa-Opa and Alex Kidd, the characters that held the honour before him, are just as important to its history. Both symbolise Sega's growth as a developer during the Eighties: Opa serves as a great reminder of Sega's illustrious coin-op beginnings, and Alex its battle to find its place in the console market.

Opa was the star of the cutesy and colourful 1986 *Defender*-style shooter *Fantasy World* and is widely regarded as being Sega's first mascot character. A sentient spaceship with feet, wings and egg-shaped body, Opa may not have been ideal mascot material on reflection, but *Fantasy Zone*'s popularity in Japan, combined with the character's anthropomorphic look, did make him an understandable candidate for mainstay Sega hero at the time.

Opa's time being the apple of Sega's eye, though, was fairly brief. And though some have questioned if he was ever really an official mascot, there is strong evidence that suggests Sega favoured him in the Eighties. As well as appearing in four *Fantasy Zone* games inside the decade (six, and one unreleased game in the PC Engine-headed *Space Fantasy Zone*, in total), Opa had cameo appearances in a bunch of Sega titles, including *Teddy Boy*, *Zillion* and *Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*.



» *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* remains Alex's most famous game. It was designed by Kotaro Hayashida, who later worked on *Phantasy Star* and *Shining Force*.

Despite Opa's coin-op success and sequels however, the landscape of popular gaming was changing thanks to Nintendo, the NES and its killer app *Super Mario Bros*. With Sega and its Sega Mark III console taking just a small slice of the domestic game market in Japan, Sega took the decision to launch the Mark III as the Sega Master System in the West and give it its own system-born platformer hero to attract gamers to the machine.

Alex Kidd was that hero and made his videogame debut in the 1986 platformer *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*. Designed by Kotaro Hayashida (using the pseudonym Ossale Kohta), Hayashida's Sega credits also include *Zillion*, *Woody Pop* and *Phantasy Star*, and it's the latter title that offers a hint as to what made *Miracle World* stand out from other platformers at the time.

"*Miracle World* is rough around the edges," says Kurt Kalata, head editor of retro gaming website Hardcore Gaming 101, "but it has a real 'epic adventure' feel that was missing from most platformers at the time. The money gathering, the hidden stuff, the map, the vehicles, the little bits of plot throughout. It's fairly advanced for a console title from 1986."

While most platformers followed the simple run-and-jump from left to right recipe, *Miracle World* featured strategy and RPG elements





KENSEIDEN

■ Another stone-based cameo – this one in the hack-and-slash SMS platformer *Kenseiden*. On the third stage Alex's face can be seen hidden in the cave walls.



SEGAGAGA

■ Alex's most memorable cameo was in *Segagaga*, where he appeared as a videogame store clerk lamenting his treatment by Sega following the arrival of the blue spiky one.



SHENMUE

■ Alex collectable capsule toys appear in both *Shenmue* instalments. Other Sega personalities given the Kinder Egg treatment include Opa-Opa, Ristar and *Virtua Fighter* cast members.

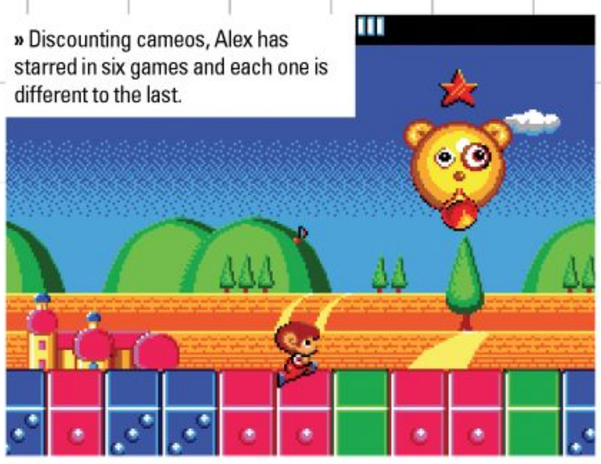


SEGA SUPERSTARS SERIES

■ More recently, Alex appeared in both *Sega Superstars Tennis* and the *Sega All-Stars Racing* series. In the latter he rides his red motorbike from *Miracle World*.

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» Discounting cameos, Alex has starred in six games and each one is different to the last.

and its levels were all distinctively themed. Some of its more obvious adventure game elements included a world map, mini-games in the form of Janken (Rock-Paper-Scissors) and in-game currency (Baums) that could be collected and used by Alex to purchase useful gadgets and power-ups – from vehicles to powerful artefacts.

Miracle World's story was also fairly involved and made use of two pretty big adventure story clichés: a powerful tyrant seizing a peaceful land and a young boy learning that he's a lost prince. All of this simply helped to create a richer-feeling world that many gamers and platformer fans were drawn to.

Miracle World remains the most popular and well-known game in the *Alex Kidd* series, and what undoubtedly helped it to achieve this status was Sega's decision to build it into Master System consoles, fusing it and Alex to the machine's legacy forever. And while *Miracle World* wasn't the first game integrated into Sega Master Systems (see Built To Thrill box out), it is the one that gamers seem to remember most vividly.

Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars was Alex's next game and was released just a few short weeks after *Miracle World*. Notable for being the only arcade game in the series, *Lost Stars* placed Alex in a more traditional style of platformer and gave him a girlfriend sidekick named Stella. The gameplay tasked the lovebirds – if playing co-op – with racing through its 12 stages to collect Zodiac signs, while negotiating obstacles and avoiding a very strange roster of enemies.



» *Lost Stars* gave Alex a girlfriend sidekick. Subsequent games wouldn't use her again though, even the Master System *Lost Stars* conversion.

Its levels include a colourful toy world, a factory guarded by deadly robots and machinery, and an underwater stage that feels very much inspired by *Miracle World*'s submerged areas. *Lost Stars* also features a few cameos and nods to other Sega games – from penguins kicking ice cubes across the ice (*Pengo*), to a retired and bloated-looking Opa-Opa (a reference perhaps to Sega putting the character out to pasture).

> **"He was well known among the small handful of kids who had Sega Master Systems"**
> Kurt Kalata

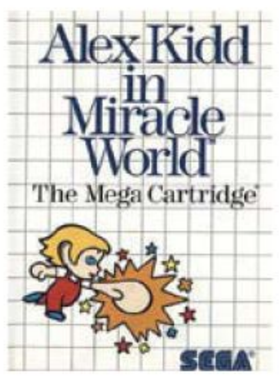
One of the things that hurt Alex was Sega placing him in different styles of game, ostensibly viewing him as a sort of all-purpose hero rather than letting him grow a fan-base within the genre he was designed for.

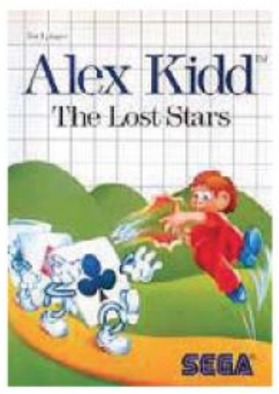
Alex Kidd In High Tech World, which is a misleading title as it kind of gives the impression that it's cut from a similar cloth to *Miracle World*, was an action-RPG for the SMS that saw Alex on a quest to find a Sega amusement arcade.

High Tech World was never released in Japan, as there it is known as *Anmitsu Hime* and isn't associated with the *Alex Kidd* series at all. Instead it's based on a Japanese manga and anime about a spirited young princess. The games are pretty much identical save for the necessary tweaks to the sprites, dialogue and story – rather than an amusement arcade the princess is on the hunt for a bakery.

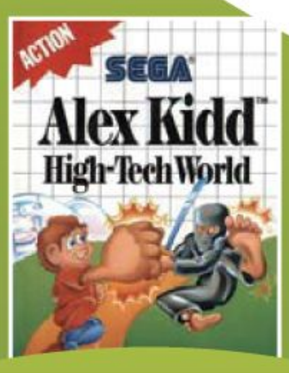
The resulting meld results in a bizarre *Alex Kidd* adventure given that it's set in ancient Japan and stars a cast made up of samurais and ninjas. It also suffers from retcon, with Alex referring to one of the samurai characters in the game as his dad. *High Tech World* isn't Alex's best outing, but it does at least retain *Miracle World*'s adventure/platformer recipe – even if it get the parts and mixing wrong.

Released in Japan in 1987, *Alex Kidd BMX Trial* was an overhead racer designed to help sell the Mark III's paddle controller, a peripheral that came bundled with the game. *BMX Trail* saw Alex negotiating colourful obstacle courses, avoiding rival racers and performing jumps on a motocross cycle. It lacks excitement and the controls could be tighter, two issues that spell disaster for a racing game. The track design is the best thing about it, with nice wide stages that allow Alex to



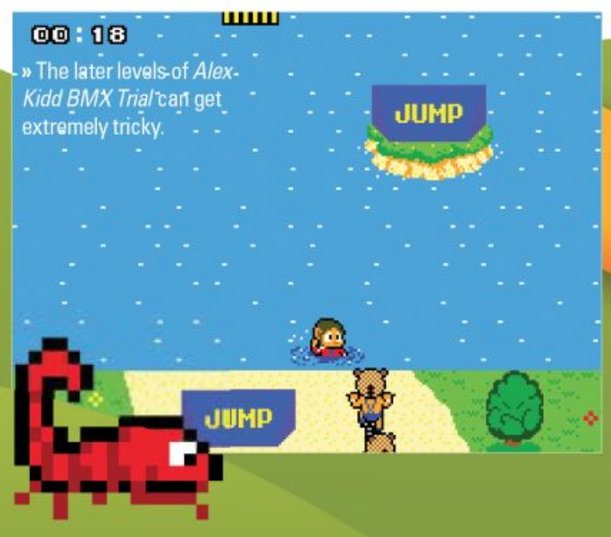








» *Alex Kidd BMX Trial* was never released outside of Japan. It's become quite sought after by collectors.



» The later levels of *Alex-Kidd BMX Trial* can get extremely tricky.

Rieko Kodama Talks

A brief chat with the artist behind Alex Kidd In Miracle World



Are you glad that Alex lives on in games like *Sega Super Star Tennis* and *Sonic All-Stars Racing Transformed*?
I am simply happy that he still is appearing in games and I really appreciate the fact that people remember him so long after the original game was launched.

How did you find working on the Mega Drive Alex Kidd compared to the Master System version?
We were able to use more colours, and parallax-scrolling was available, so we used that.

How would you like Alex Kidd to be remembered?
I have received a lot of comments from fans like "I played with my father when I was a kid! It is a good memory."

I would like Alex to be remembered as one of your friends you played with when you were a child.



venture off-road (albeit in a very limited sense) and not stick to a set route. It's a strange *Alex Kidd* title that feels more like a spin-off than a true *Alex Kidd* outing.

What could have been the game to really help catapult Alex to stardom in the US sadly turned out to be a 16-bit damp squib – one that most likely sounded the final death knell for his career with Sega. Released in Japan in 1989 and a launch game for the Genesis the following year, *Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle* was a late-to-arrive sequel to *Miracle World*. Expanding on the original story, it sees Alex on a mission to find the whereabouts of his dad King Thor, a quest that leads him to the colourful Paper-Rock-Scissors-obsessed planet of Paperock.

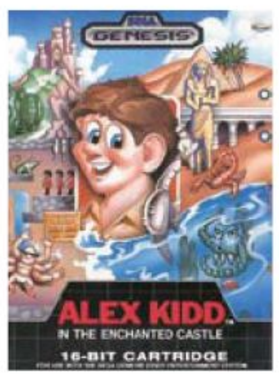
Enchanted Castle's gameplay is very similar to *Miracle World*'s. That is to say you punch things, you jump over things, you buy things, you drive things and you play Paper-Rock-Scissors with things. However, despite the extra power of the Mega Drive and a return to a genre that had worked for Alex, *Enchanted Castle* sadly failed to capture the considerable charm of its predecessor.

The biggest issues are that visuals barely look a step up from *Miracle World*, the controls feel even more slippy than they did in *Miracle World* and the stages just don't feel as fun or creative. It's not all doom and gloom though. Improvements are made in a few areas. Alex's move repertoire is expanded upon, certain coloured blocks could now be punched at enemies and purchased items were now stored in a handy inventory that Alex could dip into at any time.

Though it had been a bumpy ride for Alex up to this point, his final game did at least see him claw back some love and credibility in the enjoyable, if a bit short, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*. Released for the SMS in US and Europe, *Shinobi World* saw Alex gatecrash another Sega franchise and get to live out his final days in more conformable 8-bit surroundings. But it was a wonderful little swansong for Alex Kidd that almost never happened.



» *High Tech World* was actually a re-skin of the Japanese game *Anmitsu Hime*. It was based on a manga and anime about a young princess.





Shinobi World was originally going to be titled *Shinobi Kid*, and was to have no reference to the *Alex Kidd* series at all. The original game was also to feature a first boss named Mari-Oh (a play on *Shinobi* first boss Ken Oh) who was a thinly veiled parody of a certain Nintendo mascot. Sadly, he never made it into the finished game, but Alex did.

With its ingredients including cutesy versions of levels, weapons, music, enemies and bosses from *Shinobi*, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* is an entertaining little Sega mash-up and one of the better action games available for the SMS.



It would be fair to say that Alex Kidd never reached the videogame A-list thanks to him failing to make a splash in North America. There he was hurt by poor marketing (cover art for his games portrayed him as a gawky teenage boy) and the SMS also failing to take off.

"I knew about him as a kid, somehow," remembers Kurt. "He was well known among the small handful of kids that had Sega Master Systems. Anecdotally, there were only ▶



» *Enchanted Castle* was a very late sequel to *Miracle World*. Sadly though, it was unsuccessful in recapturing the original's magic.

Anatomy of Alex Kidd

Discover what makes Sega's old mascot tick



EARLY ORIGINS

Alex is believed to have been based on the Monkey King from the classic Chinese novel *Journey To The West* – the same Monkey King that became the inspiration for the hero in the *Monkey* TV series from the Seventies

STREET CRED

Alex's anime look was played down outside of Japan, with Western cover and promotional art depicting him as a gawky teenager with about as much edge as a rubber ring. Naturally, this did nothing to help boost his cred in playgrounds.

GAME OF ALEX?

It's also believed that Alex's bright red jumpsuit could have inspired by the iconic yellow jumpsuit worn by martial arts legend Bruce Lee in his final film, *The Game Of Death*.

FISTS OF FURY

Alex has dedicated years of his young life to mastering the 'Shellcore' technique, a fictional martial art that allows him to enlarge his fists to effortlessly break rock.

FOOTWEAR

Alex is known for having poor footwear. His shoes are slippery and offer little stability. Not really the best feet tools for platformers. Maybe he should invest in some platform shoes? Sorry.

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Built To Thrill

Alex Kidd In Miracle World wasn't the only game that lived inside Master Systems...

SNAIL MAZE



BUILT-INTO:
SMS model number – 3000

■ Unlocked by pressing UP and buttons 1 and 2 with no cartridge in the console, *Snail Maze* was a hidden game that plays exactly as it sounds. You must help a snail work through mazes and reach an exit within a time limit. As you progress the time limit gets tighter.

HANG-ON



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3005-24

■ A big hit, so undoubtedly Sega was keen to make Yu Suzuki's *Hang-On* an incentive for consumers to purchase its console. The Master System port isn't that bad. It not perfect and does get repetitive, but it looks nice and the animation and controls are smooth enough.

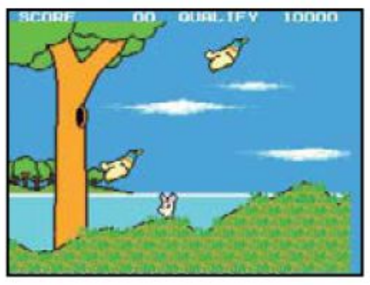
MISSILE DEFENSE 3D



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3005-C

■ *Missile Defense 3D* is a simple but entertaining lightgun game that does well to demo the potential of Sega's 3D glasses. Like *Missile Command*, you must protect a city from missile threats. The action takes place across three stages, and must shoot down the missiles before they reach and decimate their destination.

HANG-ON & SAFARI HUNT & SNAIL MAZE



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3010-A

■ The ultimate SMS 1 variant is probably the 3010-A as it came with three built in games: *Snail Maze* (hidden) and *Hang-On* and *Safari Hunt* as a double-pack. The latter is a generic lightgun game to simply show off the SMS Light Phaser. It's basically Sega's *Duck Hunt*.

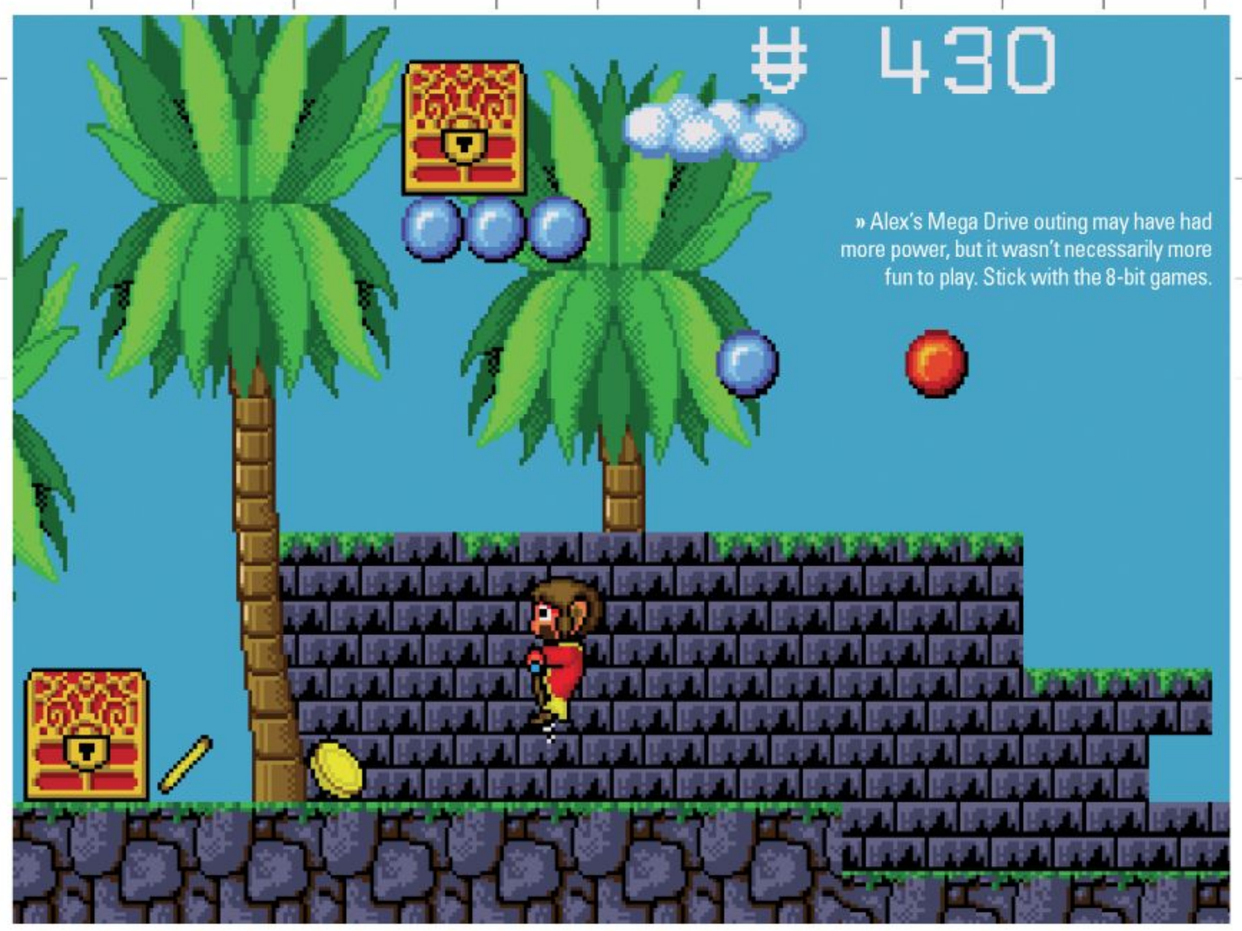
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



BUILT-INTO: Master System II variant

■ Once Sonic had become a platform superstar, Alex was left out on his big ear. Sega looked to blue hedgehog mania to help it sell its then last-gen system, and as part of the deal Alex had to give up his home. Admittedly though, it was a smart move.





» Alex's Mega Drive outing may have had more power, but it wasn't necessarily more fun to play. Stick with the 8-bit games.

"You can't talk about old games in Brazil without mentioning Alex Kidd"

Marcelo Barbosa

two other kids in my entire school that had one, so there probably weren't many. Other than that, I think most gamers only know him from *Enchanted Castle* on the Genesis, since it was a launch title for the system and was snagged by a lot of early adopters and featured in advertisements."

Though Alex failed to break North America, there were places where he found fans, namely those countries where the SMS was popular, such as Brazil.

Brazilian Marcelo Barbosa (aka MCB Remakes) has been working on an HD update of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*. Raised and still living in Brazil, Marcelo shares his memories of Alex's life in his country, giving us a glimpse of an unfamiliar world to many gamers where Alex actually went some way to living up to his prince credentials.

"Alex Kidd was tremendously popular here," Marcelo tells us. "You can't talk about old games in Brazil without mentioning Alex Kidd. It wasn't unusual to see him on magazine covers and we always directly associated him with Sega until Sonic appeared on the scene."

The opposite of how things played out for Alex in North America, getting to Brazil before Nintendo gave Sega and its mascot a significant edge.

"Sega games were sold in Brazil since 1989 but Nintendo had only arrived here in 1993. For four years we had Sega ads everywhere and no (official) sign of Mario, NES, Super Nintendo or Game Boy. For political reasons Brazil was a paradise of obsolete technology – old cars, old computers, old anything-you-can-imagine. That started to change in the late Eighties and early Nineties. Dictatorship in Brazil was gone and our country became more receptive to foreign technology. So we were still playing our old Atari 2600 games and suddenly the Master System appeared on TV and in magazine advertisements. It was clearly new, different and much more advanced than all the gaming systems available in Brazil. Every kid wanted a Master System for Christmas in 1989."

For a long while officially licensed Nintendo products weren't available in Brazil. This led to many Brazilian Famiclones appearing after the Master System's release, with gamers keen to obtain more of these advanced looking



» That boss may look extremely happy, but he'll punish you if you're not careful.

Alex Kidd In HD World

We chat to Marcelo Barbosa about his progress in updating Alex's best adventure



Why did you decide to create an HD remake of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*?
Alex Kidd HD is not exactly a remake; it's a ROM hack running in a sort of mutant Master System that is able to display images with four times more resolution. Aside from my new graphics, everything else is the original stuff created by Sega. Last year I read about an emulator called HiSMS that turns the SMS into this mutant console capable of displaying hi-res graphics. I chose *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* as it's a small, simple game that I'm very familiar with. Also, I never had a SMS but *Alex Kidd* was also the first post-Atari game that I really remember enjoying a lot – so nostalgia influenced me as well.

What has been the most challenging/rewarding part of the project so far?
Bugs on HiSMS do their best to make you give up, so the first challenge is to not turn crazy. The other two concern the graphics. I'm doing all the research I can to respect the original Japanese character designs, collecting all the *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* art I can find to help me with the designs for the more obscure characters. The final challenge has been the backgrounds because I'm definitely not good at drawing them. The most rewarding part is when HiSMS turns all confusing image files into a single, working ROM. Suddenly your drawings come alive, jumping and fighting inside this incredible Super Master System.

Do you plan to release the game once it is finished?
This is the most frustrating part of this project. People are much more interested in *Alex Kidd HD* than I could ever expect, but I can't release it because the game belongs to Sega and I don't want to get in trouble. The project is about 65 per cent complete and I'm facing it as a proof of concept, a showcase of HiSMS's capabilities. Many companies could easily create HD updates of their old games. I bet projects like these would be much cheaper than a full remake, especially if they still have their old assets around.



» [PC] The HD update of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* is looking very nice indeed.



» It's currently unclear if Marcelo's project will ever have a full release.

videogames. As a result, Nintendo also found popularity in Brazil, although Mario became known as a mascot for something else.

"Mario became very popular in Brazil as well, but he was essentially a mascot of pirate games," explains Marcelo. "He had strong presence in gaming magazines but there were no posters or promotions showing him in actual stores. The first Brazilian Nintendo commercial (1993) is weird because it sort of assumes that people know who Mario is due to piracy. So in these first years I honestly believe that Alex Kidd was as popular as Mario – probably due to excellent, omnipresent marketing campaigns by Tec Toy (Brazilian company that made and sold licensed Sega products) and the lack of interest by Nintendo in the Brazilian market, that was until they realised that Sega/Tec Toy was making a lot of money here."

In most parts of the world Alex quickly became forgotten about once the Mega Drive was released and *Sonic The Hedgehog* cemented the machine's North American success story.

At one time though, Sega and Alex were both underdogs, and it's perhaps for this reason why many Sega fans seem to have affection for the character. Alex may not have made the mascot major leagues but he still left an impact on many gamers, especially early adopters of Sega. It's also worth noting that he's done pretty well to leave any sort of mark at all, given he hardly left behind the most impressive of gaming legacies: one classic platformer, a decent but little-known coin-op sequel, an action/RPG that was a re-skin of another game and an mediocre import racer, before finishing on a disappointing 16-bit debut and an fun action-platformer that owes much to another popular Sega franchise.

So why is Alex so fondly regarded by Sega fans? "He's a tragic underdog hero," answers Kurt. "Like that scene from *Segagaga* where you find him all washed up, working videogame retail; he was a fun character that was pushed aside for Sonic, who was cooler and hipper, and thus exponentially more popular. It's hard not to feel bad for him. Also, while I've known many people that hate *Miracle World* due to its slippery controls, I think it holds up well as one of the better games for the Master System. It was clearly trying to compete with *Super Mario Bros*, but rather than ripping it off, they created something wholly unique."



» *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* remains fantastic fun to play. Buy it now people.



» If only Alex Kidd had found the time to appear in more Sega crossovers…

Special thanks to Kurt Kalata and Marcelo Barbosa for their help with this feature and invaluable insight.





FANTASY ZONE

TO BE THIS GAUDY TAKES SEGA...



- **PUBLISHER** SEGA
- **YEAR:** 1986
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MASTER SYSTEM



HISTORY

Sega's Master System was a wonderful little console that always came second place to Nintendo's NES. A shame really, as it had some truly cracking arcade conversions available for it that made up in heart and gameplay what their 8-bit visuals and sound often lacked. Every now and then though a title came along that did a remarkable job of capturing the spirit of the original arcade game. *Fantasy Zone* was one such game.

One of the original cute-'em-ups, Sega's loony shooter saw you taking control of a sweet little spaceship and blasting your way through some of the brightest, weirdest looking enemies ever seen. Many of the beasties you encountered were some of the strangest aberrations to grace a videogame and provided a unique window into the (no doubt) deranged minds that thought it would make perfect sense to host all these bizarre creations in one game.

Sega was right of course.

Fantasy Zone's bright, pastel-coloured world and crazy occupants was like no other shooter around and allowed the game to develop a cult following. While the Master System version wasn't without its faults, it was an extremely faithful port that seldom strayed from its arcade parent. The quirky music, marvellous visuals, outrageous power-ups; everything was ported with near perfect precision; even the huge bizarre bosses had made it across intact.

Sure *Fantasy Zone* was simple to play, but therein lay its charm. Each level required you to do nothing more than fly back and fourth across the gaudy landscape and take out the many purple bases dotted about each stage. Whenever an opponent was defeated it would drop behind a coin that could then be spent at the shops that floated by. Once tooled up, it was simply a case of clearing the rest of the stage's enemies and facing off against a big boss…

It's been superseded by superior versions (including a recent PS2 offering) but Sega's 8-bit version remains a testament to what its console could do in talented hands.



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

PHANTASY STAR™ ONLINE

ファンタシースターオンライン

SEGA'S PHANTASY STAR HAS GONE THROUGH ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT METAMORPHOSIS OF ANY RPG FRANCHISE. SINCE FIRST APPEARING ON THE SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, IT HAS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING THAT IS NOW VIRTUALLY UNRECOGNISABLE FROM THE ORIGINAL 8-BIT GAME. MIKE TOOLEY TALKS TO SEVERAL PHANTASY STAR DEVELOPERS AND DISCOVERS HOW THE EVOLUTION OF THIS SUCCESSFUL SERIES HAS OFTEN GONE HAND IN HAND WITH SEGA'S OWN TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES OF THE TIME



***Phantasy Star* started life way back in 1987. Sega's perennial RPG was crafted and sold as the best reason to buy the Master System, with Sega aiming to take on Nintendo's all-conquering NES.** Even by Sega's standards it was a bold design brief, and, despite the odds, it was almost fulfilled. *Phantasy Star* would become one of Sega's biggest console franchises, though at the time this was almost unimaginable. The story of the *Phantasy Star* series, lying as close to Sega's internal machismo as it did, serves to chronicle the Sega legend itself. With each instalment of *Phantasy Star* something new was added to the RPG genre or to the technology of the time. The series has brought Sega success and awards, but along the way, as has so often been the case, the Japanese giant has suffered for its art.

By 1986 the Japanese games industry had really hit its stride. Gamers the world over were enjoying stellar arcade titles from the likes of Taito and Capcom; hits like *Bubble Bobble* and *Strider* were heavy on character art and gameplay, and proved to be instantly popular. Sega, though, was in a different league altogether.

Having recently been successfully floated on the Japanese stock market its arcade games, like *After Burner* and *Space Harrier,* were a tour de force of speed and pyrotechnics – they were bolstered by the raw power of custom hardware and cabinets that had no equal at that time. Thanks largely to the formidable Isao Otiawo's drive for growth and the talents of the Sega arcade teams and their leader Yu Suzuki, in the arcades, Sega was unstoppable.

However, in the home computer and console market Sega wasn't having much success at all, and it was Nintendo and its aforementioned NES that was enjoying the lion's share of gamers' money.

Isao Otiawo wasn't prepared to give up on this lucrative market though. Moderate success was previously achieved through Sega's range of SG1-3000 computers, with some of its hardware being used in the then current Master System architecture – Otiawo knew that the hardware was good, and was acutely aware of the problems facing Sega's overseas competitors.

So from 1986 to 1996 Sega ran a club called S.P.E.C. (The Sega Players Enjoy Club). Spec's membership consisted



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

MAGNIFICENT

One of the many new and innovative features that *Phantasy Star* brought to the series was the ability to nurture a support character that would assist the player on their quest. Mags as they were known were either found or traded with other players.

They needed constant feeding but like all living things would thrive and grow based on the food they were given. If a mag's diet consisted of recovery foods then it would have healing bias, likewise if a mag was fed on magic recovery foods or photon drops it would become aggressive. Mags had three evolutions: its original state; at level 20 it would split in two; the third evolution happened depending on character and mag class but defined the mag's attributes and photon attacks. Mags took their power from photon damage taken by the player in battle – once the power bar hit 100 it was ready to send off its photon blast.



» The beginning of *Phantasy Star* is quite intriguing for a RPG, setting the action for what is to come (what comes is brilliant).



» Not many games cast you in the role of a heroine. nother example of just how different *Phantasy Star* was to its peers.



of Sega staff and fans alike, giving the developers a chance to speak to fans about their work and vice versa. The format was honest and open; looking back, this was perhaps the industry's first iteration of a focus group. The idea of S.P.E.C. repaid Sega well when it wanted to know why Sega arcade gamers were playing on Nintendo's NES at home. The Nintendo Entertainment System was dominant in Japan and North America, but at that time had few spectacular games, whereas the Master System had accurate home versions of Sega's burgeoning arcade catalogue.

The results of the S.P.E.C. survey told Otiawo all he needed to know: the most anticipated game of the year was *Dragon's Quest 3:* a NES exclusive! *Dragon's Quest*, *Final Fantasy* and *Ultima* appeared to be the difference – three massive franchises, three massive RPGs. All exclusive to Nintendo consoles and Sega had nothing to offer that was even slightly similar.

It was the decade of *Dungeons & Dragons* and Otiawo wasn't about to let Sega miss the adventure. And so it was that he assembled a team of talented individuals from within Sega to produce its very first RPG.

AM8, as it was to be known, started as a disparate group of talent and drew little interest from the other teams at Sega at the time. Ironically, *Phantasy Star* the game would bestow success on all who were involved with it. Yuji Naka was to cut his teeth designing a game world, something that had eluded him up until this point (most of Naka's previous portfolio at Sega was made up of home conversions of Yu Suzuki's arcade games). As Naka's idol and mentor, without even being connected to the project, Yu Suzuki's influence would be felt throughout the *Phantasy Star* universe. Yuji Naka was joined by Reiko Kodama who had started with Sega in 1984 and was no stranger to success thanks to her work on the arcade title *Ninja Princess* and the Master System's flagship title *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* – responsible for overall game design she would eventually persuade Naka to develop the 3D engine that would make *Phantasy Star* stand apart from its competitors. Joining the senior Kodama was Naota Oshima, again tasked with overall game design – his contributions were to make Naka and Kodama's ideas a reality. Of most significance to the franchise though was the inclusion of two others not directly involved with creating the game: enter Miki Morimoto and Tokuhiko Uwabo.

Morimoto had been around Sega for a couple of years at this point; he had joined to become part of the arcade division. Sadly, this opportunity didn't present itself for Morimoto, so he continued to work somewhat begrudgingly in the home entertainment sector. His career high at this point was to be director of the seminal *Ys*.

Morimoto was a big player within S.P.E.C. and his mandate for *Phantasy Star* was to ensure that the gamers got exactly what they asked for without recreating the Greek legend of Homer. As for Uwabo, his job was to score the works of the team and provide a suitable set of sound effects – not an easy transition when your previous musical scores have been for fast, action arcade games like *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*.

With the team members in place, it was time to create the game. "I don't really remember all the details, but Yuji Naka indicated basic concept with game style, while each team member broke this down further to eventually create *Phantasy Star*'s design," begins Reiko Kodama. "We wanted a game that was unlike any other consumer RPG that was out there. We thought the 3D dungeons in PC games were interesting, and detailed event scenes would be a unique way to convey the story – two features that weren't in any other console RPGs at the time. The game's mix of sci-fi and fantasy setting was also part of this desire to create a unique RPG," she continued.



» This where it started, innocence abounds.



» The first *Phantasy Star* villain. The once magnanimous King Lassic.



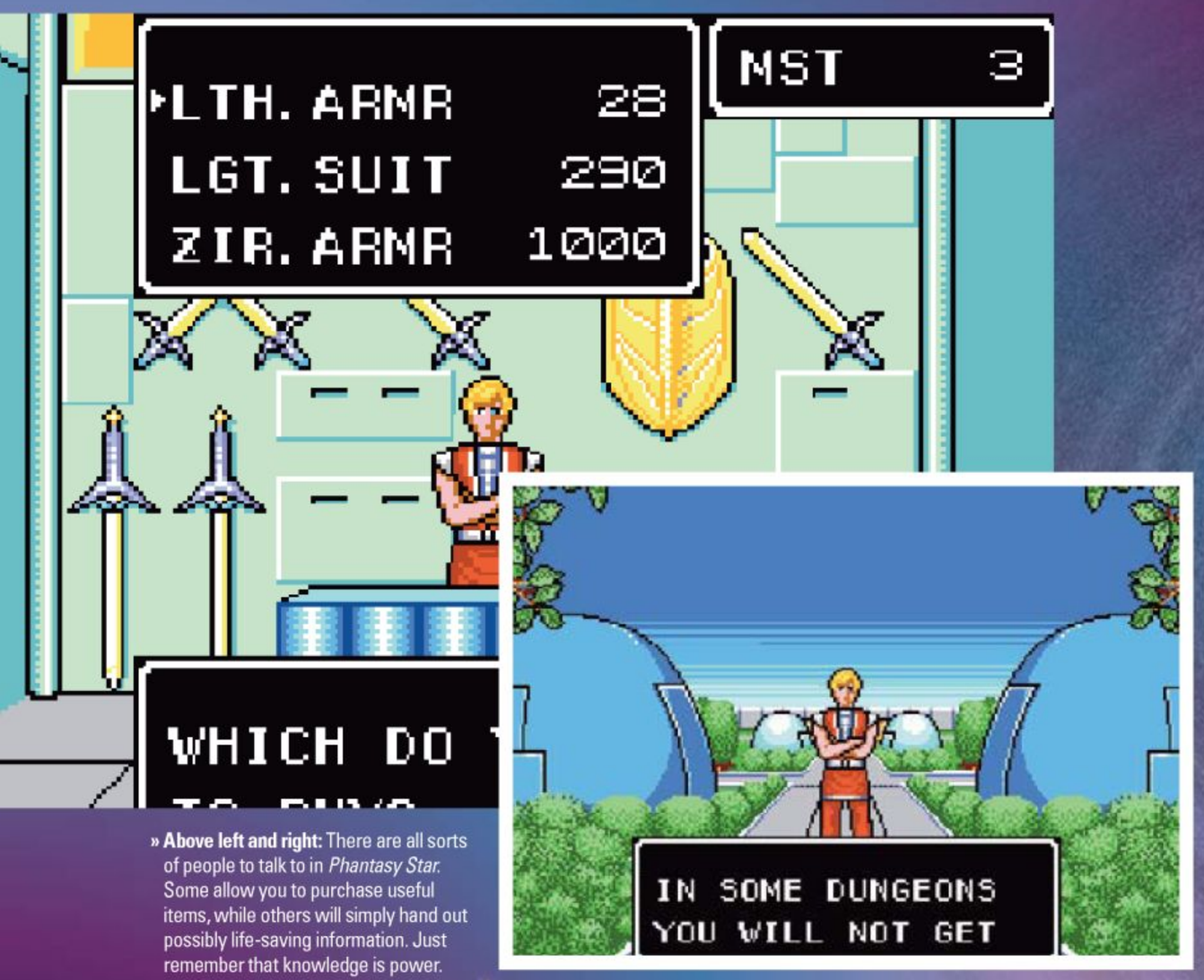
» Don't be fooled, despite having no finger, Myau was an amazing asset to the party.



» The first time incarnation of Dark Falz as seen in *PS1*.



» Shops are massively important in *Phantasy Star*, allowing you to stock up on items and useful weapons.



» **Above left and right:** There are all sorts of people to talk to in *Phantasy Star*. Some allow you to purchase useful items, while others will simply hand out possibly life-saving information. Just remember that knowledge is power.

With the game skeleton created, it fell to the designers and programmers to add flesh to the bones. Development gathered at pace and at this point the game really started to take shape.

Oshima and Reiko were determined to have their 3D dungeons and event scenes and as such tasked Naka with developing a 3D engine for the Master System, asking him to use all that he had learnt from the Yu Suzuki code he had seen as a conversion programmer. Naka rose to the challenge and delivered an engine that was beyond the then known threshold of Sega's 8-bit console. The same incentive was applied to Tokuhiko Uwabo for making *Phantasy Star*'s soundtrack. "How would you have approached this in the arcade division?" was the question that was asked. The answer would hit gamers in the pocket as Tokuhiko did exactly what the arcade division would do: increase the spec of the hardware. So Otiawo green-lighted the incomplete *Phantasy Star* to have its own FM sound chip built into the cartridge. This wasn't all though – to accommodate the 3D sections *Phantasy Star* would need a bigger cartridge. Again the team were told, "whatever it takes". As *Phantasy Star* took shape and the story line progressed it was decided that the lead character should be female. "Back then the idea of a female hero was practically unheard of," continues Kodama. "We wanted to do things that hadn't been done before, like animated monsters and 3D dungeons, so the idea of a female came naturally; we thought it would be an interesting change."

Phantasy Star eventually shipped on 20 December 1987 and launched to expectant Japanese gamers on a cartridge weighing in at 8-mega bits, some 16 times the size of a standard Master System cartridge. It also came with the aforementioned built-in FM Chip and the console's first in-built cartridge save system – all in all a fitting swansong as the last game released on the MK1 Master System.

Set on the planet Palma, *Phantasy Star* followed the story of Alis Landale as she ses out to avenge her brother's death and free her people from the corrupt rule of King Lassic. Interestingly, as the story unfolds Lassic is shown as a magnanimous and fair leader, who has been corrupted by a demon called Dark Force. Dark Force we would learn later would be the omnipresent boss throughout all the *Phantasy Star* games. AM8 had done it. It had delivered a first class RPG that had bowled over reviewers and gamers alike. It had steamrollered formulaic RPGs to create new standards of its own. Players were awarded a space ship for interplanetary travel; the 'boss who's not a boss' was seen here for the very first time; but most importantly AM8 hadn't just created a timeline, it had created a universe: a universe gamers would want to return to over and over again.

Pleased with *Phantasy Star*'s success, Sega commissioned a translation and ten months later *Phantasy Star* was released in North America. Retailing for $10 less than the hardware it was played on, even Sega was surprised to see the speed that the game was selling. The translation wasn't good, name changes made to some key characters changed the sex of the characters (even changing the story) and some gamers treat it as a different game entirely. Still, *Phantasy Star* was considered a great success and as such a sequel was quickly put into production. AM8 stayed together but were strengthened by Toru Yoshida joining AM8 as team manager. Sega had learnt from the past and knew that with a new console almost ready for launch, in the shape of the Mega Drive, it had a great chance to get an RPG established before Nintendo had finalised the specs for its then next generation SNES.

The first thing Toru Yoshida did was to make the decision that the game should be in 2D: "I wanted to lose the sparse 3D dungeons of the first game and create a densely-populated environment to give a sense of scale," he told Mega magazine at the time. The battles would play out in three dimensions though and the character animation had improved immensely



» Try talking to a scorpion and see how far it actually gets you…

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN...



YOU ENTERED THE LOBBY?
Walking into the lobby of Phantasy Star Online for the first time is one of the series' biggest highlights. Despite only being able to use a keyboard to communicate, Sonic Team's ingenious chat system instantly broke down the boundaries for players all around the world.

"BACK THEN THE IDEA OF A FEMALE HERO WAS PRACTICALLY UNHEARD OF, WE WANTED TO DO THINGS THAT HADN'T BEEN DONE BEFORE, SO THE IDEA OF A FEMALE CAME NATURALLY"



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THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN





» *PS3* was much darker than the first two games, something gamers noticed from the sinister introduction.



» Special thanks to www.shinforce.com who supplied us with many useful images, including this rather splendid boss from Phantasy Star Online.

THE OTHER PHANTASY STARS

Being a Sonic Team franchise has seen *Phantasy Star* locales and characters appear in many other games, usually as hidden extras. Some are interesting curios but some really are something to behold. *Hoshi Wo* on the Sega Master System allowed players to visit Palma, Motavia and Dezoris via a shuttle that must sound familiar to some of you. *Super Daisen Ryaku* on the Mega Drive contained a map of the planet Mota. *Shenmue 1* and *2* featured a Myau Musk Cat toy while the bus Toy had the journey Paseo-Zema on its information board. Rouge's final stage in *Sonic Adventure 2* contains *PSO* pick up boxes containing rings, and the subsequent *Sonic Adventure 2* battle contained *PSO* costumes for Shadow and Sonic, unlockable by attaining all A grades. Even as recently as the GameCube *Beach Spikers*, Sonic Team have been hiding away goodies – just type PHANTA2 as a girls' name to unlock two outfits, some green hair and Numan ears. A Humewearl face also becomes available.

SET ONE 1000 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST GAME, A DESPERATE FUTURE IS PAINTED WHERE TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE STRUGGLE TO CO-EXIST

since the first game. The cutscenes remained as well and demonstrated the power of Sega's new hardware, with Rolph, the main character, having the end of *Phantasy Star* narrated to him through a series of cutscenes.

Phantasy Star II is where the themes of the series really emerged. Set 1000 years after the first game, a future is painted where technology and nature struggle to co-exist – a future governed by a machine: Mother Brain. Developed to manage the ecology of the Agol system she has started to malfunction. Where Alis had to make do with the companions destined to meet her, Rolph gets to choose his own party to take on his adventure. Then there is, Nei, Rolph's partner through this adventure who would go on to become a firm fan favourite and prove once and for all that videogames can be emotive; Nei's fate would be mirrored in many games after *Phantasy Star II* (*Final Fantasy VII* for instance), but as in life you never forget the first time.

Another reason *Phantasy Star II* stands out in the series is due to its impressive boss battles. "I remember that both Dark Star and Mother Brain were remarkably tough," recalls Yoshida. "I don't quite know what inspired me, but Mother Brain comes from a mother with an unmistakable sense of language. I borrowed elements from computer and mothers, so when I brought her to life I managed to give her a Godlike feel." And they were tough too; techniques became integral to the game, and battles moved to a higher plain as a result, challenging players who were used to a one-dimensional attack tactic. Team play was now a necessity.

Released in March 1989 in Japan, an English translation hit stores in North America in time for Christmas, where the game dominated sales charts for the coming months.

With success now assured for *Phantasy Star*, Sega developed a third instalment almost back-to-back with the second, using the same game engine, but with a vastly different team as many of the original team had moved on to new projects. Step forward Kazunari Tsukamoto, who would join Reiko Kodama and Toru Yoshida in what has become the most talked about *Phantasy Star* of the early years.

Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom was created as and proved to be quite a departure for the series. Set a thousand years after the events of *Phantasy Star II*, this time the player would be thrown into the midst of a civil war, with the game being open-ended. The player could take a different role in each generation and this led to different story line branches and one of four different game endings. Having little correlation to the first two *Phantasy Star* games didn't prevent the game from being excellent in its own right though.

"*Phantasy Star: Generations Of Doom* is slightly different from the others," begins Kazunari Tsukamoto. "*Phantasy Star 1*, *II* and *IV* all have a vertical flow, while *III* has the feeling of being more like a side story." It's a fact not missed by Reiko Kodama. "Most of the planning staff for the game were from *Phantasy Star II*," she continues. "When we were in the planning stages for *Phantasy Star III*, we thought that we wanted to make something that could be played without prior knowledge of the first two adventures, instead of the game being a direct continuation. I think





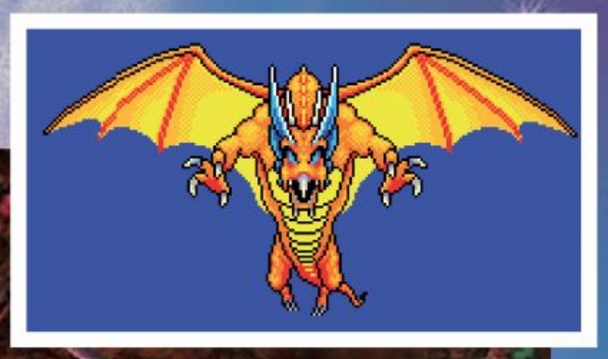
» *Phantasy Star 3 CARD Revolution* was a fantastic game, with some of the prettiest in-game visuals seen on the GameCube. Worth looking up just for the offline mode.

IF YOU PLAY ONE PHANTASY STAR GAME... PLAY THIS...



PHANTASY STAR ONLINE - DC

Never mind the many console firsts it broke, *Phantasy Star Online* should be enjoyed because it took the beloved series in an exciting new direction, whilst ensuring fans wouldn't be disappointed with the end result. Those with a 360 or PS2 may want to try *Phantasy Star Universe*, as it's the same game but on a far grander scale.





» *PSO* took materials from the original *Phantasy Star* and brought them right up to date, as the evolution of the dragon shows.

it is an interesting game in its own right. The reason why the story was so radically different is that the development team wanted to create a unique *Phantasy Star*, something they achieved and I'm very happy with the outcome"

After the run away successes of the first three games, Sega and gamers alike were hungry for more *Phantasy Star*, and a couple of minor releases on the Game Gear did little to sate the thirst for a return to Algo. The first *Phantasy Star Adventure* was an adaptation of the Sega Game library download title *Phantasy Star II: Text Adventure*. This game sought to provide a background history for the characters of *Phantasy Star II* and was greatly enhanced by the use of graphics. The second, *Phantasy Star Gaiden*, is set between *Phantasy Star 1* and *II*, where the player learns that Alis has gone off to set up her own colony. Although solid to play the game was aimed at a younger audience and the anime graphics didn't convey the feel of *Phantasy Star* like other games. By now, 1993, Sega was a vast tidal wave that swept over everything before it. Its arcade machines dominated, it was out-performing Nintendo in homes outside of Japan, and the team that Isao Otiawo had put together to make an RPG had served up a blue hedgehog that had become one of the most recognisable characters in the world. Sega's R&D departments however were finding it difficult to progress the Genesis hardware and within four years developers had almost maxed the capabilities of the machine. And so it was that Sega released the Sega CD, a CD add-on for the Genesis that incorporated hardware upgrades that would allow sprite scaling and 3D effects akin to Mode 7: Nintendo's standard at that time.



» *Phantasy Star II: Text Adventure* kept the feel of the first games, but had no animation.

Development of *Phantasy Star IV* began in early 1993. Pictures of a 3D game world started to surface in the Sega press at the time and rumours persisted that *Phantasy Star IV* was Mega CD-bound, to give the new hardware a much-needed killer app. Debates raged through letters pages in magazines as to whether the game should be released on a new format, with existing users worried they would lose the opportunity to play what was already being heralded as the end of the story. At the eleventh hour the format was changed and it was decided that *Phantasy Star IV* would indeed be a cartridge game for the Genesis. The 3D dungeons were removed and the game took a similar form to the previous games, albeit enhanced beyond the expectations of the hardware it would appear on.

"We really wanted to use those 3D dungeons in the game," regrets Kodama. "The ideas we had proved to be a little too much for the hardware to handle and, unfortunately, we just couldn't convey the sort of setting we really wanted."

Released in December 1993, the *Phantasy Star* team threw everything that they had at the game, resulting in a title that would tie up the unfinished threads of the earlier games, while introducing 16-bit gamers to anime storyboards and animation and a much more refined graphics set. The battle configurations had also changed and it was now possible to chain techniques together to create combinations, making boss battles much more palatable. Alternatively you could fight while riding vehicles in the "Machine Battle". It was interesting how the team that created *Phantasy Star* all wanted to contribute to the final episode. Kodama, who by this time could pick and chose projects, said "I worked on this title because I really wanted to illustrate spiritual exchanges, friendship and love among different races" while Toru Yoshida tells us that, "with *Phantasy Star IV* our biggest goal was to finish the game neatly. This was the one where I worked as a director and as such I dedicated all my energies to it" finally, Akinori Nishiyama adds "I focussed a great deal of creative energy on painting the lives of the people inhabiting Motavia and am very pleased with the results". It seems everyone involved wanted to ensure that the universe was summed up properly.

For six years *Phantasy Star* had enchanted its players and drew unbridled passion from its design teams and then nothing. It all stopped. *Phantasy Star* had reached a hiatus that would last for six years. With hindsight this made perfect sense, as *Phantasy Star* had achieved all that *FFVII* did, except a generation earlier; the rumoured Saturn Betas would only have delivered more of the same and after six games *Phantasy Star* needed technology to catch up so that it could progress again.

On 19 September 1999 Sega made the headlines at the Tokyo Game Show by announcing that a new *Phantasy Star* game would be released for the fledgling Dreamcast system and would make full use of the console's online technology. Sonic Team would take responsibility for the development of what would go on to be one of Sega's biggest games of the last ten years and for many would provide an entry level to the *Phantasy Star* universe.

Development was beset with problems: the Japanese beta was running late and was proving unstable. This was to be the first online console RPG and as such Sega was breaking new ground and had no history or best practices in place – every milestone had to be learnt along the way. As the launch approached Sega hit upon the idea of



» *Phantasy Star 4* told the story through animated story boards that added a vibrant feel to *Phantasy Star*.







» Dark Falz has an astonishing array of attacks, and unlike other bosses doesn't follow a set routine.

THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

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» **Right:** The Anime displays of P*hantasy Star 4* were superb, and depicted the game in a way not seen by western gamers at that point.

STILL IN THE DARK

Dark Falz or Dark Force is the only recurring character that has made an appearance in every game. Seemingly destroyed on countless occasions he just keeps coming back. As far as videogame bosses go he has killed more lead characters than any other. He panders to the weakness and vanities of the worlds that he dominates and watches as citizens evoke their own downfall. *Phantasy Star 2* talks of people getting complacent and lazy after the events of *PS1*, living as they have in a Eutopia for 1000 years. Dark Falz has evolved down the years and tackling Dark Falz at the end of *PSO* on Ultimate setting is one of gaming's toughest challenges; his Megid attack alone can reduce a whole party's health to one HP, leaving them all but dead – once you leave a boss battle to resurrect, you can't rejoin until the boss is vanquished. For maximum frustration try tackling Dark Falz with a retro editor, who accidentally sells the epic weapon you leant him when he was meant to be buying trimate, doh!

giving away *ChuChu Rocket!* – an addictive puzzle game – to Dream Arena users. The idea was that if you gave a game away en-masse, you would negate the relatively low (at the time) online user numbers by encouraging use of one game.

Naka agreed and told Sega World back in 1999, "in this case it was the network. We learned a lot of lessons from *ChuChu Rocket!*, but for *PSO* we had to learn a lot about the differences of networking in different countries, since this is a global RPG. I realized in a sense how great Microsoft is, because as long as you have Windows, you can connect to the network and play online games anywhere. So with *Diablo* and *Ultima Online*, Windows takes care of most of the networking stuff, whereas in making *PSO* we had to start with the game, and then one level below that – the network." He then went on to add some light to the biggest struggle facing *PSO* at the time: "A PC costs maybe ten times as much as a Dreamcast, and people generally look at the many PC games that are online and think it must be easy, since there's a whole bunch of them. But people probably don't realize how much more difficult it is to make network games for a machine that costs one-tenth of a PC. I think that in the end, we were able to create something that was even better."

As the deadline approached, last minute changes were made and some features were dropped or reduced in size. *Phantasy Star Online* launched in Japan on 21 December 2000 and the response was overwhelming. Players were awestruck by the vibrant world that Yuji Naka and his team had created and few ever noticed that the sounds of *Phantasy Star Online* were largely a reworking of the original score; *PSO* had absorbed all that had been *Phantasy Star* before and restructured it into a world draped in beauty and shrouded in foreboding. The timeless tale of machines and nature failing to coexist was to return and there is much evidence to suggest that *Phantasy Star Online* was borne from a backstory of *Phantasy Star II*. The story unfolds against a backdrop of helpless optimism on the planet Ragol and Pioneer 2: a ship carrying a race of settlers looking for a new home after their home world was destroyed. The Hunters Guild (which first appeared in *Phantasy Star IV*) offers quests onto the planet surface that drive the narration. Each quest acts like a burlesque dancer slowly and tantalisingly unwrapping layer upon layer until all you see is Ragol without the veneer. And then *PSO* unfolds into a warped fantasy, a future-world Hotel California you can check out any time you like. But this is a world you can never leave; the harder you look the less hospitable Ragol becomes, until it dawns on you that the reason there are no survivors from pioneer 1 is that the world



» *Phantasy Star Universe: Ambition Of The Illuminus* was released on Xbox 360, PC and PlayStation 2 and carries on from where *Phantasy Star Universe* left off.









is consumed by an evil that is feeding off anything that has the misfortune to be alive on Ragol. No one can be trusted and as your character develops and grows you can't help but feel an affinity with Red Ring Rico, who, although missing, has littered the planet with useful information for the gamer to discover. Despite never meeting her, the fate that befell her would melt even the most savage beast.

Online the game allows four players to meet up in a lobby. Online quests are available, but soon give way to character levelling and rare item exploration. *PSO* included another innovative online feature in the way that chat could be carried across the world, a user interface that transcended language by enabling icon chat. Now for the first time European players could play and communicate all around the world. Sega also gave *PSO* its own time zone; linking up with Swatch, *PSO* operated on a beat time system, that meant in-game everyone played on the same time frame. This was useful for the special event quests that were periodically launched to tie in with holidays like Christmas and Easter. Such was the success of *Phantasy Star* that Sega published these figures showing online statistics just four months after the Japanese release: Japan (release 12/21/2000): 130,000 players; America (release 1/31/2001): 70,000; Europe (release 2/16/2001): 35,000. Remember that in 2001 most Dreamcast connections were dial up, Japanese gamers had to pay for a hunters licence and less than five per cent of European users had broadband and as such had to pay per minute to play. 26000 simultaneous players was the record at that point – some six months later this number would double.

Midway through 2001 Sega released *PSO Version 2*, which was a slight update offering interactive lobbies, a higher-level cap and far tougher bosses. In 2002 and 2003 respectively the Nintendo GameCube and Microsoft Xbox would receive their own versions in the form of *Phantasy Star Online Episode 1* and *2*. The first was a bug-fixed update of *PSO*, while *Episode 2* was a reworked version of *2* that featured new levels, weapons and bosses.

2004 saw Sega release *Episode 3: C.A.R.D Revolution* as a GameCube exclusive. Staying firmly with Pioneer 2 this title aimed to conclude the story that *PSO* started. Using a totally different play mechanic to the previous *Phantasy Star*s it had more in common with the earlier *Phantasy Star* games than *PSO*, but played out through a series of card battles. The character classes remained the same as *PSO*, as did the enemies and the game proved once again that innovation is never far from the franchise's creators.

Sadly, recent years haven't been as kind to the franchise, which is now struggling to find its feet. Although we've had a number of games, including *Phantasy Star Online: Blue Burst*, *Phantasy Star Online 2* and *Phantasy Star Universe*, they've all failed to make a huge impact on their respective systems. Things have fared little better for the *Phantasy Star Portable* series on PSP either, mainly because of the success of *Monster Hunter*, a series which was arguably inspired by *Phantasy Star* in the first place. *Phantasy Star Nova* on the Vita remains confined to Japan, while an English version of *Phantasy Star Online 2* exists but is bafflingly region-locked to south east Asia. Here's hoping Sega manages to turn the franchise around for future installments.

PSO INCLUDED ANOTHER INNOVATIVE ONLINE FEATURE IN THE WAY THAT CHAT COULD BE CARRIED ACROSS THE WORLD, A USER INTERFACE THAT TRANSCENDED LANGUAGE BY ENABLING ICON CHAT

THE CLASSIC GAME

psycho FOX



Despite being part of the most derivative game genre in existence, *Psycho Fox* has become widely known as 'that Master System game with similar gameplay to those other two games'. Those games are, of course, *Kid Kool* and *Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure* (rebranded *Decap Attack* in the West), and with all three titles connected by the same developer it's little wonder they're comparable. Still, possibly one of the only games in existence to have two spiritual predecessors which are themselves linked spiritually, and telling the story of a psychotic fox battling a mad one, *Psycho Fox*'s story is certainly bizarre and its lineage somewhat mystifying. Stuart Hunt attempts to make head and tail of this classic 8-bit platformer.



TIGER

The tiger is basically a super-powered version of Psycho Fox. Harnessing the power of the tiger gives Psycho Fox the ability to accelerate faster and jump higher. Human parts are his favourite.



BIRDFLY

In addition to platforming, Psycho Fox and his animal forms can also smash open eggs to free Birdfly: a small, crow-looking companion that can be fired at enemies like a boomerang.

MONKEY

If you want to scale ledges and platforms, the monkey is the animal for you. He can jump higher than all the other animal forms in the game, though he moves slowly to compensate. Bananas are his favourite.

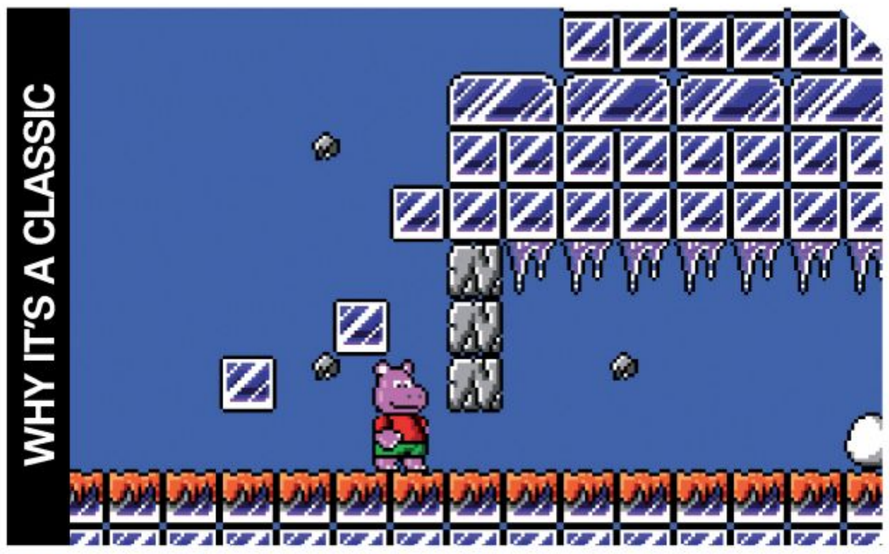


HIPPO

The hippo is the least agile of the three animal forms but does have one useful ability in that he can smash through walls. He's essentially a power character. He has a taste for white plastic marbles.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS



Master System's Mario

With seven worlds, each with hidden areas and multiple paths, *Psycho Fox* featured more to discover than your average SMS platformer. Adding to its charm was its multifaceted hero, who could change into different animals to help him get around. Fox achieves this by collecting magical shinto sticks (aka Psycho Sticks), and uses them to transmute into three other animals, each with different attributes. Proving popular, this character-swapping mechanic appeared in quite a few platform games following *Psycho Fox*'s release – from *Rolo To The Rescue* to the excellent *Kid Chameleon*.



Psycho Fox - Revered In Japan

Foxes might be considered a nuisance here, but in Japan they're practically megastars. Known as kitsune, Japanese folklore depicts foxes as intelligent creatures with magical powers, and they've appeared in games by some of Japan's most esteemed developers. The most notable examples where foxes appear in games include the *Star Fox* series and *Sonic 2*, where one played Sonic's squeaky-voiced sidekick, Tails. Speaking of Tails, some legends also say that the more tails a fox has the more powerful they are – Tails can therefore be seen as the Harry Potter of videogame foxes.



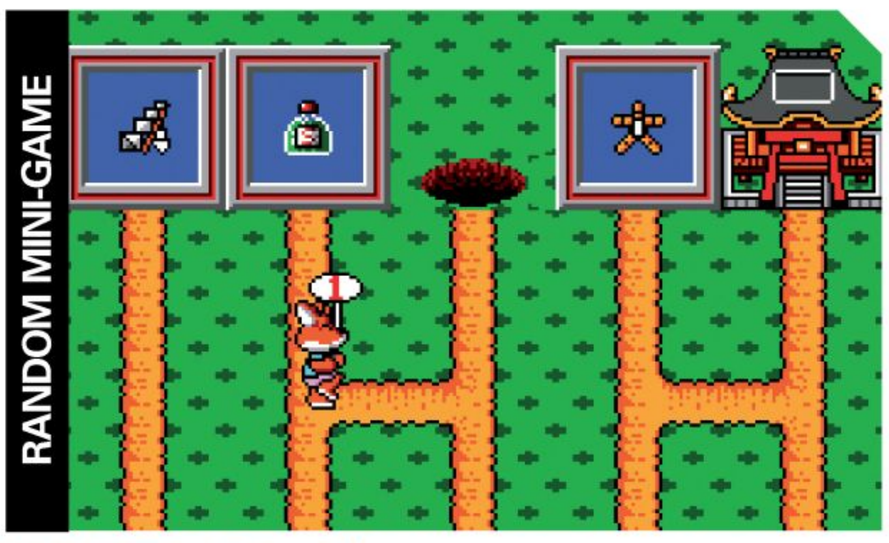
Physics Fox

Psycho Fox isn't the easiest game at first. Movement feels a little overzealous because it uses inertia-based physics. This means jumping from a stop is pointless, and it takes time for Fox to build up acceleration for his run. More frustrating, he can only take one hit before snuffing it, and you're dropped back to the start of the level. However, with perseverance and some sacrificial hair, you get used to his skittishness, and learning when to use his animal forms helps to soften the difficulty. In the end, *Psycho Fox* does a competent job of meshing together the pace of *Sonic* with the exploration of *Mario*.



The Story Explained

Like most platform games, *Psycho Fox*'s story is bananas. It tells the tale of a bad fox deity named Madfox Daimyojin, who sets about using his magical powers to conquer the land and populate it with an army of unpleasant creatures. Apparently the best way to thwart a mad fox is to simply send in a psychotic one, and so the people of the land call upon Psycho Fox to lend a hand. Using his decidedly un-psychotic metamorphosis powers, Psycho Fox embarks on a mission to thwart Madfox, restore peace and get crowned king. Something like that anyway… the king part we just assumed was a given.



Walk The Line(s)

Pick up some cash bags during the game and between stages you can partake in a random-win mini-game. Requiring zero skill to play, you're presented with a choice of trails on which to plonk Psycho Fox (or Psycho Foxes, depending on how many bags you've collected). Obscured from view, each of the trails' ending leads to either something good – extra lives or a nice transmute stick – or something rubbish like a hole to fall down. With your trails chosen, you then get to watch as your Psycho Foxes walk up the path on autopilot, occasionally changing direction at the points where they connect.



A Spiritual Guide

Psycho Fox is part of a family of platform games that includes *Kid Kool* and *Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure*. What connects these three games is that they all feature heroes that move with momentum and use a boomerang-like projectile weapon. Tec Toy also released its own take on *Psycho Fox* for the SMS. Titled *Sapo Xulé: Os Invasores Do Brejo*, it's identical bar some graphical changes: it changes Fox into a toad (said to have been based on a popular toy in Brazil) and replaces the original animal forms with a pig, a turtle and a mouse. Some of the bosses were also altered too. We call it 'Mental Toad'.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** VIC TOKAI
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

What the press said… ages ago



Mean Machines, 90%
For a Sega game, the graphics are pretty good, with well-animated sprites and varied backdrops. But it's the gameplay and lastability that count.

ACE
Psycho Fox is very much a game for platform game aficionados. It is *Mario*-esque and features some very tough pieces of platforming. It has real lasting value.

What we think

We agree. The graphics look and animate brilliantly for a SMS game. But its appeal isn't just skin deep; there's a lot of tough game to work through too. For us, it's the best game in Vic Tokai's bizarre platforming trilogy.

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Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse



Instant Expert

While this classic platformer also appears on the Mega Drive, they are completely different.

This is the first game in the *Illusion* series. Its success meant several sequels were made.

Castle Of Illusion was actually remade in 2013 by Sega Studios Australia. It's mainly based on the Mega Drive version, but we won't hold that against it.

If you're hoping to play as Minnie Mouse prepare to be disappointed. She's only available to rescue and isn't an unlockable character.

The developer, AM7 has created all sorts of games for Sega, including *Skies Of Arcadia*, *Sega Marine Fishing* and *Sega GT 2002*.

If you want a challenge, make sure you play the Master System version of *Castle Of Illusion*, as the Mega Drive outing is far too easy.

The designer of *Castle Of Illusion* is Emiko Yamamoto, she's worked on a large number of Disney games, including *World Of Illusion*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *Magical Tetris Challenge*. She also oversaw the *Castle Of Illusion* remake when it was being made.

Mickey Mouse is able to throw and carry objects in the Master System version of the game.

Mizrabel only has one form in the Mega Drive version - until you defeat her that is...

When Mickey Mouse brought his star power to Sega's platforms, the Master System wasn't left out – and arguably, got the best game of the lot. Venture into the castle with Nick Thorpe...

If you're Mickey Mouse, life must seem pretty good. Vera City is the nicest world Disney can draw, you're famous and beloved the world over, and Minnie is head over heels in love with you. Mickey has the peaceful happiness that we all want in our lives. The only problem is that peaceful happiness is much better at the end of the game than the beginning, so the jealous witch Mizrabel turns up to kidnap Minnie to steal her beauty. Needless to say Mickey is a little bit miffed about the whole scenario, and he gives chase until reaching the *Castle Of Illusion*, where an old man lets him know that he'll need to collect seven coloured gems to build a rainbow bridge to Mizrabel's place. Of course, he's got to get through a series of themed illusions to do it, setting the stage for the game – a classic rescue plot, befitting a classic cartoon character.

While the plot of *Castle Of Illusion* relies on old standards, the developers were actually relatively inexperienced. Designer Emiko Yamamoto of Disney was working on her very first videogame, while key Sega designer Yoshio Yoshida was fresh off his first project at Sega, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*. Yamamoto and Yoshida were serving as game designer and assistant game designer respectively on the Mega Drive version of *Castle Of Illusion*, developed alongside the Master System game, and basic concepts are shared between the two games. Both are platform games with the same plot, in which Mickey can attack by throwing objects and butt-bouncing off of enemies. The music, composed by Kamiya Studio, is also shared between the two versions.

The rest of the staff were different by necessity, and the Master System team was hardly devoid of talent – despite the status of the Mega Drive in Sega's plans at the time, the Disney project required the correct approach on every platform. Talent included *Phantasy Star* artist Takako Kawaguchi and Michael Jackson's Moonwalker planner Tomozou Endo, as well as a host of promising new developers. The result was a completely different interpretation of the same initial concepts. Stages such as Toy Town and The Library share conceptual commonalities with their Mega Drive counterparts, but every single aspect of the execution from graphic design to level layout was built from scratch.

Whereas the castle itself was merely a storytelling tool on the Mega Drive, on the Master System it acts as a menu screen. *Castle Of Illusion* offers a semi-linear experience, with the player given the choice to tackle the three initial stages in any order, and the same for two further stages once these have been completed. Once you're actually in those stages, further differences are revealed – primarily, on the Master System Mickey is capable of carrying and throwing only a single item at a time in much the same way as *Super*

Pixel Perfect

They might look cute but they can still hurt you!


» Old Man


» Treefolk


» Spider


» Butterfly


» Flower


»Unicycling Clown


» Bat


» Bee


» Caterpillar


» Boulder


» Grub


» RC Plane


» RC Car


» Transmitter


» Chess Knight


» Hailing clown


» Cymbal Monkey


» Genie Balloon


» Chocolate Drop


» Candy


» Peanut


» Doughnut


» Jelly Dolphin


» Book Worm


» Big A


» Little A


» Bum Note


» Sugar Cube


» Rolling Washers


» Mickey Mouse


» Fake Chest


» Mini Cuckoo


» Rolling Gear


» The Weight


» Clock Cuckoo


» Ghost


» Seahorse


» Treasure Chest


» Golden Knight


» Cuckoo Clock

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

Mario Bros 2, which means he's got to be more direct in confronting enemies. As each object is solid, stages also take on minor puzzle elements – removing blocks in the correct order can often be key, lest the player be trapped in their current location.

At the time of *Castle Of Illusion*'s development, the Master System was being repositioned as a budget alternative to the Mega Drive, with a particular focus on catching younger children. With that being the case, you'd expect the 8-bit version to be the easier of the two to beat – but the exact opposite is true. The major criticism of the Mega Drive game was that it was beautiful but a little bit too easy, but on the Master System *Castle Of Illusion* is a tricky little game to take down. While each enemy will fall to just a single hit, their attack patterns make them more dangerous than the average platform baddie – clowns in Toy Town can call down a rain of juggling balls, bugs curl up and hurtle downhill at Mickey, and some enemies spawn further threats for you to deal with.

The bosses are all original too, and some can take a little bit of figuring out. All too often platform bosses are just tough enemies that require a few extra hits, but *Castle Of Illusion*'s biggest enemies provide carefully considered encounters in which defined strategies rule the day over just attacking mindlessly. We'd go as far as to say that some of them best their 16-bit counterparts – after all, Mickey doesn't go dragon-slaying on the Mega Drive.



» This clown makes it rain juggling balls, and is a bit of a pain to deal with.

Of course, the first half of the Mega Drive's "beautiful but easy" criticism isn't a criticism at all. *Castle Of Illusion* set new graphical standards on the Master System, with highly detailed backdrops and an enormous variety of enemies, all of which are well animated. These provide alternative interpretations of the themes found in the Mega Drive game – where you might find towers of cakes representing sweetness in the 16-bit game, the Master System game provides chocolate, biscuit and peanuts. The Library in the Mega Drive game is a fusty, old-looking place, but on the Master System it's a modern workspace filled with all kinds of study equipment. But the real star of the show is Mickey Mouse himself, a masterclass in 8-bit sprite design. He's instantly recognisable and animates just like you'd expect from his cartoons – he doesn't have to blink as he runs nor wobble on the edges of platforms, but the fact that he does just draws you in.

Castle Of Illusion was a great case of the right people putting together the right game for the right time. It's easy to look back with cynicism at a platformer starring a very popular character, given the direction videogames would take over the course of the early Nineties – however, it was high quality games like *Castle Of Illusion* that drove the demand for such games. Plus, when compared to the many imitators that followed, *Castle Of Illusion* holds up extremely well – few of them offer the excellent progression structure found in Mickey's 8-bit adventure, let alone the design.

However, some Master System games do offer similar qualities to *Castle Of Illusion*. That's no surprise, as Sega recognised the quality of the game and kept the team behind the game largely intact for further licensed platform projects on the 8-bit console. The Mickey Mouse sequel *Legend Of Illusion* is one of these and is a similarly excellent game, but the team also be worked on other excellent games such as *Asterix* and even the *Sonic The Hedgehog* games make extensive mention of the *Castle Of Illusion* staff in their special thanks sections. With that kind of influence, it's clear to see that *Castle Of Illusion* wasn't just a great individual success – it was a turning point which raised the bar for Master System games for years to come.

Playing tips

Remember these handy hints and you'll have Minnie home in time for tea



»Going further

Always go that little bit further. It can be tempting to leave a screen as soon as you see the exit, but you'll miss goodies if you do.



»Scoring

Scoring means something in this game as you'll earn an extra life for every 10,000 points. One large coin will earn you 2,000!



»Butterfly

The Forest's deadliest denizen is the butterfly. Be careful around pits, being hit mid-jump could cause you to lose a life.



»Genie Balloon

The genie balloons are tricky. The balloons stop when you land on them, you can create a height difference and cross the gap.



»Just desserts

If you fall into the milk in the Dessert Factory, you'll be able to swim. But if you are holding an item, you'll sink and die.



»Look carefully

When you're tackling the Library and Mechanical stages, don't forget that there's a second rainbow gem hidden in each.



»Two sugars please!

This mug in the Library looks like convenient scenery, but if you can drop into it you'll reach a nifty little swimming section.



»Musical Mickey

Take it slow when you reach the piano in the Library, as the bad notes will reveal themselves when you get close enough.



»Clocked it

The clocks in the Mechanical stage release annoying birds. But if you can take out the clock itself, all the birds will disappear too.



»Ghostbuster

When you see a formation of three ascending ghosts like this, you'll need to butt-bounce them in sequence to cross a wide gap.

LOST IN ILLUSION

Mickey didn't stop with the defeat of Mizrabel – here are more adventures...



Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

Platform: Mega Drive **Year:** 1990

The Mega Drive version of *Castle Of Illusion* is something of a sister product to the 8-bit game, featuring an identical plot and similar themes, but drastically different gameplay. It's a little easier than the Master System game, but it's still gorgeous to look at and is easily the best of the pre-*Sonic* platformers on the console. Even if you've played the Master System game to death, you still need to play the 16-bit version.



World Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck

Platform: Mega Drive **Year:** 1992

The Mega Drive *Illusion* sequel introduced Donald Duck to the series, as he collaborates on a magic show with Mickey only to have everything go a bit wrong when they accidentally stumble into a world inside an evil magician's magical box. Two player co-operative play was the biggest addition, with each player controlling Mickey or Donald – the game was built around it.



Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

Platform: Master System / Game Gear **Year:** 1993

The 8-bit sequel to *Castle Of Illusion* retains many of the same mechanics as its predecessor, while pushing the Master System to its graphical limits and including extra mechanics. More Disney cast members are included in this game, with Goofy and Donald Duck making appearances. The Master System version of *Land Of Illusion* didn't appear in North America, but the Game Gear version was released worldwide.



Legend Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

Platform: Master System / Game Gear **Year:** 1995

Legend Of Illusion places Mickey into an old-world tale as a laundry boy, tasked with retrieving the legendary water of life by King Pete. Developed by a different team to the other 8-bit Illusion games, *Legend Of Illusion* plays a little differently and is arguably too easy. The Master System version of *Legend Of Illusion* is exclusive to Brazil and arrived late in 1998, but the Game Gear version was given a worldwide release.



Epic Mickey: Power Of Illusion

Platform: 3DS Year: 2012

Developed as a spiritual sequel to *Castle Of Illusion*, this 3DS platformer isn't an official part of the series and wasn't developed by Sega. It uses many of the same story elements including the casting of Mizrabel as antagonist, while including boatloads of cameos from across the Disney universe and introducing Epic Mickey gameplay elements. The game was given a mixed reception by the press, citing excessive backtracking.



Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

Platform: Various Year: 2013

This downloadable title by Sega Studios Australia did a stunning job of bringing the *Castle Of Illusion* look into the modern HD era under the supervision of original designer Emiko Yamamoto, and provided a moderately well-received platformer that received some criticism for its short length and control issues, as well as unskippable cutscenes. It was be the studio's last game; closure was announced before the game's release.

The ending to Castle Of Illusion sees Mickey finally coming face to face with the evil Mizrabel. Initially she takes the form of a dragon, but after a while her true form is revealed. She might look old but she's still a tough and Mickey must use all his tricks to defeat her. Once he finally gets the better of her, Mickey is reunited with Minnie and they live happily ever after. Awww!



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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse



Boss Rush

The highlight of *Castle Of Illusion* is arguably its excellent bosses. Each and every one of them will test all the skills that Mickey possesses and can prove to be incredibly tough if you don't know what you're doing. It's fortunate then that we *do* know what we're doing and we've put together this handy little guide so that you'll never become stuck again. Just remember what we've taught you.





THE BARREN TREE

This arboreal adversary really wants you to leave! Actually, it really is quite a nasty boss, considering that you're likely to face it before any of the others. The barren tree rapidly spins back and forth across the arena, and if you somehow manage to avoid this deadly attack, it will chuck leaves at you from each side of the stage.

How to beat it: A butt-bounce is almost always safe – Mickey can bounce off the spinning tree with no problem at all, as only the leaves can hurt him here. To actually damage the tree, time your plummeting posterior to strike when it's not spinning.

Difficulty rating: ★★★★★

JACK IN THE BOX

Ah, the terrifying combination of clowns and sudden shocks just never gets old. This irritating creature doesn't just spring forth from its box – left to its own devices, it'll happily bounce around your screen while creating an endless drizzle of juggling balls. Needless to say, you want to avoid getting hit by any of these things at all costs.

How to beat it: Jump on it before it jumps on you! Mickey's butt-bounce saves the day again here, though be careful – the rebound may inadvertently propel you into a falling ball. Pick your moments carefully and this shouldn't prove much of a problem.

Difficulty rating: ★★★★☆



CHOCO-WARRIOR

This guy has mastered the sweet science and really wants to knock your block off! The choco-warrior isn't speedy, but each individual chunk will damage you if it catches you while moving. Once it's fully formed it'll give the wall a hefty punch, dislodging further chunks from the ceiling in an attempt to hi you. A regular block also falls for you...

How to beat it: This guy actually has a limited range of movement, so once he's dropped a block for you, grab it and run to the side he's going to move to. When he's fully formed, hit him in the face with the block!

Difficulty rating: ★★★★★





The bosses in Castle Of Illlusion may look cute but they're no walkovers. Luckily we're experts and have beaten the game numerous times



PAPERWEIGHT CHAMPION

Hot off the presses and lurking in the library, this terrible tome likes to teleport about the screen, while flinging letters at you from inside itself. These letters, like most other objects generated by bosses, are deadly to the touch. However, they're also quite easy to avoid, making this one of the tamer boss fights you'll have to endure.

How to beat it: This one's an easy win – just butt-bounce off the letters and onto the book. Not all of the letters float low enough to reach easily, but so long as you have ample time you can afford to be choosy.

Difficulty rating:

DOOMSDAY CLOCK

It's not too often that the clock strikes *you*, but this grandfather clock is has a real mean streak. A couple of rolling cogs patrol the floor, while the clock face floats overhead and occasionally swoops in for an attack. If you kill the cogs, the clock face will just spawn more, so it really isn't worth it unless you're forced.

How to beat it: When the clock stops, get ready to jump in and attack. Don't get complacent about the face's attack pattern, as it has a nasty habit of throwing you off with a surprise attack from the other side after a while.

Difficulty rating:

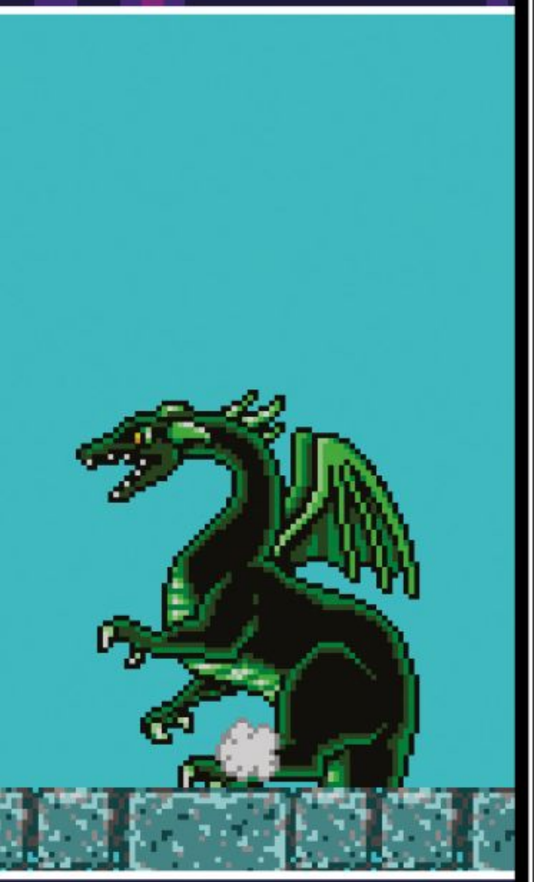


MIZRABEL

Old Mizzy floats around on her broomstick in a darkened room, hoping to catch you with two floating rocks which bounce around the room in a diagonal pattern. There's a lantern here for you to fight with, and as a nice bonus it'll temporarily smash the rocks as well as hurting Mizrabel. Good luck – this is the final showdown!

How to beat it: Conserve as much health as possible in the dragon fight, as you'll only receive a cake slice before the showdown with Mizrabel. Be mindful of where the rocks are at all times, and remember that walls aren't obstacles to them.

Difficulty rating:



DRAGON

Here's part one of the final boss, and it's a doozy. This dragon will thrash around for a bit before aiming a triplet of fireballs in your general direction, over and over again. Butt bounces won't work here, so you're provided with an M-block in the interest of good sportsmanship.

How to beat it: Repeated application of an M-block to the head wins here. The tricky thing is retrieving it from under the dragon after your attack – we prefer to grab it, let the dragon aim downwards at us and then make a dash for the platform to begin the next assault run.

Difficulty rating:





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Top 25 Master System Games

retro GAMER READERS' CHOICE

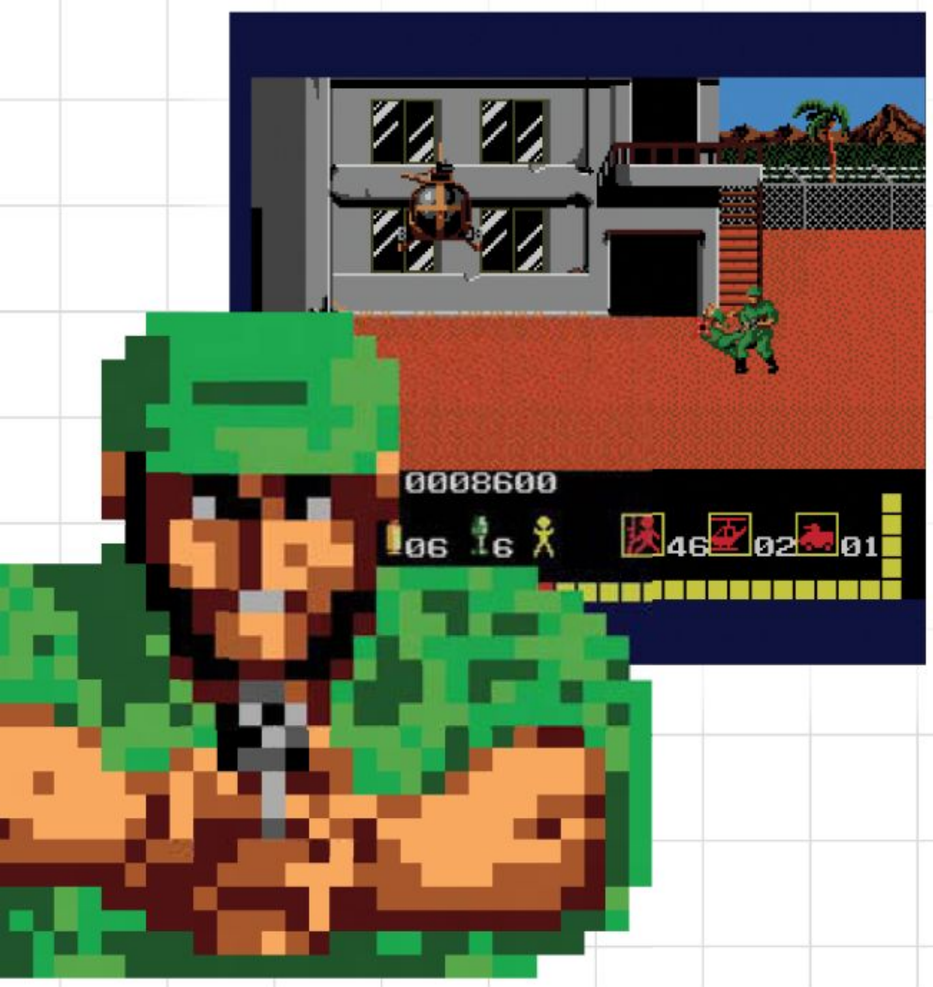
Retro Gamer readers turned out in droves to vote for their favourite games on Sega's 8-bit console – Nick Thorpe has crunched the numbers and is about to begin the countdown...

Operation Wolf

DEVELOPER: TAITO

YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** LIGHTGUN SHOOTER

25 **The Master System's** Light Phaser peripheral got some excellent support over the years, and *Operation Wolf* is your favourite lightgun title on the system. The excellent conversion included all of the arcade game's stages and even allowed players to throw grenades using the second controller. In fact, it was such a good game that it became part of the Master System II Plus bundle in Europe, replacing previous lightgun pack-in *Safari Hunt*.





California Games

DEVELOPER: SEGA

YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** SPORTS

24 **Despite having a** large catalogue of arcade hits to draw on, Sega was keen to bring other big names to the Master System and so became rather active in the licensing market. These efforts ensured that Epyx's excellent multi-sports title found a perfect home on the Master System, with the console's colourful visuals really helping to bring home the sunny California feeling during each of the six events. There's a sequel too, but it doesn't live up to the original.

Bubble Bobble

DEVELOPER: TAITO

YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

23 **Taito was one** of the few major third-party developers to ever support the Master System directly, with most firms licensing their titles to Sega to get around Nintendo's restrictive NES developer agreements. Conversions like *Bubble Bobble* certainly endeared the company to the console's owners – the game features a variety of enhancements including new items and brand new level designs, as well as new ending sequences. There's some slowdown and sprite flicker, but it's otherwise an incredibly faithful conversion.







Master Of Darkness

■ **DEVELOPER:** SIMS ■ **YEAR:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

22 **We often see** those who grew up with the NES dismissing Master System games as 'off-brand' versions of their childhood favourites, and while that's often not really the case, it's hard to describe *Master Of Darkness* as anything other than a *Castlevania* clone – albeit a very good one. It's a platformer in which you're out to kill Dracula, you fight all manner of supernatural enemies and even the stairs are drawn in the same odd way. However, since *Master Of Darkness* was only released in PAL territories, where the NES wasn't so dominant, there was a good chance that its players had never experienced *Castlevania* in the first place.

The storyline in *Master Of Darkness* sees psychologist and paranormal investigator Ferdinand Social taking a journey through Victorian London to investigate a series of murders in which the bodies have been completely drained of blood. This clearly isn't the work of Jack The Ripper – though you'll meet him as the first boss – and Social finds himself drawn into a nightmarish vampiric plot. *Master Of Darkness* is a very solid platform game, featuring some nice visuals and a wide array of supernatural enemies to slay, including ghosts, zombies and bats. It's also filled with memorable moments – we'll certainly never forget being trapped in a room with a succession of possessed waxworks rapidly chasing us down.

In fact, given its high quality we were surprised that *Master Of Darkness* didn't place a bit higher on the list, but your votes predominantly favoured worldwide releases from the days before the Mega Drive hit it big. As such, the fact that the game made an appearance on this list at all is a very strong indicator of just how good it is.



> "*Castlevania* rip-off? Yup. But why not rip off something awesome? Plays great, and is a pretty decent challenge for most gamers"
> learnedrobb

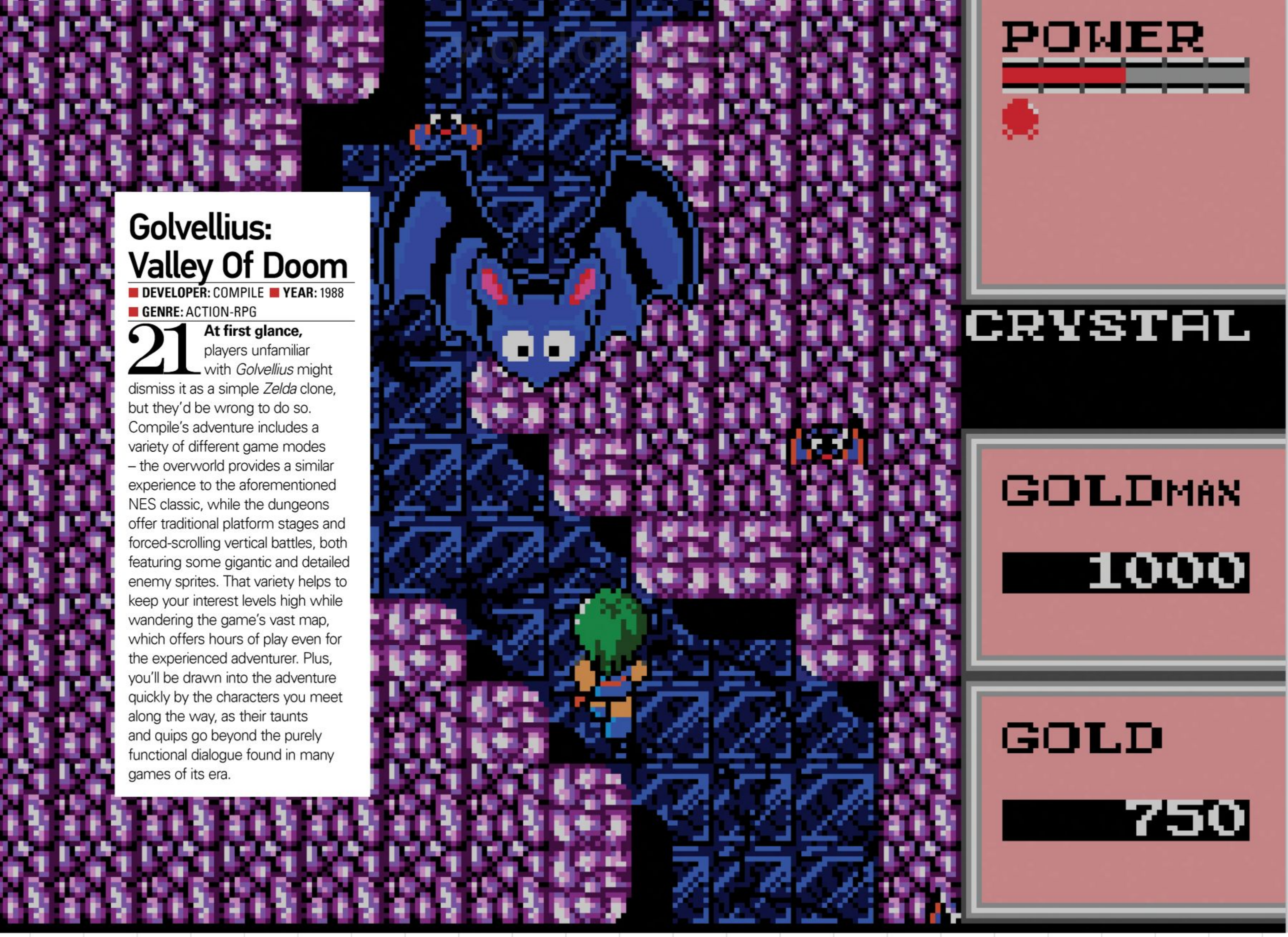
> "We'll never forget being trapped in a room with possessed waxworks"

Master Of Darkness gave us some memorable scary moments

Golvellius: Valley Of Doom

■ **DEVELOPER:** COMPILE ■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

21 **At first glance,** players unfamiliar with *Golvellius* might dismiss it as a simple *Zelda* clone, but they'd be wrong to do so. Compile's adventure includes a variety of different game modes – the overworld provides a similar experience to the aforementioned NES classic, while the dungeons offer traditional platform stages and forced-scrolling vertical battles, both featuring some gigantic and detailed enemy sprites. That variety helps to keep your interest levels high while wandering the game's vast map, which offers hours of play even for the experienced adventurer. Plus, you'll be drawn into the adventure quickly by the characters you meet along the way, as their taunts and quips go beyond the purely functional dialogue found in many games of its era.



Choplifter

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **The classic rescue-themed** shoot-'em-up was one of the first games to make its way to the Master System, and was the most visually impressive of those early releases. It threw around a lot of sprites at very high speed, with some smooth faux-parallax scrolling serving as the icing on the cake. Confusingly, the Master System version of *Choplifter* is actually a conversion of a conversion: it's based on Sega's coin-op, itself an enhanced conversion of Brøderbund's original computer game. This means it includes the extra environments and scoring mechanics of the arcade game, adding a bit of extra depth and visual variety over the home computer versions.



> "Easily the best version of the classic game with its great graphics and more varied levels"
> The Laird



Secret Commando

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

19 **You might call** it *Rambo: First Blood Part II* if you're in North America or *Ashura* if you're in Japan, but the European title makes no bones about Sega's homage to *Commando*, Capcom's classic arcade shoot-'em-up. Just like in that game, you wander up-screen shooting all manner of infantry grunts and blowing through end-of-stage fortresses. It's a bit slower than *Commando* and features rather chunkier sprites that seem to ape the *Ikari Warriors* style, but retains the two-player co-op play that makes these games so much fun, ensuring that you'll keep coming back.

Asterix

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ■ **YEAR:** 1991 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

18 **For a console** which thrived on platform games and was more popular in Europe than elsewhere in the early Nineties, a licensed *Asterix* platformer was more or less the perfect release. The setup is rather plain: the Romans are holding the druid Getafix captive, and without his potions the Gauls will be powerless to resist the imperial forces. However, the gameplay is fantastic. High-quality platforming is common on the Master System, but what sets *Asterix* apart is the fact that you can opt to play as Asterix or Obelix. The former relies on his small size and potions, while the latter offers brute, block-smashing strength. Each stage has two layouts, one tailored to each character's strengths, so you'll have a rather different experience depending on which one you pick.







"Rock hard, but so satisfying to control. I loved the first level's theme"
SMD

Ninja Gaiden

DEVELOPER: SIMS **YEAR:** 1992 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

17 **When discussing forgotten** entries in classic series, the Master System version of *Ninja Gaiden* demands a mention. Licensed from Tecmo but developed by SIMS, then a subsidiary of Sega, it's an entirely new adventure which retains many elements of the NES games while adding some twists of its own. Chief among these is a brand new wall-jump move, which replaces the climbing of previous games. While the visuals and music deserve praise, what makes the game so good is simply the joy of movement. Ryu Hayabusa is an incredibly agile chap, who moves quickly and is capable of navigating dangerous environments with ease. You'll feel like you have actual ninja skills when you've spent a while with the game, and slicing up bad guys is all the more enjoyable as a result.



"I was gutted as a kid when I found out it wasn't a straight conversion, but ended up enjoying it way more than similar 8-bit games"
BellyFullOfHell

Enduro Racer

DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1987 **GENRE:** RACING

16 **Despite the fact** that ROM cartridges were unavoidably more expensive than the tapes and disks used for most home computer software, Sega and its distributors were keenly aware that price was a factor for many consumers and offered a range of lower-priced games. The budget-oriented Sega Card format didn't last too long, but Mastertronic had success in the UK by offering a range of titles for as little as £9.99 – and judging by comments we received, it seems that it was the price that persuaded many of you to buy *Enduro Racer*.

The game itself is a bit of an oddball, as it doesn't really resemble Sega's arcade game of the same name, instead playing more or less like an isometric *Excitebike*. It stands up to extended play well, thanks to its varied off-road stages and an upgrade system that really makes a difference – you'll definitely notice if you're using a better engine or improved suspension. Take note: the Japanese Mark III version of *Enduro Racer* utilises a bigger cartridge than the Western release and boasts additional stages, more varied scenery and improved presentation as a result.

Double Dragon

DEVELOPER: SEGA
YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** PLATFORM



15 **The classic Technos** beat-'em-up made its way to the Master System via Sega. It's an excellent conversion featuring faithful level designs, all the enemies and even all the weaponry of the coin-op. Best of all, it includes the simultaneous two-player mode that the NES version lacked.

The Ninja

DEVELOPER: SEGA
YEAR: 1986 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



14 **This updated version** of *Ninja Princess* is another game that many UK readers enjoyed as a £9.99 budget special. The fast-paced shoot-'em-up action is tough and it's hard to gather the five scrolls required to beat the game, but there's a lot of love for *The Ninja*.

Wonder Boy

DEVELOPER: WESTONE
YEAR: 1987 **GENRE:** PLATFORM



13 **The first *Wonder Boy*** release isn't nearly as complex as later entries in the series, but that's why we like it – it's a straightforward dash to the end of each stage. This is a rather fine conversion of the coin-op, and we always did like the skateboard as a power-up.

Alex Kidd In Shinobi World

DEVELOPER: SEGA
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORM



12 **Originally planned as** a parody game titled *Shinobi Kid*, Alex Kidd was drafted in to add some crossover star power. The result is a great game which adds more platforming to the *Shinobi* formula and more combat to *Alex Kidd*, and should still manage to satisfy both sets of fans.

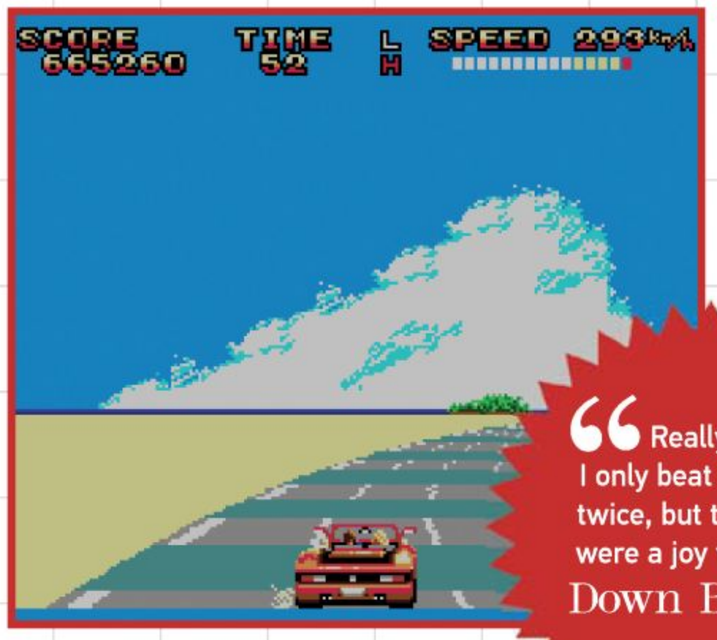
R-Type

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



11 ***R-Type* received a** number of fantastic conversions over the years, with the Master System's standing out as one of the best of the early efforts. There's some sprite flicker as you might expect, but it's otherwise amazing and an exclusive secret level really sweetens the deal.

worldmags.net



"Really hard and I only beat it once or twice, but the stages were a joy to play"
Down By Law

Out Run

DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1987 **GENRE:** RACING

10 **The Master System** didn't always fare well with conversions of Sega's high-end arcade machines, often struggling to emulate the sprite-scaling effects that made them so impressive. However, the Master System conversion of *Out Run* is a very playable representation of the classic coin-op, including all 15 courses and the three memorable tunes of the arcade game.

While better conversions of *Out Run* have come along since the Master System's heyday, this one makes it into your top ten because of the impact it had at the time of release – it was the best home version around. Compared to the largely disappointing home computer releases, the colourful visuals and smooth movement of the console game seemed just like the real thing, lending credence to Sega's claims of arcade-quality games at home.



"At the time of release, it was the best home version around"
Out Run did a great job of emulating the classic coin-op



Fantasy Zone

DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1986
GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

9 **Sega's trippy take** on *Defender* is one of the earliest examples of the cute-'em-up, and the Master System conversion is excellent. While it had to drop the backgrounds in order to get the massive bosses on screen, it's otherwise visually faithful to the original, with bright colours and surreal enemy designs. The audio is also great, with close renditions of the arcade tunes. As for the gameplay, it's a very tight horizontally scrolling blaster which requires you to locate and destroy a series of bases in order to fight each end-of level boss. Defeated enemies drop coins to spend on power-ups, which you'll definitely need – this game is a stiff challenge despite its cartoonish visuals. We remember being utterly destroyed many, many times in our youth, but as with any great game, we kept returning for more punishment.

Wonder Boy In Monster Land

DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1988 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

8 **The second arcade** *Wonder Boy* outing was a world away from the simplistic platforming of its predecessor, retaining linear stages but introducing a currency system, shops, upgradeable weaponry and armour, and even people to converse with. There were plenty of secrets to discover too, with health and cash stashed all over the place and even hidden doors to find. The fusion of RPG elements and arcade platforming was a big hit with players, and the change of format would eventually prove to be a permanent one. The Master System conversion kept up with the coin-op due to some impressive visuals and the same cross-genre gameplay. It's a fantastic game, and remarkably one which set the stage for even bigger things to come…





"Different from its Mega Drive counterpart but still full of charm – I might even say I enjoy this version more"
Black Ridge

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

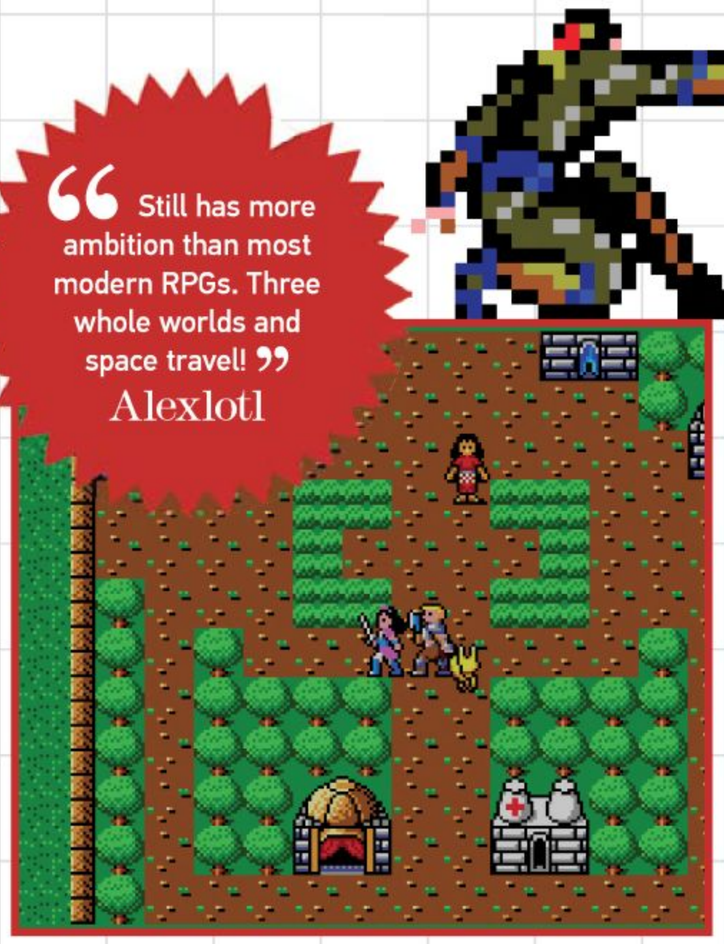
DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

7 **For a time** in the early Nineties, it seemed that picking up a Disney platform game was a guarantee of quality – Capcom turned in some fantastic NES releases, while Sega kept its own crowd happy with the likes of *Castle Of Illusion*. Minnie Mouse has been kidnapped by the evil witch Mizrabel, and it's up to Mickey to gather the seven rainbow-coloured gems and bring her back.

Despite the Master System being targeted at a younger audience following the release of the Mega Drive, the 8-bit version of the game is noticeably harder than its 16-bit counterpart. That's not for bad reasons either, as the new level designs are tough but fair. It isn't quite as visually lovely as the Mega Drive game, but it'll certainly last you a whole lot longer – and it seems you all appreciated that.



> Still has more ambition than most modern RPGs. Three whole worlds and space travel!
> Alexlotl



Phantasy Star

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

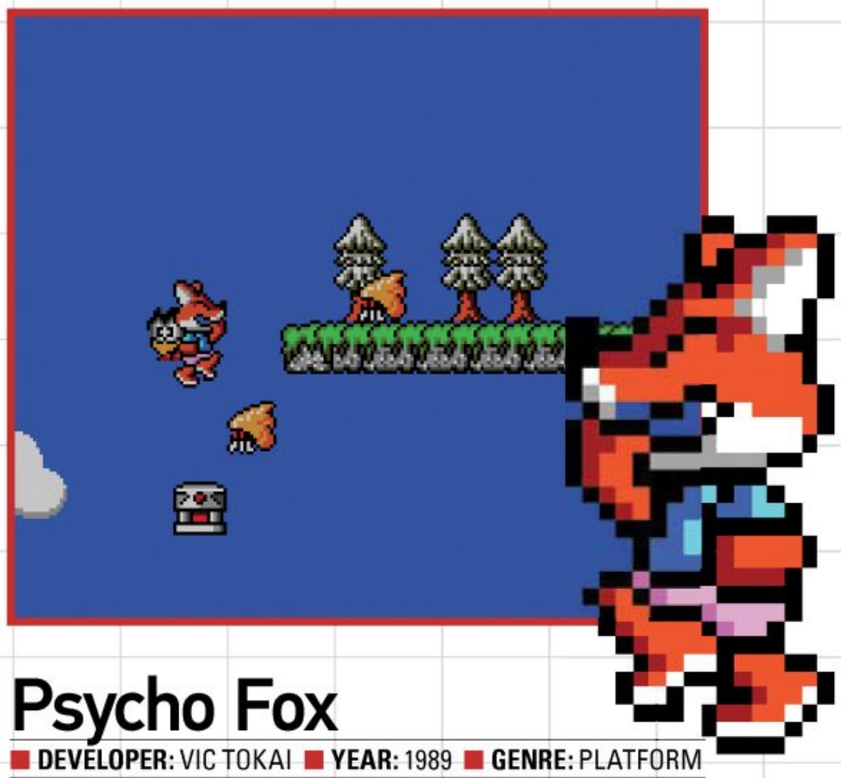
6 **Alis Landale's quest** for vengeance against King Lassic is one of the all-time great RPGs, and was highly influential in the development of the genre on consoles. The large 4-megabit cartridge enabled a huge amount of visual variety and a truly epic quest for the era, the smooth animation of the first-person dungeon scenes was a sight to behold, and the game even let players save via battery backup. However, that technology meant *Phantasy Star* was a pricey release, which we suspect is why it failed to crack the top five.

Shinobi

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

5 **The first of** Joe Musashi's adventures received an excellent Master System conversion, which included all of the arcade stages and enemies but also provided a number of updates for the home audience. Joe could now sustain multiple hits before death and didn't have to rescue all the kidnapped kids, though it was still a good idea – they represented the only way to get new weapons, regain health and access the classic bonus stages. These enhancements helped *Shinobi* to become your top Master System arcade conversion, and we can't argue – it's ace.





Psycho Fox

■ **DEVELOPER:** VIC TOKAI ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

4 **In the days** before *Sonic The Hedgehog*, fast-paced platformers were rare, but *Psycho Fox* was one of them. Taking the basic gameplay template of NES platformer *Kid Kool*, it stars a fox which can transform into a variety of creatures – a hippo with a powerful punch, a monkey with a high jump and a really speedy tiger. Top-notch stage design and tight controls ensured the game's success, and Vic Tokai's momentum-based platforming template would later be used for *Decap Attack* on the Mega Drive.

Sonic The Hedgehog

■ **DEVELOPER:** ANCIENT ■ **YEAR:** 1991 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

3 **While Sonic might** have been created to promote the Mega Drive's strengths, Sega wasn't going to deny its 8-bit customers a chance to experience its exciting new mascot. But with Sonic Team busy creating the full-powered 16-bit version, Sega didn't have the resources to develop it in-house – enter Ancient, a new team co-founded by notable gaming musician Yuzo Koshiro. Knowing that a straight conversion of the Mega Drive platformer would be impossible, the team instead opted for a loose adaptation which lost a little of the speed and all of the loops, but remained faithful to the spirit of the original.

In fact, it's even arguable that the Master System version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* is actually a better game than its 16-bit counterpart. It might be missing a few of the flashier tricks, but the game includes completely exclusive stages with more varied level design, including gimmicks such as an auto-scrolling stage, an entirely vertical stage and a proper maze that had no place in the Mega Drive game. And while only the title theme and Green Hill Zone music remain from Masato Nakamura's iconic soundtrack, Koshiro's new music is of equally high quality.

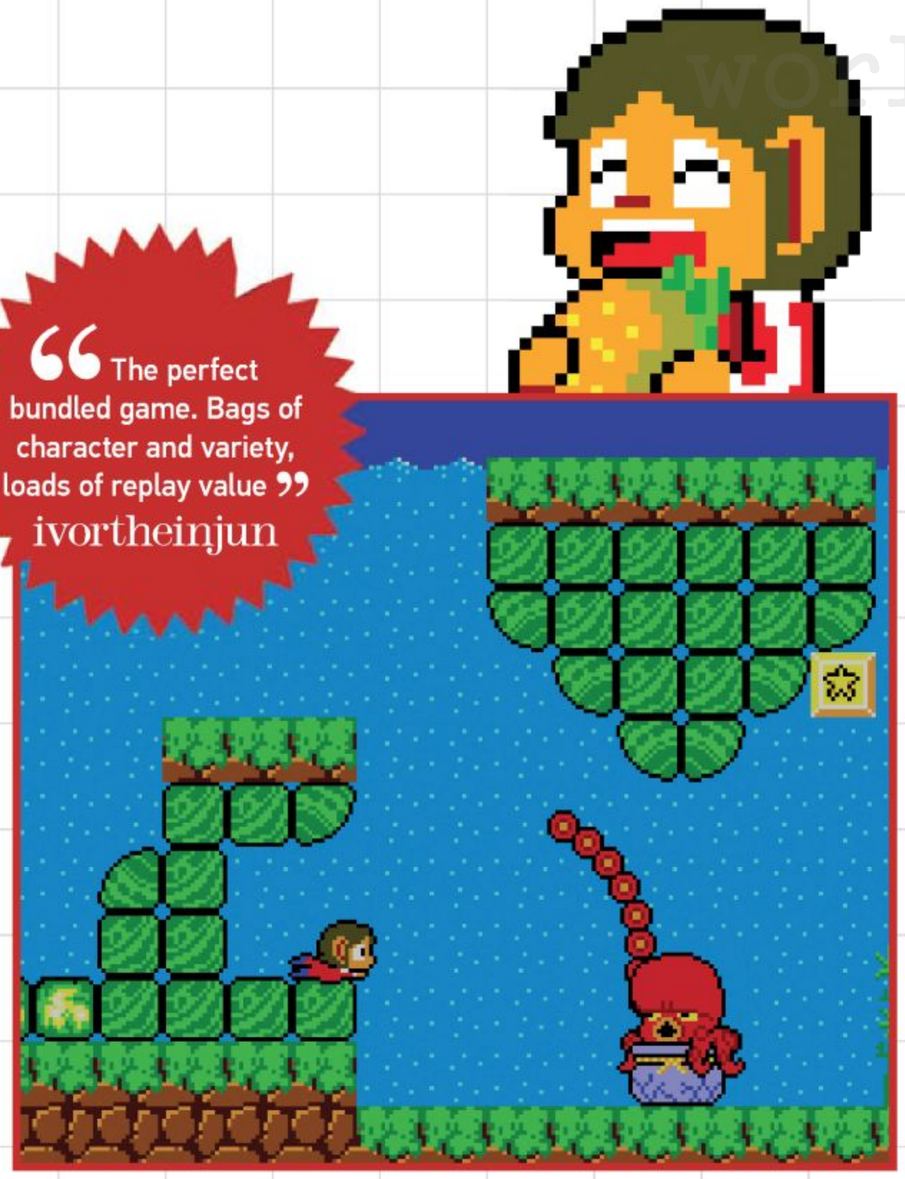
This game set the tone for Sonic's later Master System outings, both of which would be completely disconnected from the Mega Drive releases. It served an interesting dual role, too – it was the final game for the Master System in North America, but in Europe it replaced *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* as the Master System II's built-in game, serving to extend the life of the console by bringing in thousands of new Master System owners. However, whether you experienced it as a swansong or an introduction, it's hard to deny that *Sonic The Hedgehog* is an excellent platformer which deserves its high place on this list.

> Arguably a better game than its 16-bit counterpart
> Master System Sonic impressed with is more varied level design

> Not only the better version of Sonic, but one of the best Sonic The Hedgehog games ever made to this day
> samhain81







> The perfect bundled game. Bags of character and variety, loads of replay value
>
> ivortheinjun

Alex Kidd In Miracle World

DEVELOPER: SEGA **YEAR:** 1986 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

You had to know that if Sonic was high on this list, his predecessor as Sega's mascot wasn't going to be too far away. Despite having received five games on the Master System, it's Alex Kidd's debut that stands the test of time as the strongest instalment in the series and one of the strongest games on the console. *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* owes a lot to Nintendo – the game takes inspiration from the incredibly popular *Super Mario Bros*, with its visual similarities and destructible blocks showing the influence clearly. However, Alex's choice to punch the blocks instead of headbutting them is only the start of the differences.

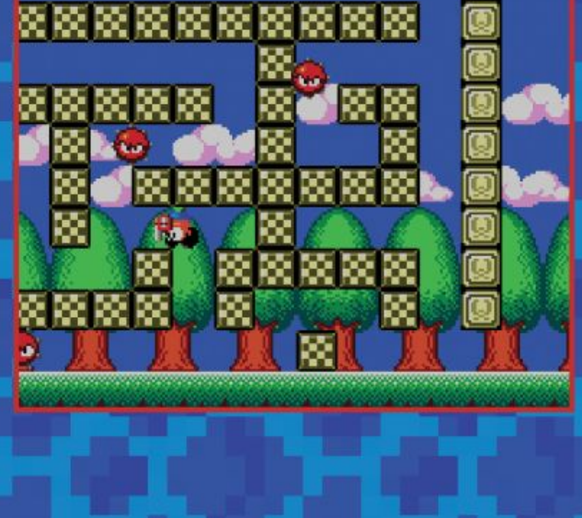
While Nintendo's hit is a fairly simplistic platform game, Sega loaded its release with features that keep the gameplay varied. While Mario's coins existed solely to provide extra lives, Alex can spend the money he collects in shops throughout the game. He can also store items to use later on, a feature which would eventually be added to Nintendo's series, and even ride vehicles such as a motorbike and a speedboat. The rock-paper-scissors boss battles seem like a strange inclusion, but for many they're simply a part of the game's unique charm.

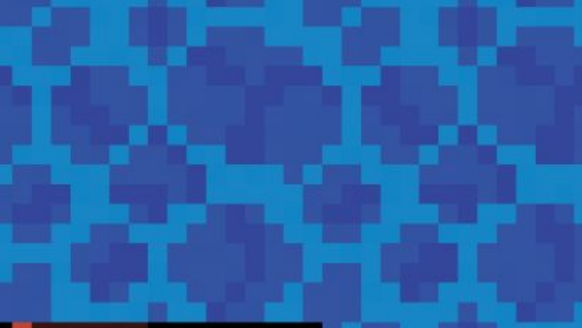
Sega's fortunes never benefited from Alex Kidd in the same way as Nintendo's did from Mario, but it's not hard to explain why this game placed so high in your list – it was built into all North American Master System II consoles and a great many of the European ones, ensuring popularity from the get-go. Gamers would return to their cartridge-free consoles time and time again to play it, and they were rewarded with the kind of lengthy, challenging platform adventure that is not commonly surpassed on any format. In fact, on this console only a single game manages to do so…





> Loaded with features for varied gameplay
>
> Alex Kidd is far more than a Super Mario Bros variant







> Picked this up when I was eight because I thought the cover was awesome, then never played anything but this for a year!
>
> Lorfarius



Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap

DEVELOPER: WESTONE **YEAR:** 1989 **GENRE:** PLATFORM

If there's one thing the Master System excels at, it's definitely platform games – the genre is clearly dominant in this top 25, so only a platformer of exceptional quality could possibly rise to the top. Described in a 95% *Mean Machines* review as "one of the best games of its type available on any console," it's fair to say that *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* is a platformer of exceptional quality.

Beginning in the final level of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, you get the chance to fight the final boss of that game again – but this time, defeating it reveals a nasty surprise. Our plucky hero is cursed upon the dragon's defeat, transforming him into a fire-breathing lizard. He escapes the collapsing castle but now needs to become human again, so a new quest begins, taking him to locations such as a spooky forest, a dry desert and a fiery cave. That sounds like standard fare for the series but unlike its predecessor, *Wonder Boy III* doesn't contain individual stages. Instead, it takes place in a single large world where everything is connected and you're only limited by the obstacles you can overcome.

Of course, as a lizard you can't overcome too many obstacles, but during the journey you'll encounter more dragons and be transformed into new animal forms. The first is a tiny wall-scaling mouse, while later ones include a lion with a massive sword swing and an eagle which can fly. All of these forms enable you to visit new areas and access new areas in old ones, creating the feeling of a grand adventure where undiscovered secrets could be hiding anywhere.

The *Metroid*-esque structure is certainly great, but it's far from the only thing that makes *Wonder Boy III* so good. The controls are dead-on while the vibrant, detailed visuals are superb and sprite flicker is kept to a minimum. In some places, the game almost reaches the visual quality of early Mega Drive releases. The soundtrack contains a number of superbly composed tunes and even supports the FM add-on for improved sound, despite never having been released in Japan.

Wonder Boy III would be a great game on its own, but as a sequel it really acts as a model for others to follow. New players are brought into the action quickly thanks to the game's inspired introduction, while old fans have a whole new structure and new abilities to play with. It's telling that *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, a PlayStation classic considered by many to be the pinnacle of that series, shares a lot of its design traits with *The Dragon's Trap*. It just goes to show that while **Retro Gamer** readers have voted for *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* as their favourite Master System game, its design principles ensure that it would be an exceptional game on any platform.

retro GAMER READERS' CHOICE

5 reasons why it's great

- It's a truly epic adventure, requiring multiple nights of play and password saves to reach the ending.
- Each of the different transformations feels truly unique, changing the way you play the game.
- It's a great example of the Master System's visual strengths, with colourful graphics and detailed backgrounds.
- Shinichi Sakamoto's soundtrack is fantastic, and should get far more recognition – there's even an FM version!
- Beginning from the final level of the previous game is one of the greatest introductions to any game, ever.



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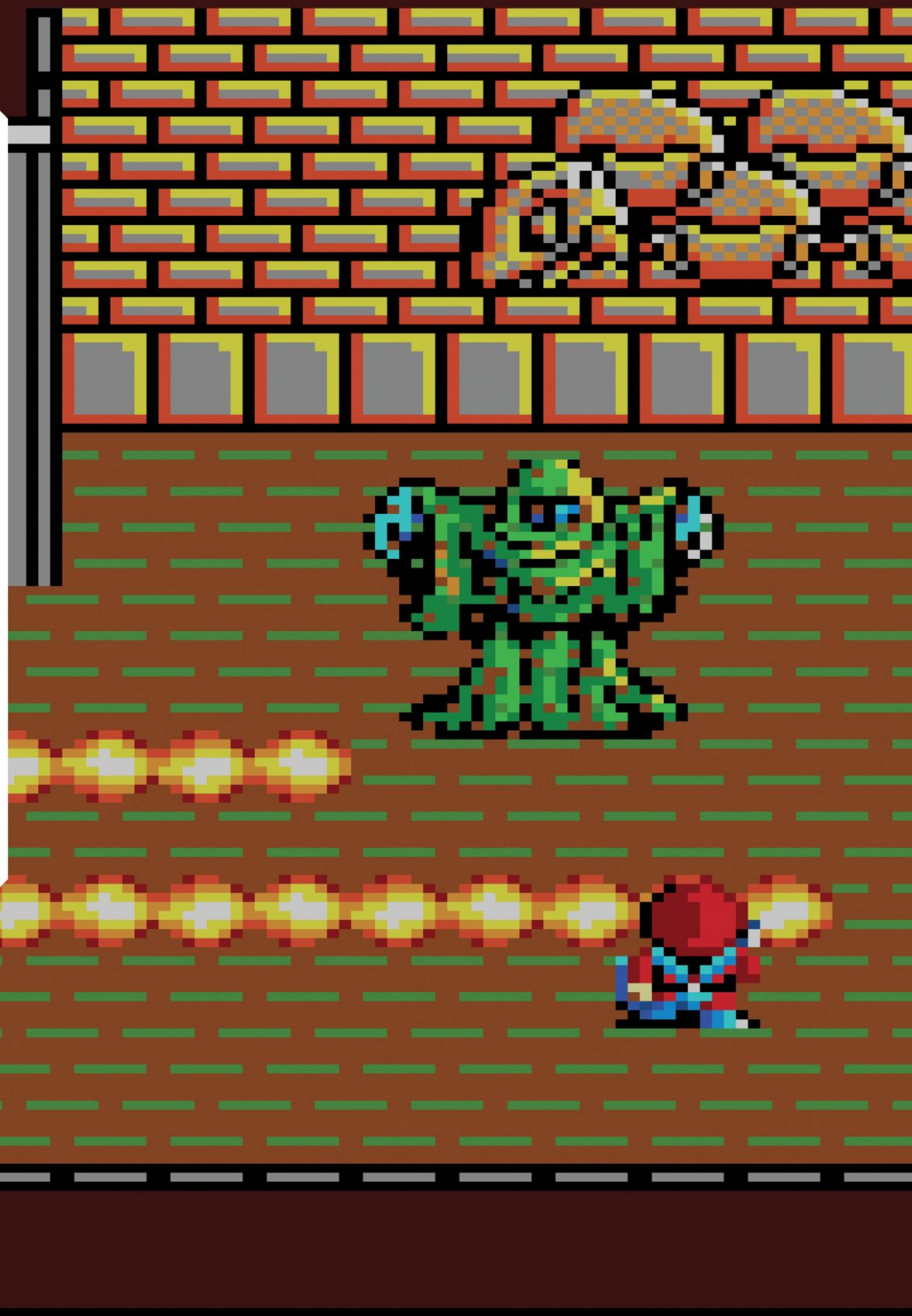
CLASSIC MOMENTS

Ys: The Vanished Omens

» **PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA » **RELEASED:** 1988

Picking on someone your own size is overrated. Sure, picking on someone smaller is obviously detestable and fairness is lovely, but we're not looking at smaller opposition – we're looking to go big or go home. Luckily for us, after beating all manner of cannon fodder and some increasingly tough regular enemies, we reach the shrine and find Ankharat – a big, ugly boss character who is in need of a good smiting.

If you're unfamiliar with *Ys*, the method of beating him might seem flat-out suicidal, as you have to run right into him to deal any damage. Unfortunately for you, that task is complicated by the flame jets shooting from the walls of Ankharat's lair – you'll be toast before you can strike the fatal blow if you fail to time your runs correctly. But once you've slain the fiend, you'll have achieved your first step to becoming a proper hero – taking the David role against a Goliath. There's no rest for the righteous though, as you've got a damsel in distress to rescue. Hop to it, hero time is of the essence… *



BIO

Falcom's action-RPG released on a wide variety of Japanese computer platforms in 1987, and became a sizeable hit. With a simple combat system which involved running into enemies off-centre, it lent itself well to the console market. A Famicom conversion appeared in 1988, alongside a Master System version licensed by Sega which would become the first English-language release in the series. As well as receiving a variety of sequels, *Ys* has been converted and remade on a variety of platforms including PC Engine, Saturn, PlayStation 2 and Nintendo DS, often together with *Ys II: The Final Chapter*.

MORE YS: THE VANISHED OMENS MOMENTS

Going Unpunished



Early in the game, it's possible to buy a sapphire ring from the town market, but a local denizen will happily inform you that the trader is dodgy and the ring was stolen. Return the ring to its rightful owner and not only will you get the satisfaction and warm feeling inside of doing a good deed, but a reward which leaves you with a 50% profit. Nice!

Road To Ruin



As the fields and towns give way to a narrow, rocky path up a cliffside, it's easy to get the sense that the stakes are getting higher. The ascent towards the temple near Zepik visually highlights a turning point in Aron's quest, from the preliminary stages of low-level combat and simple item retrieval into the game's first proper dungeon.

Helping Feena



While adventuring, Aron finds a girl named Feena who couldn't remember how long she had been locked away or why. Though Aron couldn't comprehend the importance of his actions, his natural instinct for helping people told him that the only just thing to do was to rescue the damsel in distress. It was at that point that he becomes a true hero.

Dark Depths



When you venture down to the mines for the first time, there's a massively increased sense of danger. The monsters are the most dangerous so far, but that's just the start of your troubles. The real worry is that the darkness means you'll be totally unaware of those monsters until they're within striking range, and your escape routes are hidden too!

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The Definitive WONDER BOY



WHILE A LATER SPIN-OFF FRANCHISE APPEARED ON THE NES, MANY GAMERS ASSOCIATE WONDER BOY WITH THE MASTER SYSTEM. HERE ARE ALL THE GAMES ANYWAY...

Batten down the hatches, viewers; this one's going to be messy. When little-known coin-op developer Westone created a simple cutesy run 'n' gun game called *Wonder Boy* in 1986, incredibly few videogaming academics predicted the screwed-up rats' nest of licensing and sub-licensing and rebranding that would result over the following 20 years. This, of course, is largely due to the fact that there WERE no videogaming academics in 1986, but the point still holds. While *Wonder Boy*'s gameplay could hardly be any less complex (it is, perhaps, one of the least deep videogames ever made), the seemingly-undemanding act of knocking out a few sequels and giving them titles created a twisted trainwreck that makes the world of *Contra* (see The Definitive Contra in **RG**35) look like a simple, straightforward place of easy-going innocence belonging to a backwards agrarian age. Disturbingly – given that he's a small child and has remained so for two decades – Wonder Boy spawned four distinct families of offspring, from simple arcade games reminiscent of the coin-op debut to more complicated adventures of strategy exploration, and countless variants in between. That's if "countless" can mean "two", anyway.

The legacy of *Wonder Boy* may well be a messy one, but it's a mess that's certainly worth sorting out, particularly with the recent news that a brand new game in the series has finally been announced. He may not have started off life on the Master System, but with so many games available on Sega's 8-bit console, it seems silly to ignore the yellow-headed cave boy.

1986
WONDER BOY AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA REVENGE OF DRANCON (COUNTLESS FORMATS)

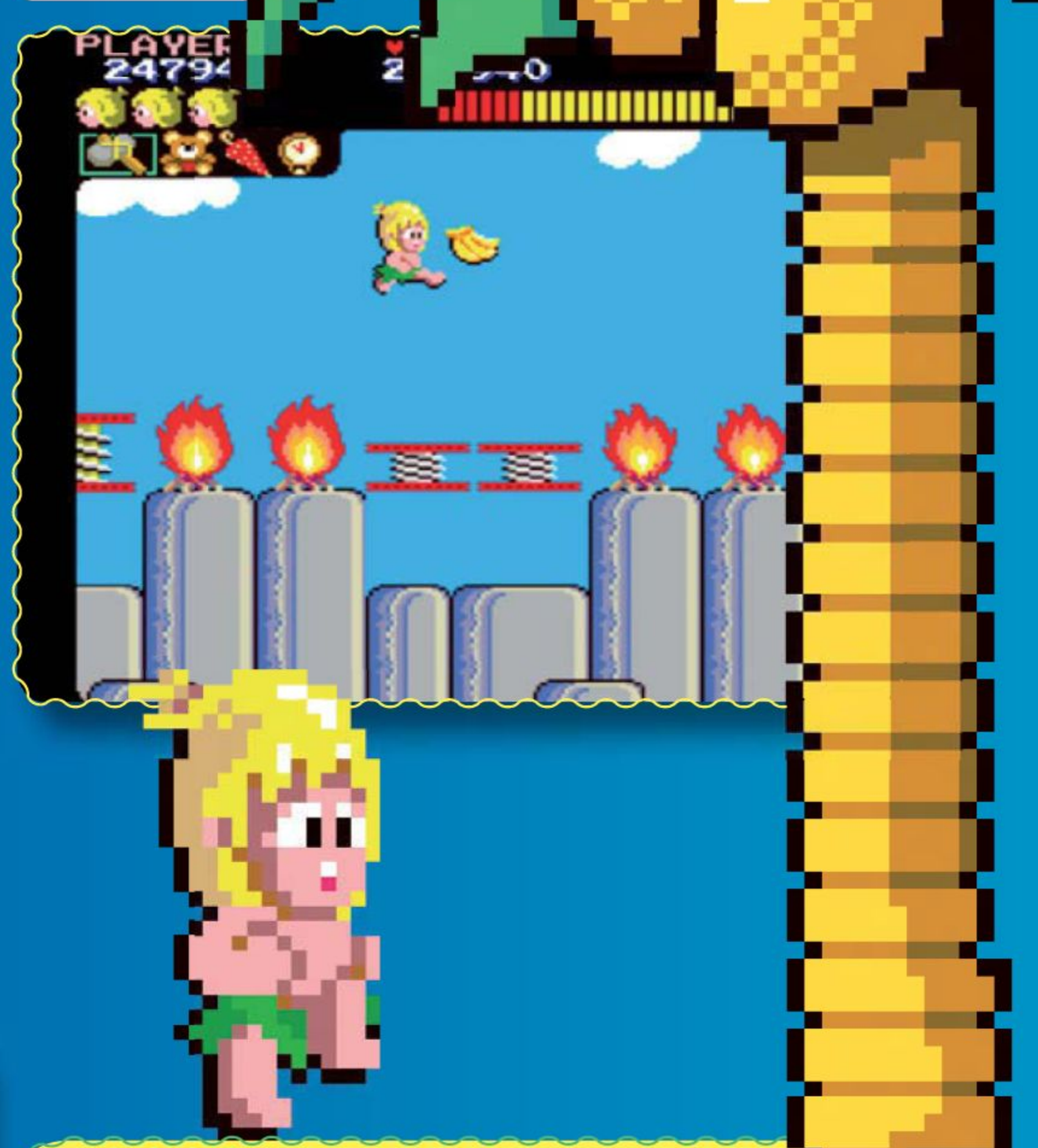
The original *Wonder Boy* was converted to pretty much every 8-bit format in existence, from the Spectrum to the MSX, but not all *Wonder Boy*s are the same. The biggest conversion discrepancies are found in the Master System/Game Gear ports (the American GG version is the only one to bear the baffling "*Revenge Of Drancon*" title), where the final areas of each level are handled entirely differently, and there are also hidden icons which summon a red-haired female character (Wonder Girl?) who flies our hero up into the clouds where he can collect hearts and skip forward to later areas.

Sega had snaffled the copyright to the *Wonder Boy* name, so when the series moved over to other formats in later years (mostly under the auspices of Hudson Soft), it got a new moniker, in the shape of the commendably accurate *Hudson's Adventure Island*. (The "Hudson's" was binned for the PAL NES release – which didn't show up until 1992, four years after the NTSC versions and six years after the original – but as compensation it picked up a "Classic" on the end.) *Adventure Island* is basically identical to the original *Wonder Boy*, except instead of Tom-Tom you play a new character, Master Higgins (complete with baseball cap in place of Tom-Tom's shock of blond hair), the bosses are different, and all the music is new too.

1986 also saw the release in arcades of *Wonder Boy Deluxe*, but this reporter is jiggered if he can find a single noticeable difference between it and the vanilla version.

DID YOU KNOW?: If you're interested in playing a lot of the earlier *Wonder Boy* games you might want to check out the PS2's Japanese release of *Monster World Collection*, a hugely comprehensive compilation of lots and lots of *Wonder Boy* games (including multiple versions of each one from different formats) with plenty of extra content and features. It's getting quite hard to get hold of now, so online auction sites are the best place to look.

» The same four areas basically repeat throughout all eight worlds of the game. This shot of Level 8.1 is more or less the only place there's any variation from the standard set of island, cave, water and ice-palace settings.



» This is a picture of level 2, just to prove that it can be done.



1986
WONDER BOY (SG-1000)

The first home release of the series, pre-dating all of the 8-bit versions mentioned above, actually appeared on Sega's forerunner to the Master System, the SG-1000. (It stands for Sega Game, if you were wondering.) While it carries the same name and at first glance it seems like the familiar coin-op, it only takes 20 seconds into the opening level to start noticing that this is a radically different and new game. The absence of the trademark skateboard and variable jumping is the first clue, but things really veer off halfway through the stage, when the level breaks up into multiple branching routes and culminates in a boss fight (after just one area, not the usual four) with a big crow in a death's-head tabard. To be honest, there isn't a lot of point in talking about the rest of it, as most of you won't get any further than that. And yes, I *am* calling you a puff.

DID YOU KNOW?: The *Monster World Collection* mentioned above, includes the SG-1000 version of *Wonder Boy*, meaning you have a legitimate way of playing it, providing you have a chipped/import console…

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1987
WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND AKA SUPER WONDER BOY MONSTER WORLD AKA BIKKURIMAN WORLD AKA SUPER WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND AKA MONICA IN THE DRAGON'S CASTLE (MULTIPLE FORMATS)

With five titles but only one game, *Monster Land* is the most confused of all the *Wonder Boy*s, and it's also the best. A radical departure from the original, it's basically a platform game with exploring and RPG elements, and rather than featuring a baby romping around a volcanic tropical island, it's set in a medieval fantasy land called Monster World and the protagonist is a little knight called Book Shonen, with a sword and a shield. (*Monster World*, rather than *Land*, is the generic series name for the *WB* games that are part of this line rather than the arcade line started by the original *Wonder Boy*. For the sake of some sort of clarity in this piece, we'll refer to the semi-RPG-type games as *Monster World* games and the arcadey tropical-volcanic-baseball-hat ones as *Adventure Island* games, regardless of their actual titles) Why it was ever attached to the *Wonder Boy* brand is anyone's guess.

Like many great games, the key in *Monster Land* is that you're your own worst enemy. A large proportion of baddies and hazards can be avoided, but you're constantly tempted to take them on in order to grab bonuses and collect gold coins to buy yourself weapon upgrades, special powers, armour and the like from the many shops. There's almost no pressure anywhere in the game – the pace is relaxed, energy hearts are plentiful and few enemies attack you with any kind of determination – yet you still manage to get yourself into trouble time and again, and the more impressively you equip Book Shonen, the more dangerous opponents and situations you find yourself rashly tackling, which is self-balancing (and therefore totally compelling) gameplay in action.

The names? (Deep breath.) *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* was the name given to the arcade game and the Master System release in the West; the "Super" prefix was attached to the 8-bit computer incarnations by Activision (the Amiga and ST versions had the "Super" on the box, but were just called "*Wonderboy In Monsterland*" in-game); the "Monster World" suffix went with the Sega Mark III version (the Japanese version of the Master System); while the Japanese PC Engine game answered to *Bikkuriman World* (and had a mostly new cast of characters).

And round about now would be as good a time as any to note that in Brazil, where the Master System was quite big news, all the *Wonder Boy* games (including *WB5* on Mega Drive) were adapted to use the characters from a popular comic-book series, Monica's Gang, with different sprites and storylines. (Some sources translate the second word as "Team", because God forbid we should have a *Wonder Boy* game that only had three or four different names.)

DID YOU KNOW?: Leave us alone.

» Regardless of what name you know WestOne's game by, it remains a fantastic addition to the series, offering the first glimpse that the franchise could head into new directions. It's arguably one of the most well known games too, having been ported to numerous systems over the years. The Master System outing shown here remains a firm favourite.





1988
WONDER BOY 3: MONSTER LAIR (ARCADE, PC ENGINE CD, MEGA DRIVE)

The next proper release in the series was a return to something much more like the original game, but with a few new tricks (as well as a new hero, a little Flash Gordon dude called Leo, much more closely resembling Book Shonen than Tom-Tom or Master Higgins). The normal levels now have a forced scroll, but each one is also followed with a horizontal shoot-'em-up section after each platform level. You get lots of fancy new weapons too, but *Monster Lair* is a largely uninteresting game designed as a coin-sucking continue-thon. However, the PC Engine CD version has a ridiculously splendid, wildly out-of-place *Miami Vice* soundtrack, which is almost worth tracking the game down for by itself. The Mega Drive port, despite running on considerably more powerful hardware, is incredibly drab and weedy-looking by comparison.

DID YOU KNOW?: *Wonder Boy 3: Monster Lair* was not ported to the Master System because *Wonder Boy* creator, Ryuichi Nishizawa had no interest in simply porting an existing game. He instead used the opportunity to create *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*.



» The shmup sections in particular are designed to kill you off and get you shovelling more credits in. With emulation, of course, that isn't a problem. Except with the Mega Drive version, which limits your continues. Gah.



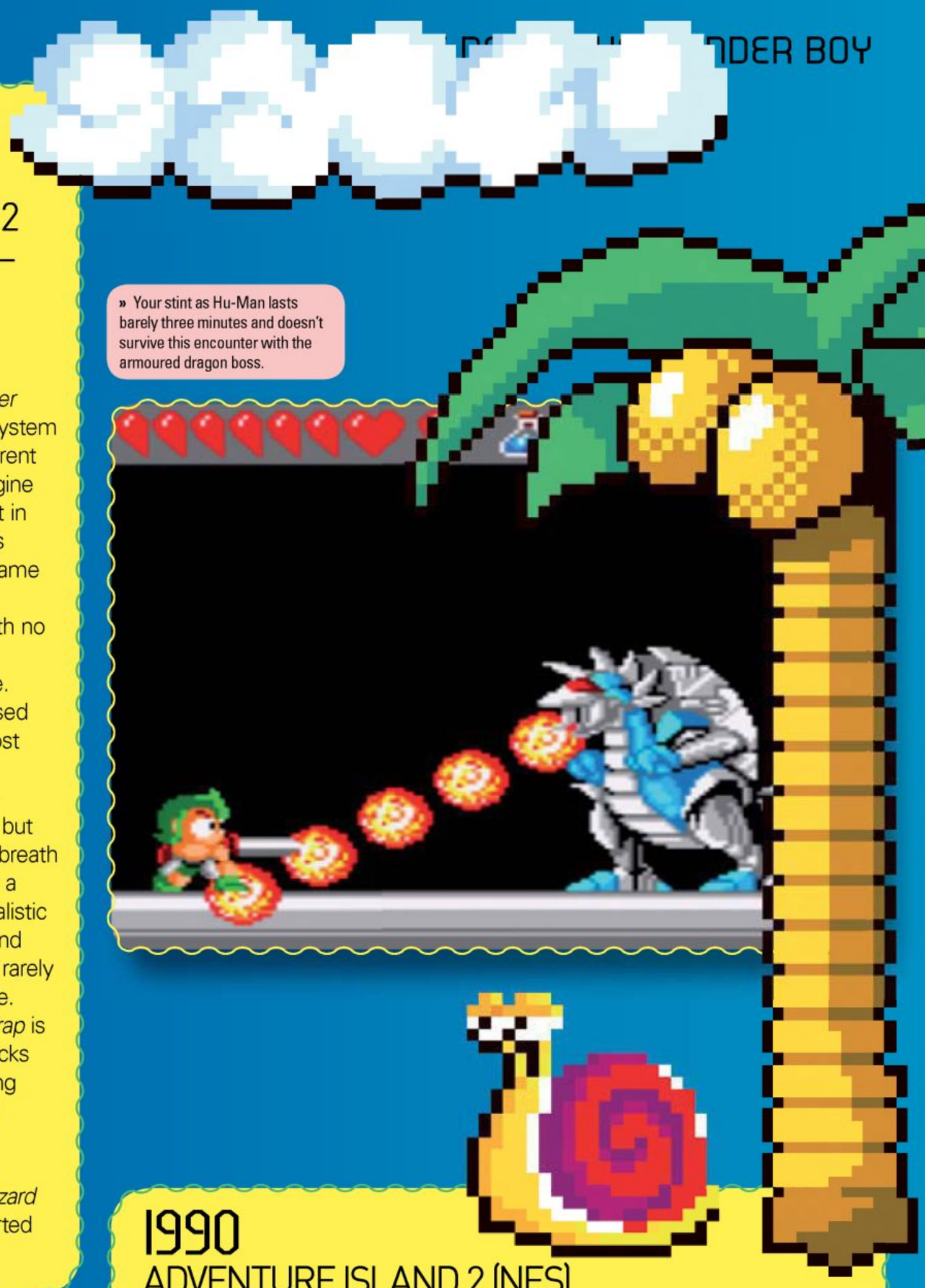
1989
WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA MONSTER WORLD 2 AKA DRAGON'S CURSE AKA MONICA'S TEAM – THE RESCUE (MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR, PC ENGINE)

Now we're starting to get in a real tangle. Despite being called *Wonder Boy III* (except on the Game Gear, where the "III" from the Master System version's name was left out in Western releases), this is a totally different game to the arcade *Wonder Boy 3*, and despite the Japanese PC Engine version (released in 1991) carrying the Adventure Island name (except in the US, where it was released for the Turbo Grafx under the Dragon's Curse label), it's a *Monster World*-type game (indeed, in Japan the Game Gear version, whose levels have substantially different layouts to the Master System and PC Engine titles, was called *Monster World 2* with no mention of *Wonder Boy* at all), not an *Adventure Island* one. Hngh.

Firstly, if you made it through that sentence in one piece, well done. Have a sit down for a minute. *Dragon's Trap* is a more exploration-based game than *Monster Land*, but it plays in a very similar manner. Its most notable feature is that as the story progresses you play six different characters with varying abilities. You start off as the traditional sword-wielding toddler (called "Hu-Man"), with a near-invincible energy bar, but on defeating the dragon in the first castle it curses you with its dying breath and turns you into "Lizard-Man", who can breathe fire but carries just a single energy heart into subsequent levels. There are four more animalistic protagonists to "be" later on (Mouse-Man, Piranha-Man, Lion-Man and Hawk-Man), all with their own strengths and weaknesses, so there's rarely a moment to get bored throughout what's a big and challenging game.

With its involved plot and character-changing gimmicks *Dragon's Trap* is probably the most popular of all the *Wonder Boy* titles, and while it lacks the focus and subtlety of *Monster Land* it's still excellent and absorbing stuff that stands in the very topmost echelons of Master System and Game Gear software.

DID YOU KNOW?: The recently announced *Monster Boy And The Wizard Of Booze* is heavily based on *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*. It started off life as a standalone game called *Flying Hamster II*.



» Your stint as Hu-Man lasts barely three minutes and doesn't survive this encounter with the armoured dragon boss.

1990
ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (NES)

While *Wonder Boy* had veered off into the *Monster World* style of game, the Nintendo incarnation of the series under the *Adventure Island* banner chose a different path. The NES's first original *Adventure Island* was a completely new game, which would define the form for all subsequent *AI* games. Spread across eight multi-area worlds in the same equatorial setting as the first arcade game, this time Master Higgins has some help, in the form of various dragons which can be hatched from eggs lying around on the islands and then ridden around the levels, providing extra protection, firepower and abilities.

The key innovation is that whenever you reach the end of one of a level's short areas with power-ups intact (including the dragons), you can choose whether to carry them through to the next area, or keep them in reserve for later if you think you can manage the section without them or feel confident you'll find some in there. (In this way you can stockpile multiple power-ups against later losses.) This strategic helping hand, combined with the shortness of the stages, makes *Adventure Island 2* a friendly little game that's easy to make progress in, but beware – if you do manage to use up all your lives, continuing sends you right back to the start of a world and loses every stored power-up item in your inventory, and without them you'll find life in the later stages pretty hard going. The only real fly in the ointment of this likeable game is the absence of even a password save, meaning that you'll have to play through the whole thing in one go if you want to see the end.

DID YOU KNOW?: *Adventure Island 2* is downloadable on Virtual Console.



» The selection of levels seems to be semi-random, and stages can even show up in different worlds from one game to the next – since the worlds are all fairly generic, stages can shift around without looking out of place. Which has nothing to do with this screenshot, I just realised we hadn't had one of him on his skateboard yet.

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1991
ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (GAME BOY)

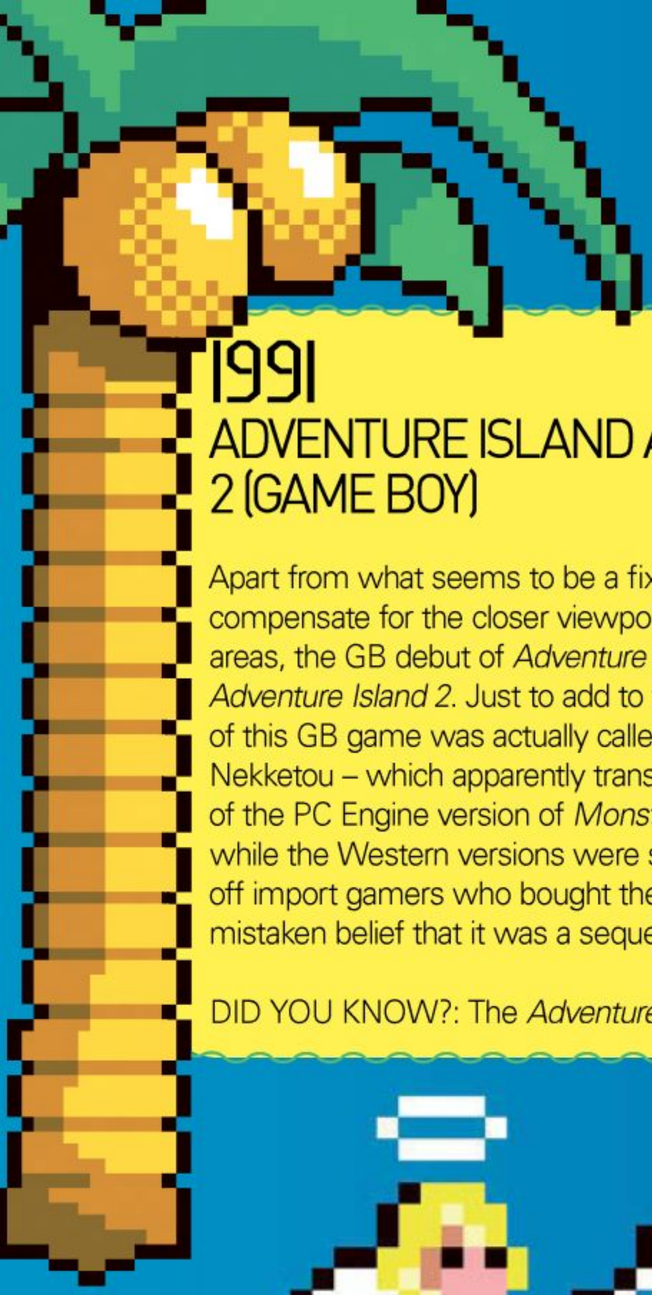
Apart from what seems to be a fixed ordering of levels, a speed reduction to compensate for the closer viewpoint and the addition of some secret bonus areas, the GB debut of *Adventure Island* is basically the same game as *Adventure Island 2*. Just to add to the confusion, the 1992 Japanese release of this GB game was actually called *Adventure Island 2* (subtitled Bikkuri Nekketou – which apparently translates as "Aliens In Paradise" – in an echo of the PC Engine version of *Monster Land*, to muddy things even more), while the Western versions were simply *Adventure Island*, greatly cheesing off import gamers who bought the Jap game in the understandable but mistaken belief that it was a sequel.

DID YOU KNOW?: The *Adventure Island* series is owned by Konami.

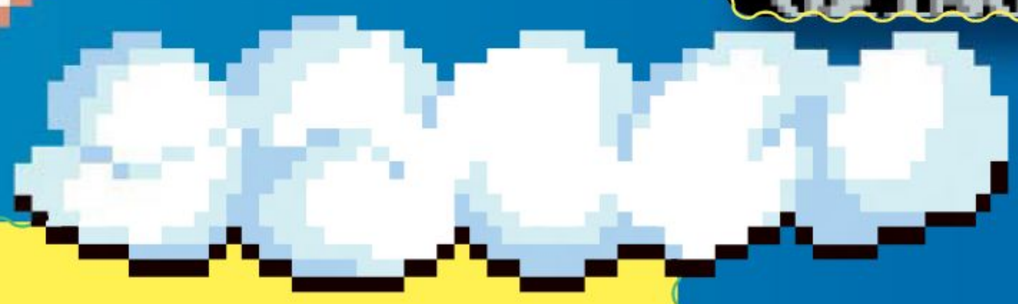
» In a concession to handheld play values, continues on the GB game return you to the start of the current area, not all the way back to the beginning of the entire world.











1991
WONDER BOY IN MONSTER WORLD AKA WONDER BOY 5: MONSTER WORLD 3 AKA THE DYNASTIC HERO AKA MONICA'S TEAM IN THE LAND OF MONSTERS (MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, PC ENGINE CD)

So where's *Wonder Boy 4*, then? In an attempt to straighten out the continuity tangle, Westone and Sega evidently decided in 1991 to retrospectively regard *The Dragon's Trap* as *WB4* (and also *Monster World 2*) and then move on with a clear conscience. Although it might have been nice if they'd cleared up the whole World/Land thing too while they were about it. And if this is *Wonder Boy In Monster World*, where does that leave *Super Wonder Boy Monster World*? (The Mark III game from 1987, aka *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, if you've lost track.) And that raises another question, come to think of it.

"Monster World was once a peaceful region", runs the intro to *WB5*. "Then the peace was shattered by an invading army of", it continues, waiting again for you to press a button before revealing the answer to be "monsters." It subsequently goes on to explain that a young adventurer called Shion (that's you) has vowed to "defeat them and make his land peaceful again."

But hang on – whose land are we talking about here? Isn't this place called Monster World? Wouldn't it logically belong to the monsters? Get the hell out, you imperialist invader. Anyway, *WB5* is a return in style to *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* (appropriately, since we seem to have returned to one of its names too), and indeed the opening few screens are taken directly from the 1987 game to provide a bit of much-needed atmospheric continuity. Despite that, though, it lacks the charm of its parent, and is a slow-paced and rather twee imitation. You can spend your time a lot more entertainingly than this.

DID YOU KNOW?: The PC Engine CD version, while endowed with the usual lavish music, is painfully sluggish, so stick with the Sega versions of the game. Or again, there's the option of the *Monster World Collection* on PS2.





» Just for laughs, here's a picture of the Brazilian "Monica" adaptation of *Monster World* on the Mega Drive. Perhaps oddly, it's still a princess she has to go and rescue.

1992
NEW ADVENTURE ISLAND (PC ENGINE)

It's hard to explain why *New Adventure Island* is so enjoyable. In essence it's a completely straightforward game in the same vein as the original *Wonder Boy*, but scratch just a fraction below the surface and you'll find gameplay so sharply honed and tuned that it's elevated to a whole new strata. It's as if some crazy scientists got hold of *Adventure Island*'s DNA and spliced it with *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Super Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* – this is a game designed so that you can run at full tilt from the start of a level to the end and, if your reactions and co-ordination are perfect, get yourself safely to the finish line even if it's your first try. (Unlike some of the other games in the series, stuff doesn't just materialise in your path – when an enemy or obstacle appears in *NAI* you've always got enough time to do something about it without breaking your stride.) What's much more likely, of course, is that you'll mess up somewhere and be returned to the start of the stage or the midway checkpoint, and have to do it over and over until you get it right, but when a half-stage is only 25 seconds long that's not so much of a problem.

While its predecessors are basically platformers – even when there are no platforms around, it's all about accuracy of positioning and jumping – this is a twitch game, exciting and addictive and constantly pushed along by the jaunty music and bright colours and only slowed up by the marginally out-of-place boss stages. It's by far the most fun of all the *Adventure Island*-type games, and a fine example of the sort of thing the PC Engine excelled at.

DID YOU KNOW?: This is playable right now on Virtual Console.





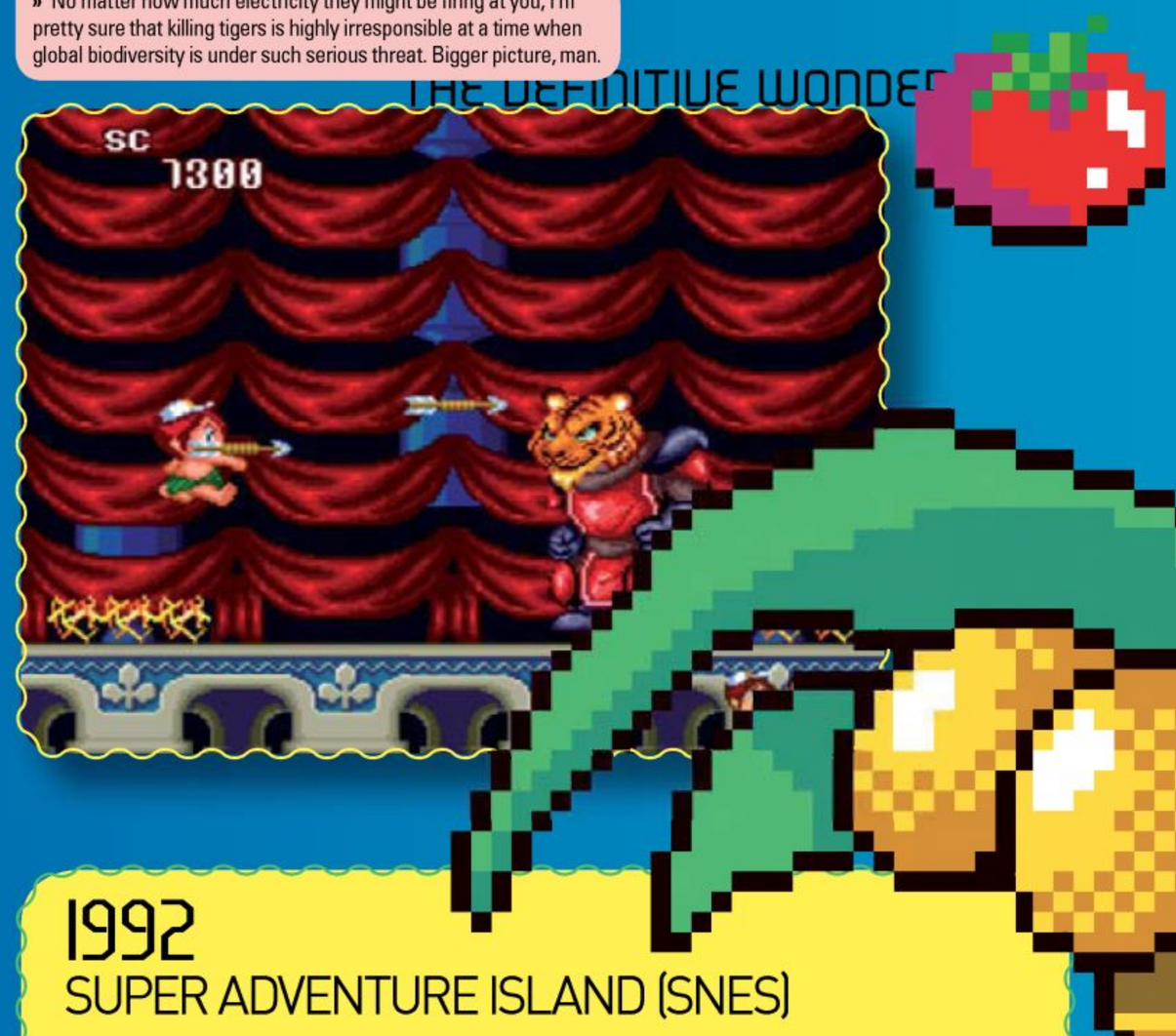
» The look of grim, angry determination Master Higgins wears throughout the SNES game would be better suited to *Gears Of War* than a cutesy arcade cartoon platform game.

1992
ADVENTURE ISLAND 3 (NES)

The third NES game is so similar to the second one that it's almost more of a 12-inch remix than a new game. It's got the same settings, the same dragon-riding shenanigans, the same power-up storage and selection mechanism, the same lack of any kind of save/password facility and (obviously) the same gameplay style – in all the time I spent playing the game for this feature the only thing I found that could be identified as a meaningful difference between *AI2* and *AI3* was that in this one you can discover secret routes which lead to different areas, in the same way as *Super Mario World* (or even let you skip entire worlds, like in *Super Mario Bros*). So it'll save us all some time if you basically just go and read the entry for the previous game again. Thanks.

DID YOU KNOW?: The first NES *Adventure Island* was ported to the Game Boy Advance as part of the Famicom Mini series in Japan. It's a flawless, good-looking straight conversion fitted neatly into the Game Boy Advance screen. However, later on the Game Boy Advance also saw the release of *Hudson Best Collection Vol.6*, which compiled all four NES *Adventure Islands* onto one cart. Inexplicably, these conversions are rather rubbish. If they weren't so cynically, disgracefully poor they'd be a perfect way to experience the four games legitimately on a widely available modern format, but sadly they're not, meaning most will want to emulate them instead.

» No matter how much electricity they might be firing at you, I'm pretty sure that killing tigers is highly irresponsible at a time when global biodiversity is under such serious threat. Bigger picture, man.



1992
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND (SNES)

And here's what's weird about videogames, viewers. *Super Adventure Island* and *New Adventure Island* have, in every obvious sense, the exact same game design. Both are classic-style *Wonder Boy* with big, brash graphics and pure arcade gameplay, with one-hit kills and infrequent checkpoints designed to have you repeating difficult sections over and over until you can make it through intact. Yet while *New Adventure Island* is unarguably the best of the original-model *Wonder Boys*, *Super Adventure Island* is rubbish. For some reason Tom-Tom has been made macho (well, as macho as a chubby boy wearing a grass skirt and a baseball cap can be), the end result being something hideously akin to Danny DeVito in a nappy. Whereas the levels in *New* are laid out in such a way to keep you in near-continuous movement, *Super*'s are fiddly stop-start affairs full of cheap deaths and annoyingly elusive enemies, and worst of all you only get two continues compared to *New*'s endless supply. Add it all together and it makes a mean little game almost bereft of enjoyment, and you'll need the steeliest determination to start again from the very beginning once your measly three credits are exhausted.
DID YOU KNOW?: The excellent soundtrack is by Yuzo Koshiro.



» For extra IntErACtiVe fUN (™), see if you can find this exciting surfing bonus game that's hidden somewhere in the very first area (it's within 40 seconds of the start).

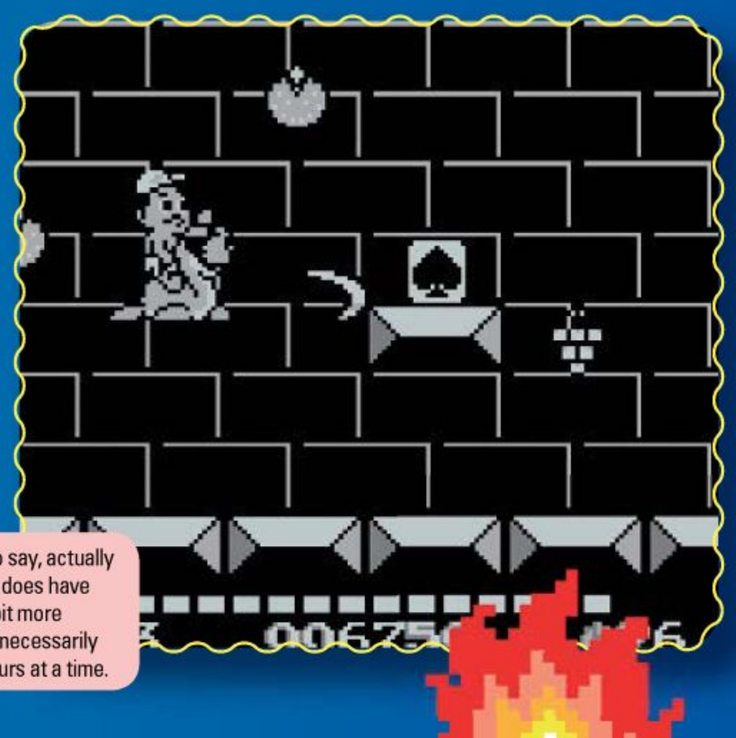


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1993
ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (GAME BOY)

As with the previous generation, GB *Adventure Island 2* is basically the same game as NES *Adventure Island 3*, save in this case for a few very minor differences in the layout of some levels. (And is therefore nothing to do with the *Japanese* Game Boy game called *Adventure Island 2*, covered above. As far as I can tell, the "real" GB *Adventure Island 2* – ie this one – was never released in Japan, which in itself is pretty strange for a Japanese-originated game series that's always been far bigger over there than in the West.) We've already established that there isn't much more to say about this one and we're getting tantalisingly close to the end, so let's move swiftly along.

DID YOU KNOW?: This was the last handheld *Adventure Island* game.



» Ooh, there IS something else to say, actually – this time the Game Boy version does have passwords, which make it a fair bit more inviting for those of us who don't necessarily want to play a single game for hours at a time.

1994
MONSTER WORLD 4 (MEGA DRIVE)

The first game in the *Monster World* line not to mention *Wonder Boy* anywhere in any of its titles (though actually, since it was only released on one format in one territory, it only HAS one title) is also the first one where you don't play a boy at all, Wonder or otherwise. This time you're a green-haired elf girl called Asha, and you have to blah blah something blah blah rescue someone blah blah restore peace somewhere blah blah if I never hear another videogame plot in my life it'll be too soon blah blah. You will fervently wish you were dead before you get off the interminable intro level, and your central nervous system may shut down to protect you from the awful music, but if you can make it past that point you'll find a nippy game that never transcends the formulaic but by its own lights is decent enough fun. If you managed to glean enjoyment from *MW3*, then *Monster World 4* will leave you as happy as a pig in a high-class pig brothel with a free swill bar and satellite TV. Showing, I dunno, *The Muppets Take Manhattan* or something.

DID YOU KNOW?: Good news everyone, Sega decided that *Monster World 4* deserved a Western released, so it was finally translated to English and released on PS3, Wii and Xbox 360 in 2012.

» There is absolutely nothing smutty about this screenshot. Behave yourself.





» I'd be nervous too, in the circumstances.

1994
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (SNES)

The storyline to *SAI2* starts off with Master Higgins relaxing on a raft in the middle of the ocean with his "lovely wife Tina" after their "glorious wedding". What? He's MARRIED? Surely he should be MISTER Higgins by now, or there's something VERY unseemly going on in Waku-Waku World. (If anyone thinks I'm playing right to the end of every previous game in the series to find out if there's an established plot explanation for this somewhere, they've got another thing coming right along in just a second, on the end of a fist.) At least our under-dressed hero's marked his newfound maturity by casting off his old baseball cap and replacing it with, er, a Mario hat.

Anyhoo, just in case anyone thought they were starting to get the hang of it all, along comes *Super Adventure Island 2*. *SAI2* is nothing like *Super Adventure Island 1*, and represents something of a hybrid of the *Adventure Island* and *Monster World* games. More than that, though, it also takes the exploring, puzzle-solving and discovering-new-abilities-that-let-you-access-previously-blocked-areas elements of the *Metroid* games, and even throws in some *Final Fantasy*-style random battles as you cross the game world map. So just to be clear, what we're really talking about here is Super Wonder Metroid Adventure Fantasy Island Boy. Once you've adjusted to the new approach it's reasonably engrossing, but if you're looking for a traditional *Wonder Boy* game (of either strain) you won't find one here.

DID YOU KNOW?: You can play this on Nintendo's Virtual Console.



1994
TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKENJIMA 4 (NES)

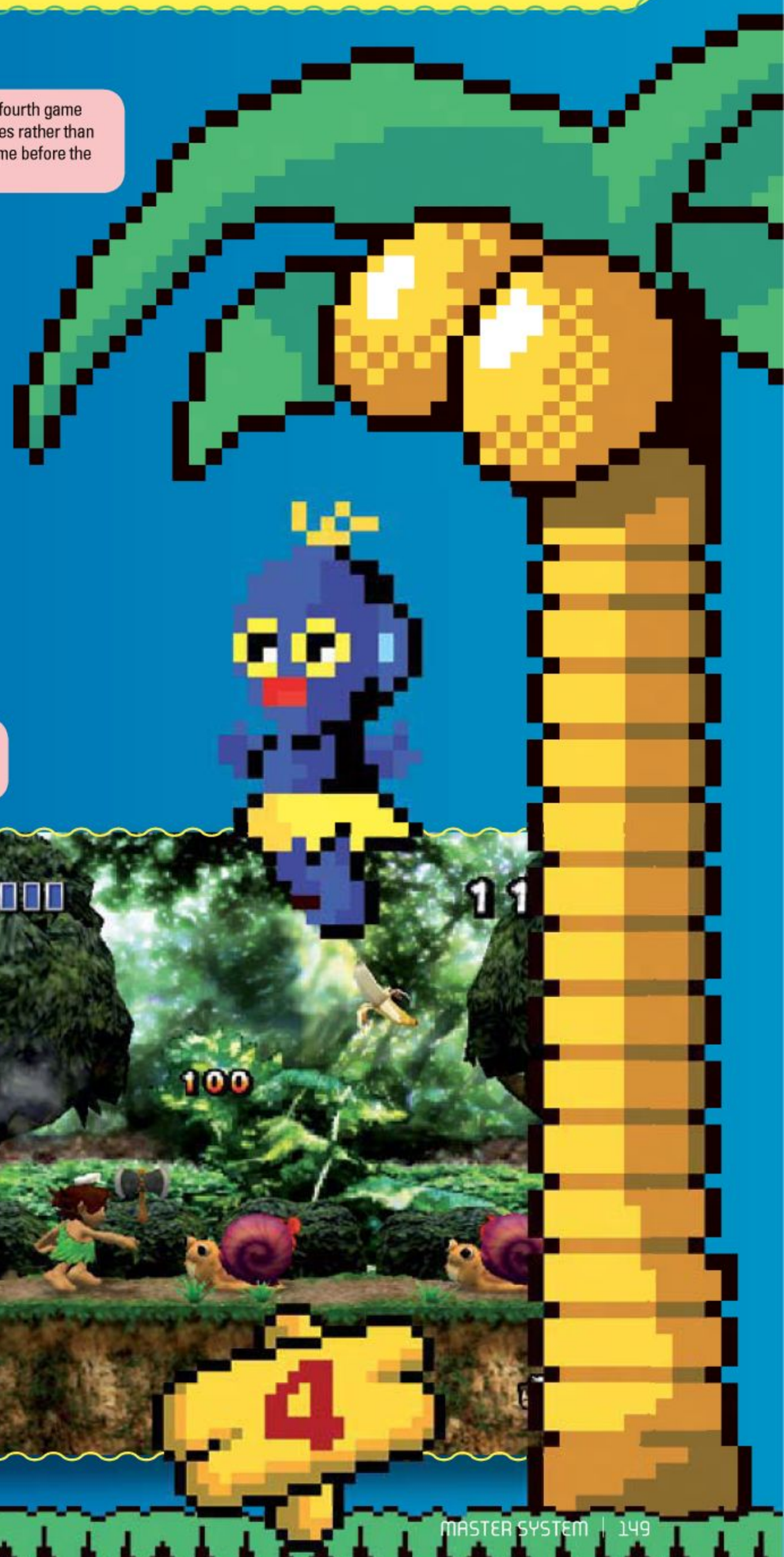
Mercilessly destroying any last shred of coherence that might have existed anywhere, the fourth NES *Adventure Island* (all of the Japanese games in the series are called *Takahashi Meijin No Boukenjima*, but the fourth is the only one not to have had a Western release and therefore never actually carried the *Adventure Island* title) completely dispenses with the design features of its predecessors, and instead lifts the style of *Super Adventure Island 2*. What you get here is almost exactly the same TYPE of game as *SAI2* (the main difference is that Tom-Tom, or Mr Takahashi as he's actually known in the Japanese games, uses his traditional projectile-throwing attack rather than the punching and sword fighting of *SAI2*) but one that has no other connection to it. The levels are different, the settings are different, the plot is different, the only thing the two games share is their basic genre template.

It works a little better for the SNES title than the NES one – the latter is far too keen to exhaust your small health supply and send you back through large swathes of territory you've already cleared – but there's certainly plenty of challenge here, and it's a pretty good showcase for what the NES could do at the end of its shelf life.

DID YOU KNOW?: There's no way to legitimately play *TMNB4* in English (and you do need to be able understand the text), but fans have fully translated the original ROM (right down to the title-screen graphics).

» For some reason, in the fourth game you start off chucking bones rather than axes. Maybe it's set in a time before the evolution of tool use.





» That's an awfully small axe to be throwing at an awfully big snail.



2004
HUDSON SELECTION 4: ADVENTURE ISLAND (GAMECUBE, PS2)

The story of *Wonder Boy* comes full circle with the last release (so far) in the series. The Hudson Selection label (also comprising games such as *Lode Runner*, *Star Soldier* and *Wonder Boy*'s spiritual soul mate *BC Kid*) hosted remakes of big-in-Japan titles originating in the 8-bit era, and *Adventure Island* was the best received of them. Leaving the gameplay untouched (except for the addition of an Easy mode in which, unlike the classic *Adventure Island* games, the health bar doesn't constantly decrease unless you keep eating fruit) Hudson ramped the graphic level up dramatically with a rather lovely Claymation kind of look and remixed the music gently but effectively. After the ever-growing complexity of the sequels (especially if you have to play all of the damn things one after the other), returning to the simple, colourful arcade action is a refreshing lungful of mountain-fresh air. And since I'm sure we could all do with one of those after wading through the mind-torturing labyrinth that is the *Wonder Boy* series, let's all switch our consoles off and go outside into the sunshine. Watch out for giant snakes.

DID YOU KNOW?: The limited release of all four games in the Hudson Selection series means they are continually rising in price online.

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CLOUD MASTER

FLYING EVER HIGHER



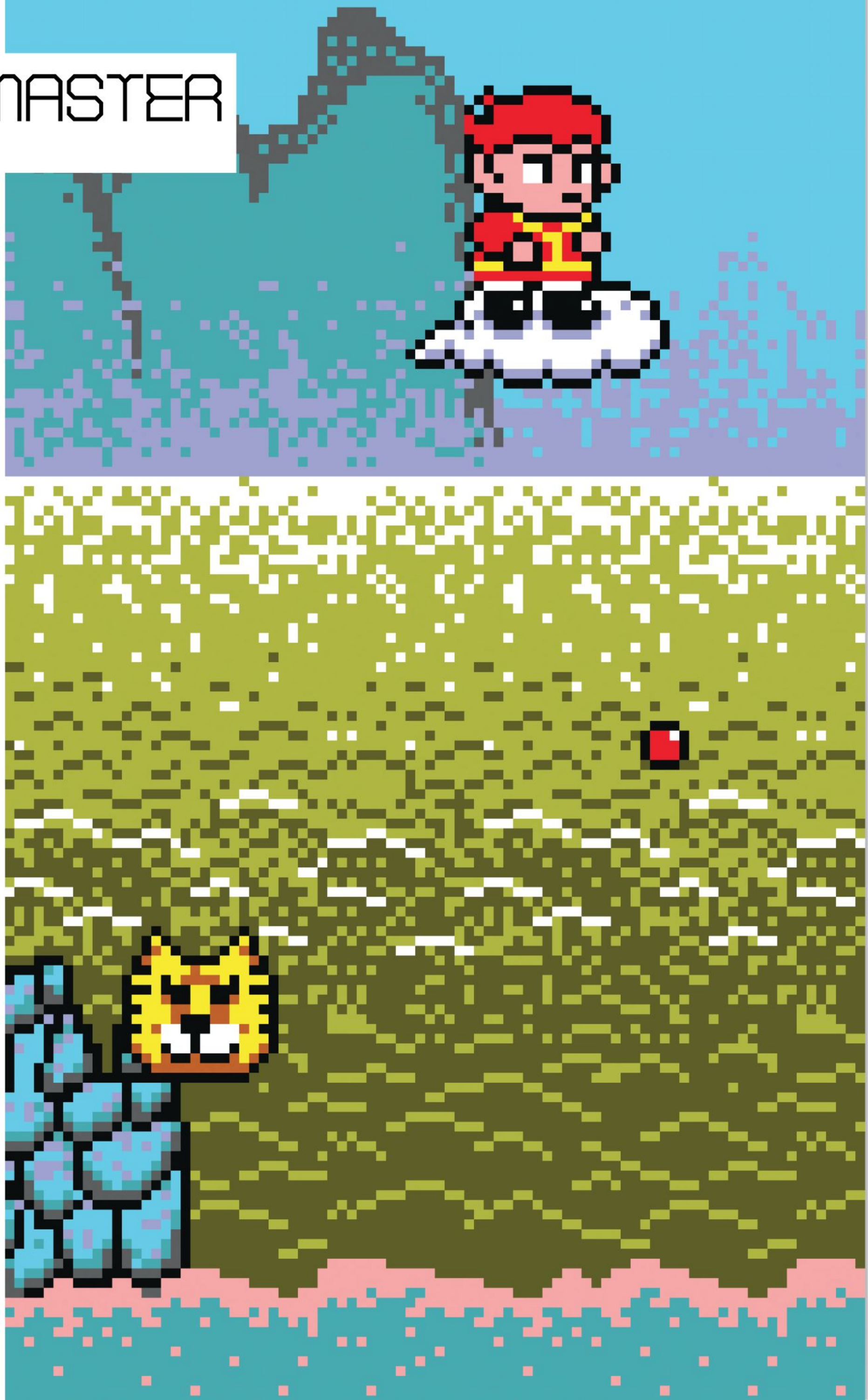
- **PUBLISHER** SEGA
- **YEAR:** 1986
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MASTER SYSTEM



HISTORY

Growing up with the Master System could be a strange experience at times. On one hand, the system's sustained European success saw some decidedly Western games arrive on the system via third party publishers – the likes of *Fantastic Dizzy*, *Robocop Versus The Terminator*, and *Sensible Soccer* were typical of the console's impressive Nineties line-up. On the other hand, the lack of third-party releases in the system's early years meant that some very Japanese games were selected for international release. Games that would have most likely never have appeared if Sega's fortunes had been a little different at the time. Sega's low budget back then meant that a lot of them received very little localisation, which sometimes resulted in releases that didn't make a whole lot of sense when viewed through the eyes of a young British kid.

The rather enjoyable *Cloud Master* definitely falls into the category of 'very Japanese games'. This slightly tough conversion of Taito's arcade shoot-'em-up is standard fare for the genre, but the Eastern influence shows up heavily in the game's visual design, making it look extremely distinctive. It's filled with imagination, has some greatl looking sprites and presents a solid challenge that certainly ensured it would be a good while before you reached the end of the game. *Cloud Master's* characters and setting are loosely drawn from the classical Chinese novel *Journey To The West* – a monkey-like character riding a cloud, the presence of pig enemies and the ancient Chinese setting all point to this origin, but that's knowledge I acquired as an adult. As a kid, this didn't make a lick of sense. I just resigned myself to the fact that sometimes I played as Robocop and needed to blow up the Terminator, and other times I played as the cloud-riding Michael Chen, shooting at bowls of noodles and floating tiger heads. Such was life as a Master System owner.





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SEGA Master System The Collector's Guide





Its lack of success in Japan and the US has turned Sega's 8-bit console into something of a forgotten masterpiece. This ignorance has resulted in it becoming highly collectible, with a superb library of interesting ports and excellent exclusives. Adam Buchanan explains why you need Sega's console in your collection



SEGA Master



» **Manufacturer:** Sega » **Models:** Master System, Master System II, Master System 3, Master System Evolution » **Launched:** 1985 » **Country of origin:** Japan

System

worldmags.net

SEGA Master System The Collector's Guide



» These excellent retro-styled panels not only look cool, but explain how to hook up your beloved machine to a TV.



» Sega followed up the Master System with this ugly-looking second model. We've no idea what Sega was thinking…





» Sonic had a pretty good showing on Sega's Master System, with a selection of genuinely great games.

» The Master System II was cheaply made, so you won't find an RGB connection on it.

Why it's collectable

After a couple of false starts entering the console market, Sega's third attempt – dubbed the Mark III – would eventually pave the way for things to come. Although the new console was pushed aside by the runaway success of the Nintendo Famicom in Japan, Sega had high hopes for it elsewhere. With revamped looks and rebranded as the 'Master System', it was unleashed on North American shores; however, Nintendo was showing no sign of slowing down there either. This left the Master System one relatively untouched territory in which to triumph: Europe.

As the hefty price tag of the Nintendo NES – coupled with lacklustre marketing – left a huge gap in the British gaming market, Sega began preparing an unforgettable ambush. Its pre-Christmas ad campaign in 1987 had gamers lusting after the promised near-perfect arcade gameplay, something that was never guaranteed by home computer coin-op conversions. For just £99 at launch, the attraction of instant-loading accurate arcade ports of *Hang-On*, *After Burner* and *Space Harrier* were hard to resist – and so a Master System was soon installed in countless households.

During this time the European Master System software library expanded to nearly 300 licensed titles, including some fantastic arcade conversions, the beginnings of franchises such as *Alex Kidd*, and even 8-bit interpretations of Mega Drive titles such as *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Streets Of Rage*. In addition, the glowing PAL selection featured dozens of exclusive releases such as *The Lucky Dime Caper*, *Asterix*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Master Of Darkness* and *Power Strike II*.

In comparison, North American owners had little to shout about, as publishers began focusing their efforts on the European market. This unusual turn of events left just over 100 games released within the US. However, it only got stranger from there. The Master System's native Japan was neglected further, with an even smaller catalogue of titles. Despite the fact that these regional differences created a handful of desirable import-only titles, Europeans today find themselves fending off a flurry of competition from abroad for their own exclusive 8-bit classics.

Looking back over the course of the Master System's life, the desirability of the console today wasn't determined solely by the output of game developers all those years ago. Throughout the course of its continental crusade, the system not only saw various game-enhancing accessories, such as state-of-the-art 3-D Glasses, but a revised model of the hardware in 1990. The Master System II dropped the hard edges of the previous decade's design and included the definitive *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* as a built-in game – a clincher for any late adopters of 8-bit videogame systems. Collectors today will find themselves hunting the rarer variation of this revision, one which left Sega's Eighties mascot behind and replaced his built-in game with *Sonic The Hedgeho*g.

Many years later, after an impressive run and slow retirement, the Master System's European lifespan would come to an end with one final game, released in



» Alex Kidd used to be Sega's mascot before Sonic arrived, so he stars in a lot of games on Sega's 8-bit console.



» The Sega Cards were rereleased on normal cartridges, making the originals highly collectable now.



» A selection of magazines from the time that used to cover the Master System. Interestingly, *C&VG* called it the 'Sega'.



» Sega Cards held less information than a normal Master System cartridge.

Did you know?

■ In 1984 an add-on was released for Sega's SG-1000 known as the Card Catcher. This enhancement featured a small slot, the size of several credit cards stacked together, which accepted the newly introduced My Card format. These pocket-sized releases were intended to reduce the cost of manufacturing games, compared to cartridges, while offering up to 32KB of ROM. Sega decided to build this technology into the Master System for launch, but unfortunately by then it was showing its age: as cartridges were generously providing up to 512KB of ROM, only the smallest and most basic games remained in this once promising format.

1996. This title's existence in major European markets, however, remained unknown until much later on. Although it was an official release, *Les Schtroumpfs Autour du Monde* (aka *The Smurfs Travel The World*) wasn't discovered until early 2000, when a Finnish tourist visiting the Czech Republic stumbled across a handful of copies. Initially unaware of the small fortune he had uncovered, his dead-end research into the title and subsequent discussions online made it very clear he needed to return to this gold mine to amass his fortune. Needless to say, this extreme rarity soon became the holy grail for Master System collectors, with just a few copies circulating worldwide – many of which originated from this initial haul. Surprisingly enough, this final European title would not be the last the world saw of Sega's 8-bit system.

Several thousand miles away in Brazil, a company by the name of Tec Toy (now Tectoy) began distributing the Master System in 1989 – and has continued to do so ever since. Even today, the prehistoric hardware continues to sell in surprisingly large quantities through the many revised models Tec Toy has manufactured, most of which arrive with hundreds of built-in games. The true desirability of these Brazilian products, however, resides with the Master System software which was distributed in the Southern Hemisphere around two decades ago. Tec Toy not only released a multitude of Portuguese translated games, but also over 20 exclusive titles which have since become highly collectable worldwide. This selection featured the only 8-bit Sega versions of *Street Fighter II* and *Fire & Ice*; conversions of Game Gear titles such as *Legend Of Illusion*, *Baku Baku* and *Dynamite Headdy*; and also several unique titles including *Férias Frustradas do Picapau* and *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*.

Small blue creatures and South American imports aside, the most unusual and troublesome collectable available for Master System fans dwells in the last place you'd think to look: the US release of *Sonic The Hedgehog*. While appearing to be nothing more than the European version imported for general sale in North America, this US version of the timeless classic differentiates itself with an additional UPC barcode sticker on the back of the game's case. Although most will cast aside this extreme case as being one for the die-hards, those aiming for the definitive full set of US releases face a difficult task ahead – contacting sellers and requesting photographs of the reverse side of their purchasable items. A quest that could yield a significant bargain, or total loss of sanity.

All things considered, the Master System holds a lot of history and oddities to lure in late adopters and second-time-around fanatics. Given that it's one of the few consoles which was focused on the European market, PAL collectors for once can bask in the glory of knowing that the better titles the system has to offer aren't several thousand miles away, nor locked behind import restrictions. But as if that weren't enough already, the final beauty of Sega's 8-bit system is that a large proportion of the console's library, including some of the definitive titles, on a good day, can still be had for mere pennies – at least for now...

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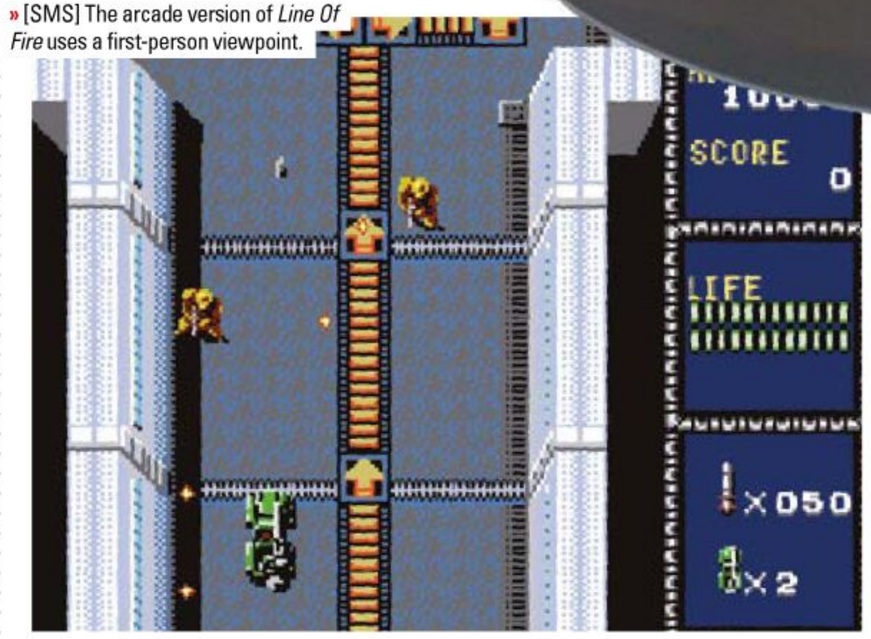




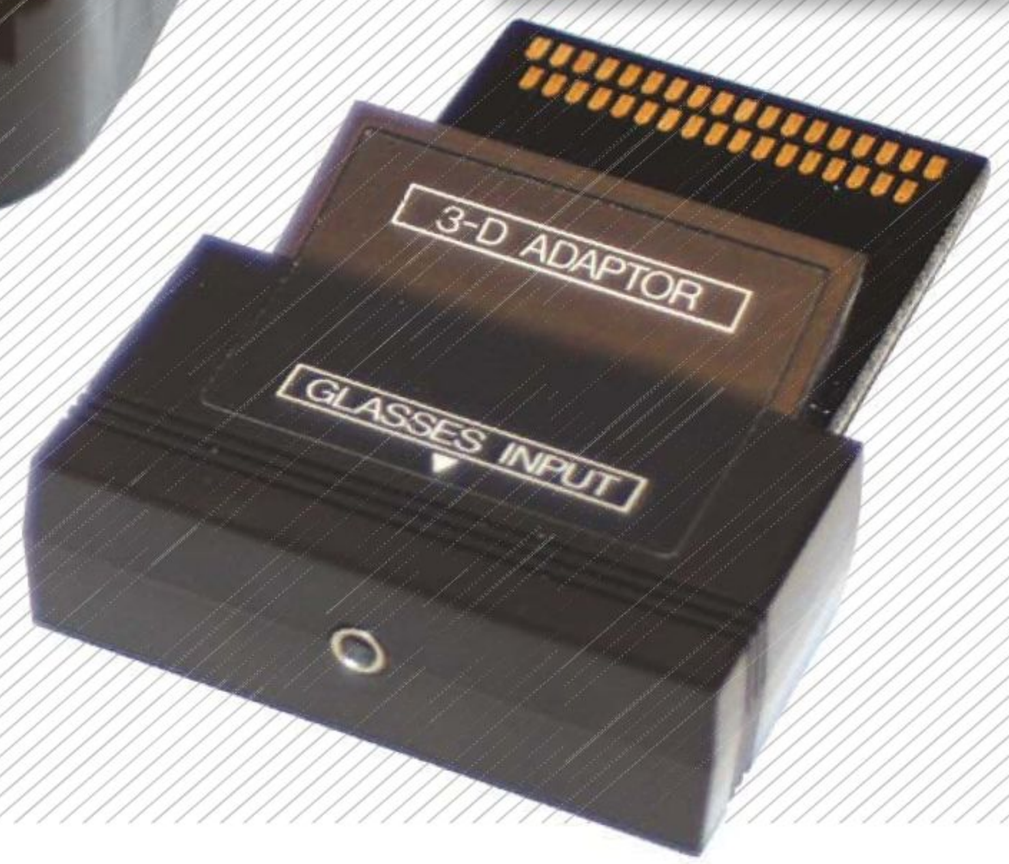
» [SMS] *Space Harrier 3-D* was a Master System exclusive.



» [SMS] *Out Run 3D* is one of eight compatible games.



» [SMS] The arcade version of *Line Of Fire* uses a first-person viewpoint.



SegaScope 3-D Glasses

The three-dimensional gaming we've all grown accustomed to on modern gaming platforms is actually nothing new. By the late 1980s, Sega had already been to the next dimension and back, with the Master System's very own SegaScope 3-D Glasses.

Using a technique known as an active shutter 3D system, Sega's accessory would display the on-screen visuals intended for the left eye while obscuring the right eye's view, then quickly reverse the process by presenting an image for the right-eye while blocking the left eye. This cycle would then repeat over and over again at a speed much faster than the human eye could register, tricking the brain into interpreting the two images as a stereoscopic 3D picture – leaping out of a once flat television.

Although a simple process, to achieve this effect the 3-D Glasses required a constant connection to the Master System. To sync the on-screen action with the active shutter visuals, the wire leaving the headset would need to be plugged into the card slot found on the original Master System console – something which would in turn leave the system's cartridge slot open for software to run from. This solution was anything but future-proof: by the time the revised Master System II console had arrived, the once significant card slot had been removed from that sleek update, as had Sega's focus on the technology.

While the Glasses were an impressive piece of kit, sales were soon dwindling. The line-up of compatible software would only ever reach a grand total of seven specially developed titles, with one additional game offering a 'hidden' 3D mode. Among this small count, several arcade classics such as *Space Harrier*, *Out Run* and *Zaxxon* were impressively adapted to make use of the added depth and new functionality.

This commercial failure, however, was not exclusive to Sega. The Famicom 3D System, Nintendo's equivalent to the Master System's 3-D Glasses, saw an equal number of compatible games made available shortly before being swept under the carpet – very much like the Virtual Boy would be in years to come. Even the Vectrex had its own 3D Imager accessory – which predated Sega's technology by a good few years – but sadly it fell victim to the American videogame crash of 1983.

Finding a pair of these 3-D Glasses in working order today is a difficult feat, something that can be attributed to ever-growing demand. Some of the most common issues found with adopting these glasses second-hand are the prevalent cracked hinges and snapped temples, a result of Sega's flawed design. Only those with a head the size of a small child's will feel safe wearing this vintage headwear without fear of causing damage. There is, however, a solution at hand to combat these head-size issues, as the technology used decades ago is still around today. Believe it or not, most brand new active shutter 3D glasses available (with an accompanying wire ending in a 3.5mm jack plug) should work once connected to the adaptor in the Master System's card slot.

...AND THE REST



01. Pro Action Replay

■ Following the successful release of cheat cartridges on the Commodore 64, Datel moved its focus onto home consoles. One of its first efforts, a Master System version of the Pro Action Replay, was only released in small quantities in Europe. Those hoping for quick access to infinite lives should look towards the easier-to-find German version, while die-hard collectors may want to scout out the more desirable UK version instead.

02. Handle Controller

■ Quite possibly the most unusual and collectable accessory for the Master System, this replica steering wheel and flight stick hybrid was a short-lived 1989 release. It's incredibly difficult to find a working one today: not only was it poorly made, but its accompanying (and vital for use) detachable wire is easy to misplace.

03. Sega Light Phaser

■ While the Nintendo NES may have had the bright toy-coloured Zapper Light Gun, Sega produced a more realistic-looking weapon for its Master System. The Sega Light Phaser was compatible with 13 titles and was, strangely enough, a Western exclusive accessory – one often bundled with the system and harder to find boxed alone.

04. Sega Control Stick

■ In the decade leading up to the release of the Master System, gamers worldwide had grown accustomed to the standard layout of coin-op controls. So for one of the leading arcade machine makers of the day to create a reversed left-handed arcade stick for the home console was nothing short of baffling.

05. Rapid Fire Unit

■ In an attempt to add more firepower to our gaming accessories, Sega expanded upon its standard control pad with an add-on which introduced auto-fire functionality. This small block sat between the console and joypad, offering two independent switches to control which buttons were turbocharged.

06. Master Gear Converter

■ With the Master System and Game Gear sharing near identical hardware, the small cartridge slot on the handheld was the only thing preventing console software from being enjoyed on the go. The Master Gear Converter (aka Gear Master) pass-though device remedied this by providing a larger slot for Master System titles to fit into the Game Gear.

07. Sega Sports Pad

■ One of the few accessories to skip out on a European release was the trackball-equipped Sega Sports Pad. Although promising a precise 360° movement range, this three-game-compatible peripheral failed to deliver such accuracy.

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TOP GAMES TO PLAY



Alex Kidd In Miracle World

■ To build-in one of the greatest platformers to date with its console was a stroke of genius from Sega, as no gamer should be without this gem.

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

■ It's a rare occurrence to see an 8-bit title outshine its 16-bit counterpart, but that's exactly what this Disney licensed platformer from Sega managed to do for many.

Phantasy Star

■ While the Master System may only have a had a handful of RPGs released for it, *Phantasy Star* makes up for the console's quest-heavy shortcomings by offering a legend to last a lifetime.

Sonic The Hedgehog

■ Developer Ancient was well aware of the Master System's hardware limitations when tasked with bringing the blue hedgehog to the 8-bit world – something which really paid off.

Bubble Bobble

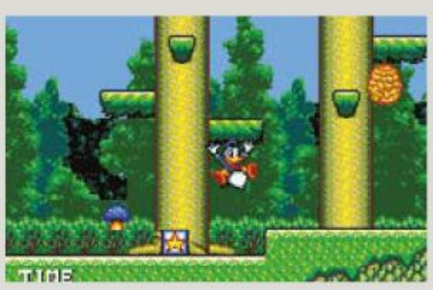
■ As far as arcade ports go, Taito's classic on the Master System was not only a near perfect conversion, but also one with additional hidden rooms and endings.

PLAY THESE NEXT



Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap

■ The fourth game in the series (strangely named *III*) had a lot to live up to – something it did in style with gorgeous visuals and fluid gameplay. While the use of the term is generally frowned upon, there is no better description for it than being an early example of the 'Metroidvania' genre.



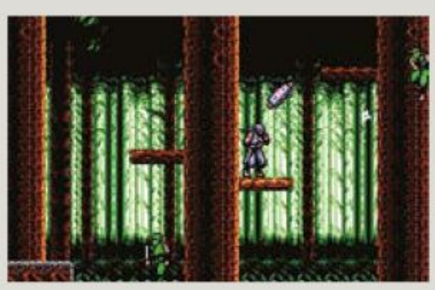
The Lucky Dime Caper Starring Donald Duck

■ While Mickey Mouse's *Castle Of Illusion* stole the limelight, Donald Duck's adventure is just as worthy of the 8-bit Disney crown. His globetrotting quest to reclaim his kidnapped nephews and Uncle Scrooge's Number One Dime further proved what the Master System was capable of.



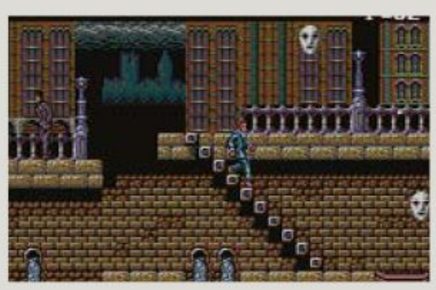
Golvellius: Valley Of Doom

■ Created for the MSX range of computers in 1987, *Golvellius* was Compile's fantastic answer to Nintendo's *Zelda II*. After licensing the side-scrolling adventure franchise the following year, Sega went on to release a remake for its 8-bit system – one that built upon the original with enhanced graphics and new in-game maps.



Ninja Gaiden

■ Much to North American gamers' surprise and delight, Tecmo's timeless *Ninja Gaiden* series was not exclusive to the Nintendo NES, though only for a brief moment. Sega's 8-bit range of systems saw two equally difficult challenges which both featured superior visuals to their rival NES counterparts.



Master Of Darkness

■ Within moments of controlling Dr Social in his investigation of a series of London murders, a certain iconic castle-based-quest may come to mind. Released six years after Konami's *Castlevania*, *Master Of Darkness*, if anything, is Sega's tribute to the 2D Dracula-hunting action-adventure, and it was far from shy in its admiration.

TOP IMPORT GAMES



Baku Baku

■ To think that the 32-bit Sega Saturn release *Baku Baku* was remade for Sega's 8-bit range of consoles is somewhat puzzling. Nevertheless it is a must-have import from South America.

King's Quest – Quest For The Crown

■ The North American library of Master System software may be lacking, but it did receive a port of Sierra's iconic entry into the adventure game genre with *King's Quest*.

Legend Of Illusion – Starring Mickey Mouse

■ The finale of Mickey's trilogy of early Sega outings may have skipped out on an European release (if you don't include the Sega Game Gear port), leaving the Brazilian import a hot property.





Dynamite Headddy

■ Originally ported to the Sega Game Gear, the Southern Hemisphere's finest distributor, Tec Toy, secured the rights to distribute a port of Treasure's bonkers platformer on the Master System.

ALF

■ Of all the fictional characters worthy of receiving the video game treatment, Sega somehow landed with *ALF* – a laughable, although enjoyable, attempt to immortalise the Alien Life Form of TV fame.





Virtua Fighter Animation

■ Given that *Virtua Fighter* is known for its amazing visuals and ahead-of-its time gameplay, taking it back to Sega's 8-bit console was ambitious. While it may have lacked the 3D element and controls of its 32-bit equivalent, the newly introduced story element further proved there was life left in the then decade-old system.



Battletoads In Battlemaniacs

■ After having its imminent 1994 European release canned, the Master System port of the *Battletoads* sequel flew south – in an unfinished state, with several stages lacking music and others riddled with bugs. The already infuriating turbo tunnel level contained more obstacles than usual, many of them hidden from view.



Solomon's Key

■ Following its arrival in the arcades, Tecmo's coin-op hit made its way onto just about every platform going. The Sega Master System version of the fantastic puzzler, however, ended up as an import exclusive for some unknown reason – leaving gamers settling for the European Nintendo NES port in its absence.



BMX Trial – Alex Kidd

■ One of Japan's few exclusive releases was another title in the once prolific *Alex Kidd* series. Casting aside his platforming antics, *BMX Trial* was a top-down stunt playground mixed with elements of *Enduro Racer*. What made it more interesting, though, was that it required the *Pong*-esque Paddle Controller – another Asian rarity.



High School! Kimengumi

■ Based on the manga series of the same name, this unusual school-'em-up was quite different to the ZX Spectrum's *Skool Daze* and *Back To Skool*. Instead of stealing report cards from the headteacher's office, the player had to capture the five misfit junior high school boys who made up the troublesome 'Kimengumi' club.

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TOP RAREST PAL GAMES



Les Schtroumpfs Autour du Monde

■ Being the very last title to grace the Master System, this Central European release from 1996 is every bit as rare as the elusive blue Smurfs it stars.



Buggy Run

■ *RC Pro-Am* may be remembered fondly as the definitive isometric racer; however, Sega's 8-bit console had its very own diagonal driver known as *Buggy Run*.



Masters Of Combat

■ Although many had failed to bring the fighting genre to the Master System, SIMS' ambitious, albeit late, effort in 1993 proved how far the then already-dated console could be pushed.

Home Alone

■ Macaulay Culkin's exemplary holiday blockbuster was done little justice in the videogame department, an offence that wasn't exclusive to its shambolic Master System release.





Power Strike II

■ Not to be confused with the Game Gear title of the same name, *Power Strike II* is one of the more expensive European Master System releases, but worth every penny it commands.

GET THESE NEXT



Assault City: Light Phaser Version

■ Despite its cursor based on-screen shooting action, 1990's *Assault City* didn't quite feel right – thanks to its glaring lack of support for the Light Phaser accessory. Sega too was aware of this issue and an updated version of the title was soon released, sporting a huge red silhouette of the peripheral on the game's box.



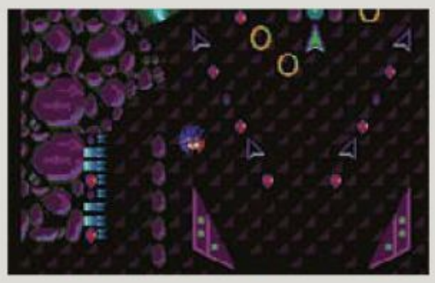
Asterix And The Great Rescue

■ For the third and final *Asterix* title on the 8-bit console, Sega handed over the responsibility to Core Design. While its cross-platform release may not have been up to scratch compared with Sega's prior releases, it eventually became a considerable rarity, though more common in the country the Gauls originated from.



Championship Hockey

■ Two years before *Championship Hockey* skated onto the scene, SIMS set the standard for puck-smashing simulators for the years to come with *Slap Shot*. US Gold's 1992 attempt, however, somehow managed to slip on the ice with its jerky animation, sprite flickering and horrific AI. A title best suited to the sin bin.



Sonic Spinball

■ While most of Sega's 8-bit ports of Mega Drive titles were handled well, something went amiss with Sonic's pinball spin-off. Either the Master System was a little underpowered to handle the fast-paced action, or the game's programmers were a little too lazy to fix the wobbly camera and questionable physics in play.



Ultimate Soccer

■ With the Master System port of *Sensible Soccer* leaving a lot to be desired, the goal was left wide open for a rival to hit the back of the net. *Ultimate Soccer* was Rare's bold attempt to dethrone Sensible Software, and an admirable one at that. Being a late release on the 8-bit console, it's understandably rare today.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

After a super-rare PAL Master System game? Then this is the one that you should be trying to add to your collection

What makes it hard to find?

■ With disposable casing, a once fashionable T-shirt and outdated audio cassette, it's somewhat understandable that the components of this bumper pack of '90s nostalgia have since been discarded. While locating these contents may be tricky enough, finding a set with all its feathers in good condition is a much harder task.





What makes it so special?

■ In what might have been the first limited-edition Sega product to hit European shelves, Disney teamed up with the videogame giant to celebrate Donald Duck's home console debut. This combined effort in 1991 saw an alluring box set made available in limited quantities, packed to the brim with goodies.



Why is it so expensive?

■ Unlike today's mass-produced 'limited' offerings, the *Lucky Dime Caper* box set really was dispatched in small numbers. The fortunate few lucky enough to own this exotic rarity are more than eligible to join Uncle Scrooge's Fortune 500 equivalent of videogame collections.

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SEGA Master System The Collector's Guide

THE PAL MASTER SYSTEM GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

- Ace Of Aces
- Action Fighter
- Addams Family, The
- Aerial Assault
- After Burner
- Air Rescue
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alex Kidd In Miracle World
- Alex Kidd In Shinobi World
- Alex Kidd: High Tech World
- Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars
- Alien 3
- Alien Storm
- Alien Syndrome
- Altered Beast
- America Baseball
- American Pro Football
- Andre Agassi Tennis
- Arcade Smash Hits
- Assault City
- Assault City: Light Phaser Version
- Asterix
- Asterix And The Great Rescue
- Asterix And The Secret Mission
- Astro Warrior / Pit Pot
- Aztec Adventure
- Back To The Future II
- Back To he Future III
- Bank Panic
- Basketball Nightmare
- Batman Returns
- Battle Out Run
- Black Belt
- Blade Eagle 3-D
- Bomber Raid
- Bonanza Brothers
- Bram Stoker's Dracula
- Bubble Bobble
- Buggy Run
- California Games
- California Games II
- Captain Silver
- Casino Game
- Castle Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- Champions Of Europe
- Championship Hockey
- Chase HQ
- Cheese Cat-astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales
- Choplifter



Bubble Bobble

- Chuck Rock
- Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck
- Cloud Master
- Columns
- Cool Spot
- Cosmic Spacehead
- Cyber Shinobi, The
- Cyborg Hunter
- Daffy Duck In Hollywood
- Danan: The Jungle Fighter
- Dead Angle
- Deep Duck Trouble Starring Donald Duck
- Desert Speedtrap
- Desert Strike
- Dick Tracy
- Double Dragon
- Double Hawk
- Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- Dragon Crystal
- Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story
- Dynamite Duke
- Dynamite Dux
- E-SWAT
- Ecco The Dolphin
- Enduro Racer
- F-16 Fighter
- F1
- Fantastic Dizzy
- Fantasy Zone
- Fantasy Zone II
- Fantasy Zone: The Maze
- Fire & Forget II
- Flash, The
- Flintstones, The
- Forgotten Worlds
- G-LOC: Air Battle
- Gain Ground
- Galaxy Force
- Gangster Town
- Gauntlet
- Ghost House
- Ghostbusters
- Ghouls'n Ghosts
- Global Defense
- Global Gladiators
- Golden Axe
- Golden Axe Warrior
- Golfamania
- Golvellius: Valley Of Doom
- GP Rider
- Great Baseball
- Great Basketball
- Great Football
- Great Golf
- Great Soccer
- Great Volleyball
- Hang On
- Heavyweight Champ
- Heroes Of The Lance
- Home Alone
- Impossible Mission
- Incredible Crash Test Dummies, The
- Incredible Hulk, The
- Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
- James Bond 007: The Duel
- James Pond 2: Codename Robocod
- Joe Montana Football
- Jungle Book (Disney's), The
- Jurassic Park
- Kenseiden
- Klax
- KO Boxing (George Foreman's)
- Krusty's Fun House
- Kung Fu Kid
- Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- Laser Ghost
- Lemmings
- Line Of Fire
- Lion King, The
- Lord Of The Sword
- Lucky Dime Caper Starring Donald Duck, The
- Marble Madness
- Marksman Shooting / Trap Shooting / Safari Hunt
- Master Games 1
- Master Of Darkness
- Masters Of Combat
- Maze Hunter 3-D
- Mercs
- Micro Machines
- Miracle Warriors: Seal Of The Dark Lord
- Missile Defense 3-D
- Monopoly
- Moonwalker (Michael Jackson's)
- Mortal Kombat
- Mortal Kombat II
- Ms Pac-Man
- My Hero
- NewZealand Story, The
- Ninja Gaiden
- Ninja, The
- Olympic Gold: Barcelona '92
- Operation Wolf
- Ottifants, The
- Out Run
- Out Run 3-D
- Out Run Europa
- Pacmania
- Paperboy
- Parlour Games
- Penguin Land
- PGA Tour Golf
- Phantasy Star
- Pit-Fighter
- Populous
- Poseidon Wars 3-D
- Power Strike
- Power Strike II
- Predator 2
- Prince Of Persia
- Pro Wrestling
- Psychic World
- Psycho Fox

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.


Shinobi

- Putt & Putter
- Quartet
- R-Type
- RC Grand Prix
- Rainbow Islands
- Rambo III
- Rampage
- Rampart
- Rastan
- Renegade
- Rescue Mission
- Road Rash
- RoboCop 3
- RoboCop Versus The Terminator
- Rocky
- Running Battle
- Sagaia
- Scramble Spirits
- Secret Command
- Sega Chess
- Sega World Tournament Golf
- Sensible Soccer
- Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi
- Shadow Of The Beast
- Shanghai
- Shinobi
- Shooting Gallery
- Simpsons, The: Bart Vs The Space Mutants
- Simpsons, The: Bart Vs The World
- Slap Shot
- Smurfs 2, The: Travel The World
- Smurfs, The
- Sonic The Hedgehog Chaos
- Sonic Spinball
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- Space Gun
- Space Harrier
- Space Harrier 3-D
- Special Criminal Investigation
- Speedball
- Speedball 2
- Spellcaster
- Spider-Man Vs The Kingpin
- Spider-Man: Return Of The Sinister Six
- Spy Vs Spy
- Star Wars
- Streets Of Rage
- Streets Of Rage II
- Strider
- Strider II
- Submarine Attack
- Summer Games
- Super Kick Off
- Super Monaco GP
- Super Monaco GP II (Ayrton Senna's)
- Super Off Road
- Super Smash TV
- Super Space Invaders
- Super Tennis
- Superman: The Man Of Steel
- T2: The Arcade Game
- Taz-Mania
- Tecmo World Cup '93
- Teddy Boy
- Tennis Ace
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day
- Terminator, The
- Thunder Blade
- Time Soldiers
- Top & Jerry: The Movie
- TransBot
- Trivial Pursuit: Genus Edition
- Ultima IV: Quest Of The Avatar
- Ultimate Soccer
- Vigilante
- Wanted
- Wimbledon
- Wimbledon II
- Winter Olympics: Lillehammer '94
- Wolfchild
- Wonder Boy
- Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap
- Wonder Boy In Monster Land
- Wonder Boy In Monster World
- World Class Leader Board
- World Cup Italia '90
- World Cup USA '94
- World Games
- World Grand Prix
- World Soccer
- WWF Wrestlemania Steel Cage Challenge
- Xenon 2: Megablast
- Ys: The Vanished Omens
- Zaxxon 3-D
- Zillion
- Zillion II: The Tri Formation
- Zool


Sonic The Hedgehog

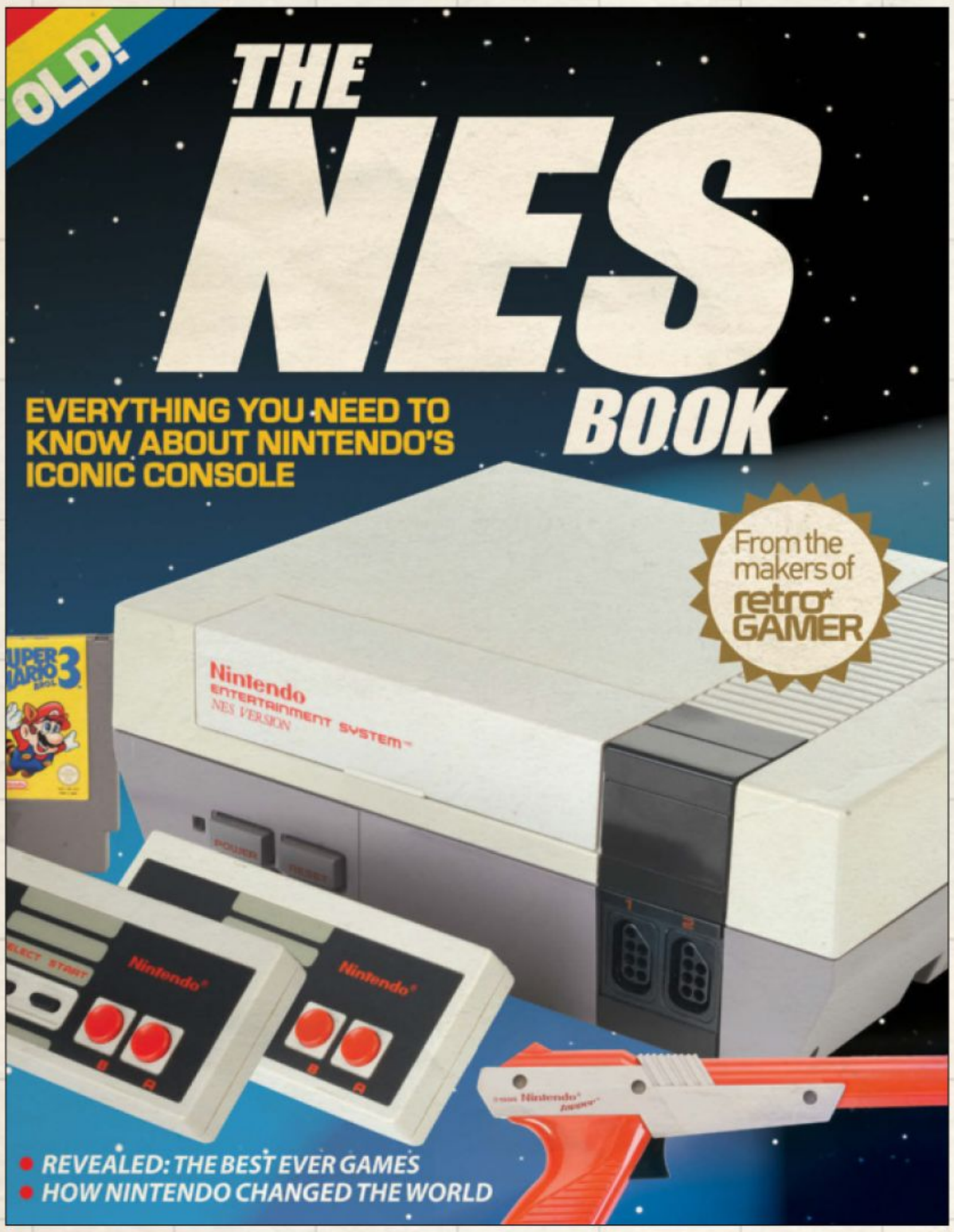


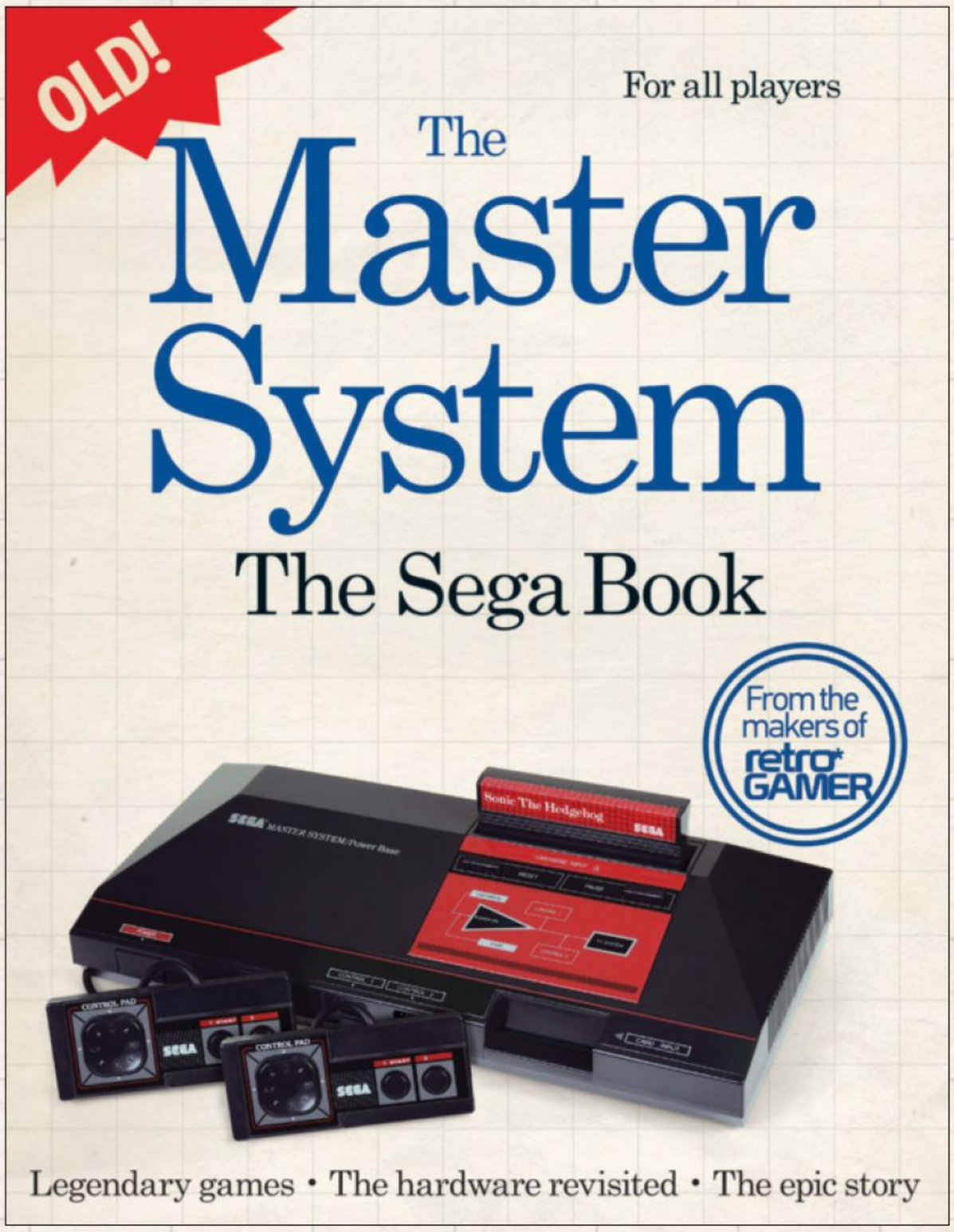
Phantasy Star


Wonder Boy

EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT TWO ICONIC CONSOLES

Remember the legendary games and hardware, plus learn the epic stories of how these consoles changed gaming





Celebrate two of the greatest 8-bit consoles of all time with our exciting new bookazine. We've selected the very best content from past issues of Retro Gamer and even added exciting new features that look at some of the greatest NES and Master System games that ever appeared on their respective systems. If you're a big fan of Nintendo and Sega's systems you need this book in your collection.

From the makers of retro GAMER

Legendary games • The hardware revisited • The epic story

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