The unofficial
SNES/Super Famicom:
a visual compendium

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The unofficial
SNES/Super Famicom: a visual compendium

With its Famicom – known to Western gamers as the NES – Nintendo rescued the ailing home video game industry and created a global phenomenon. Launched in 1983, the little 8-bit system dominated the gaming landscape for over a decade and was only officially retired in 2003, by which point it had sold almost 62 million units worldwide.

But times were changing: the little games machine had seen off competition from the likes of SEGA and Atari, but by the late 1980s a new breed of 16-bit systems was starting to appear, with more colours, larger sprites, greater resolution and the power to realise more exciting gaming experiences. The PC Engine and SEGA Mega Drive stole a march on Nintendo, but NEC's system never really gained traction outside of Japan, and the Mega Drive – known as the Genesis in the US – initially struggled to compete with the dominant NES.

Nintendo was in no rush to produce new hardware, but, after faltering starts, the PC Engine rose to become the number one console in Japan, and SEGA found a foothold in America and Europe, thanks to its edgy advertising, mature games and a dynamic mascot in the shape of Sonic the Hedgehog. Seeing its market share being eroded, Nintendo was eventually forced to act, and the result was the Super Famicom, known overseas as the Super NES.

Released in 1990, this sleek 16-bit system had a great spec and some clever graphical tricks that gave it an edge over its competitors. It was an instant hit thanks to Nintendo's brilliant first-party titles and would, over time, play host to some of the greatest games of all time.

In this latest visual compendium from Bitmap Books, we celebrate the Super NES: the hardware, the games and the cultural changes that it brought about. The SNES introduced Westerners to the Japanese language and artwork, its mythology and characters; it set many people on the path to manga and anime, convinced them to become programmers and artists, and even persuaded a few to move and settle in Japan.

The SNES is still regularly cited as the gaming community's favourite console, so whether you're looking for a bout of nostalgia, or to discover classic titles for the first time, we hope you enjoy this tribute to Nintendo's superlative games machine.

Bitmap Books, 2017

SNES/Superfanicon: a visual conpendiun

Welcome reader.
Have fun exploring...

Meet the cast...

Sam Dyer
Bitmap Books' end-of-level boss, Sam the design wizard is armed with sharpened crayons and an encyclopaedic knowledge of retrogaming. He's not much use against dragons and the like, but is a whizz at Mario Paint.

Steve Mayles
Character designer and artist, Steve was a key member of the *Donkey Kong Country* team at Rare, but eventually stopped monkeying around and now works his magic at Playtonic, makers of the brand-new retro-inspired game, *Yooka-Laylee.*

Steve Jarratt
The 'legendary' (well, legendarily old) games journalist makes sure the words in Bitmap's books are correct and in the right order – more or less. The only spells in his world are the ones in MS Word's grammar checker.

Meet the Cast by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

Damien McFerran
Lifelong Nintendo fan (he prides himself on having once met his hero Shigeru Miyamoto) and passionate retrogaming enthusiast, Damien's Samson-like power lies in his unfeasibly thick shock of black hair.

Craig Stevenson
Craig is another of the team's creative gurus, wielding his sorcerer-like art skills to conjure up pixelated images of all manner of creatures, characters and collectibles. He loves the ZX Spectrum and is a master wrangler of colour clash!

Matt Wilsher
Chronicler of the team's adventures, Amiga fan-boy Matt carries an enchanted device that captures the souls of everyone that dares to look into its single, uncaring eye. He can also banish negative spirits with his powerful DJ skills.

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Despite starting my video game art career on the NES, it wasn't a machine I could love. I'd gotten used to the splendour of my Amiga 500 for home gaming and the limited colours and performance of the NES I was faced with on my first day at Rare back in 1992 wasn't quite what I'd been expecting.

Don't get me wrong: it didn't get any better for an 18-year-old than working for the Stamper brothers, heroes from the ZX Spectrum days in Ultimate Play the Game guise. Yet I could see games that were in development at Rare using larger, more colourful sprites, with many on screen at once.

Plenty has been written about the greatest of all the console wars, the SEGA Mega Drive vs the SNES; I'm not going to add to this, but you can guess where my allegiance lies…

My first taste of SNES development came in 1993 with the conversion of *Battletoads Double Dragon*. It was a great way to ease into the extra power of the SNES – taking sprites I had created for the NES version and embellishing them with the extra colours and size the new console afforded. Sprites with 16 colours, 32 sprites per line; who could ask for more?

Of course, creating the graphics now took longer, a trend that has continued with every new console launched to this day. The in-house editor we used (think a very basic *Photoshop*) had a camera rigged up to it so any artwork drawn on paper could easily be slotted in as a background to start adding pixels to.

Unfortunately, it didn't handle rotation or scaling very well (it was sometimes better to just redraw from scratch!) so it paid to get the sprites right first time. Often I'd see sprites where the extra colours were used just to soften the shading, without any thought being applied to shape and form, a trap I tried not to fall into.

Boxing the sprites (8x8 squares that could be overlapped to encompass the character) was a necessity I found strangely therapeutic. Now we had 32 of these to play with per line – the troublesome flickering/disappearing sprites that plagued the NES should be a thing of the past!

The bar for video game art was constantly being raised during the 16-bit era, and not just because of the extra horsepower. Whereas previously I think it would be fair to say many video game artists fell into the job, in which function usually took precedence over form, now art professionals were actively entering the fray, producing some truly memorable graphics. The means were now available to the skilled to create a particular mood, a flowing animation, an awe-inspiring end-of-level boss. Art could really sell a game now. The dream of arcade-quality gaming at home was pretty much here.

At Rare, so prolific on the NES, we were off to a slow start on the SNES. We needed an edge. Thanks to the forward thinking and genius of the Stampers, what we got was the greatest leap in graphical quality ever during any console's lifespan – so great, people thought it was running on Nintendo's next gen console, not the humble SNES. It was a leap that will never be repeated, a once-in-a-career moment. You know the rest…

Steve Mayles, character creator
and animator – 2017

Hi, I'm Steve Mayles. This is my foreword...

Steve Mayles portrait by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

> **"Naturally we were excited to work on the new console, as we felt we'd done everything we could do on the Famicom without additional chips in the cartridge."**
>
> *Masahiro Ueno, game designer and programmer*

The 16-bit revolution

The 8-bit NES conquered the gaming world and made Nintendo a household name. But as technology progressed, the arrival of a successor was inevitable…

It would be a massive understatement to say that the Super Nintendo had a formidable act to follow when it arrived at the dawn of the 1990s.

Nintendo's previous console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (or Famicom as it was known in its native Japan), enjoyed seven years of almost unrivalled dominance following its initial launch in 1983 and had almost single-handedly rehabilitated the home video game market, turning Nintendo into a household name across the globe. However, with powerful rivals like the SEGA Mega Drive and NEC PC Engine threatening to chip away at Nintendo's market share, success was by no means guaranteed. The successor to the NES needed to offer more power and better software than these upstart competitors while simultaneously maintaining the adoration of the legion of gamers who had grown up with Nintendo's 8-bit console and now – quite rightly – demanded more complex experiences.

With the competition already winning over players with dazzling, arcade-quality visuals, Nintendo's hardware designers were fully aware that the company's 16-bit console would have to go one better in the presentation stakes. While the focus of this new system was still 2D visuals, the 'Super' Nintendo could display many more colours on screen than its nearest rival, the Mega Drive. This spectacle was bolstered by the inclusion of simulated 3D effects and scaling – referred to by Nintendo's developers as 'Mode 7' because it was one of the SNES's eight graphics modes – which had previously been seen in arcade games like Namco's 1988 title Assault. In addition to this, the console was equipped with the Sony-made S-SMP sound chip, which offered CD-quality audio to ensure that, sonically, the system was a considerable leap ahead of its rivals. Coincidentally, this versatile chip was the creation of Ken Kutaragi, who would later design the Sony PlayStation, a system that shared its DNA with the SNES – but more on that in a moment.

For the console's outer casing, Masayuki Uemura was once again employed to create a product that would become iconic in the minds of players – just as he had done with the original red and white Famicom. Uemura's vision was more mature than his previous design, using a subtle two-tone grey colour scheme along with the now-legendary red, blue, yellow and green Super Famicom logo. This colour combination was a reflection of the system's groundbreaking controller, which used the same hues to differentiate its four face buttons. The pad was more ergonomic than the ones that shipped with the Famicom and NES, and introduced the concept of shoulder buttons to the gaming world. When the Super Famicom was rebranded as the Super NES for the North American market, history repeated itself and it was given an entirely new design by Lance Barr – who was also responsible for the design of the original NES – to cater to the aesthetic whims of its Western audience. Barr felt that the Super Famicom's look was "too soft and had no edge", and even likened it to a "bag of bread". The four-colour button arrangement and logo were abandoned in favour of a purple and lilac colour scheme. Outside of America, however, the SNES used the same design as the Super Famicom.

> 66 *The pad was more ergonomic than the ones that shipped with the Famicom and NES, and introduced the concept of shoulder buttons to the gaming world.* 99

F I G . 1

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13a 13c 13b 13d

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14a 14b

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SNES/Super Famicom controller patent – *1993*
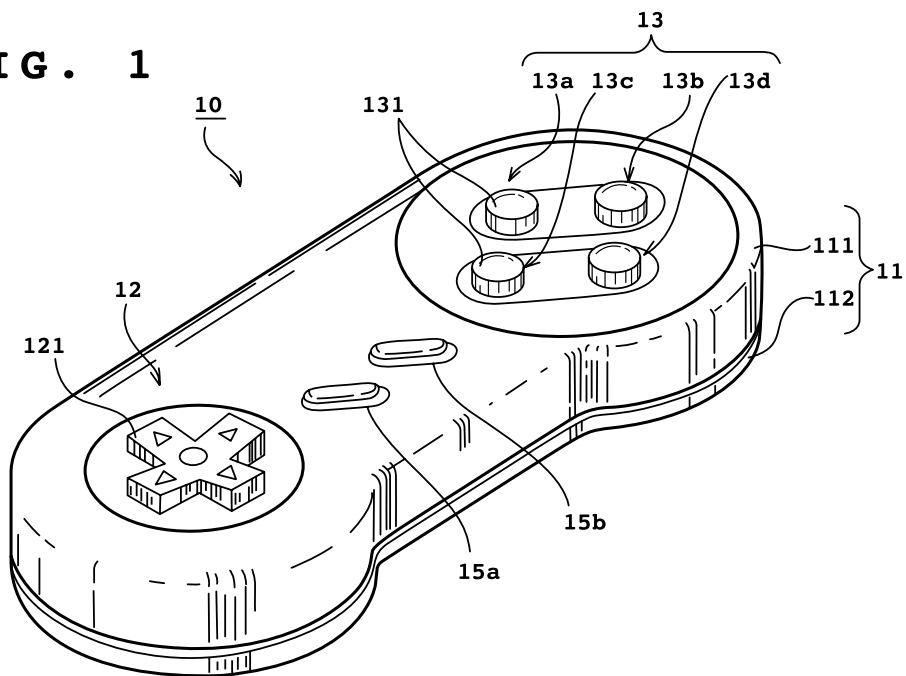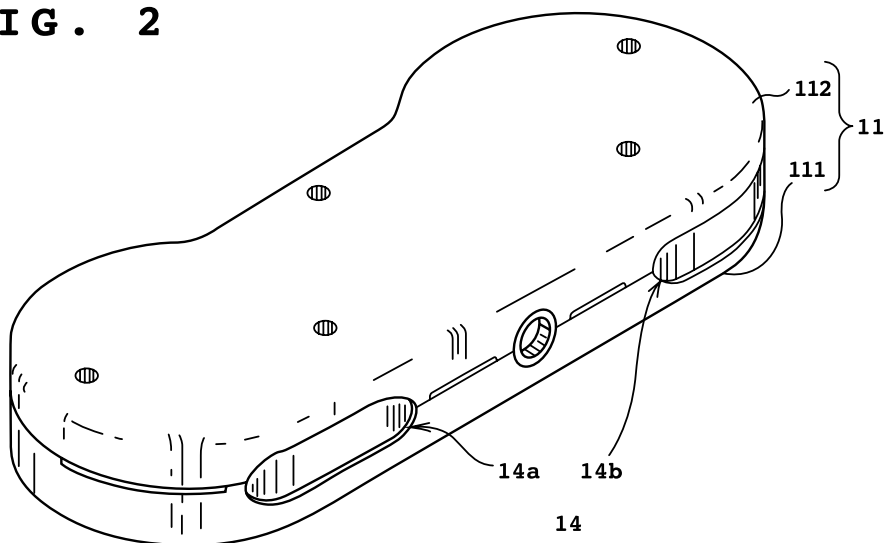
> **" It was Rare's 1994 release** Donkey Kong Country *that rejuvenated the SNES' fortunes in the face of new 32-bit hardware hitting the market.* **"**

The Super Famicom launched in Japan on 21 November, 1990, alongside two of its most iconic pieces of software: the futuristic racer *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*, a 2D platformer which was arguably never bettered during the console's entire lifespan. Despite being beaten to market by both the PC Engine and Mega Drive by three and two years respectively, the Super Famicom effortlessly shifted its initial shipment of 300,000 units in the space of a few hours, creating such a furore in the process that the Japanese government subsequently requested that console manufacturers only release new hardware at the weekend.

The robust commercial performance of the console in its homeland was instrumental in securing a wide range of third party support, but Nintendo clearly had a lot of goodwill left over from its 8-bit days, and early exclusives like *Gradius III* and *Final Fight* – one of the biggest arcade titles of the period which had previously been tipped for a Mega Drive conversion – showed that heavyweights like Konami and Capcom were on-board from the off. Even so, it was the support of RPG behemoths Enix and Square that made the most telling impact, in Japan at least. Enix released the seminal ActRaiser early on and ably supported the system with titles like *Soul Blazer*, *Illusion of Gaia* and – of course – *Dragon Quest*, the series, which, alongside

Square's *Final Fantasy*, turned the Famicom into a must-have item in Japanese homes during the 1980s. Likewise, Square became one of the console's most fervent supporters, blessing it with the genre classics *Chrono Trigger*, *Secret of Mana* (*Seiken Densetsu 2*), *Romancing SaGa*, *Front Mission*, *Bahamut Lagoon* and *Super Mario RPG*.

The North American launch took place on 23 August, 1991, while the European release occurred the following April. In both regions, SEGA was a more formidable opponent than it was in Japan; Europe had traditionally been a SEGA stronghold since the 8-bit era, while in North America – where the NES had enjoyed almost total dominance of the console market during the '80s – the Genesis (as the Mega Drive was known in that region) had leapfrogged the NES in terms of yearly sales. This was due in no small part to SEGA's canny marketing, which focused on kids who had 'graduated' from the family-friendly NES and now wanted a more mature experience. The existence of two powerful players in the home console market ultimately proved to be terrific news for gamers and the 16-bit era was graced with a wide range of amazing titles, many of which were released on both consoles, causing inevitable clashes in school playgrounds around the world regarding which had the superior version.

Super Famicom box illustration – *1990*

Unlike the Mega Drive – which was superseded in 1994 by the aforementioned Saturn – the SNES was kept alive well into the next generation thanks to the fact that its successor, the Nintendo 64, wouldn't arrive until 1996. In Japan, the console received new releases even after the 32-bit tussle between SEGA and Sony had begun in earnest, because the system continued to enjoy a massive slice of the domestic market. In 1997 – three years after the Saturn and PlayStation had hit the market – Nintendo released a redesigned SNES console in North America and Japan. However, the writing was on the wall by this point: Nintendo had already released its much-delayed N64 and many of its former third party allies – including Square – had thrown their support behind the PlayStation. Sony's machine was the clear leader of the next-generation war, following Nintendo's fateful decision to ignore CDs in favour of expensive cartridges, which offered faster loading times but were limited in terms of storage space. Some might argue that Nintendo's relationship with third parties has never been the same since.

Production of the SNES ended in 1999, while in Japan the Super Famicom lasted until 2003. By the end of its lifespan the console had sold just over 49 million units worldwide, falling short of the 61 million global sales achieved by its forerunner, the NES. Despite this, the SNES is often regarded as one of the greatest home consoles of all time, thanks to its practically unmatched library of 16-bit classics. Games like *Super Mario Kart*, *Pilotwings*, *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Super Metroid*, *EarthBound*, *Cybernator* and *Super Star Wars* contributed not only to bumper sales but also astonishing critical acclaim. In 2017, Nintendo announced that it would release a miniature version of the system dubbed The Super NES Classic Edition, pre-loaded with 21 games – one of which is the never-before-released *Star Fox 2*. The news was met with frenzied excitement and anticipation all over the world, with pre-orders snapped up almost instantly. Despite the passage of time and the unstoppable march of technology, this 16-bit legend clearly retains the power to captivate gamers.

Super Nintendo logo – *1991*

Alexander Friedman - mailme@gmail.com

F-Zero

"While *Super Mario World* was unquestionably the Super Nintendo's key launch title in all regions of the world, it was *F-Zero* that better demonstrated the incredible power possessed by Nintendo's 16-bit system. Using its much-hyped Mode 7 graphical power, the game presented a smoothly scaling (albeit entirely flat) landscape which made all other racing titles of the period look obsolete in comparison. *F-Zero* was much more than just a pretty face, however; it had gameplay to match and even by modern standards is an addictive yet thoroughly challenging racer. With its colourful vehicles, futuristic tracks and fully formed cast of comic-book heroes and villains, *F-Zero* was an important weapon in Nintendo's battle for supremacy over the incumbent Mega Drive, proving that the company was just as comfortable breaking new technological ground as it was creating compelling fictional universes and riveting gameplay concepts. Fierce debate still rages as to which instalment in the *F-Zero* franchise is best, and it says a lot about this debut release that it still compares very favourably to *F-Zero X* (1998) and *F-Zero GX* (2003), subsequent entries which replaced 2D visuals with polygons but stayed true to the thrilling gameplay of the 1990 original."

Damien McFerran, games journalist

First released *1990* / **Genre** *Racing* / **Developer and publisher** *Nintendo*

Super Mario World

"*Super Mario World* has been my favourite game ever since I pestered my parents into buying an imported Super Famicom and the Japanese version of the game back in early 1991. I spent the whole trip home clutching that ergonomic new controller with all its extra buttons and excited beyond words to see what Mario in 16-bit was like. I was not disappointed.

"While the Japanese text meant I had no clue what was going on, the brilliant and intuitive gameplay meant it didn't matter. In fact, the mysterious message boxes in the game intrigued me until I played the PAL version and discovered they were just mundane tutorials!

"Yoshi is, of course, the standout addition. His ability to eat enemies to gain different powers, as well as being a springboard when the player misses a jump, adds a new layer to the Mario formula. There's also the wonderful touch of bongo drums being added to the music whenever you jump onto Yoshi. Best of all, 26 years later and I'm still finding new things in the game to surprise me. In fact, I just recently found that Yoshi can eat activated purple blocks. A simply timeless classic."

Simon Wilmer, guest reviewer

First released
1990
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo

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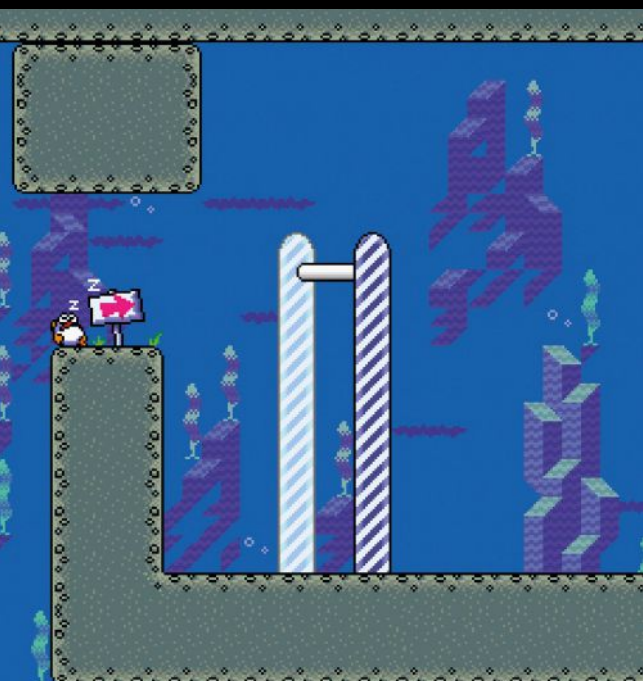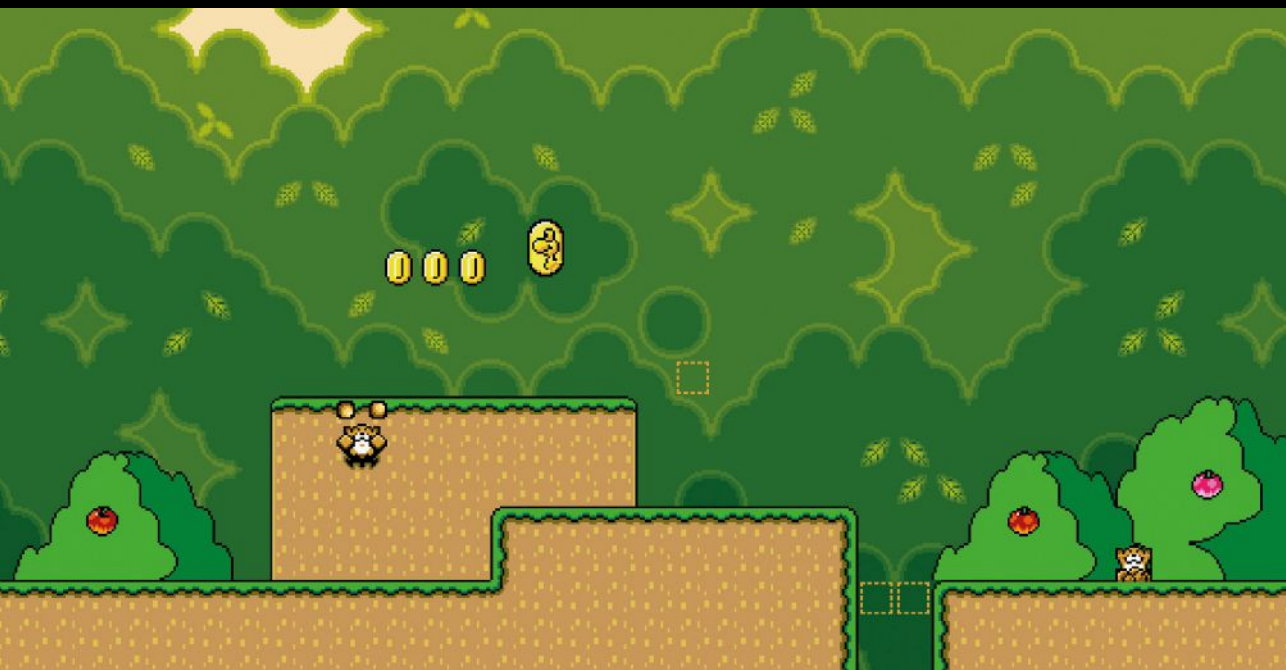
Super Mario World

"I was the producer on *Super Mario World*. How to describe my role … basically, I stood by and watched closely, for a long time, what everyone was doing, interjecting various ideas of my own here and there. We no longer had the restrictions on scrolling and the number of colours that the Famicom had, so it became much easier to depict things. That was nice. However, before starting *Super Mario World* we ported Mario 3 to the Super Famicom as a hardware experiment, and even though the colours and sprites were more detailed, it was still the same game. It made me realise that we couldn't just make the same game again: we had to create something new. So it was in that context that we talked about how to make the most use of the new hardware."

Shigeru Miyamoto, producer

"The biggest thing was not having to worry about the hardware limitations like we did in the Famicom days. One specific example would be Mario riding Yoshi: we came up with that idea a long time ago, but couldn't do it on the Famicom. I'm really happy we finally got to realise that in *Super Mario World*."

Toshihiko Nakago, programming director
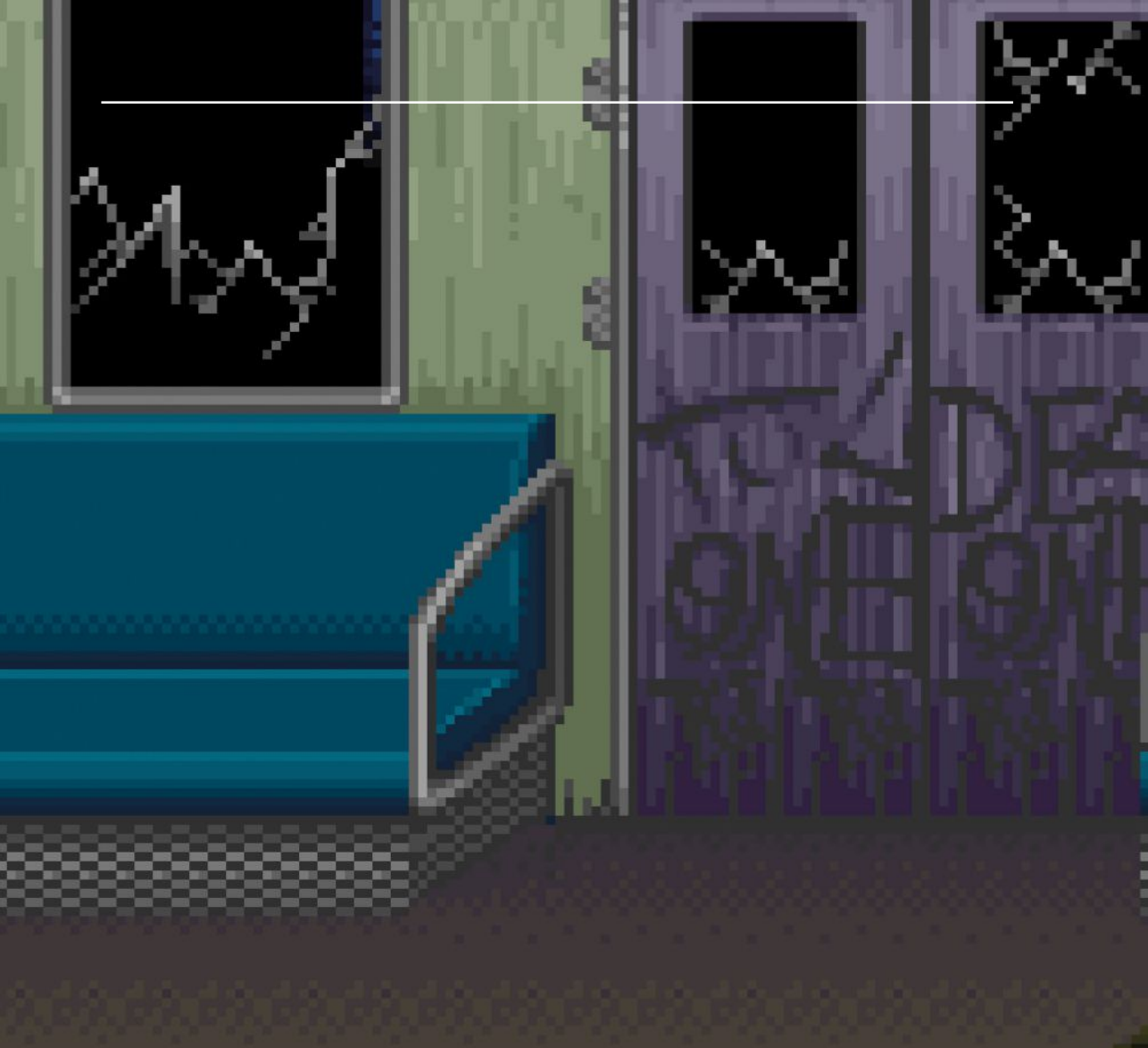
Final Fight

"Before *Street Fighter II* arrived in an irresistible explosion of fireballs and dragon punches, it was 1989's *Final Fight* that was the coin-op industry's biggest draw. Boasting massive, screen-filling sprites and a wide range of moves to exploit, this scrolling brawler guzzled coins like crazy, and inevitably became one of the most-requested home conversions of the early '90s. When it was finally confirmed after months of rampant speculation that the Super Nintendo – and not the Genesis/Mega Drive – would be the lucky recipient of a port, there was much gnashing of teeth amongst SEGA fans. What arrived alongside the Super Famicom in 1990 was a compromise, with one character,

one stage and the all-important two-player mode missing – but it nevertheless demonstrated the ability of Nintendo's console to host graphically faithful arcade ports. Despite the painful omissions the SNES version of *Final Fight* plays very similarly to the coin-op original, and was only bettered by the release of the Mega CD version – ported by SEGA under licence from Capcom – in 1993. Capcom would later release a second SNES port, which replaced Cody with the missing character Guy, but didn't reinstate the two-player mode."

Damien McFerran, games journalist

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First released
1990

—

Genre
Scrolling shooter

—

Developer
and publisher
Konami

32

Gradius III

"*Gradius III* was one of the very first games to grace the Super Nintendo, not that you'd know by looking at it. Having long been considered a hallmark for quality in the shooter genre, Konami's *Gradius III* very much lives up to that reputation, retaining the trademark intense gameplay while mixing in a few welcome changes, such as the ability to completely customise your spaceship and its weaponry.

"Nevertheless, the core of the action will be familiar to any fan of old-school shooters. Just like any great arcade-inspired title, the gameplay is frantic, unforgiving and extremely difficult. This time around, players must once again take to the cockpit of the Vic Viper spaceship in order to battle their way through ten continuous-scrolling missions, as wave after wave of enemies – alongside larger-than-life bosses – relentlessly try to take you down.

"To say *Gradius III* is difficult really is an understatement. In fact, the original arcade release was so difficult that Konami was forced to pull it soon after release. Thankfully, Konami toned down the difficulty somewhat before releasing the game on Nintendo's 16-bit platform, but you'll still need quick reflexes and nerves of steel in order to survive its fast and frantic space shooting action."

Sophia Aubrey Drake, games journalist
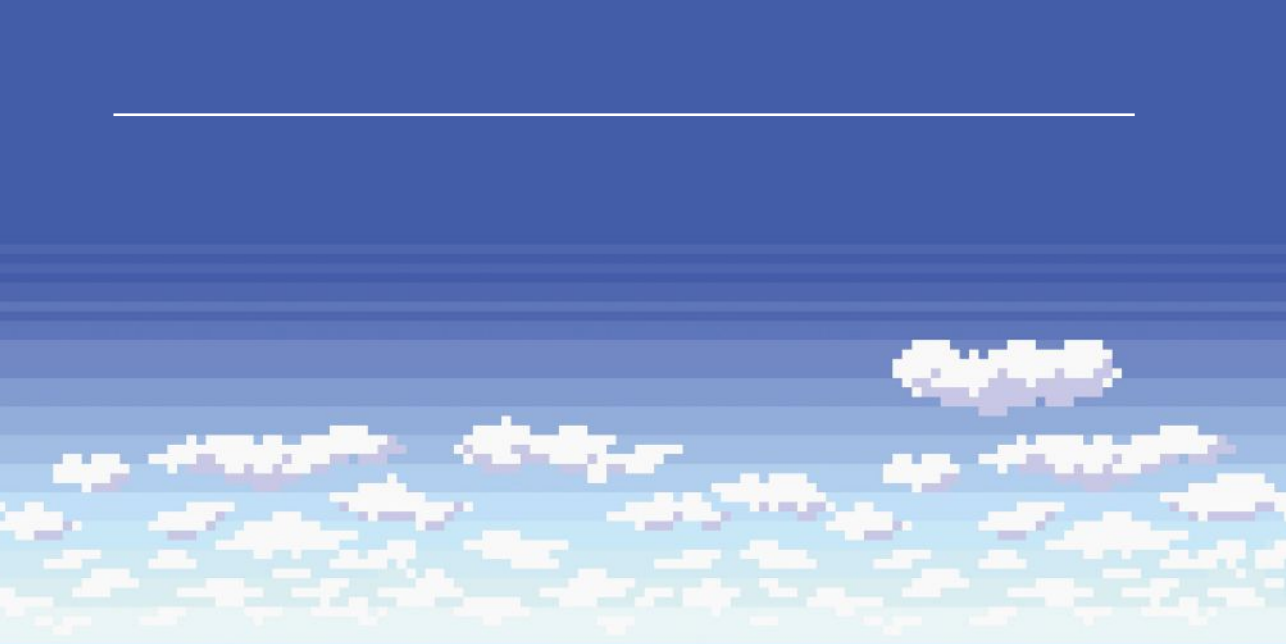
Pilotwings

"I was working on a Commodore 64 magazine when an imported Super Famicom arrived in the office. The vibrant sound and vivid colours of this amazing little machine completely blew me away – compared to the geriatric 8-bit machines I was used to, this felt like an alien device sent from the future.

"While *Super Mario World* garnered the most attention, I was more interested in *Pilotwings*. At first I was simply beguiled by its glorious '3D' Mode 7 graphics, but I soon learned to love the game's beautifully crafted levels, gradually building in difficulty until you were rewarded with the final combat chopper stages. I played the game to death, slowly mastering each of its different flying machines, earning gold medals on every stage and completing the game in its entirety – and still going back to it for a quick flight in between sessions on other titles.

"To this day it always brings back memories of those early days with my own Super Famicom, opening up a world of import gaming and bizarre Japanese releases. So I'll never understand why Nintendo has only ever made two sequels, for the N64 and 3DS. Release a version for the Switch and I might buy one!"

Steve Jarratt, games journalist

ActRaiser

"I was good friends with Masaya Hashimoto – we'd go out for drinks and visit each other's homes and so on – and at Quintet I also came to know Yuzo Koshiro. He was freelancing so we contracted him to do the music for *ActRaiser*. Nihon Falcom was a conservative company and consoles were gaining momentum rather than computers. We had a desire to do console games when we were all still at Falcom, but the company said Nintendo's cartridge business was high risk. As a creator I was frustrated: we wanted to make an action game for consoles that was similar to *Ys III*, but we couldn't do that. Later on we realised our desires at Quintet with *ActRaiser*.

"For *ActRaiser* I was also involved in the localisation – converting it for the international overseas market. What was pointed out was that for the Western version, we had to avoid using religious motifs. The rules for software for children were very strict. For example, if there was a cross on the map, we weren't allowed to show it in the overseas versions. The last bosses for *ActRaiser* were demons, but they were rejected by the Western publisher, so we had to change the designs."

Kouji Yokota, graphic artist
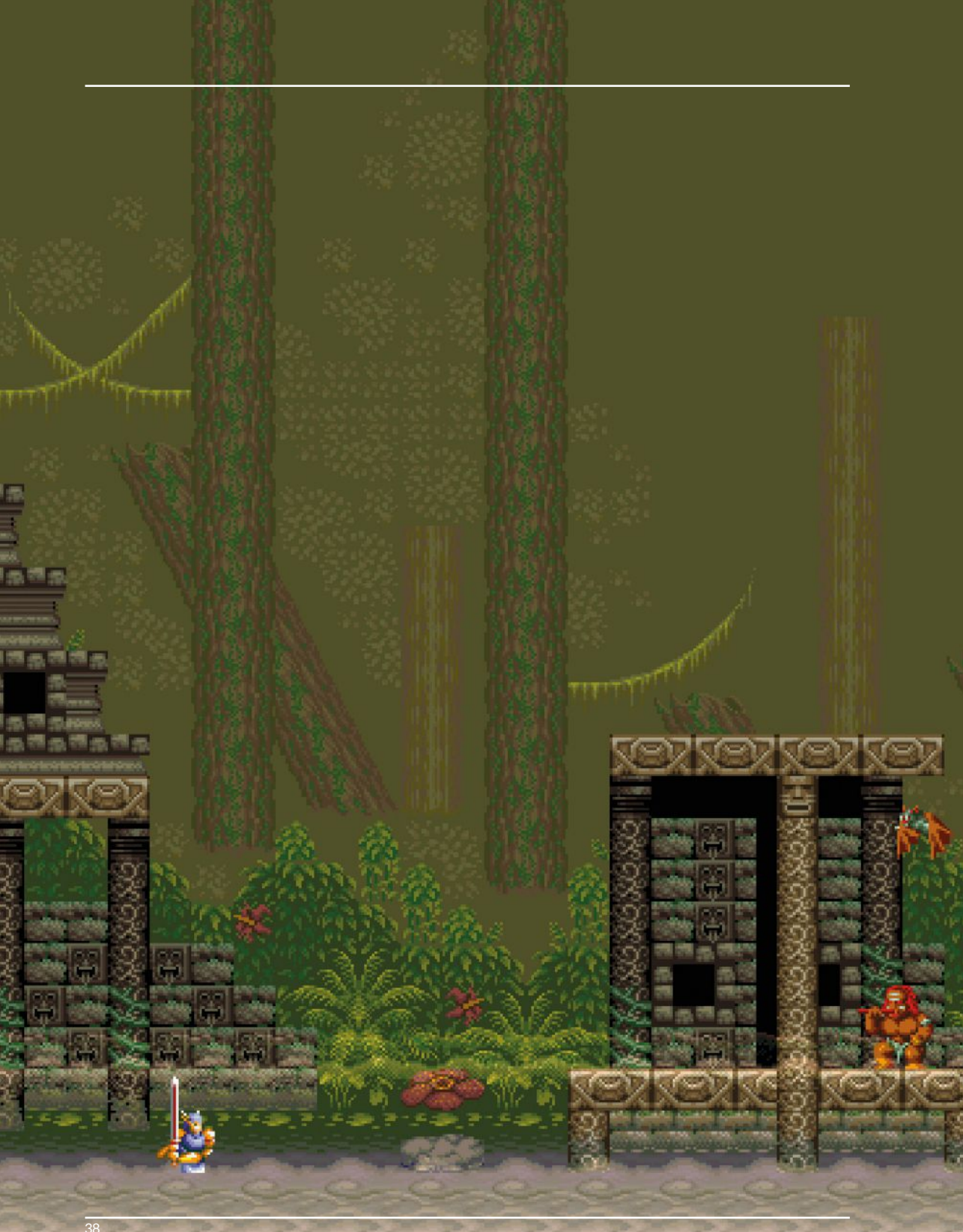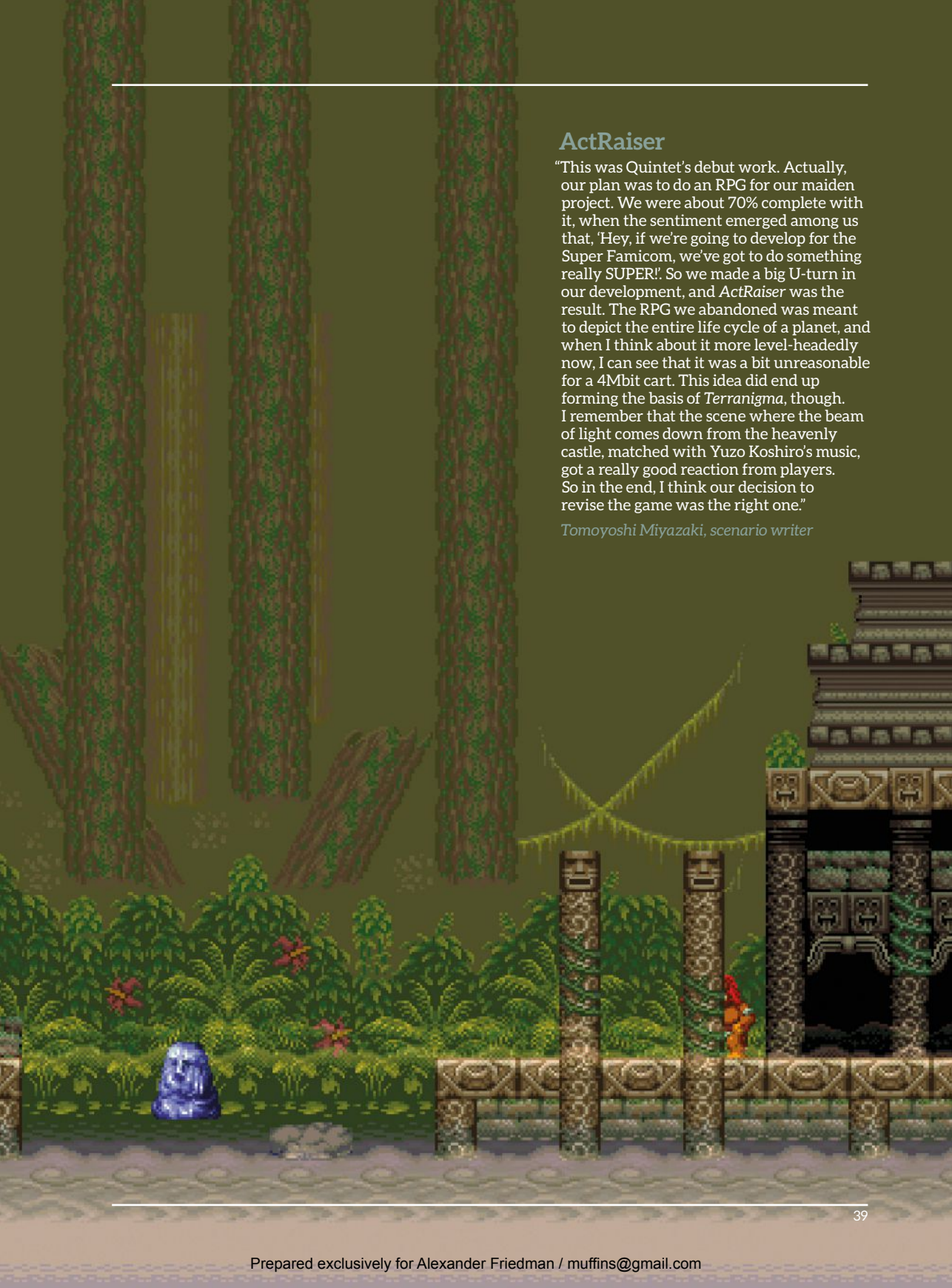
ActRaiser

"This was Quintet's debut work. Actually, our plan was to do an RPG for our maiden project. We were about 70% complete with it, when the sentiment emerged among us that, 'Hey, if we're going to develop for the Super Famicom, we've got to do something really SUPER!'. So we made a big U-turn in our development, and *ActRaiser* was the result. The RPG we abandoned was meant to depict the entire life cycle of a planet, and when I think about it more level-headedly now, I can see that it was a bit unreasonable for a 4Mbit cart. This idea did end up forming the basis of *Terranigma*, though. I remember that the scene where the beam of light comes down from the heavenly castle, matched with Yuzo Koshiro's music, got a really good reaction from players. So in the end, I think our decision to revise the game was the right one."

Tomoyoshi Miyazaki, scenario writer

Super Soccer /
Super Formation Soccer

"It was originally just *Formation Soccer*, a soccer game on the PC Engine with a bird's-eye perspective, which was converted to a more realistic 3D view using the Mode 7 functions of the Super Famicom. It adopted a 3D feeling and became an explosive hit in Japan. Europe and other countries later received this soccer game on the Super NES.

"There's no offside rule in *Super Soccer*! If you did have the offside rule, it would disturb the pacing of the game. Like, if you're playing the game and really into it, and then you're suddenly told that you violated the offside rule, you'd have to halt and suspend the game. So of course I tried to place the players in such a way that it wouldn't violate that rule, or sometimes you'd see a situation where it sort of looks like offside, but I just wanted the player to continue on without worrying about it because it's fun to play. I wonder about games nowadays because they seem to go after reality or authenticity. So if players learn that there's no offside rule in a modern soccer game, they may wonder if the game is realistic enough."

Ryouji Amano, programmer

First released
1991

—

Genre
Sports

—

**Developer
and publisher**
*Human
Entertainment*

Darius Twin

"Gameplay-wise, *Darius Twin* closely follows the formula set by *Gradius* and other side-scrolling shooters: enemies in tight, disposable formations; bigger enemies for bosses; and familiar power-ups (e.g. a bubble-like shield, multi-directional shots, and bombs that just lazily slip out of the belly of the ship and miss everything). But *Darius Twin* offered a fishy twist: the enemies, especially bosses, are spaceships made to resemble terrible creatures of the deep.

"*Darius Twin*'s space invaders got creative with both their designs and monikers: you take on a towering squid battle station ('Demon Sword'), a badass sea turtle mothership ('Full Metalshell') and a huge, disgusting lobster ('Dual Shears SP'). It all culminates with a battle against the glorious walrus 'Great Tusk', but getting there is pretty unlikely, as *Darius* offers no continues! At least while you train for the 'Tusk you can rock out to some synthesised slap bass.

"The Darius series began in the arcades and featured a pretty cool gimmick: a three-monitor setup that spread the action across 36 inches of aligned picture tube. Fishy odours not included."

Samuel Claiborn, games journalist
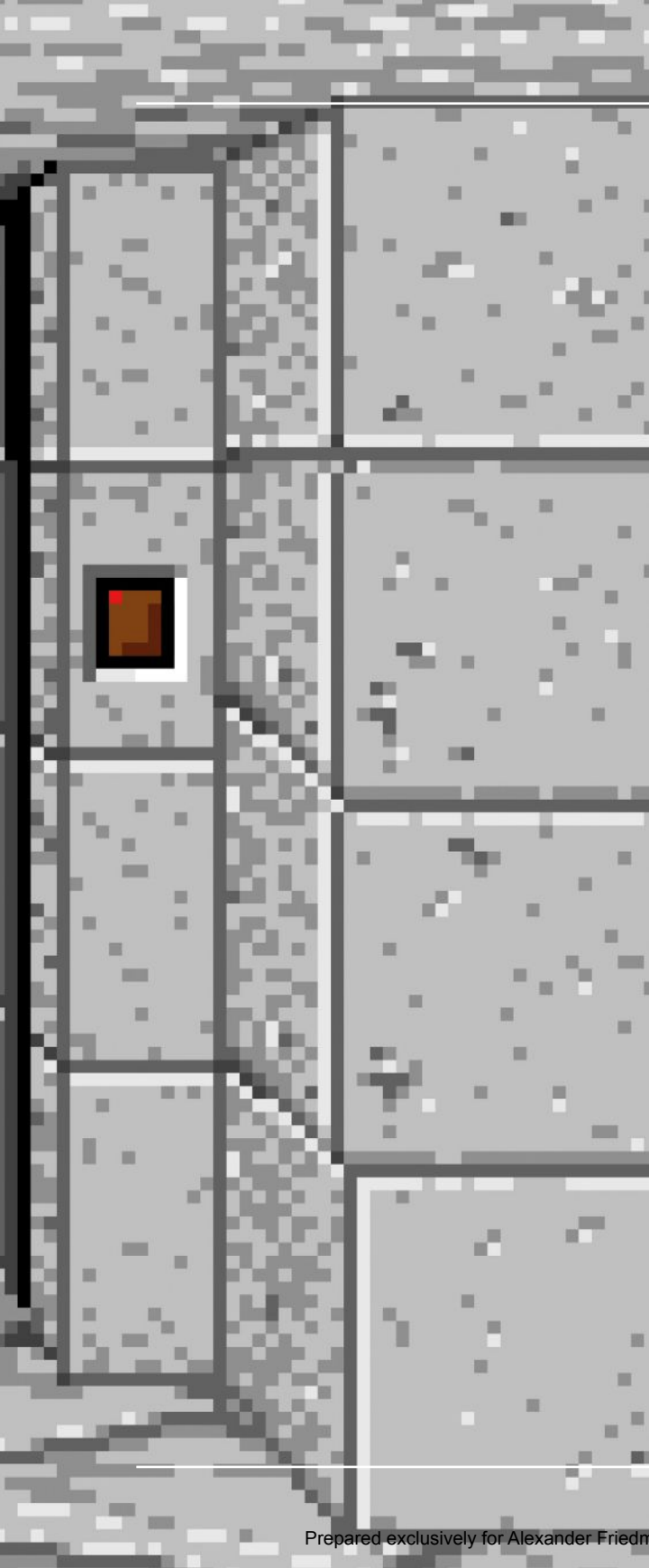
Dungeon Master

"The groundbreaking first-person RPG from FTL received a strong SNES conversion. A party of four is chosen and resurrected from their portraits in the Hall of Champions. The quest that follows is to find the legendary Firestaff and use it to defeat the evil Lord Chaos.

"The clever icon-driven interface enables the player to cast spells, fight enemies and interact with objects in a new way. Each character can be manipulated by choosing the objects in their hands (including weapons), given food and drink and have their clothing/armour changed. Torches or light spells must be found to allow the player's character to see, and the bones of dead characters should not be left behind as they can be reincarnated. Spells are learned by reading scrolls, or experimenting by mixing runes.

"The 3D view of the dungeon moves in steps, the player rotating and moving by either using the icons or switching to Movement Mode for more direct control. Locked doors, teleporters, trap doors and pressure pads hinders exploration of the dungeon's many levels, and the battery back-up was vital for those hoping to complete the arduous quest. Atmospheric sounds and music added to the well-drawn graphics in a true classic."

Andrew Fisher, guest reviewer

First released
1991
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
FTL
—
Publisher
Victor
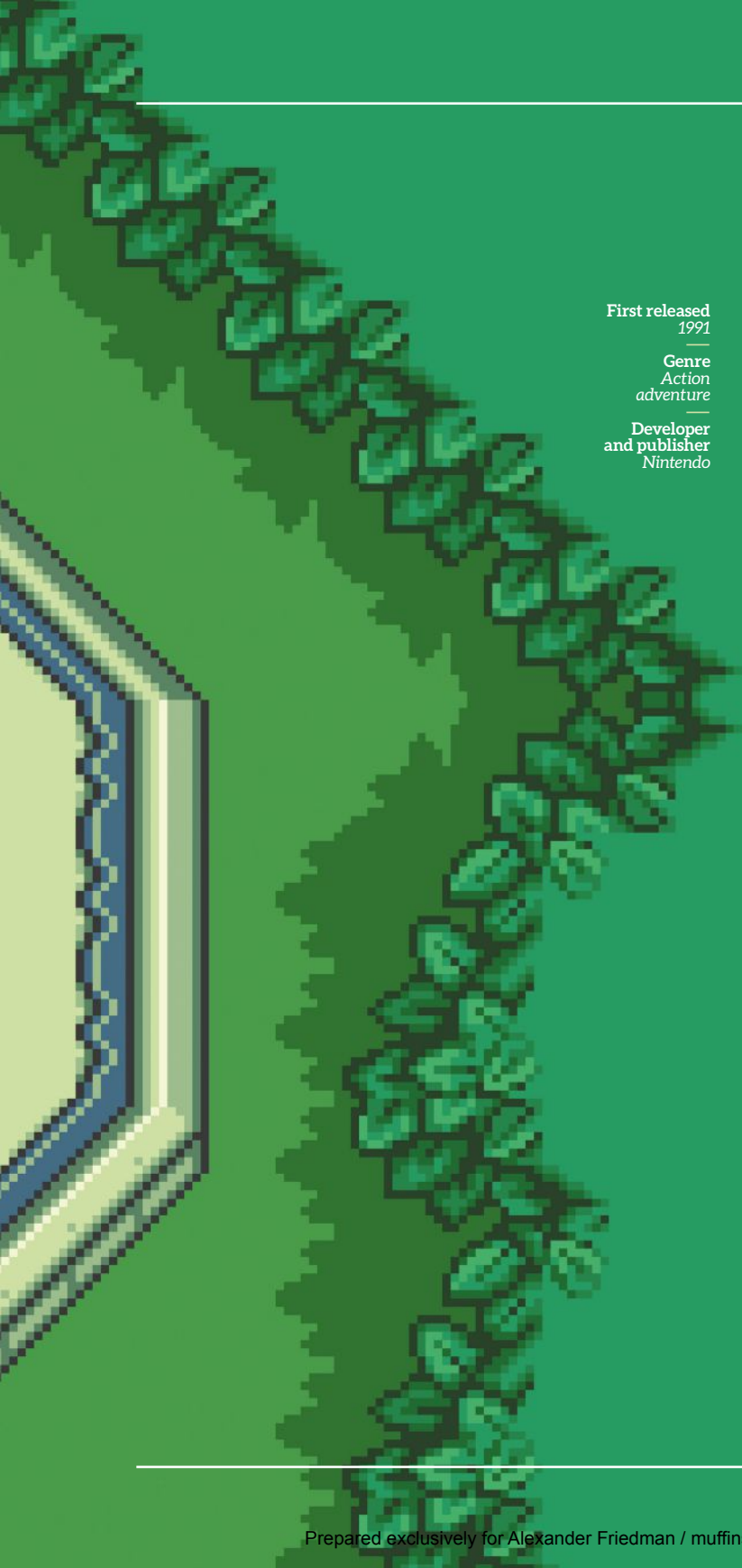
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past / Zelda no Densetsu - Kamigami no Triforce

First released
1991
—
Genre
Action adventure
—
Developer and publisher
Nintendo

"I was 12 years old when I first played *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to The Past*. Nearly 25 years later, it's still my most unforgettable gaming experience. I had never heard of Zelda before, but while visiting my local game store with some friends one weekend, the game's incredible box art immediately caught my eye. The game promised adventures in an age of magic and heroes where I would venture into twisting mazes, dungeons, palaces and shadowy forests whilst wielding mighty swords and magical weapons. I was sold!

"Over the coming weeks, me and my friends bonded over the game. We would spend many late school nights and weekends working our way through the game's iconic dungeons, challenging missions and mysterious side quests. We would meet up in the local neighbourhood park to trade tips, secrets and stories about our adventures in Hyrule.

"To this day, me and the same group of friends still play video games together and have worked our way through many more iconic Zelda games since. But there is always one game that comes up in conversation and is remembered so fondly, and that's the experience we all shared playing *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to The Past*."

James Keenan, guest reviewer

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past / Zelda no Densetsu - Kamigami no Triforce

"We started making the game at the same time as *Super Mario World*. Even back when we first unveiled the Super Nintendo at the company in July 1989, our plan had always been to develop and release the game alongside *Mario*. We had wanted to make it a launch title for the Super Famicom, too. We had been hoping to release it in March, but it got delayed to the summer vacation, and, in the end, it came out for the Super Famicom's one-year anniversary.

"If we'd made the controls too difficult, there would have been people who didn't learn how to use them. That's why we put in a way to grab things, and the game became the way it is today. There were staff members opposed to it, though. There are switches that require you to pull them, right? You've got to pull them no matter what, so you should be able to do it just by pressing A. But just pressing a single button doesn't make you feel like you're actually pulling something. That's why I put in two types of switches, one of which wouldn't be correct. If players can decide for themselves which way it's supposed to go, they'll get a greater sense of satisfaction when they figure it out. It took a lot of time to bring out that feeling."

Shigeru Miyamoto, producer
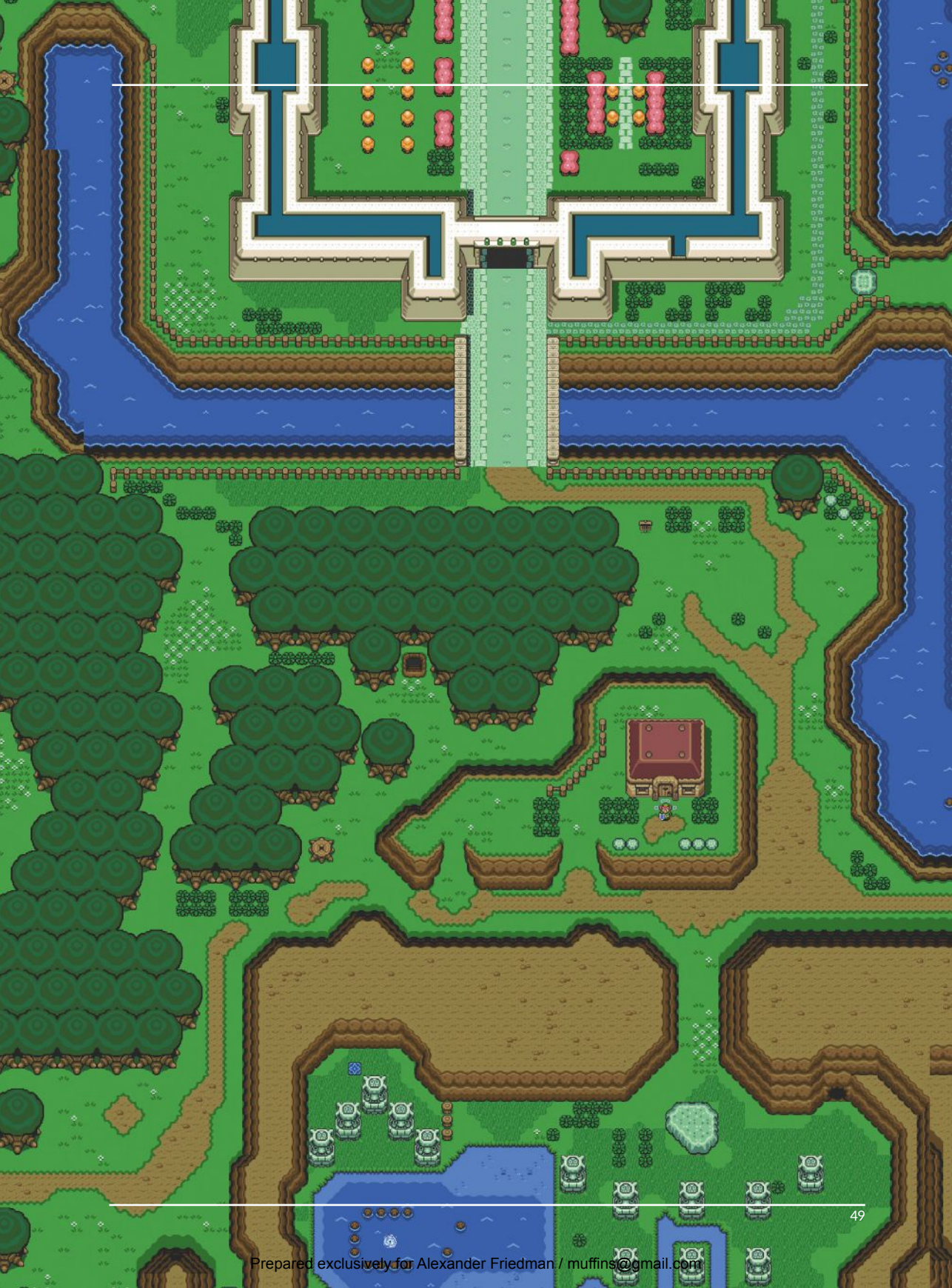
Final Fantasy II / IV

"It was from *Final Fantasy IV* that I became a full employee, working as a game designer at Square. I've worked on a lot of projects over the years: some big, some small, some successful, some not. And maybe I had a lot of those opportunities because of *Final Fantasy*.

"We wanted to beat *Dragon Quest*, so I had the idea of taking the best aspects from the previous Famicom titles *Final Fantasy I*, *II* and *III*, and balancing them to create the strongest Final Fantasy yet. We added in elements of various movie genres, particularly from sci-fi films and Westerns. Originally the script was very long, and we ended up cutting it down to around a quarter of this – big sections were removed, but we kept the key elements, which made it more concentrated.

"In those days it was expected that the staff would stay overnight working on their projects. However, we were paid hourly so these sorts of crunch times were a great way to make money. At the end of a project everyone in the company – everyone, not just the development team – would stay late play-testing it. We were somewhat restricted on when we could take a shower during testing!

"I was blessed to have the opportunity to be able to work on a series as big as Final Fantasy, but to also be able to make small games as well."

Takashi Tokita, game designer

HAL's Hole in One Golf / Jumbo Ozaki no Hole in One

"At first glance this looks like a pretty staid golfing sim. The whizzy Mode 7 intros for each hole are, sadly, replaced in-play by scrolling 2D courses, simply decorated with trees, grey bunkers and blue water hazards. But once you're over the disappointment that it's not played out in 3D, *Hole in One Golf* is actually a really solid and fun golf game. Typical game mechanics apply in terms of club selection, shot direction, spin and power – it's dead easy to play and feels suitably accurate. There are also a few nice touches like a zoomed-in camera view of the ball as it pops in (or skirts around) the hole, and the shading on the green is a clear indicator of slope when it comes to putting.

"Solo players get a really stiff competitor in the shape of HAL – a powerful computer-controlled opponent – but the game comes into its own played head-to-head with friends. My girlfriend and me used to play this on Sunday evenings with her golf-loving parents, and so – despite having just one course and a single earworm soundtrack – it still holds many fond memories."

Steve Jarratt, games journalist

First released
1991

Genre
Sports

**Developer
and publisher**
HAL Laboratory
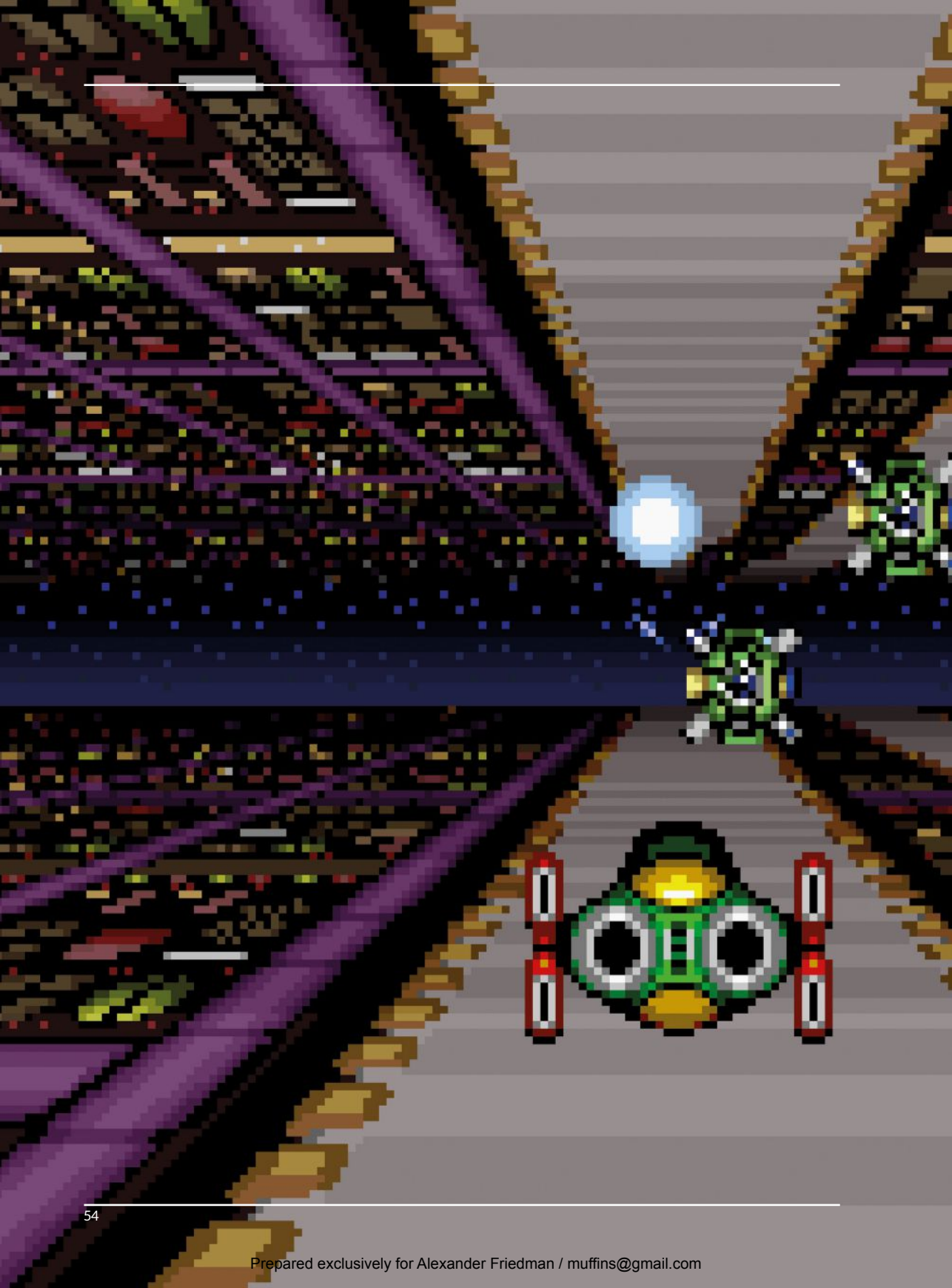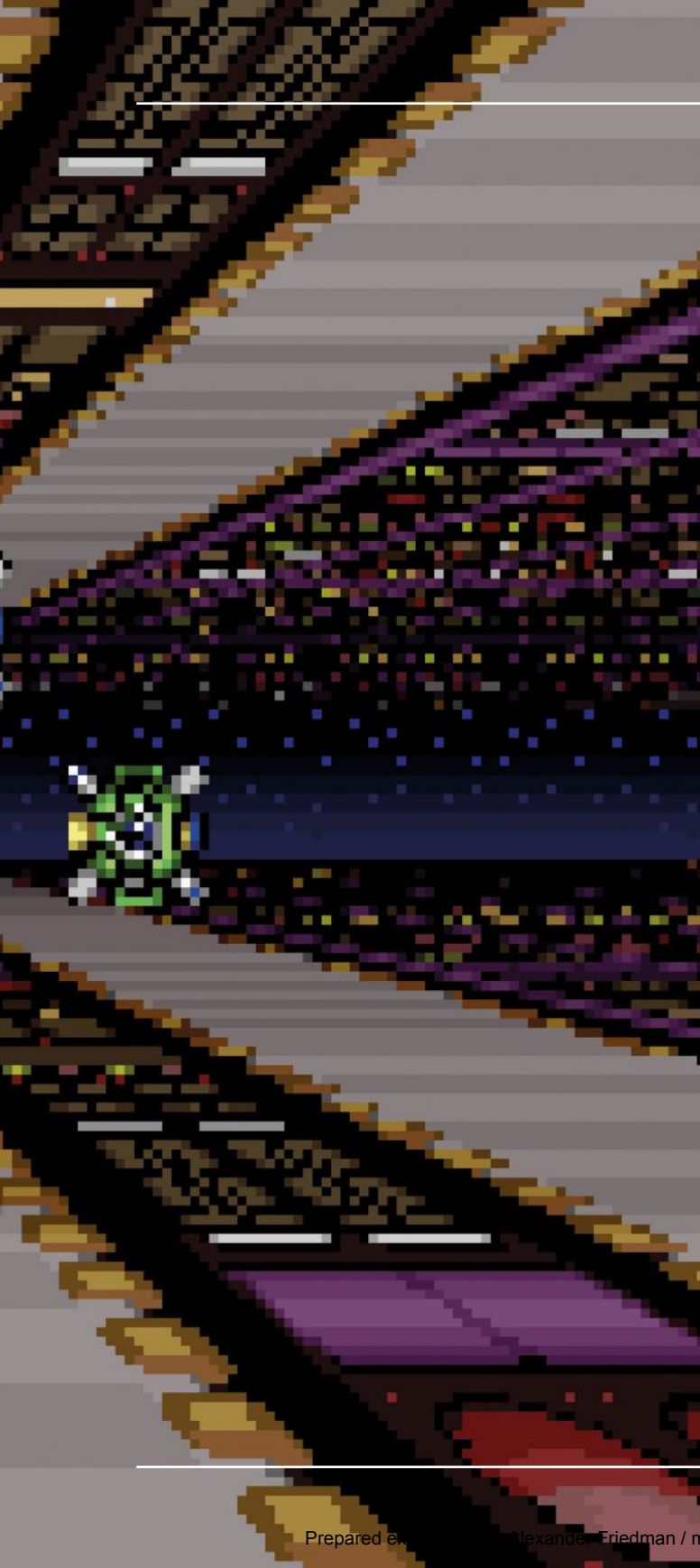
HyperZone

"Coming to the Super Famicom as a somewhat 'under the radar' game, you'd be mistaken in thinking that *HyperZone* was just a crazy tech demo showing off what the SNES was capable of. HAL Laboratory, intent on proving its worth and showcasing what Mode 7 could do outside of Nintendo's hands, decided to create a scrolling shooter with the feel and speed of *F-Zero*.

"With crazy, eye-watering zones to navigate, a mirror projection image of the floor – which was the basis for your craft to hover on – was displayed at the top of the screen too. This led to some rather hectic, mind-blowing action while trying to progress through eight zones, only to be thrown back to the beginning as the game works on an infinite loop.

"Stereoscopic 3D support was initially added to the game but the player couldn't play it in 3D unless a cheat code was entered. No peripheral hardware, such as 3D shutter glasses, was ever made for the game.

"Upgradable ships, fierce enemies and a cool, hard-hitting Jun Ishikawa soundtrack make *HyperZone* a must-play."

Daniel Major, guest reviewer

First released
1991
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
Developer
and publisher
HAL Laboratory

It's ironic that one of Japan's most renowned video game companies started life not in the realm of interactive entertainment, but in the rather less exciting world of real estate magazine publishing. Enix's genesis can be traced back to Eidansha Boshu Service Center, founded by businessman Yasuhiro Fukushima in 1975.

With the company's focus initially around magazine publishing, Fukushima harboured aspirations of moving into video game development. In 1982 the newly-christened Enix held the first of its famous Annual Hobby Program Contests. These were open to the public with the challenge being to produce game designs for the popular personal computers of the period, such as the PC-8801 and PC-6001.

> 66 With the company's focus initially around magazine publishing, Fukushima harboured aspirations of moving into video game development. 99

This unique approach resulted in titles such as Koichi Nakamura's *Door Door*, for which he was awarded ¥500,000 as a runner-up. The game was ported to other formats and Nakamura – who was still a student at this point – earned annual royalties of more than ¥10 million. Subsequently ported to the Nintendo Famicom to great commercial success, *Door Door* is considered to be one of the classic games of the early '80s by Japanese players, but is virtually unknown outside of its homeland.

Buoyed by his early success, Nakamura founded Chunsoft in 1984 and produced *Door Door MkII* on the PC-6001 the following year, published by Enix. He was joined by fellow Annual Hobby Program Contest winner Yuji Horii, whose title *Love Match Tennis* was an early PC hit for Enix in 1983. Horii worked on the popular manga magazine *Shōnen Jump* at the time, and was encouraged to enter the competition by one of his superiors, despite thinking he wouldn't win. One of Horii's early releases for Chunsoft was *The Portopia Serial Murder Case*, a unique murder-mystery adventure that adopted a

first-person perspective and tasked the player with solving a crime. Credited as being one of the first detective-style 'visual novels', it sold an impressive 700,000 copies when it was ported to the Famicom in 1985 and proved to be quite influential: Metal Gear creator Hideo Kojima has cited it as a major inspiration not only for him entering the video game industry, but also for his thematically similar titles *Snatcher* and *Policenauts*.

The Portopia Serial Murder Case was significant as it was the first game that Horii and Nakamura worked on together, with the pair collaborating on the 1985 Famicom port. While not strictly an RPG, it would nevertheless inspire what is undoubtedly Enix's most famous video game franchise: *Dragon Quest*. Horii was a fan of Western role-playing adventures such as *Ultima* and *Wizardry*, and wanted to combine Portopia's dialogue-driven gameplay with a grand fantasy adventure showcasing genre tropes such as dragons, magic and other elements. Horii cherry-picked aspects he enjoyed from other RPGs, including *Wizardry*'s

random battles and *Ultima's* top-down overworld view, and attempted to present them in a package that would appeal to those who had never experienced an RPG before. His worry was that Japanese players – at this point largely unaccustomed to stat-based adventures, despite homegrown titles like *Dragon Slayer* finding success on PCs – would find the staggering amount of statistical data intimidating. Horii's objective with *Dragon Quest* was to streamline the experience to make it easier to grasp for newcomers. It wouldn't be necessary to memorise pages of rules or notes like the tabletop games which had thus far inspired most video game RPGs; instead, the player's character gained experience points automatically and became stronger as the quest progressed. The lack of a keyboard was another reason for this simplification; the game was focused mainly on the Famicom, which was incredibly popular in Japan at that time and represented a lucrative market for publishers and developers.

In order to make *Dragon Quest* even more appealing to a console audience weaned on the likes of *Super Mario Bros.* and *Donkey Kong*, Chunsoft employed the services of famed manga artist Akira Toriyama, creator of the popular Dragon Ball series, which started life in *Shōnen Jump* in 1984. Toriyama has remained the principal artist for the series ever since, with his signature 'chibi' style lending the franchise a colourful and cartoonish look which stands in stark contrast to the grim and often foreboding visuals of many other RPGs. Toriyama wasn't the only contributor from outside of the games industry: *Dragon Quest's* iconic music was composed by Koichi Sugiyama, whose previous work includes *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman:*

The Movie, *The Sea Prince and the Fire Child*, as well as numerous TV commercials during the '70s and '80s. A fan of video games, Sugiyama approached Enix regarding a PC adaptation of the popular Japanese strategy board game Shogi, and created the musical score for the 1985 title *World Golf*. Amazingly, Sugiyama has since stated that he composed the signature tune for *Dragon Quest* in five minutes; it's now one of the most instantly recognisable pieces of video game music ever written.

Dragon Quest eventually found its way onto Japanese store shelves in 1986, and publisher Enix was so confident of success that it ploughed a significant amount of capital into producing around 750,000 cartridges. Despite this massive order, initial sales were disappointing, and it wasn't until a feature on the game and its storyline ran in *Shōnen Jump* that the Japanese gaming public sat up and took notice. This kind of cross-media promotion was groundbreaking for the time; many of the 4.5 million readers of *Shōnen Jump* were keen gamers and were quickly sucked in by *Dragon Quest's* epic plot and Toriyama's appealing illustrations. The game's sluggish start was quickly forgotten as it went on to sell two million copies in Japan alone, with a North American release – under the name *Dragon Warrior* to avoid a copyright dispute with the pen-and-paper RPG *Dragon Quest* – adding another 500,000 units to that haul. Such was the incredible commercial success of the game that Enix awarded its Japanese staff a bonus equivalent to 12 months' salary.

The next two Dragon Quest titles formed part of a connected trilogy, and sold 2.4 million and 3.8 million copies respectively. It was reported at the time of

Dragon Quest III's release that almost 300 arrests for truancy were made among Japanese students who were absent from school on launch day. 1990's *Dragon Quest IV* sold 3.1 million units – a drop on its direct forerunner – but was lauded for its innovative five-part story, with each chapter focusing on a different character. The fifth instalment in the series was the first to make its debut on the Super Famicom, while the first three titles were also ported to the 16-bit system in the guise of enhanced remakes.

The arrival of the Super Famicom marked a new phase in Enix's history. Almost solely reliant on Dragon Quest for its revenue, the publisher decided to develop new brands by working with other software partners – the most notable of these was *Quintet*, which made its SNES debut with the sublime *ActRaiser* in 1990. Boasting gorgeous visuals and an exquisite soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro – best known as the musical talent behind SEGA's *Streets of Rage* and *Revenge of Shinobi* – *ActRaiser* was unique in that it blended two otherwise disparate game styles: the action platformer and the 'God Sim'. The action alternated between intense side-scrolling battle sequences and more sedate top-down town-building segments, the latter being heavily inspired by Bullfrog's 1989 classic *Populous*.

> **66** *It was reported at the time of* Dragon Quest III's *release that almost 300 arrests for truancy were made among Japanese students.* **99**

Just over a year later Enix published Quintet's second SNES game, *Soul Blazer*, which took the town-building concept of *ActRaiser* and placed it in a more traditional RPG setting. Success in the game's dungeons helped rebuild a nearby settlement, populating it with townsfolk who could be conversed with in order to drive the story forward. *Soul Blazer* was the first part in a thematically connected trilogy of SNES RPGs from the developer, with *Illusion of Gaia* (1993) and *Terranigma* (1995) following afterwards, both to widespread critical acclaim.

During the SNES era Enix became synonymous with RPG titles, despite the fact that it acted mainly as a publisher and didn't actively develop any of its own games. Between 1990 and 1996 Enix published the likes of *Robotrek* (1994), *Brain Lord* (1994), *Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen* (1993), *The 7th Saga* (1993), *E.V.O.: Search for Eden* (1992), *Wonder Project J* (1994) and *Star Ocean* (1996). A sequel to *ActRaiser* was also produced, but it sadly ditched the town-building stages and focused entirely on side-scrolling action levels. Many of these games were published in North America, and Enix even went as far as branching out into publishing American software with the sadly mediocre *King Arthur & the Knights of Justice*, based on the TV show of the same name.

Dragon Quest VI arrived in Japan in 1995, and marked a turning point for the series – Chunsoft was no longer the lead developer with those duties taken up by Heartbeat. Despite the change of studio, Yuji Horii was still involved as the designer and storywriter, while Akira Toriyama and Koichi Sugiyama also contributed as usual. The game went on to sell 3.2 million copies in Japan.

Given that Dragon Quest and Square's Final Fantasy were Japan's two biggest RPG franchises – the latter being heavily inspired by the former – it should come as no surprise to learn that the gaming press of the period liked to position the companies as rivals fighting over the same turf. When Square famously turned its back on Nintendo and took *Final Fantasy VII* to the Sony PlayStation, Enix stood by its long-time hardware partner and stated its intent to release titles on the Nintendo 64 – although it had by this point also decided to support both the PlayStation and SEGA's Saturn as well. It was a vote of confidence that was sadly short-lived: *Wonder Project J2* (1996) and *Mischief Makers* (1997) were the only two games Enix published on Nintendo's cartridge-based system before throwing its full weight behind CD-based platforms. Like Square, Enix would eventually transplant the Dragon Quest series – which owed a massive debt to the

incredible market share of the Famicom in Japan – to the Sony PlayStation, starting with 2000's *Dragon Quest VII*, which sold over four million units in its homeland, making it the best-selling PlayStation game of all time in that region.

Ironically, as the new millennium dawned, both Enix and Square found themselves in rather precarious financial situations. Enix was struggling to control the rising cost of game development: while the aforementioned *Dragon Quest VII* was a smash hit, it missed its intended release window in 1999 and therefore impacted Enix's financial report for that period – an event which saw the company's stock value drop by 40%. In 2001, reports suggested that Enix was looking for potential merger options to revive its fortunes, and Square was an obvious candidate. However, its great rival was still reeling from the box office bomb that was *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, and it was only when Sony stepped in to shore up Square's ailing finances that Enix felt confident enough to follow through with a merger. Both Enix and Square ceased to exist on April 1, 2003, when they merged to become Square Enix, the giant developer/publisher, which now controls some of the biggest video game brands in the world, including Tomb Raider, Deus Ex and – of course – Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest, Japan's two most beloved RPGs.
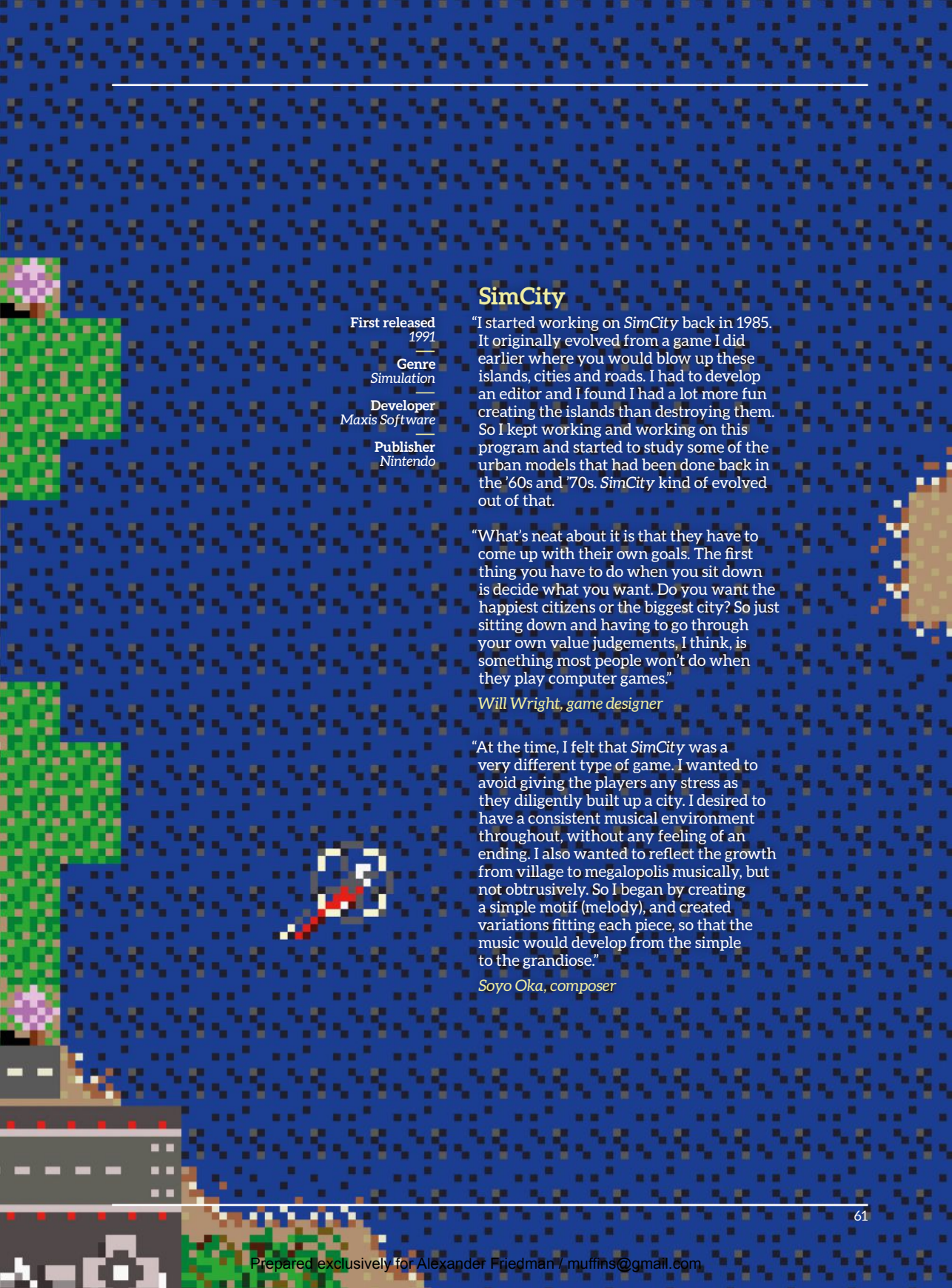
Soul Blazer / Soul Blader – *1992*

Terranigma / Tenchi Sōzō – *1995*

Dragon Quest III – *1996*

SimCity

"I started working on *SimCity* back in 1985. It originally evolved from a game I did earlier where you would blow up these islands, cities and roads. I had to develop an editor and I found I had a lot more fun creating the islands than destroying them. So I kept working and working on this program and started to study some of the urban models that had been done back in the '60s and '70s. *SimCity* kind of evolved out of that.

"What's neat about it is that they have to come up with their own goals. The first thing you have to do when you sit down is decide what you want. Do you want the happiest citizens or the biggest city? So just sitting down and having to go through your own value judgements, I think, is something most people won't do when they play computer games."

Will Wright, game designer

"At the time, I felt that *SimCity* was a very different type of game. I wanted to avoid giving the players any stress as they diligently built up a city. I desired to have a consistent musical environment throughout, without any feeling of an ending. I also wanted to reflect the growth from village to megalopolis musically, but not obtrusively. So I began by creating a simple motif (melody), and created variations fitting each piece, so that the music would develop from the simple to the grandiose."

Soyo Oka, composer

The Legend of the Mystical Ninja / Ganbare Goemon: Yukihime Kyūshutsu Emaki

"Ganbare Goemon [known in the West as *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja*] holds a special place in my heart as it showed me a side of Japan that I didn't know existed! I moved to Japan in the summer of 2002. I 'knew' Japan from your typical J-pop culture resources – Godzilla, Akira, Shenmue and Yakuza films – and it all matched up reasonably okay, albeit minus the kaiju.

*"*One humid, sticky summer night on the outskirts of Tokyo, I headed up to the local Internet cafe at the town square. Unbeknown to me there was a celebration for Obon festival (an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one's ancestors). This festival was from Ganbare Goemon's first boss battle! Lanterns swaying. People dancing. Drums beating. Tower standing. Alas no boss battle but it brought to life a game that I loved, in a way that was unexpected and very welcome.

"Ganbare Goemon is a great couch co-op that combines beat 'em up and platforming elements, with bizarre mini-games and dry absurdist humour, for a fun adventure in mystical, ancient(ish) Japan.*"*

Jan Bielecki, guest reviewer

First released
1991

—

Genre
Action adventure

—

Developer and publisher
Konami

62

Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts / Chōmakaimura

"I remember being pleased that the SNES felt extremely Japanese from the outset. Of course, it was Japanese, but it had a style that felt different, and the initial rush of games only added to this. *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* arrived a few weeks after the console launched. A classic sideways scroller, it required the player to master the pixel-perfect double-jump. Not just to be able to do it, but to master it completely. There was no other way to win.

"Arthur, the character you play, fires lances horizontally, so is more than capable of taking care of business – business in this case being some nonsense about rescuing the kidnapped Guinevere. But lances, infinite though they are, won't get you through the game. Nor will all the armour and other collectibles hanging around. No, jumping accurately will. Reacting instantly to spawning zombies (which I don't recall being part of the Camelot canon, frankly) and leaping perfectly is the only way to get through to your loved one. Or sister. I was never sure.

"So a great game. But an incredibly tricky one which, if you finished, sent you back to do it all again. Apparently. To my eternal shame I never beat the last level."

James Leach, games journalist
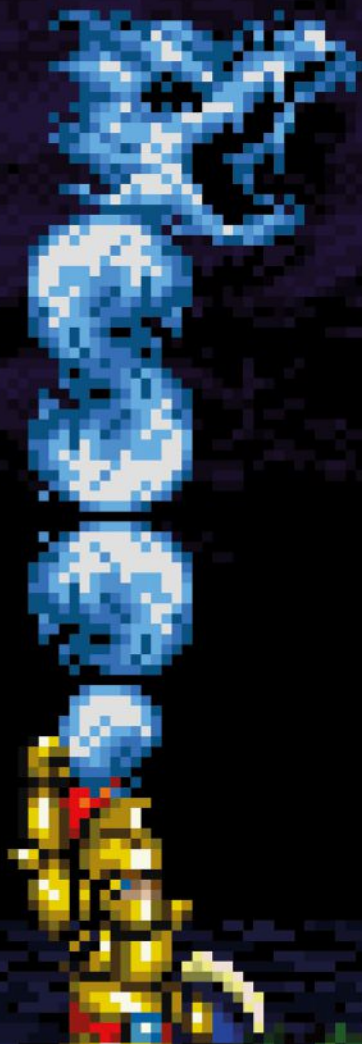
First released
1991

Genre
Action platformer

**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom

Super Tennis

"Since the advent of *Pong*, it was ubiquitous that a tennis game would accompany or quickly follow the launch of yesteryear's console systems. The SNES was no exception, with *Super Tennis* serving up a compelling simulation that holds up to this day.

"The game offers one- and two-player modes in one-match Singles and Doubles play, and a Circuit campaign comprised of eight events including the four major Grand Slam tournaments. A large roster of challenging fictitious computer opponents with various playing styles, and three court surfaces (hard, grass, and clay) provide depth and replay value. Furthermore, a big match ambience is realised by stadium settings filled with enthusiastic fans, remarkably realistic sound effects, and utilisation of the SNES' Mode 7 graphics to present a pseudo-3D view of the court.

"At its heart, the gameplay captures the actual feel and challenge of playing tennis. The weight of each shot is satisfying, and the robust and responsive control set allows for tactical play at a quick pace. Sharp reflexes and footwork are a must, to first get into position to hit the ball, followed by skilfully selecting, aiming and timing a stroke near-simultaneously. With practice comes great reward in a well-placed service ace, or working an opponent in a long, gripping rally, setting them up for a blistering cross-court pass!

"Game, set and match, *Super Tennis!*"

Perry Rodgers, game producer and journalist

First released
1991

—

Genre
Sports

—

Developer
Tokyo Shoseki

—

Publisher
Nintendo
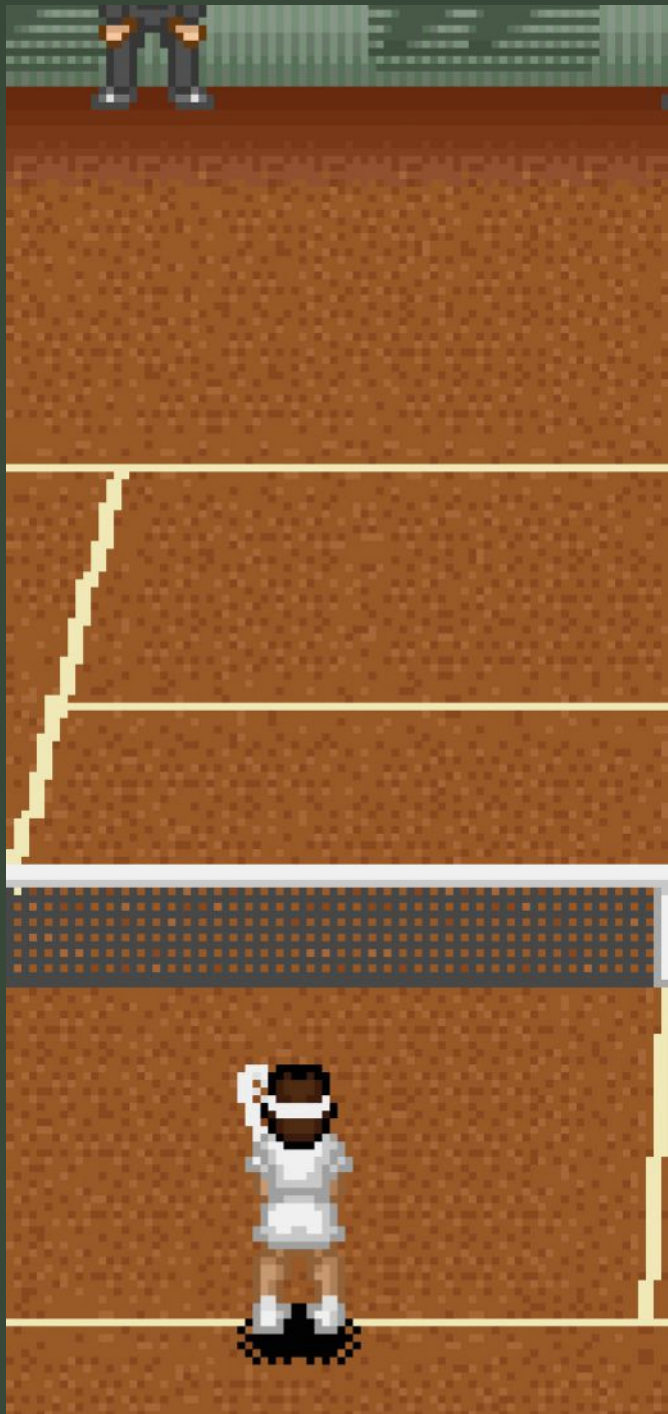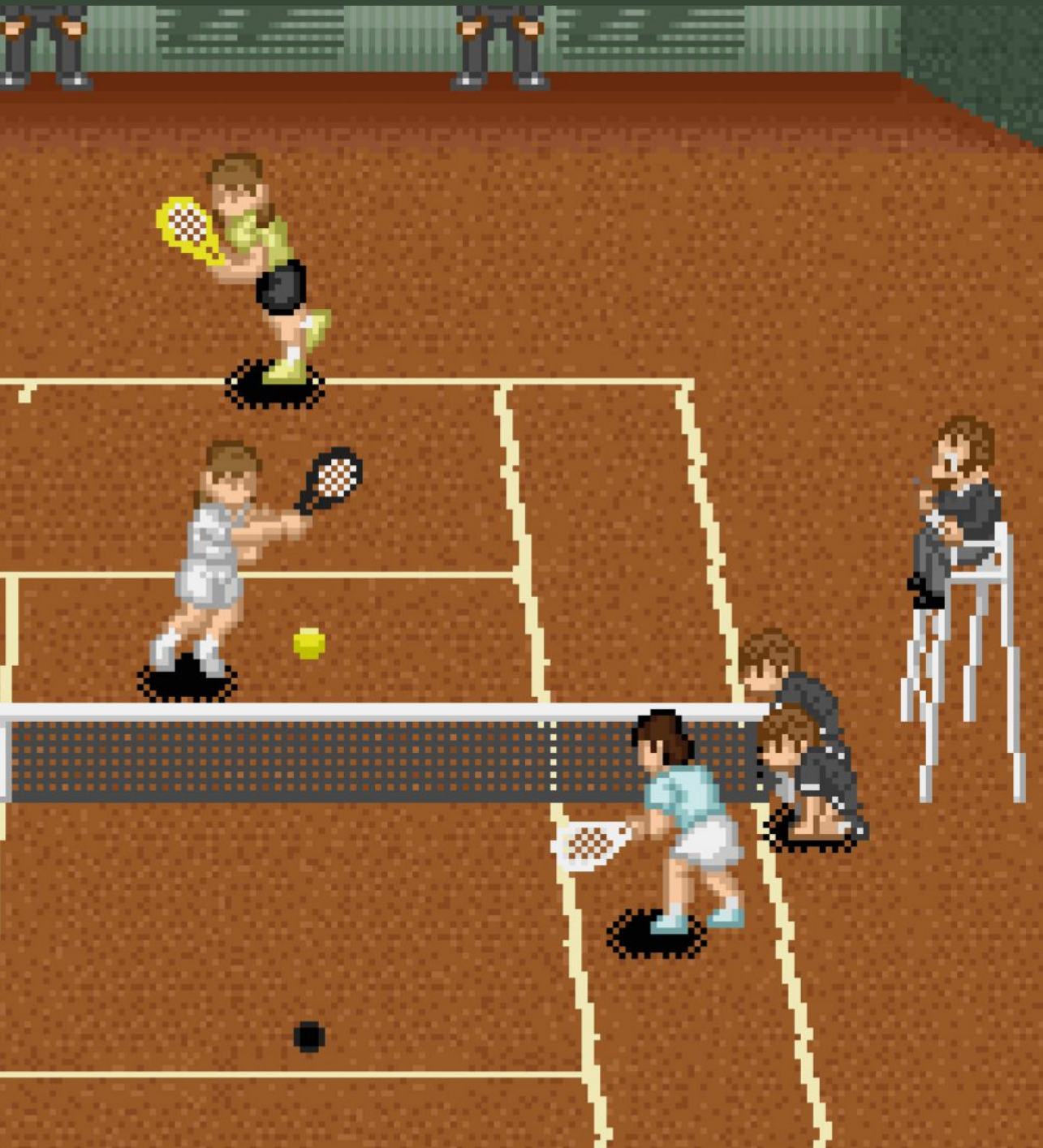
U.N. Squadron / Area 88

"While originating as a coin-op, many may not know that this shooter started life as an adaptation of the manga *Area 88*. What Capcom did with the conversion was to build upon the solid foundation of the arcade, add a lot of new ideas and features into the mix, and produce something that stands head and shoulders above many others of its kind.

"Part of this is down to the linear nature of the original game being partially thrown away; instead of always progressing directly from one level to the next, there's usually a choice about which stage to tackle as you advance towards the enemy base. And what levels! The elegant, and at times clever, designs married with some of the boss set-pieces (especially a strafing session over a battleship) induce a certain wow factor, shortly followed by thoughts of how on Earth to survive it all. Taking to the skies, weapons bristling, clouds and lightning bolts surrounding you, with an energetic soundtrack marrying it all as you blast through enemy attacks … it leaves a lasting impression.

"In summation, *U.N. Squadron* on the Super Nintendo is a tour de force of how to do a scrolling shooter."

Mat Allen, guest reviewer

First released
1991

Genre
Scrolling shooter

**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom

Ys III: Wanderers from Ys

"When I was joining Falcom I didn't know I was to be involved with *Ys III*. I was only told they were in the process of developing a side-scrolling action game – the Ys title hadn't been added yet. The project was simply referred to as 'that side-scrolling action game'. *Link's Adventure* on the NES inspired them to create the game. The main character wasn't important, so Adol was temporarily used, just for development. Later they decided, oh well, we'll just use this character, and to market the product the management decided to make it *Ys III*. They were originally thinking of coming up with *Ys III* separately.

"I was mainly responsible for creating the map for the story in *Ys III*, and also the graphics for enemies and boss monsters. Most of the story parts were undecided, so the designers came up with level layouts, which were later compiled into a story. In the maps there were some story parts already decided, so we designed it to accommodate those. For example I would be asked to shape the map to have an event happen at a specific point – I had the freedom to draw the map based on those story points – then when the map was finished someone would add events. Then we'd say we should extend the map, to give more emotion to it. Or we changed the map, or directed the scene so that when the stage starts, if the character moves a little a boss suddenly appears."

Kouji Yokota, graphic artist

Super Castlevania IV / Akumajō Dracula

"The original *Castlevania* is a great game, but I felt it was a bit too difficult and many players got frustrated. The changes in the 'stair behaviour' were to give more control to the players and reduce the frustration. The new whip system was to introduce some gameplay elements that had not been possible on the Famicom. We had freedom to make many changes, but we wanted to keep the game aligned with the original CV.

"The Super Famicom was definitely more powerful than the Famicom, especially in graphics and sound, but the CPU was a bit more difficult to work with as it's more like a slightly faster 8-bit CPU with integrated bank registers. Unlike modern consoles, we had access to all the hardware registers and we had to figure out how to use those effectively, which I really enjoyed. But it took us some time and experiments to find the right ways to use various tricks during actual gameplay.

"Because the team was small, everybody was involved in the design. Some ideas came from creative artists and others were from programmers' experiments. The whip feature was really a big part of the game and it was experimented with and implemented by [player programmer] Yaipon. We drew maps on paper but I think we changed a lot as we iterated the game."

Masahiro Ueno, director

First released
1991
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer
and publisher
Konami

Super Castlevania IV / Akumajō Dracula

"I think it was in my teens that I started to enjoy listening to music more than anything else. I would divide music into what I loved and what I disliked, more on the basis of whether or not it had phrases and harmonies I liked, even within a part of a song, rather than on the basis of genre.

"At the time of *Super Castlevania IV*, I was working on techno and ambient music, together with the people who ran a techno event called Voice Project. I think that turned out to be very influential. Unfortunately, at the time the reception to the soundtrack had been extremely negative. The same was true during production. Back then we would do internal evaluations, where people would clearly express whether they thought something was good or bad. I was grateful that the people who were in charge of making decisions let me keep creating whatever I wanted to the very end.

"After the game's release, the soundtrack went completely ignored by fans who had loved the series' music up to that point. I lost a lot of my self-confidence, but afterwards I received an award from a magazine called *Edge*, so I felt that it paid off in the end. As for Simon's Theme, I had no idea that the track would become so iconic."

Masanori Adachi, composer

ROOKS

HP 150
MP 30
LV 1

TEEFA

HP 120
MP 35
LV 1

Money   500G

Welcome.
What would you like?
▶ Buy   Healing

Arcana / Card Master:
Rimsalia no Fuuin

"Known in Japan as *Card Master: Rimsalia no Fuuin*, this first-person, turn-based RPG followed closely in the footsteps of FTL's *Dungeon Master* and SEGA's *Shining in the Darkness*, and was predictably compared to both. Developed by HAL Laboratory – famous for its cute and cuddly Kirby series – *Arcana* placed you in the boots of Rooks, the titular Card Master, whose aim is to overthrow the sinister magician Galneon.

"Like *Shining in the Darkness*, towns serve as hubs where you can converse with locals, recuperate, purchase items and upgrade your weapons and gear. The various 'dungeons' are a little more creative however; some take place above ground in forests and canyons, while enemies are displayed as cards – a thematic device in keeping with the game's story. Visually, *Arcana* boasts some gorgeous 2D artwork, and the soundtrack by Jun Ishikawa and Hirokazu Ando is utterly gorgeous, especially the stirring main battle theme.

"*Arcana* never seemed to get the recognition it deserved at the time of release – its similarity to SEGA's first Shining title was perhaps to blame, with many writing it off as nothing more than a shameless clone – but it's definitely worthy of reassessment today."

Damien McFerran, games journalist

First released
1992

—

Genre
RPG

—

**Developer
and publisher**
HAL Laboratory

Super Smash T.V.

"*Super Smash T.V.* is one of those rare games that seems to put a smile on every retro gamer's face! The crazed combination of futuristic comedy and carnage is always fresh. The SNES version is so flawless, it's hard to believe that the game was originally an arcade title. Far from suffering the fate of so many 'shovelware' ports, the passion and sweat of programmer Jamie Rivett and his team made it the definitive port for millions of console players.

"Another amazing team member, John Tobias, worked pixel by pixel on Mutoid Man, Evil M.C. and all the other crazed villains. More than just drawing 2D images, John created fully animated sprites, 3D rotated, pixel-by-pixel in his mind to create all the views required by the isometric 2.5D projection. The result was the incredibly immersive futuristic game show world of Smash T.V.

"Another artist on the *Smash T.V.* project was Lynn Young. At end of the arcade development in 1990, Lynn proposed a game about growing plants! We all thought it was the dumbest idea ever – like watching paint dry. Little did we know that we'd just killed FarmVille 20 years ahead of its time!"

Eugene Jarvis, game designer

First released
1992
—

Genre
Action
—

Developer
Williams
—

Publisher
Acclaim
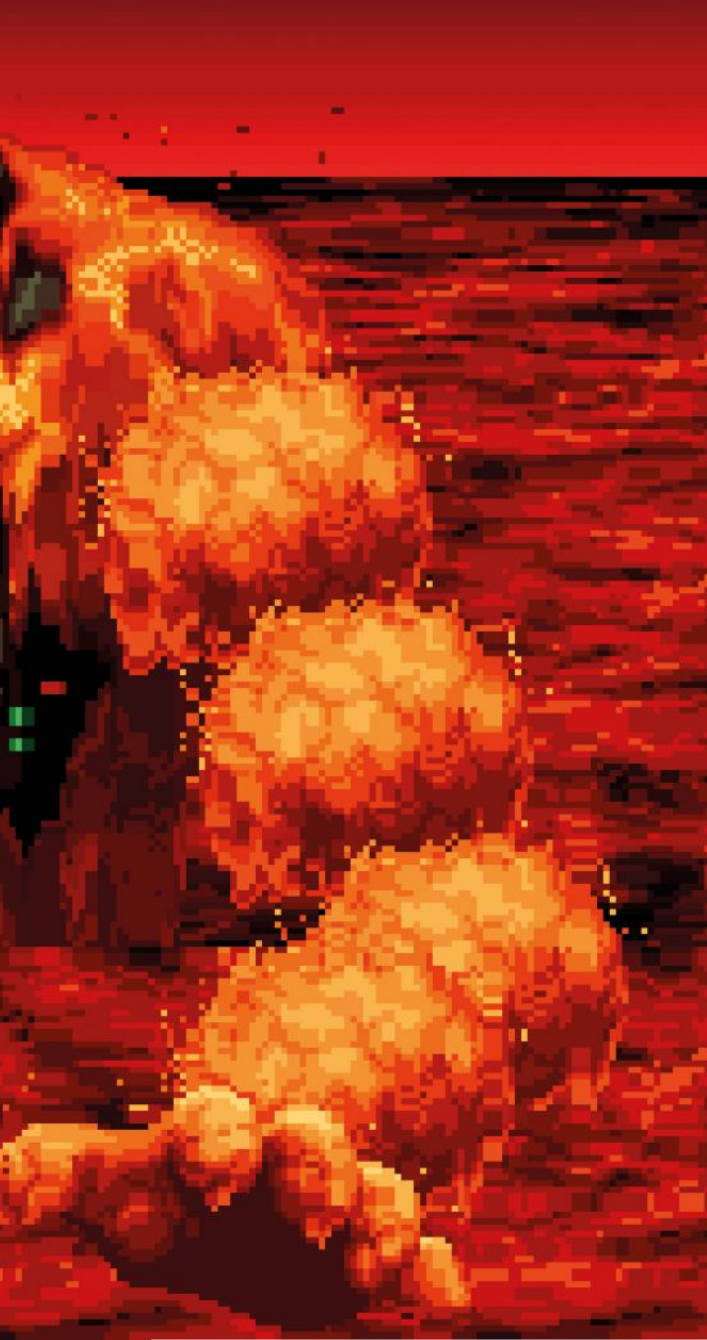
Axelay

"If there was one genre that seemed particularly underserved on the SNES (especially in comparison to the other platforms of the time), it had to be the shoot 'em up. Perhaps due to the console's relatively slow processor (which made it difficult to render many objects on screen at a time, a staple of the genre), the SNES' library was woefully lacking in this regard. Thankfully, it made up for this by having one complete gem of a shooter, arguably the 16-bit era's best.

"*Axelay* was a real showcase for the SNES at the time, with ample use of Mode 7 effects. While the game mixed things up with both horizontal and vertical scrolling levels, it was the latter that *Axelay* is remembered for. Utilising a unique visual effect, scrolling backgrounds gave the illusion of flying over surfaces with curvature and depth. The effect has admittedly lost some of its appeal today, but at the time the game was a real stunner.

"Its gameplay, however, completely stands the test of time, with a fantastic armament system encouraging the strategic use of each weapon. *Axelay* is also fondly remembered for its brilliant soundtrack by Taro Kudo, well known for his equally fantastic work on *Castlevania IV*.

"The biggest disappointment about *Axelay* had nothing to do with the game itself, but rather the tease for an *Axelay 2* when beaten on Hard – a sequel that sadly never came to bear."

Sam Kennedy, games journalist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

BlaZeon: The Bio-Cyborg Challenge

At first glance you might think you'd stumbled upon the love child of *R-Type* and *Gradius*, as *BlaZeon* borrows heavily from both – indeed, it's actually quite shameless in its appropriation of Irem's classic in terms of level design and Gigeresque graphics. There is some invention within its meagre five levels, but largely there's nothing here that enhances or expands the genre.

Its only real claim to innovation is in the capture of enemy Bio-Cyborgs. These are made immobile by your missiles, and when you collide with them your puny ship disappears and you continue the battle in control of the alien hardware. But even this feels scripted, with each craft designed to cope with upcoming hazards – and should you lose them in battle, reverting back to your pea-shooter vessel, the rest of the stage feels nigh-on impossible.

BlaZeon definitely has potential, but with huge, 45-second-long chunks of game where there's literally nothing happening (bar the scrolling backdrop), interminably long boss battles, and the traditional rollercoaster difficulty curve, it simply has too many flaws to be enjoyable. As such, Atlus's effort is of interest only to hardcore shoot 'em up fans or SNES gamers desperate to add another notch to their 'played' tally.

First released
1992
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
Developer
A.I
—
Publisher
Atlus
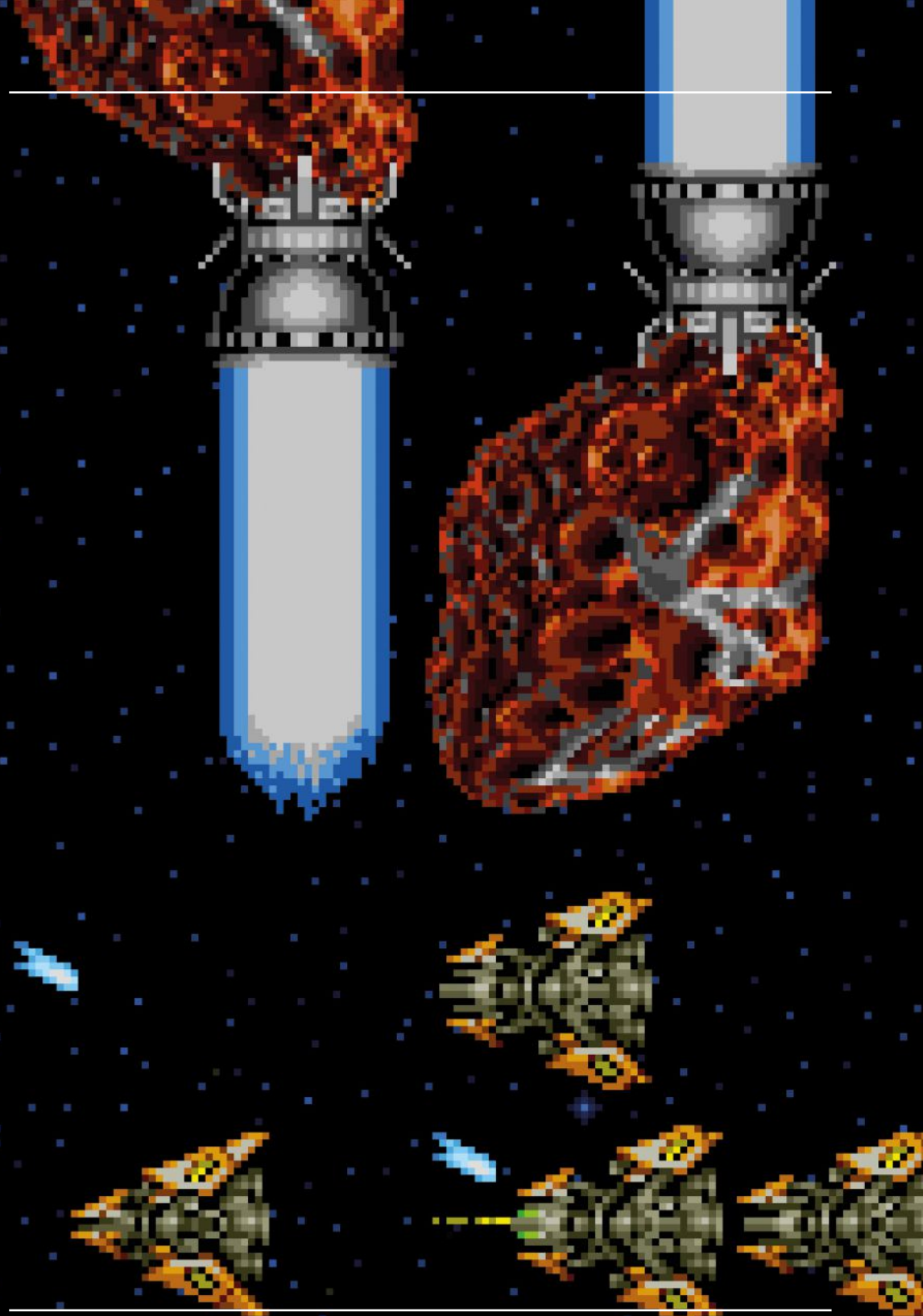
Contra III: The Alien Wars / Contra Spirits

"The late 1980s and early 1990s were a golden age of sci-fi action films, and the Contra series clearly capitalised on that trend. The scenes that you run, gun, future-cycle and missile-hitchhike through in *Contra III* are almost all nods to the blockbusters of the era. While *Rambo*, *Predator* and *Alien* are the Contra series' main influences, *Contra III* also added a timely *Terminator*-inspired skeleton robot battle, and even a weird Rocketeer-like jetpacker to the mix.

"*Contra III*'s finest moments are the massive, pulsing, 16-bit aliens that soak up your bullets while shrieking over the heavy metal soundtrack. It's a gross-out game that revels in biologically twisted exoskeletons, egg sacs and ooze, and all in the glorious pastel shades of the SNES' 256 simultaneously displayed colours. H.R. Giger, the artist behind the Alien series, should probably have collected a royalty check for all of his designs that made it into pixel form in *Contra III*.

"Gameplay-wise, *Contra III* simply added more guns, and (in the US) removed the life-giving Konami code of its predecessor. Luckily, co-op made C*ontra III* possible and, like any good summer blockbuster, it's much more fun to bring a friend."

Samuel Claiborn, games journalist

First released
1992
—

Genre
Run and gun
—

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

David Crane's Amazing Tennis

One of the original founders of Activision, David Crane was well known for classic titles such as *Pitfall!*, *Ghostbusters*, *Little Computer People* and *A Boy And His Blob* – hence his name gracing this ambitious sports sim. Released for SNES and SEGA Genesis it features the key innovation of providing the player with a realistic 3D view of the court, while employing a huge main character sprite.

However, while this perspective is remarkable for a game released in 1992, in play it's less effective than more traditional setups – like the sublime *Super Tennis*, for example. With a reliance on split-second timing, simply serving the ball is tricky enough, but moving your character to receive the ball and then directing it as you'd like proves to be entirely (and ironically) hit and miss.

Things become even worse when you change ends and have to play from the opposing side of the court, where your character is far smaller, and your view of the action much reduced. Predicting the ball's trajectory and timing your shots proves incredibly frustrating. So while the developer is to be commended for trying something different, the novel 3D perspective comes at the price of playability – which is sadly lacking here.
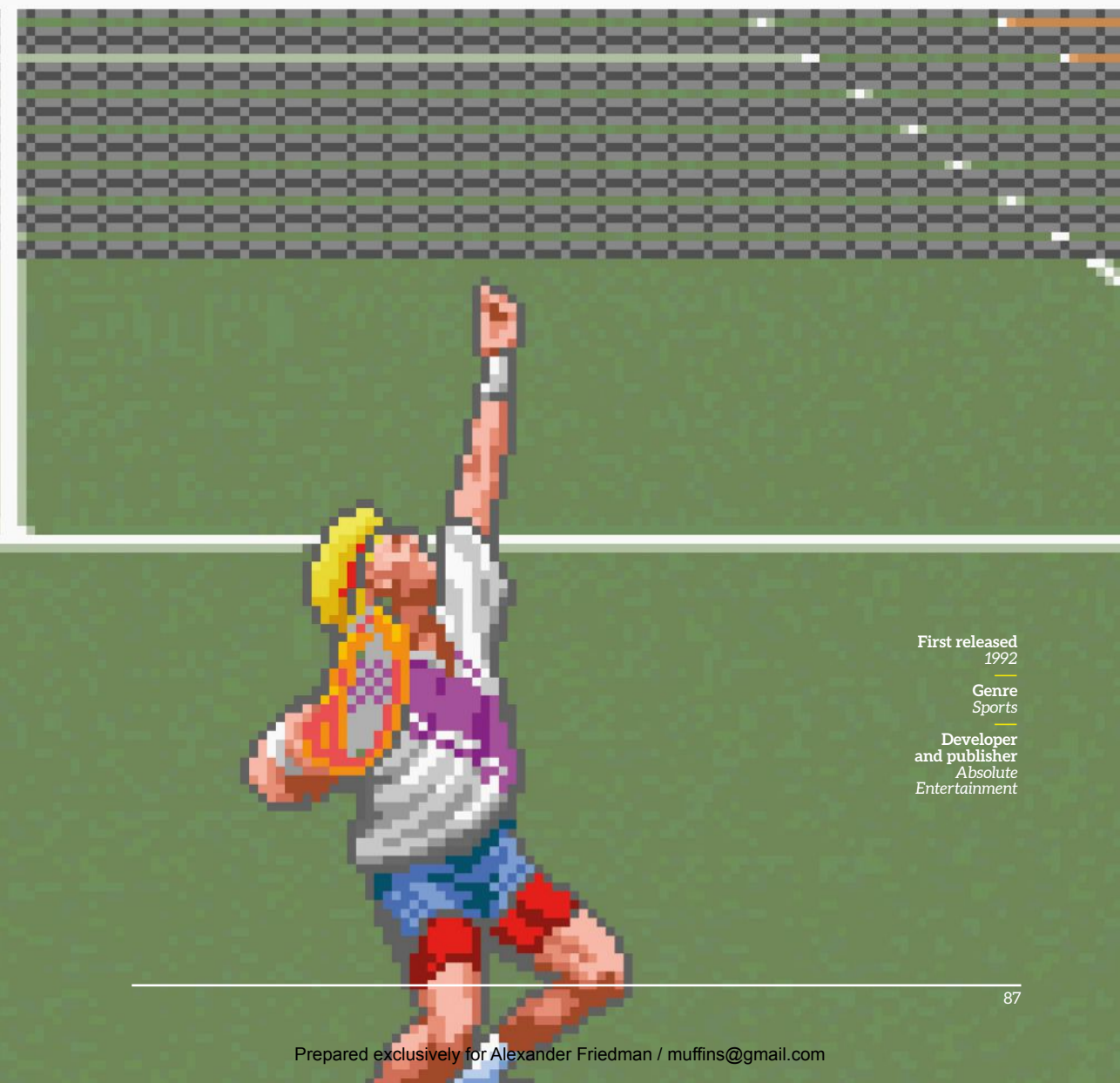
First released
1992

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
*Absolute
Entertainment*

Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf

"Inspired by the events of the First Gulf War, Electronic Arts' *Desert Strike* puts the player in the pilot's seat of an AH-64 Apache helicopter gunship and dispatches them to the Middle East in order to single-handedly take on a rogue Gulf state.

"The action plays out over a series of challenging missions, with the gunship viewed from a third-person, isometric 3D viewpoint. This helps give the player a commanding view of the multi-directionally scrolling battlefield as they fly low over enemy terrain, destroying personnel, vehicles, buildings and emplacements with the Apache's arsenal of machine guns and missiles.

"What makes *Desert Strike* particularly entertaining to play is that while it's ostensibly a fast-action shoot 'em up, it's underpinned by elements of strategy. Each mission has multiple objectives, and the Apache has limited fuel, so sorties into enemy territory have to be efficiently planned and executed. This helps make the gameplay tense and gripping as the player attempts to hit mission targets while also taking out the enemy's network of defensive anti-aircraft hardware.

"With its high quality graphics and finely tuned gameplay, *Desert Strike* is an absolutely cracking game that proved a huge hit with players and critics alike. It was Electronic Arts' biggest-selling game of the period, and went on to spawn no fewer than four sequels."

Julian Rignall, games journalist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Shoot 'em up
—
Developer and publisher
Electronic Arts

89

First released
1992
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer
and publisher
Irem

DinoCity / Dinowars Kyōryū Ōkoku e no Daibōken

"It was a weird one, *DinoCity*. With its cheery cartoon characters and jolly music it had the air of something you'd give to your four-year-old niece to keep her quiet. But she'd swiftly have been reduced to tears: this was a brutally – sometimes even preposterously – difficult platformer, every bit as challenging as its Irem stablemate *R-Type*.

"The mechanic was very much Mario/Yoshi, with a choice of two prehistoric steeds and the occasional need for rider and dinosaur to separate to tackle mini-puzzles. But these needed to be solved fast, with the screen scrolling relentlessly and every platform seeming to crumble beneath your early-'90s sneakers, not to mention the continual onslaught of angry cavemen, eagles and porcupines. Oh, and the spurious time limit. Grr.

"Unlike so many movie tie-ins passing through the Super Play office back then, *DinoCity* felt lovingly crafted and thoroughly 'SNES', from the eye-catching attract sequence to the smashing mid-level sunset effect. Each brief level was filled with intriguing twists: one minute you were leaping between speeding rollercoasters, the next fleeing a prehistoric giant determined to wall you in alive. So it was worth persevering with, albeit through the occasional choked-back tear."

Jonathan Davies, games journalist
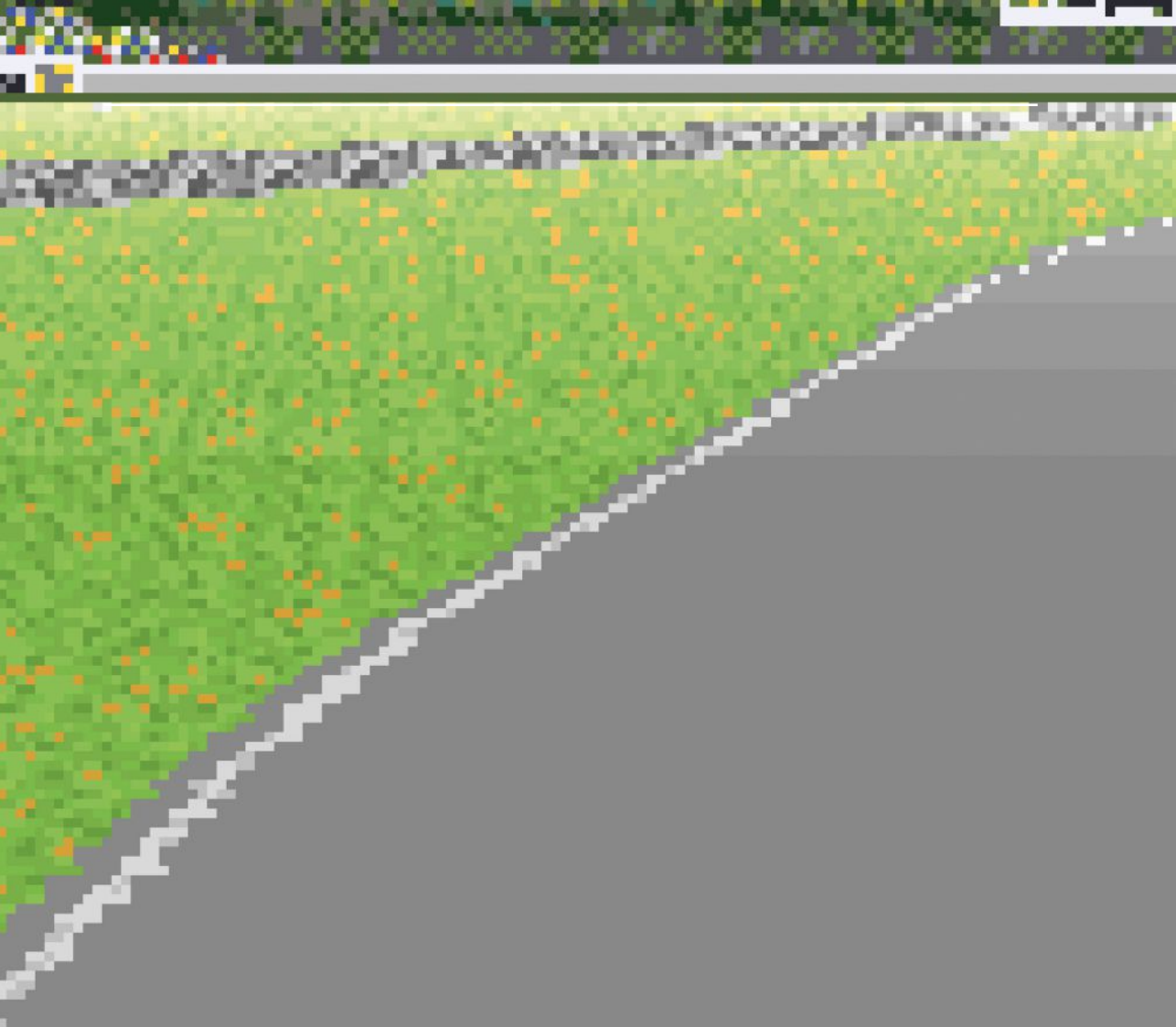
First released
1992

Genre
Racing

**Developer
and publisher**
Seta Corporation
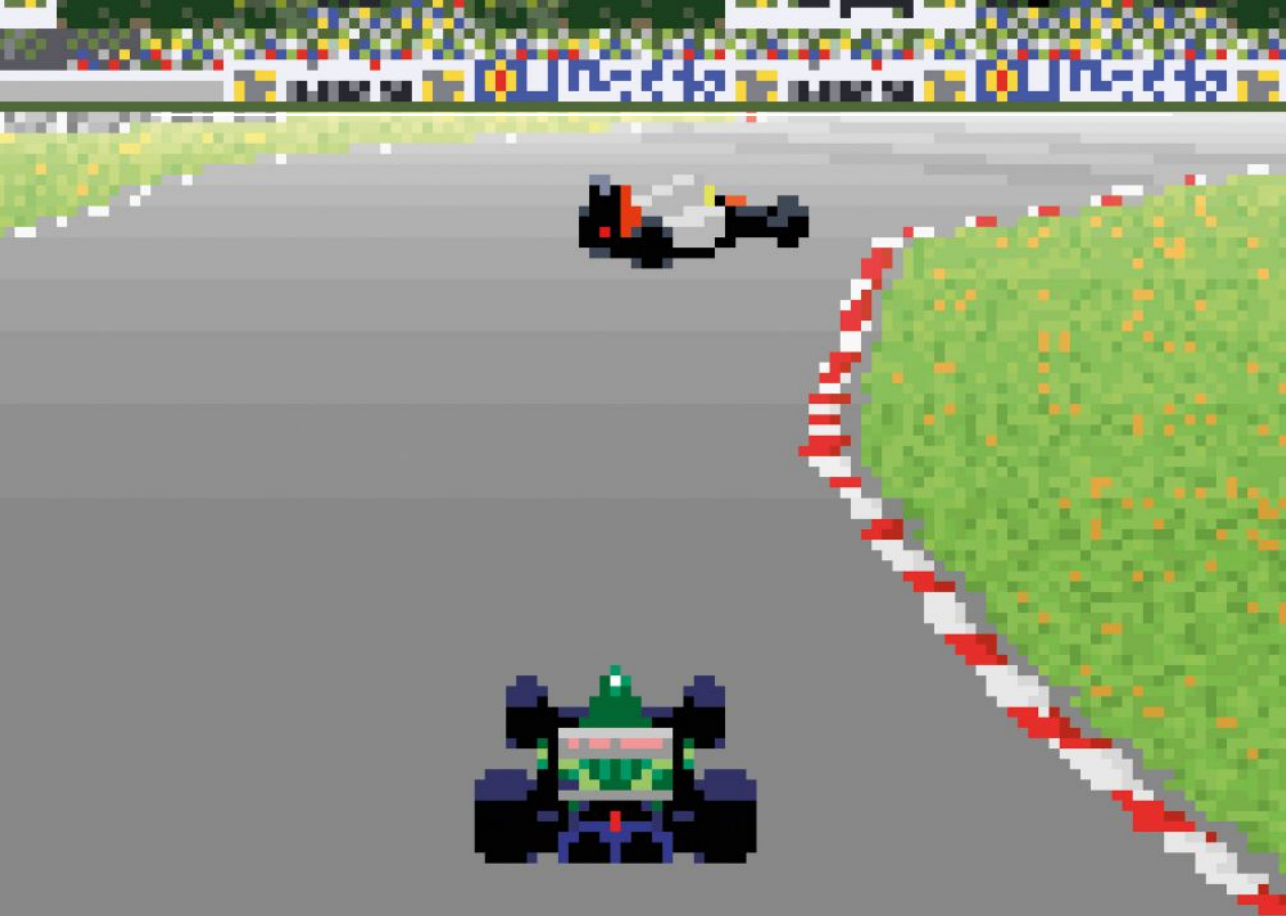
F1 ROC: Race of Champions / Exhaust Heat

"Initial impressions of Seat Corporation's 1992 *Exhaust Heat* – renamed *F1 ROC: Race of Champions* for its US release – aren't especially favourable. Its 16 Formula One-inspired tracks are displayed using the Mode 7 graphics option, and while they move and rotate very smoothly, they don't have any trackside objects or landscape features, making them feel barren and empty.

"However, look beyond the stark visuals and you'll find a fast-paced racing game with a surprising amount of depth and detail. Players begin a competitive season driving a basic F1 car, which they can improve over time by earning cash from winning races. There's a comprehensive list of tuning options available, from new engines and transmissions to wings and diffusers, and the more the player progresses, the faster and more efficient their car becomes. Assuming, of course, that they're investing their money in performance parts, and not spending their winnings on fixing accident damage caused by colliding with fellow competitors while racing.

"With a fully upgraded car, *Exhaust Heat* is fast, exciting, and highly challenging. Most players tend to remember the likes of *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart* when recalling the best SNES racing games, but don't discount *Exhaust Heat*; it's an overlooked classic that's still a lot of fun to play."

Julian Rignall, games journalist

Final Fantasy Mystic Quest

"*Mystic Quest* was developed by Square's Osaka team, which had done Game Boy titles previously. So it was sort of hard to hit your first console RPG out of the ballpark!

"I think back in the 1990s, Japanese software companies were frustrated they weren't seeing acceptable sales volumes for key franchises in the world's largest potential market for games, the US. Europe was, of course, a consideration as well, and the thought was, 'Nail the USA, and localise for Europe to find success there afterwards'.

"At the time, anime wasn't as well adopted or popular as it is today. It was thought the look and feel of Japanese games, combined with the fact that users didn't have a dozen or so great RPG franchises to train on when growing up, meant US gamers weren't meeting with satisfying story, character or visual elements. That was the hypothesis. To fix this, it was suggested that something more along the lines of US comics, including scatological humour and other familiar references and art, would resonate better with US customers. Hence Mystic Quest.

"Unfortunately, the game that was created and shipped paled in comparison with *Final Fantasy IV*, partly due to the fact that the development team was smaller and didn't have the resources and training or the experience that the Final Fantasy teams did."

Ted Woolsey, translator

Hook

"Games based on tent-pole Hollywood movies were often shunned in the '90s, and with very good reason – they were usually exploitative cash-grabs which used the name to sell copies and rarely offered any genuine entertainment to the player. 1992's *Hook* is a rare exception.

"Based on the Spielberg-directed Robin Williams vehicle, which portrayed a grown-up Peter Pan, the game was developed by fledgling Japanese studio Ukiyotei, founded by former Capcom employee Kenshi Naruse. Wisely using the film as a rough template rather than a strict guide, Ukiyotei adopted an anime-like visual style in order to convincingly render the world of Neverland; Pan's flying abilities were also superbly showcased, and the developer would later build on this foundation with its next major release, 1994's *Skyblazer* (released in Japan as *Karuraou*).

"The SNES version of *Hook* was duly ported to the Mega Drive/Genesis and Mega CD by UK-based Core Design, while a totally unconnected adaptation exists for the NES and Game Boy, developed by Ocean Software. While Ukiyotei's *Hook* will never be considered a solid-gold classic in the SNES library, it remains a playable and visually alluring take on a movie which, like the game, is ripe for critical reappraisal."

Damien McFerran, games journalist

First released
1992
—

Genre
Action platformer
—

Developer
Ukiyotei Company
—

Publisher
Sony Imagesoft

King Arthur's World /
Royal Conquest

"I was one of several artists who worked on *King Arthur's World*, mainly drawing some of the distant backgrounds and helping put the levels together. Sadly, some of my work never made it into the final game, because the cartridge was reduced from 8MB to 4MB to save costs. The biggest casualty was a Mode 7 perspective map, which showed your progress through the game world. I was very disappointed to see it cut as it took a lot of work and looked great.

"The graphics were originally drawn on PC using *Deluxe Paint* and imported into a custom tile editor. After being turned into 8×8-pixel tiles and arranged into levels, the maps were downloaded directly to the SNES using custom hardware. We found the crisp PC graphics turned rather blurry on a TV screen, with red in particular tending to bleed over into adjacent pixels, so we had to be careful in our use of colour and shading.

"We had to make some adjustments due to the very strict Nintendo content guidelines, as they objected to our use of red blood splats to indicate damage, so we changed them to yellow dust clouds instead. *King Arthur's World* was also the first game to use Dolby Surround Sound, which was a major technical achievement."

Stephen Robertson, graphic artist

First released
1992

Genre
Strategy

Developer
Argonaut Software

Publisher
Jaleco

Prepared exclusively for Alexander Friedman / muffins@gmail.com
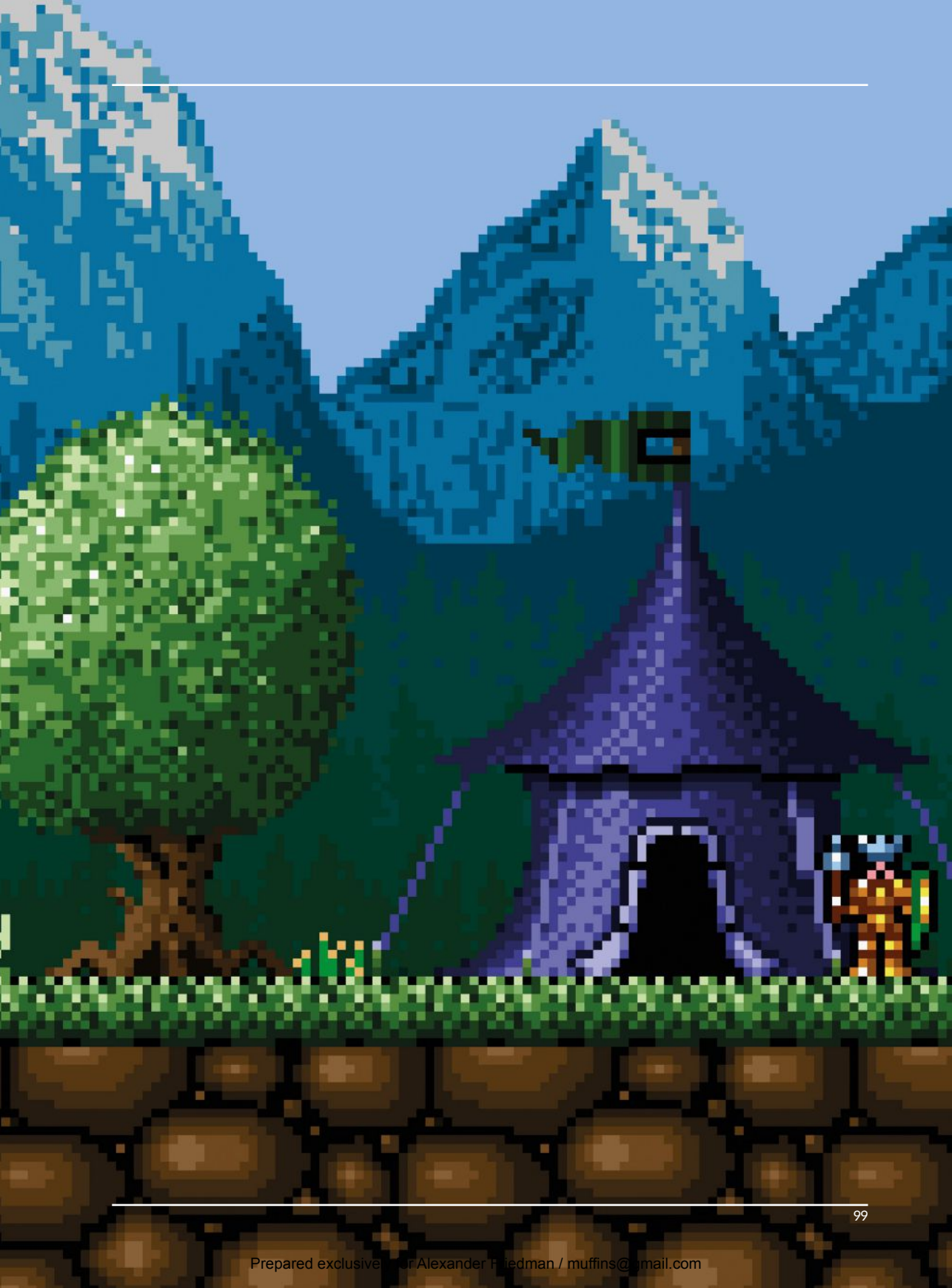
Jaki Crush

This third entry in the Crush pinball series – following *Alien Crush* and *Devil's Crush* on the PC Engine – is based around a Japanese demon called a 'jaki'. The pinball table is three screens tall, with bumpers, multiple flippers and roaming creatures that help or (more often) hinder the progress of your pinball. The aim of the game is to reach the top of the table, where six hidden areas lie in wait. Destroy the various demons and a portal appears, providing access to a series of single-screen mini-tables with shoot 'em up overtones.

As pinball games go, *Jaki Crush* is up there with the best of them (although some prefer its PC Engine predecessors). There's a load of gameplay here for those willing to stick with it, but the main problem is that it's still pinball, with both the thrills and random frustration that come with it. Pinball fans should enjoy mastering the various hazards and mini-games, but everyone else will just wonder why the flippers couldn't be longer as their last ball unceremoniously plops off screen.

The fourth and final Crush game in the series was *Alien Crush Returns*, released in 2008 by Tamsoft and available only as a WiiWare download.

First released
1992
—
Genre
Simulation
—
Developer
NAXAT Soft
—
Publisher
NEC

100

First released
1992

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Data East

Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja / Joe & Mac: Tatakae Genshijin

"Arcades saw a resurgence in the early 1990s thanks to *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, and, like those games, the briefly popular *Joe & Mac* had a home release hot on the heels of its arcade debut. Data East's home version was graphically very similar to the arcade game, which was no small feat at the time. Giant boss fights with a googly-eyed T-rex, an oversized piranha plant and a really annoying pterodactyl were both easy on the eyes and proof that you could actually save money in 1991 by bypassing the coin-munching arcade machine and playing *Joe & Mac* at home.

"*Joe & Mac* is also a co-op game meaning that, unlike, say, *Super Mario World*, you don't have to wish misfortune on your friend in order to get a chance to play. Two Caveman Ninjas on screen is as chaotic as it gets, with mad rushes for good weapons and a perilously scrolling screen.

"Like other brawlers of its time, *Joe & Mac* relied heavily on its flashy graphics (for 1992) – although the joys of discovering each new boss along with its comedically-animated death throes might well be lost on modern players. Joe & Mac were heroes in their own time, however, and that, of course, was the historical period in which ninjas and dinosaurs coexisted."

Samuel Claiborn, games journalist

"We really wanted to see how far we could push the Super Famicom to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world."

Yoshio Sakamoto, Super Metroid director

John Madden Football '93 / Pro Football '93

"The original had never intended to include either John Madden or real NFL teams – it was strictly meant to be a fun arcade football game. It was my job to create the teams and the player ratings, and test that these ratings were accurately reflected in the gameplay. I felt my job would be a lot easier if I created the teams and ratings based on real NFL teams, so I could keep better track of who was supposed to be fast, who was an accurate passer, who had great hands for pulling in passes, etc. This meant literally going in and rating each player on each team on different physical attributes like speed and agility. We also added uniform numbers under the player control icons so we could tell which player the avatar was meant to represent. The time was well spent as, very quickly, all those involved in testing and tuning the game wanted their own favourite NFL teams represented in the game.

"We were so limited for cart memory space in those early days that the first version of the game only had 16 of the NFL teams represented! But the game was so successful in evoking the fantasy of playing with NFL teams and players, despite lacking either licence, that the NFL came to EA asking us to include them in our *Madden* football game."

Michael Brook, associate producer

First released
1992
—
Genre
Sports
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Electronic Arts

106

Krusty's Super Fun House / Krusty's World

"During the early '90s, the Simpsons marketing machine was running overtime. Video games starring Matt Groening's beloved family were a given, of course, but the real proof that The Simpsons had taken over pop culture came when B-tier denizens of Springfield began to get their own games. Behold *Krusty's Super Fun House*.

"Now, given the quality of Acclaim's previous Simpsons efforts and the 'why is Krusty getting his own game?' gut reaction you're probably having, *Super Fun House* is a surprisingly entertaining little jaunt. This is likely because *Krusty's Super Fun House* began its life as an Amiga game called *Rat Trap*. A quick rights purchase and licensed reskin, and Acclaim had another Simpsons title ready to go.

"Another factor in Krusty's favour is that it's not yet another platformer, but an action puzzle game that takes more than a few cues from DMA Designs' classic Lemmings series. Krusty's titular fun house has become infested with rats that have the fortunate tendency of marching blindly forward. This allows Krusty to use blocks, tubes and springs to lead the rodents towards their grisly fate at the business end of the clown's cartoonishly violent rat traps."

Phil Theobald, games journalist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Puzzle
—
Developer
Audiogenic
—
Publisher
Acclaim

108
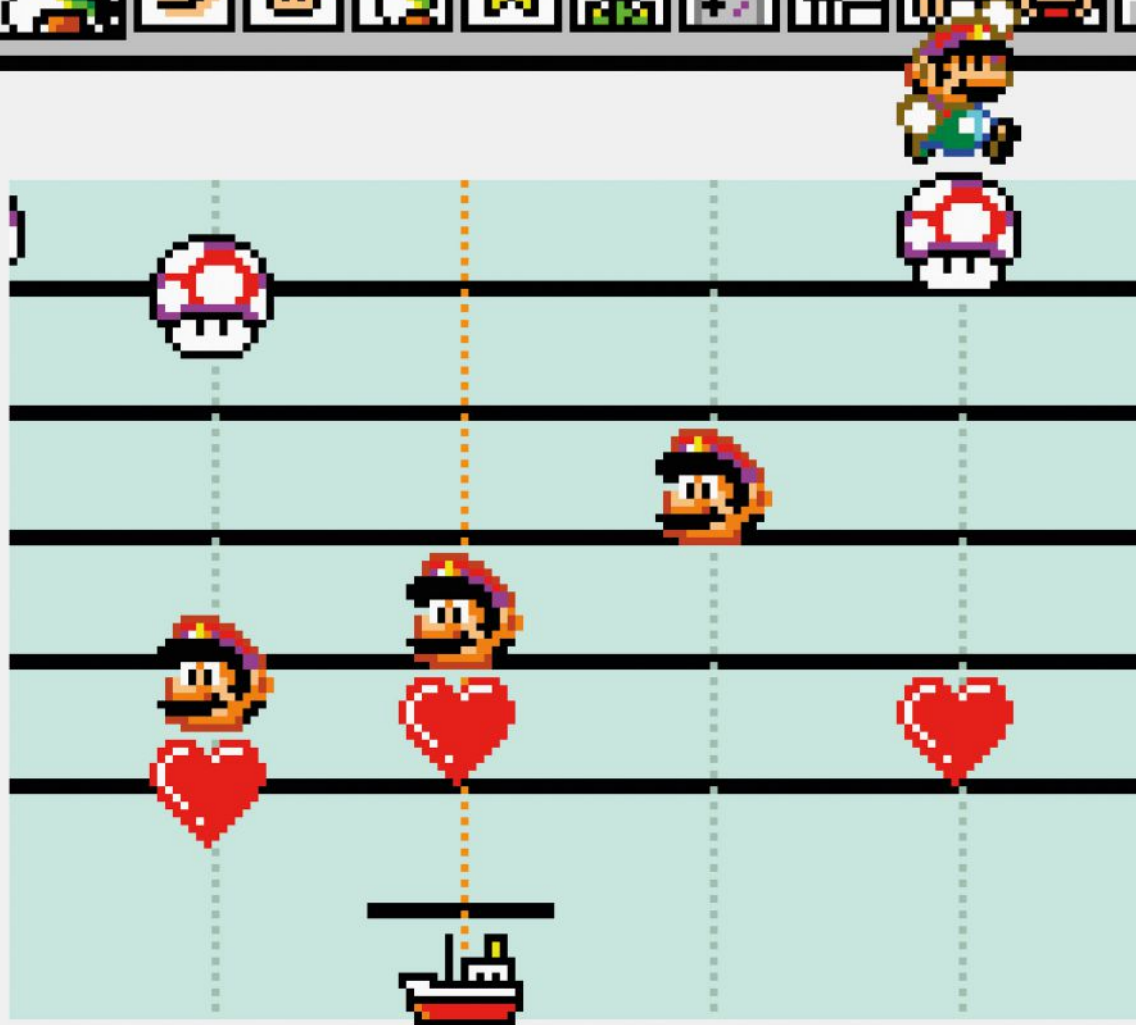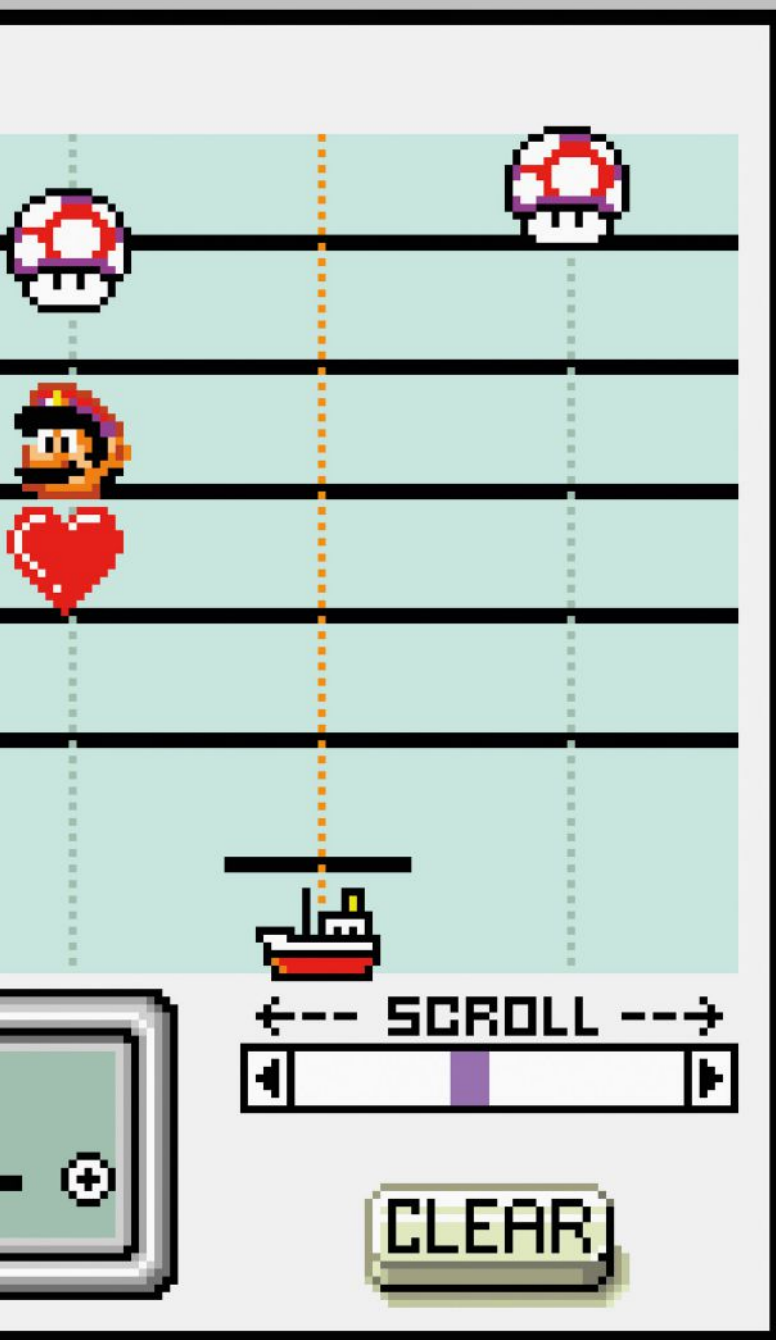
Mario Paint

"First let me say I am no artist. Yet some of my fondest memories of the SNES days are from playing *Mario Paint*. Or should I say 'experiencing' *Mario Paint*.

"There was no real game here *per se*, with the exception of the always-amusing fly-swatting mini game. Instead, players got to flex their creative muscles using the criminally underutilised mouse accessory. This was my introduction to a love of pixel art, more popular now than ever. It was my first experience dabbling with music creation (who can forget that baby sound effect?) and animation, even though my friends and I would create rather crude things. It was the way it all came together, from being able to click on the letters on the title screen to the creative ways to erase your drawings.

"*Mario Paint* was a symphony of crazy images, sounds and experiences. It was what you turned on when you were bored with other games, because the possibilities were, and still are, endless."

Anthony Micari, guest reviewer

First released
1992
—
Genre
Utility
—
Developer and publisher
Nintendo
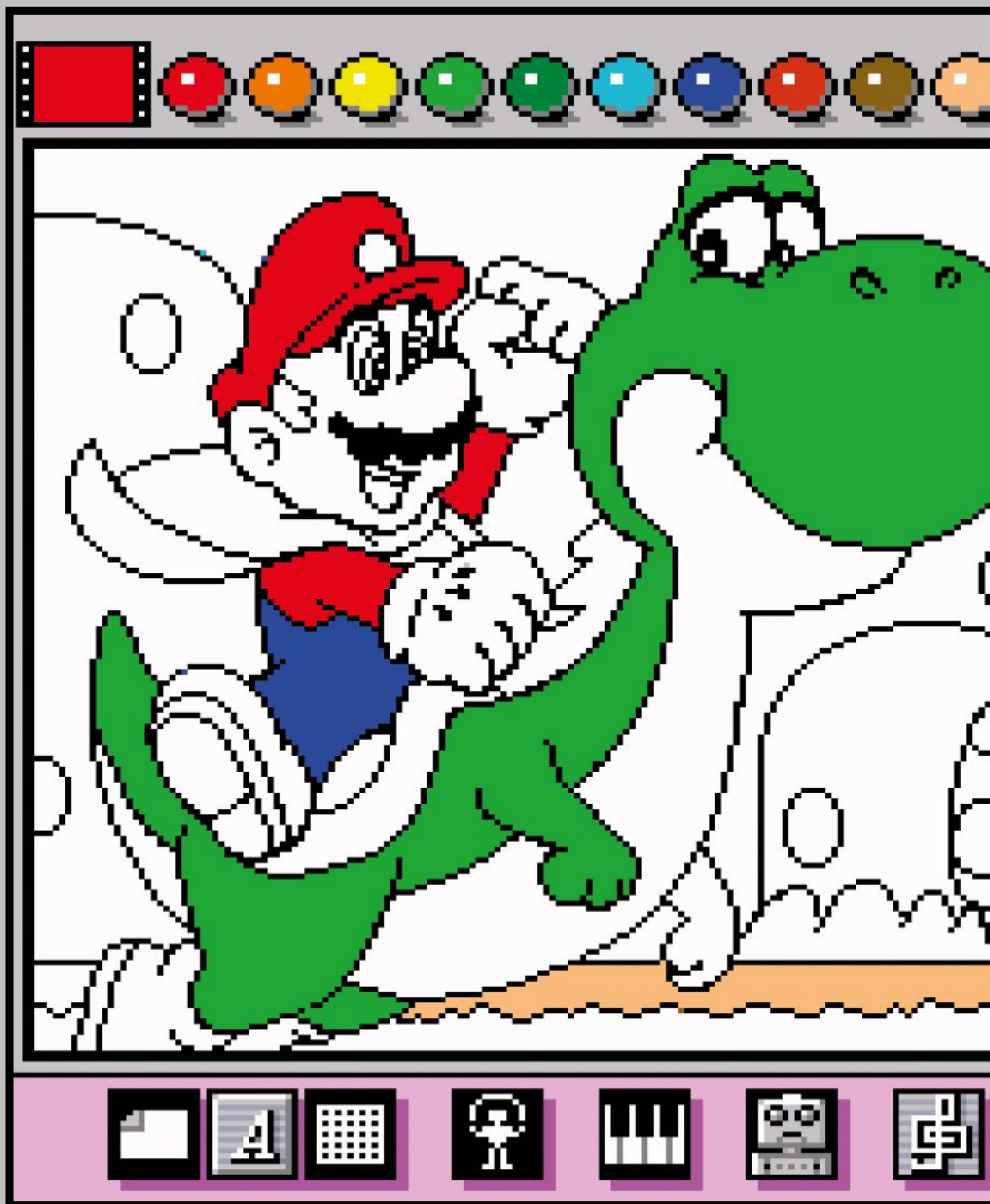
Mario Paint

"No other game on the Super Nintendo allows players to utilise their own creativity to the same degree as *Mario Paint*. The inclusion of the Super NES Mouse gave many console players their first experience of using a mouse, an input device often reserved for more expensive personal computers at the time.

"*Mario Paint* does have a mini-game called Gnat Attack, but its core is an artistic production suite that encourages players to unleash their imagination. Its Drawing Board provides a palette and tools for the creation of digitally painted imagery. Reusable stamps can also be designed, pixel by pixel. For the musically inclined, songs can be crafted by laying out a variety of notes and sounds in the music editor.

"One could spend hours producing painting after painting, and melody after melody, before ever touching the Animation Mode that brings their portfolio together. Animated scenes are designed by creating character movement, frame by frame, and then determining a path and speed at which it should travel. The finished animation can be placed in front of a player's own painted scene, and custom music added to finish the audio-visual spectacle.

"By the time an animation is complete, players are astounded by not just what the package can do, but also by what *they* can do. Decades later, people still use *Mario Paint* and their work can be found on YouTube and other websites. There is no doubt that some of today's artists have memories of learning the foundations of drawing, music composition and animation with *Mario Paint*."

Zack Scott, guest reviewer

Parodius / Parodiusu Da! Shinwa kara Owarai e

"I first experienced *Parodius* on the Super Famicom while working at *Electronic Gaming Monthly* magazine. Seeing pictures of it in *Weekly Famitsu* magazine, I knew I had to have this game. Luckily, a colleague was going to Japan and taking requests. When a box of games came back, *Parodius* was inside. That day, I fell in love with *Parodius* – my first 'cute 'em up'. I later learned the Super Famicom version was a port of the arcade game *Parodius Da!* Upon playing the arcade original, I was happy to see that the translation to the Super Famicom was nearly perfect, adding in one extra stage (Bath House) and Omake (continue) mode.

"*Parodius* is a shoot 'em up from Konami that pokes fun at the Gradius series. You can play as the famous Vic Viper ship from *Gradius*, but there are also three more characters to choose from: Octopus, Twin Bee (another Konami favourite), and Pentarou (the penguin). Each of the selectable ships plays differently, which enhances the replay value.

"Each stage is full of peculiar characters and even more outlandish bosses including a Cat Battleship, giant showgirl Chichibinta Rika, the giant 'Uncle Sam' Eagle Satake, and much more. From Easter Island Heads to the Big Core, it's all here, yet presented with a colourful and light-hearted vibe. The music is classical and wacky, which fits the game perfectly."

'Trickman' Terry Minnich, games journalist

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Prince of Persia

"Jordan Mechner's pioneering, puzzle-based platformer was originally released for the Apple II computer in 1989. But by the time it had migrated to the SNES (initially for the Japanese market in mid-'92 with memorable box art by Katsuya Terada), the port's Japanese developers, Arsys Software, thankfully had the vision to dramatically upgrade its graphics, music and overall design. Arguably, it still stands as the definitive version of the original 2D action game.

"Most notably, the flick-screen visuals were substantially enhanced with attractively detailed dungeon and palace mazes, a wider variety of enemies, new cutscene animations – and the fluidly rotoscoped Prince now adorned in suitably Arabian turban, vest and pants. The game was also effectively doubled in size, with seven more levels added (totalling 20), the timer extended from 60 to 120 minutes, and many of the puzzles and layouts extended or modified for a greater overall challenge. A five-level training mode was a useful inclusion too.

"Like many games from the 8-bit era, *Prince of Persia* was tough as nails – an often frustrating, occasionally cheap, but ultimately rewarding marriage of trial-and-error puzzle solving and precise joypad gymnastics. With its haunting soundtrack and so many extra flourishes, though, the SNES version remains the jewel in the crown for the princess-rescuing, trap-defying platform series."

Jason Brookes, games journalist

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Creating the SNES packaging

After successfully producing the iconic design style for the NES, Seattle-based brand agency Girvin was appointed to generate the Super NES brand identity. This identity system was then applied across various console packaging, peripherals and game boxes. This is a unique opportunity to hear about the process from lead designer Kevin Henderson and Nintendo of America marketing manager Don Coyner, and also see some never-before-seen concept designs from the Girvin archives…

Kevin Henderson

"In those days the way we usually approached new packaging design, especially for a big client like Nintendo, was that individual designers would each separately start sketching out concept ideas (really rough, Sharpie pen or pencil and markers on tracing paper). Then we'd meet up and share our ideas, and decide which ones to flesh out and comp up for the first client presentation. In those days we had just one computer in the office (aside from accounting and admin). It was used exclusively for production, and the monitor was black and white, so making up a design presentation meant that any 'photos' would be represented by marker drawings, colours would be created with Pantone colour papers hand cut and pasted in place, and for type it would be set by the typesetter or hand drawn so that camera-ready art could be supplied to the place that converted it into colour rubdowns. In the end, we'd have black presentation boards with the hand-assembled comps, looking somewhat realistic as if they had been printed. Of course today you'd just send the file to a colour printer or, more likely, make a PDF and share it on a screen.

"Funny though, I remember that the in-house designers at Nintendo in Japan had older versions of the software and we were restricted to sending them only saved-back versions of what we were sharing, so they could open the files. You'd think the Japanese would be first and furthest in everything. I sure think of them that way these days."

> 66 *The SNES was being launched at a time of intense competition and growing excitement for video games across the world.* 99
>
> *Don Coyner*

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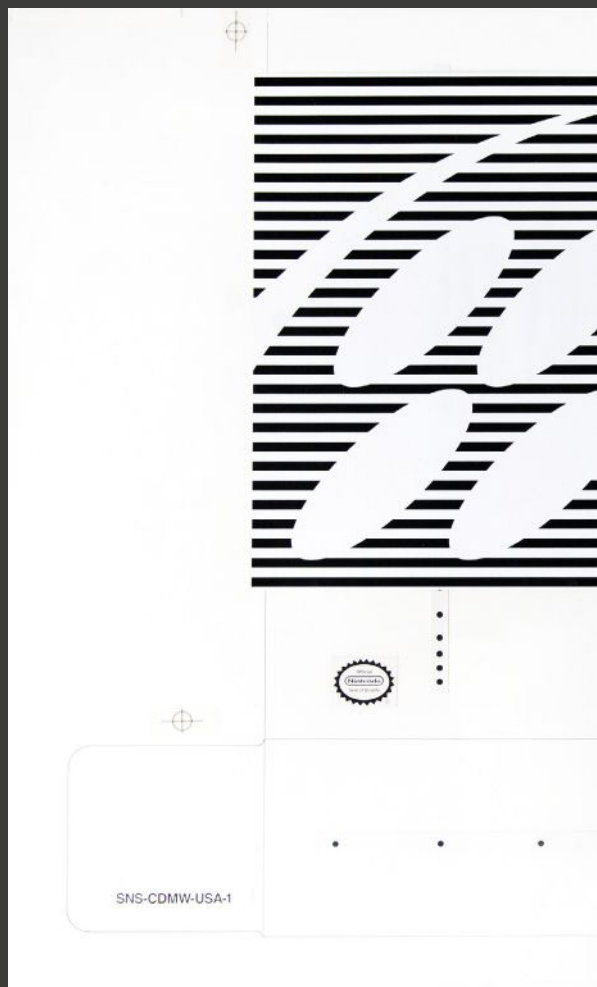
> **❝** *I'm really proud of the abstract game controller icon.*
> *It just sort of exists behind all the little colour bits, and*
> *unless you happen to be familiar with that controller,*
> *you'd never even know what that shape is; but,*
> *if you play, then you'd recognise those buttons.* **❞**

Kevin Henderson, Girvin

'Paste-up' artwork for Super NES hardware packaging.
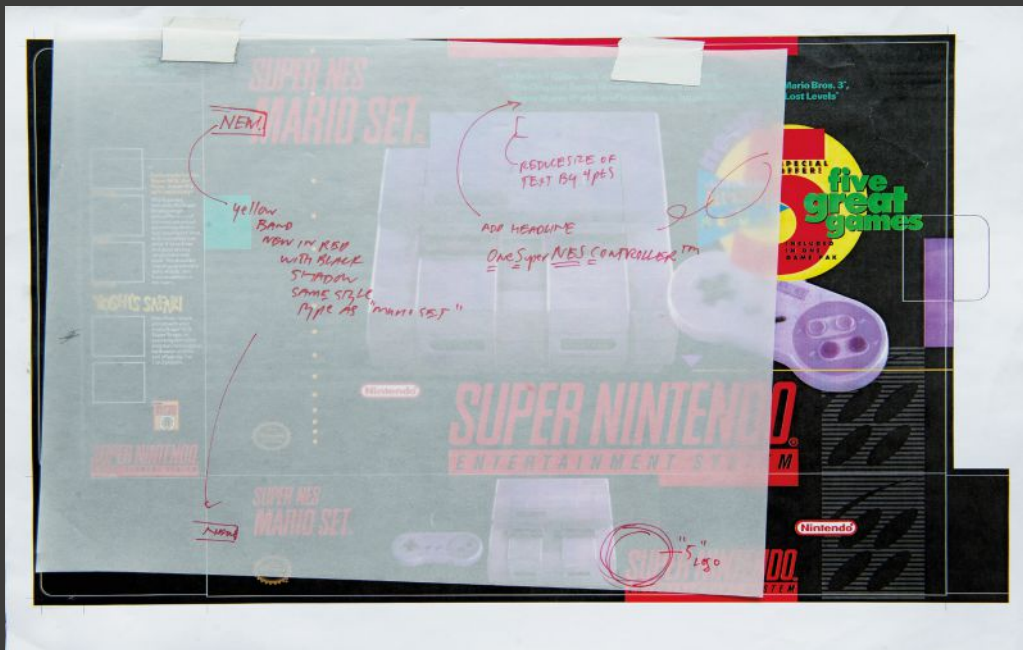
A press sheet of the Super NES Mario Set. Overlay has markups indicating adjustments and corrections for the printer to make before the press run of actual packaging is released.

A press sheet of the back and side panels of Super NES Mario Set. Approval sticker is seen at lower right.
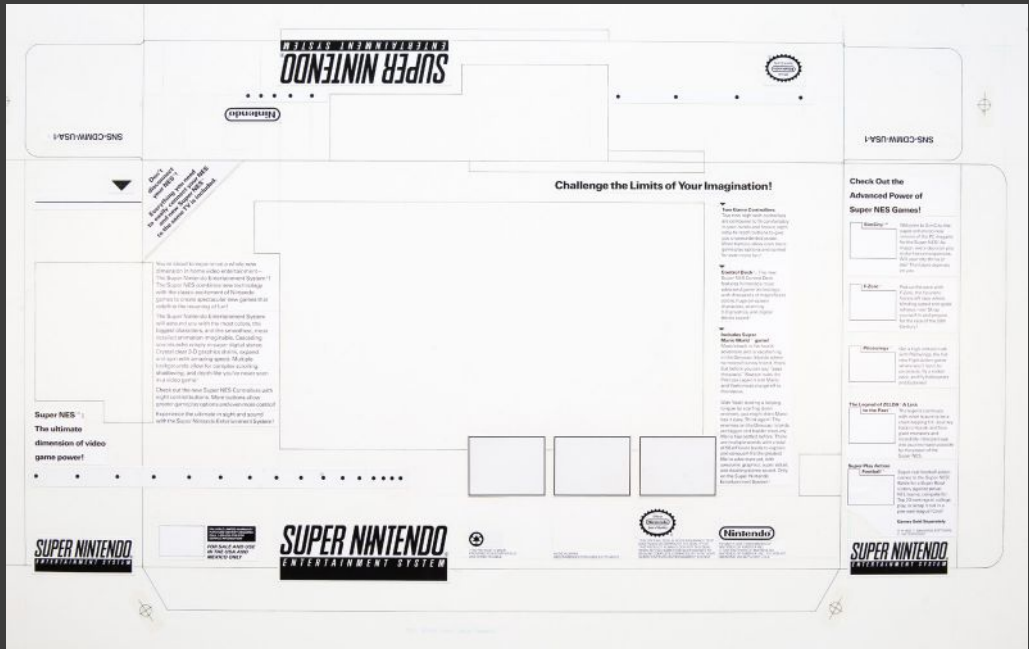
'Paste-up' artwork for Super NES hardware packaging, back and side panels.
All type and graphics are adhered to the board with hot wax.

Kevin Henderson

"The SNES system also has a lot of photography, both product photography and shots of models playing the games, so I would sketch out what I wanted the photo to look like (marker drawings) and then spend a day at the photo studio overseeing and sometimes helping to set up the shots, and approving them as we went. This was long before digital photography, so the process would be: we'd set something up, the photographer would shoot it using a Polaroid type of insert for his camera, we'd look at the results, and once we thought we had it, he would start shooting using 4×5 colour film sheets. Final photos would then come back to us as 4×5 transparencies. It's funny, Nintendo would, of course, provide us with actual consoles and controllers for the shoot, but because we wanted the wires to curve smoothly and gracefully in the shots (you know how kinked up the wires are when you first unpack them?) the first thing we'd do is take it all apart, cut off the cords and replace them with copper tubing which we'd spray-painted flat black, then reassemble. In the final image it looked just like the real thing."

Don Coyner

"The SNES was being launched at a time of intense competition and growing excitement for video games across the world. The NES system had been hugely successful but SEGA had released a 16-bit device and Nintendo was perceived as being behind. Therefore, the launch of the SNES was very important and we were asked to make a lot of noise in marketing. As with all of our briefs for Girvin, we would have asked for a dramatic package, which would pop from the shelf, clearly show the product, and convey a sense of excitement and confidence. We knew from talking to a lot of customers that there was a strong desire to clearly understand what was included inside the package, see what the product looks like, and see a number of screenshots for the games that were available. This product came at a time when the boxes would sit on the retail shelves, so people could actually handle them before they purchased them. Today, it seems more common that it's hard to actually get the package until you've purchased the product since retail space is at a premium."

Press sheet for Super NES Killer Instinct package. Overlay has designers' markups, indicating either improvements in the image that the printer is being directed to make, or in some cases, even some design changes.

Kevin Henderson

"Our office back then had shelves full of design books and magazines. It was like working in a library, sort of. Usually when starting out on a quest for ideas, I'd have a lot of open books and magazines around me, even just illustration and photographers' sample books – whatever would cause a spark of an idea. I knew that black and red could be very striking, and then thought that little colour elements moving in various directions around the faces of the package could abstractly evoke the idea of ever-changing, ever-moving game elements. We like to develop a visual vocabulary so that we have these elements to work with for each size and proportion of box. So, the yellow dots, the purple triangle, the abstracted grey controller image, all these pieces ended up framing the hardware photography or, in the case of game packages, the illustrations.

"At the time, we were just so hard at work on everything, I don't think I had time to think about how cool it was to see my design in the shops and all over television and print advertising. Except, there was a time at CES, where Nintendo had us produce many, many copies of the games and hardware packages, because the real stuff hadn't been printed yet, so that they could create a simulated 'store'. It was pure production, and we'd all gather around a huge light table in the office, making foam core boxes, around which we would wrap the game images and carefully craft them to look like the real thing. We'd designed the elements to line up such that when the package fronts were repeated, you'd get red and black patterning over a broader area. Well it worked. They started calling it their 'wall of doom', meaning doom for their competitors."

Master logo artwork for *F-Zero*. Once the logo design has been finalised, a high quality black and white master is kept for further reproduction in other forms of artwork, such as advertising or additional packaging.

Master logo artwork for the Super NES logo. The original would have been drawn and inked in at a size much greater than any final use, then this high quality photo reduction is kept on hand to make all subsequent copies for use in all artwork.

Don Coyner

"It was an amazing time to be at Nintendo. The NES was still selling, but SEGA was coming on strong with very aggressive advertising, which took Nintendo head on. Also, we had launched Game Boy, which was selling very, very well, so we were very busy. I still remember when I saw the games for Super NES and they were such a wonderful advance from the NES games, it was all very exciting. I have 20-something boys who never played video games very much, but they still enjoy the SNES (especially Metroid). There is just something about the quality of the gameplay and the way the controllers feel in your hands that I think makes it a compelling experience, regardless of its lack of power versus today's systems."

❝ I always enjoyed our packaging meetings with Girvin as they always did great work and surprised me in great ways. I do remember that when I first saw the very powerful red letters on the black background it felt very dramatic and powerful and I could see how it could extend to our retail presence (which frequently happened). ❞

Don Coyner, Nintendo

Rival Turf! / Rushing Beat

Jaleco's first instalment in its series of scrolling brawlers (known as *Rushing Beat* in Japan), sees Jack Flak and Oswald 'Oozie' Nelson on a *Final Fight*-style mission to rescue Jack's girlfriend from Big Al and his Street Kids gang. Indeed, the similarities to Capcom's side-scroller don't end there: Jaleco's game is heavily inspired by the Capcom classic, with similar moves, character styles and locations.

However, while *Final Fight* is undoubtedly the slicker, more refined game, *Rival Turf!* does at least play quite quickly and provides the signature 'rushing' move, allowing your character to dash across the screen in bursts – *Final Fight* always did feel a little pedestrian in that regard. There's also an Angry Mode in which Jack and Oozie get incensed after taking a beating, imbuing them with furious speed and power for a short time.

In an effort to steal a march on its competitor, Jaleco also implemented the two-player co-op mode sadly lacking in Capcom's original title (although this was reinstated for *Final Fight 2*). However, with its simplistic animation, fussy collision detection and uninspired design, *Rival Turf!* always feels like a cynical cash-in, devoid of its own ideas and lacking the finesse and wit of *Final Fight*. Sadly, there would be a similar situation with its sequels, *Brawl Brothers* and *The Peace Keepers*.

First released
1992
—

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up
—

Developer and publisher
Jaleco

Soul Blazer / Soul Blader

"For *Soul Blazer* my main responsibility was the map graphics. Basically in *Soul Blazer* you have a town, and if you clear a certain scenario you can rebuild or reconstruct that town. However, we had only limited ROM memory we could use, so we had to recycle the graphics data. We had to create a foundation for a ruined house, and then we had to create the completed house for when you rebuild the town. It was quite a challenging task doing that.

"There was a common thread shared among Quintet's games in terms of scenario writing, delivery of the dialogue, and so on. Starting with *ActRaiser*, and followed by *Soul Blazer* and *Illusion of Gaia*, the games are definitely connected, in Miyazaki-san's mind at least. There are resemblances among the three games because Miyazaki-san liked the idea of having a god versus a demon, in which the main character is on the side of the god and battles the demon. That is the underlying concept that he likes to adopt, which unites those three games. He liked to grapple with the themes of creation and destruction, and he was good at entwining human existence within the context of creation and destruction in order to create drama. Miyazaki-san became very popular because he was able to come up with a convincing script, incorporating pathos or a kind of sadness into it."

Kouji Yokota, graphic artist

First released
1992

—

Genre
RPG

—

Developer
Quintet

—

Publisher
Enix

Super Adventure Island / Takahashi Meijin no Daibōken Jima

"*Adventure Island*, the alternate universe spin-off of the Wonder Boy series, became pretty darn popular when it debuted on the NES, so it only makes sense that Master Higgins' island adventures would continue on Nintendo's 16-bit machine. Despite being released after the NES's *Adventure Island II*, *Super Adventure Island* forgoes some of that sequel's gameplay enhancements (such as rideable dinosaurs) and returns to the simpler roots of the original title.

"After the wicked Dark Cloak transforms Master Higgins' girlfriend, Tina, into stone, our hero sets out on a side-scrolling quest to restore her humanity. Much like the first Adventure Island, the action is limited to running, jumping and chucking hammers or boomerangs. Occasional skateboards allow Master Higgins to shred through a level until he smacks into an enemy or obstacle (or careens into a pit). The gameplay may be rudimentary, but the bold, colourful visuals helped this title stand out during the early days of the SNES.

"Special notice should also be given to *Super Adventure Island*'s fantastic music, which is composed by Yuzo Koshiro of *ActRaiser*, *Streets of Rage* and *Revenge of Shinobi* (among numerous others) fame. His funky calypso beats provide the perfect soundtrack for chilling out on a tropical island."

Phil Theobald, games journalist

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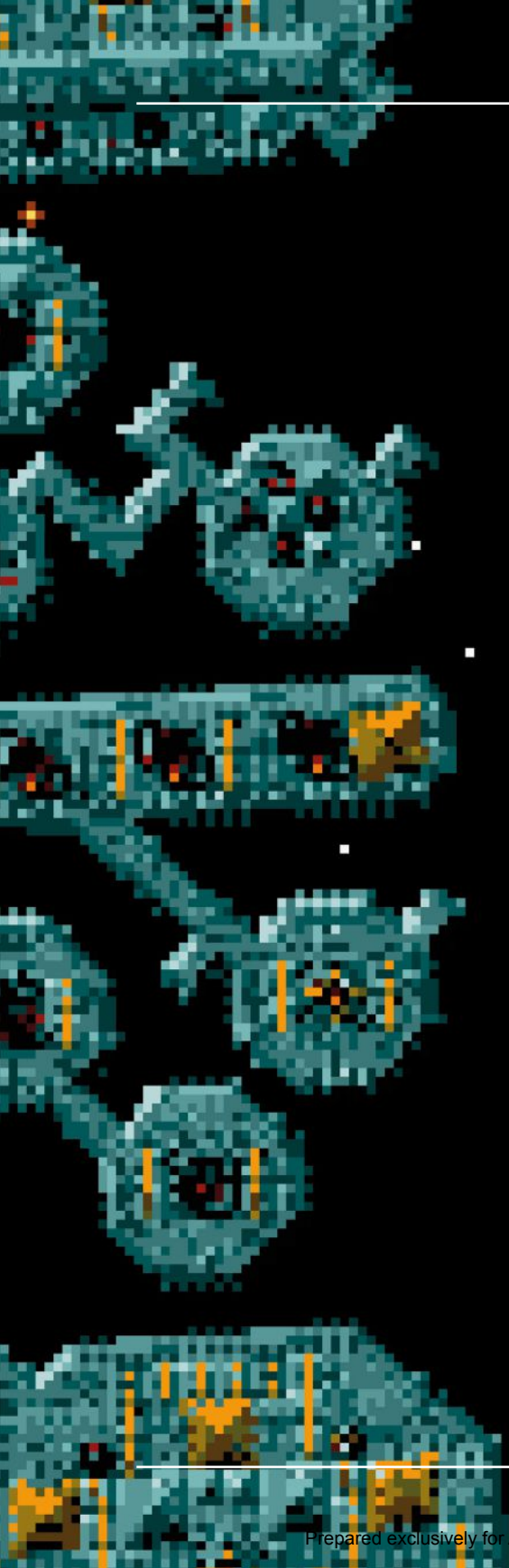
Space Megaforce / Super Aleste

"With the infamous sprite slowdown that plagued early shooters such as *Gradius III*, *Area 88/U.N. Squadron* and *Super R-Type*, many wondered if Nintendo's economical 3.58MHz processor was simply not up to the job. Fortunately, in the masterful hands of Japanese shmup masters Compile, *Super Aleste* quickly carved out its place as one of the fastest and most impressive blasters on the console.

"The premise is straight out of Japanime space sagas: aliens send large mechanical spheres to attack major cities around the world which spurs the development of the Super Aleste fighter as humanity's last chance at survival. Rather like *Gradius'* reliance upon 'multiples' or 'options', a snaking tail of orbs trace the player's movements, which can even be locked into formations for concentrating firepower through its array of eight weapons. Initially this feels a little like taking an Uzi to a Ping Pong match, though, so if there's one thing you do before playing this game, it's to man up and make sure you increase the difficulty a notch or two – otherwise it'll just be a pleasant, muzak-y ride over some very pretty parallax backdrops … plus the obligatory Mode 7 bits of course."

Jason Brookes, games journalist

First released
1992

—

Genre
Scrolling shooter

—

Developer
Compile

—

Publisher
Toho

Super Double Dragon / Return of Double Dragon

"At a time when we needed a good *Double Dragon* game again – sorry, but *The Rosetta Stone* just didn't cut it – Tradewest delivered with the very satisfactory *Super Double Dragon*, the series' debut for the Super NES. Though the gameplay does get a little repetitive over time, there's no question that this satisfies far more than the previous games in the series.

"Part of that is due to gameplay. Not only do the Lee brothers have some great punch and kick moves, but they can also grab enemies mid-attack and fling them around or nail them with a few extra hits. For good measure, if you charge up your energy bar (coloured orange up top), you can pull off other moves too, like the trademark spin kick that will knock enemies back in your wake.

"Graphically the game's not amazing, but it is suitable for SNES standards, and the music's good fun, too. But it's all about the gameplay and kicking butt alongside a friend as you take out swordsmen, thugs and other dangerous foes, led by the unpredictable Duke. *Super Double Dragon* doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it brings the series back to proper form, and that counts as a win."

Robert Workman, games journalist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up
—
Developer
Technōs Japan
—
Publisher
Tradewest

Congo's Caper / Tatakae Genshijin 2: Rookie no Bōken

This spinoff of the Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja series is very much a chip off the old block in terms of 2D side-scrolling platform games. It features similar structure and mechanics to *Joe & Mac*, but with a life/power-up system that's straight out of *Super Mario Bros*. Congo, who's half monkey, half-human, reverts to his simian side when hit by an enemy, and while in monkey form a further hit causes him to lose a life. Similarly, collect enough rubies while in human form and Congo becomes Super Congo for a brief period.

In terms of accessibility, the game is simply switch on and get going; anyone who's played a platformer before will feel instantly at home. Movement is fast and smooth, and the character performs just as you'd expect, jumping, swiping his club, and performing high jumps with a button charge-up. In fact, if anything, *Congo's Caper*'s worst flaw is its unoriginality. It's quite an enjoyable romp but it doesn't do anything you won't have seen before: swinging on branches, destructible blocks, leap-of-faith platforms, hidden secrets, and so on and so on.

Still, with solid, vibrant graphics, a bright 'n' breezy soundtrack and an effective control system, you could do worse than spend some time in the company of Congo and crew.

First released
1992

Genre
Action platformer

**Developer
and publisher**
Data East

Super Mario Kart

"When people play this game, they have a big smile on their faces. That was a big goal for us: a game where both players and onlookers would be laughing and smiling. This isn't the world of F1 racing: it's more like going to an amusement park. To be more specific, we wanted to make a game where there was more fun to the driving than simply cornering. That's why, during the development, it was decided that no one would be allowed to testplay the game in 2-player mode. That was something the whole staff agreed on actually. In a 2-player race, it's the competition itself that is fun – overtaking your opponent with skillful cornerning, for instance. That's why, when we were making *Super Mario Kart*, we were very careful not to lead ourselves astray in understanding what makes the game fun. We focused our efforts on the 1-player experience: if that was fun, then 2 players would automatically be fun, too."

Shigeru Miyamoto, producer

Super Mario Kart

"My role, to put it simply, was to direct the overall presentation of the game. I was responsible for deciding to set the game in Mario World, the inclusion of items, and which characters will be in the game.

"In the finished version, you press L or R to do a little hop, then you drift as you turn. But in the beginning we didn't know it would actually work. In real driving, you drift by counter-steering the wheel in the opposite direction when you corner. We tried implementing those controls, but the majority of people couldn't do that technique.

They'd over-drift every time, so we abandoned that idea. After a bunch of research we hit upon the idea of drifting by holding down the L/R buttons. Most people could do that at will, once they got used to it.

"In a real car, drifting actually happens at slow speeds. Our drifting controls were different from *F-Zero*, and I thought they were cool, so I thought we should incentivise players who had learned the technique by making drifting a little faster."

Hideki Konno, director
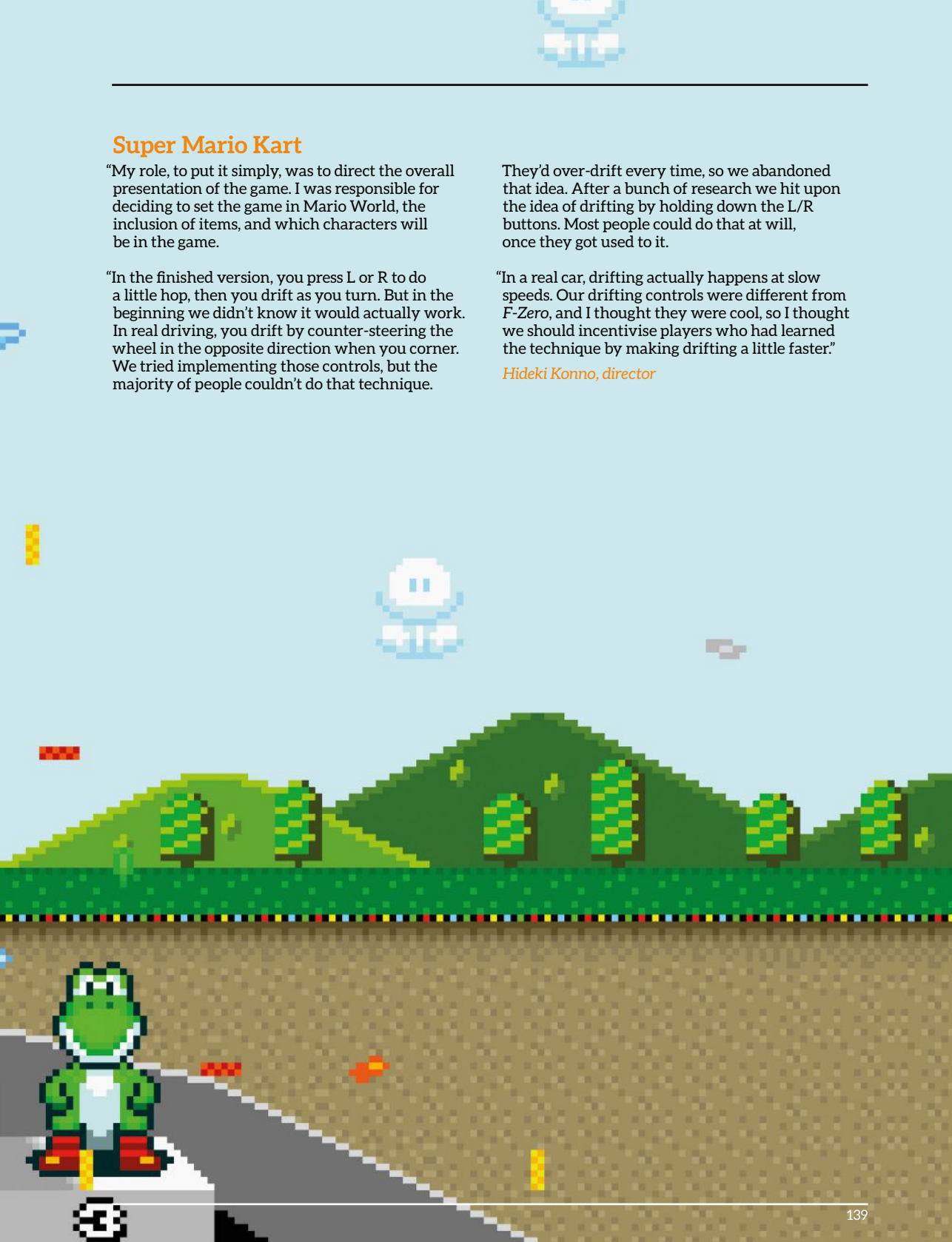
The art of Blizzard Entertainment

Graphic artist Samwise Didier talks about his work.

Sam 'Samwise' Didier is one of Blizzard Entertainment's longest-serving employees and has been creating artwork for its games since the company was known as Silicon & Synapse. Now employed as Blizzard's senior art director, Didier's influence is keenly felt on the company's long-running Warcraft *and* StarCraft *series, but he honed his talent on SNES titles such as* The Lost Vikings, Rock n' Roll Racing *and* Blackthorne.

Would you say you were artistic from a very early age or did your love of art come later on?
Definitely from very early in my childhood – I've been into art and drawing forever. I remember getting into trouble in preschool for bringing in my *Conan* comics and drawing him fighting dinosaurs and aliens. This was back in '73–'74, so I was three or four years old! After preschool, I went to an elementary school by my grandma's house and her raised brick fireplace was my first art workspace. She would get me colouring books and ask why I didn't colour in the pictures. I showed her the normally blank inside cover pages and they were filled with dinosaurs and superheroes, and I said "I like colouring my own". After that she just got me blank sketchbooks.

How did you get involved in the games industry and how did you come to work at Silicon & Synapse – the company that would become Blizzard?
I saw an ad in a local paper saying something like, 'Make art for video games'. I was working at a local movie theatre as head usher at the time and my mum asked if I was going to apply to the job posting. I said something along the lines of, "Maybe, I don't know, it doesn't sound very promising". She laughed and said it sounded more promising than a career cleaning up trash-filled movie theatres. I didn't have a portfolio, but I did have a ton of pictures I had tacked up on the walls of my room – some were even framed. I threw them into an unused portfolio case I'd received as a gift and my dad and I drove over there. I got the job offer that day. See kids, it pays to listen to your mum!

What were your thoughts when you first started working on the SNES?
I had no idea how to work a computer or create art other than on paper, canvas or on walls. Luckily I'd been playing video games almost as long as I'd been making art. I didn't know how to create game art but I knew what it needed to look like. I was trained on the job by some of the other Blizzard artists on the team, Joeyray Hall and Ron Millar. They're doing their own stuff now but I've always been thankful to my old art friends who took a completely computer illiterate artist and made me into the semi-competent computer dude I am today!

> **❝** *I remember getting into trouble in preschool for bringing in my Conan comics and drawing him fighting dinosaurs and aliens!* **❞**

What kind of programs were you using to create pixel art for SNES titles back then?
Deluxe Paint and *Deluxe Animator* were used almost exclusively by the artists. We also had a cel-editing program called *CED* that Mike Morhaime tweaked to support the SNES stuff. That was the trinity of programs we used to create art for all our early games. It wasn't until *Warcraft* and *StarCraft* that we started playing with *3D Studio* and *Adobe Photoshop*.

The Lost Vikings *was one of your earliest hits. Where did the concept of the game come from?*
This game started out as a Viking-themed riff on a game we all enjoyed – *Lemmings*. In *Lemmings*, you marched around little lemming dudes and assigned them abilities like climb, float, bomb and so on, to navigate the level. We loved the game and thought it could be fun to make little Vikings and have them raiding castles. Some had torches, some had ladders – you get the idea. As we were developing it, we noticed that it wasn't easy to see all these little dudes pillaging

on a TV screen (this was well before the age of 70-inch Ultra HD TVs), so we started making the Vikings larger, less numerous, and assigning them more abilities each. We went from 20 to ten, then to five before landing on the eventual three. We even started pushing a more cartoony look for our characters as well, and added more humour to the game, since that style fit the SNES pretty well.

Blackthorne – *1994*

> 66 *Art is always fun to create and I'm happy using everything from busted crayons to thousand-dollar art software.* 99

What inspirations did you draw on when creating Eric, Olaf and Baleog?
Once we had the number of Vikings down to three, we had to make each character unique and memorable – after all, we were competing with iconic dudes like Sonic and Mario! I was a huge fan of the animated movie *The Hobbit* and the dwarves in particular. I also grew up on a French comic book series called *Asterix*, by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. The Asterix and Obelix characters inspired me and helped mould the trio into how they look today. We played up that influence even more when we added Erik, Baleog, and Olaf into *Heroes of the Storm*. When updating Blizzard's oldest characters to be one of our game's newest characters, I added blue striped pants on our biggest Viking, Olaf the Stout. These are a tribute to the striped britches Obelix sported through his years of adventuring.

***The Lost Vikings** was released to particularly positive reviews – how did it feel to see your work reach such a wide audience?*
It was fantastic! *The Lost Vikings* were the first characters I helped create, my first attempts at video game art, animation and design, as well as the first tangible thing I could show people to explain what I did for a living. It turned out I didn't just 'make art for video games'; I made games for myself and my friends. To this day, I remember my friends and I screaming at the TV and slamming down the controller in rage. That is the sign of a good game – a game that challenges you enough to spend countless hours playing it and eventually conquering it. Then you go back and play it again!

***Rock n' Roll Racing** was Silicon & Synapse's next hit – was this inspired by Rare's **R.C. Pro-Am**, or did the concept evolve organically?*
R.C. Pro-Am was an influence on our first version of this game, *RPM Racing*. *Rock n' Roll Racing* was originally called *RPM II* and was just going to be a sequel to the original. I remember working on background elements like hotels, homes and other mundane stuff. It was boring! I don't remember the exact moment it changed, but I remember we started pushing the look and the style. We took the game into space, travelled to different planets, and raced against alien drivers. The environments were creepy, Giger-esque worlds and burning lava lands. It was the first of our games to look more akin to what people now call 'the Blizzard art style'.

With Rock n' Roll Racing, you were working primarily with vehicles rather than characters. What challenges did this present?
The cars were actually a very easy part of the game to create. Artistically speaking, the bulk of *Rock n' Roll Racing* was done by three artists. Joeyray, who I mentioned earlier, did the cars and Ron did the bulk of the UI, the in-between level stuff and some of the environments. I did the characters and environments as well as the weapon FX and art for various game screens. The three of us just cranked out all the art for this game. This was the game I hit my stride on. I wasn't the art director at the time – we didn't have one – but my art style was starting to become the standard direction for Silicon & Synapse, starting with *The Lost Vikings* and now *Rock n' Roll Racing*.

Were you involved at all with Tim Follin's awesome 'rock covers' soundtrack in Rock n' Roll Racing?
My main contribution to the audio part of the game was introducing heavy metal to the Blizzard game worlds. I had the song *Paranoid*, by Black Sabbath, cued up in the car and when we went to lunch I popped in my cassette tape. Out came Tony Iommi's buzz-saw riffs and Geezer's monster bass, and I looked over at Allen Adham, our president at the time, and I said, "What do you think about this for *Rock n' Roll Racing*?" That was my contribution to the soundtrack and whenever I hear *Paranoid*, it brings back fond memories of playing *Rock n' Roll Racing*, destroying cars with my buddies, and even blowing up their cars!

Blackthorne's cover artwork was drawn by the famous comic book illustrator Jim Lee. Did he draw to suit the brief from Blizzard, or was his design entirely original, and therefore taken as the template for the rest of the game?
No, the look of the game was largely complete when we found out Jim Lee was going to do a cover for us. We were all fans of his work in comics and were super excited knowing that Jim friggin' Lee was going to create art for our game, based on our art and creations. *Blackthorne* was the first Blizzard title that felt like it could be a comic, so it fit really well. This was also long before the days of social media, where you can just reach out and talk to stars and the like. It was a huge thing for us to even get close to working with someone like Jim.

> **The Lost Vikings were the first characters I helped create, my first attempts at video game art, animation and design.**

What games and other media properties provided inspiration when it came to creating Blackthorne, its world and its cast of characters?
We played a lot of games in those days and we'd fall in love with them. At Blizzard, we make the kinds of games that we personally enjoy playing. *Blackthorne* was our nod to Delphine Software's *Out of this World* (also known as *Another World*) and *Flashback*. It originally started out as a horror game. Our hero wasn't Blackthorne yet, but he was still a vigilante-type guy investigating a series of child kidnappings – these kids

were being taken to a shadowy realm and it was up to him to save them. The game's working title was *Nightmare*, but we eventually thought the idea was just too dark and not geared toward the adventure game genre. We kept a lot of the gameplay ideas and simply got rid of the kidnapping and horror elements.

Blackthorne's animation received particular praise at the time of release. Was it difficult to cram in all those frames of animation on a memory-limited cartridge?
It was technically challenging on our end, not necessarily because of memory issues but due to artistic constraints. We were trying to push the realism of the animation so we started doing rotoscoping, basically drawing over a video of Frank Pearce (now serving as our chief development officer), who we filmed running, jumping, climbing and so on. We drew over the footage and it looked nice and fluid but it was a pain in the ass to film, clean up the files,

draw over them, and all that. It was a labour and took forever to do. We ended up just ditching the 16 frames of Frank climbing and did an original animation of Blackthorne climbing, using the same number of frames. Boom! We had super-fluid and graceful animations without the chore of rotoscoping one of our programmers! Turns out it was the number of frames that made it look fluid: 16 – or whatever the number was – is a lot more than the five to eight frames we normally used. Sometimes less is more, but in this case, more was better!

Do you ever miss the days of working entirely with pixels?
I still work on pixel art, it's just slightly bigger than the 32×32 pixels the original Lost Vikings were built with! Art is always fun to create and I'm happy using everything from busted crayons to thousand-dollar art software.

The Lost Vikings – *1992*

Rock n' Roll Racing – *1993*

Street Fighter II - The World Warrior

"I joined Capcom in May of 1992 and was told about this arcade game that had been chewing quarters at an unprecedented rate, both in Japan and in the US. Capcom was planning to bring a home version of it to a new console which was about to hit the market called the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. It was my role to develop the packaging, advertising and overall business strategy for getting the game into consumer's hands.

"We launched the game in August of '92 and I remember sitting with my boss, Joe Morici, who told me we were going to be ordering 1.2 million units from Nintendo, which at that point was an unprecedented first order for any platform. Then we released *Street Fighter II* into the marketplace and we completely sold out within 72 hours! Being out of stock for two months while we waited for more cartridges from Nintendo was very hard, but it wasn't all that bad because it helped fuel the frenzy. People were desperate for the game and that just helped drive the demand and desire!"

John Gillin, director of marketing

First released
1992
—
Genre
Fighting
—
Developer and publisher
Capcom

Street Fighter II – The World Warrior

"I would say yes to almost everything people would bring me. Back then, there were several teams creating games at Capcom, so the teams were competing with each other. But the *Street Fighter II* team was also competing amongst itself – the programmers and artists were each working on their own characters, which led to a lot of rivalries. You know, 'My character's going to be better than yours'.

"Because of that, they'd each come up with crazy ideas and bring them to me. And I didn't want to tell them, 'Ah, that won't fit with our game system, so you should do something else'. Or, 'That idea's too crazy – you should come up with something less over the top'. I didn't want to discourage their creativity, so I said, 'Okay, cool, I'll make that happen, and come up with more crazy ideas and I'll make those happen too'.

"I think that's part of the reason why the game turned out well. These days, as the president of a company, I can't be as irresponsible as I was back then. So sometimes what I'll tell people today is different from what I'd tell them then. Back when I was making *Street Fighter II*, though, that was my attitude."

Akira Nishitani, character designer

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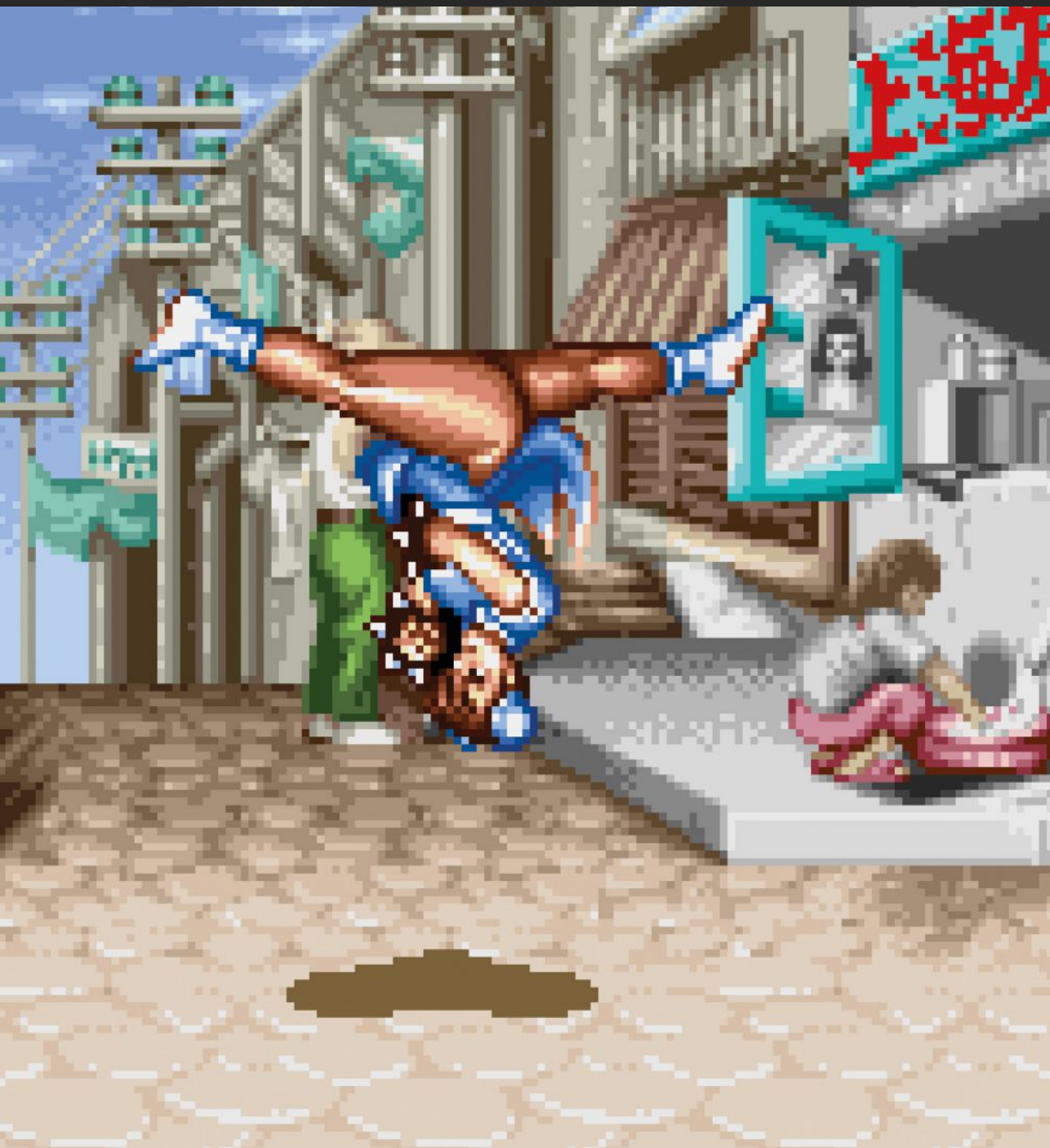
Super Buster Bros. / Super Pang

"The American rebranding of *Super Pang* was certainly curious. On US soil the game would become known as *Super Buster Bros.*, a name perhaps chosen to take advantage of the public's fondness for Nintendo's popular plumbing brothers. However the removal of a simultaneous two-player mode not only made the game far less desirable, it also meant the new game branding was somewhat deceptive.

"The game is, of course, a home console port of the arcade game *Pomping World*. In it, a lone player travels the planet, using a harpoon-like gun to clear single-screen stages of giant bubbles. Taking inspiration from *Asteroids*, each time a bubble is popped it divides into two, and as a result the enclosed play space becomes filled with cascading debris. What initially looks like a simple arcade blast quickly becomes surprisingly tactical, especially with weapon upgrades and onscreen hazards altering the approach a player must take.

"While the bright colours and bouncy music of the arcade have been replicated in this SNES version, critics unanimously agreed that the exclusion of a two-player mode harmed the game. What could have been one of the system's most frantic two-player experiences is little more than a monotonous trudge when played alone."

Julian Hill, guest reviewer

First released
1992
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer and publisher
Capcom

Super Star Wars

"*Super Star Wars* is an interesting time-and-place game. Even if some consider the early '90s to be a lull in the Star Wars universe, I still remember the release of this game being met with incredible excitement. The licence still had ample cachet, and seeing a pixelated yet distinct Luke Skywalker facing off against an above-ground(!) sarlacc monster made for an impressive screenshot.

"Indeed, the game excelled visually. Playable characters Luke, Han and Chewbacca all looked sharp, and the bosses that punctuated each stage were appropriately otherworldly and imposing. Unfortunately, *Super Star Wars* also followed the strange logic of many a licensed action game, as the opposition was pulled from convenience rather than common sense. Womp rats and banthas dead set on ending Luke's life? Seems like a stretch, but okay.

"And because the creatures and droids appeared in multitudes, the game felt needlessly difficult. It turned into a constant tug-of-war between a depleting life bar and the replenishing hearts that almost every defeated enemy dropped. Couple that with merely adequate controls and underwhelming landspeeder and X-wing levels, and *Super Star Wars* certainly had its flaws.

"But it was also steeped in enough authentic *Star Wars* trappings that fans happily persevered, myself included. Where else were we going to tackle screen-filling bosses or take control of an agitated Wookiee battling through the Mos Eisley Cantina? Throw in John Williams' iconic soundtrack, and for us, it scratched an itch as only a lightsaber could."

Greg Ford, games journalist

First released
1992
—

Genre
Run and gun
—

Developer
Sculptured Software

Publisher
JVC

GREAT SHOT
THAT WAS
IN A

KID, ONE MILLION!

Super Star Wars

"Back in the late '80s and early '90s, many movies of
the day were adapted into video games, most of which
weren't of the highest quality. One that really bucked
that trend, however, was NES *Star Wars*. While it did
take some creative liberties with the original movie's
moment-to-moment plot (such as fighting Jawas in their
Sandcrawler, and brawling with what felt like the entire
clientele of the cantina in Mos Eisley), it nevertheless
faithfully followed the story arc of Lucasfilm's sci-fi epic.

"Most of the action boiled down to side-scrolling
run-and-gun platforming, but there were also several
sequences in which the player controlled vehicles
such as a landspeeder, the Millennium Falcon and
an X-Wing fighter.

"Later that same year, the Super Nintendo version was
released, and it didn't disappoint. It was fundamentally
similar to the NES game, but featured significant graphical,
audio and gameplay upgrades – as you'd expect from a
machine that was a generation ahead. The vehicular
levels were displayed using the system's Mode 7 graphics,
the game's platforming sections were expanded, and
the cutscenes were all upgraded. Most important of all,
though, was that it was even more fun to play than the
NES iteration – a truly classic game-of-the-movie that
still ranks as one of the best of its era."

Julian Rignall, games journalist

SNES memories

*Like its predecessor, the NES, Nintendo's
16-bit system carries long-held and fondly
cherished memories. For many it may
have been their first games machine, their
first contact with the Mario franchise
and even with Japanese culture. It might
bring back images of happy gaming
sessions with the family on cold winter
nights, or with friends during the long
summer holidays. It may have helped
people get through sad times or illness.
And, for a few, the arrival of this
amazing device may well have been a
turning point in their lives, sending them
off on a new course as a games designer,
programmer, artist or even further afield.
This section presents a small selection
of those coveted memories…*

SNES memories by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

Adam Dufty

"To me, the SNES will always hold memories of friendship. Whether it was weekend sleepovers playing F-Zero until 3am in the morning, trying to beat our previous best scores, or working together to get the 100% completion in *Super Mario World*, the early days of the SNES were always a reason for me and my friends to get together and share an adventure. Where else could we save our neighbours from zombies on Monday, dodge turtle shells as we raced down Rainbow Road on Tuesday, defeat Bison and his Shadaloo with a series of well-timed uppercuts and fireballs on Wednesday, save the world from the dark plans of Golbez and his four elemental fiends on Thursday, and box our way to glory, trying to earn a match with the hidden Special Circuit champion on Friday. The SNES was a robust platform that focused on fun, and resulted in many memories that will last a lifetime."

Roisin Craig

"It was the first console that I played that felt like *mine*, even though it was bought by my parents and I was pretty young. I remember both of them playing through *Super Mario World* at their own pace; the joy when my dad and I finally managed to beat Tubular; my cousin beating me repeatedly at *Street Fighter*; and the exploration into games that never made it to PAL territories via late '90s/early '00s Internet when a 2MB file took at an absolute minimum 20 minutes to download. The latter helped to develop my love for games and genres that I otherwise would never have had access to, and basically kick-started my journey into working in games now."

Diego Oyarzún

"The NES was for me the first console that had really playable pixels; a console that did a whole lot with very little. Then the SNES came to perfect that formula and take it to the next step, showing us that we didn't need to envy the games in the arcades. With the SNES we were able to play the most fun, astounding and challenging games, giving us some of the most beautiful pixelated scenes that would stay in our memories to this day. Not just an average game console, it was a super entertainment system!"

Paul Hassall

"I've been gaming since the Spectrum and NES days up until Xbox One and I still don't look fondly at any console more than the Super Nintendo! It's what it gave us access to; developers weren't afraid to push boundaries: 'A game about a unicycle on a rollercoaster-type track? Sure go for it!' It introduced brand new genres to gamers that up to then were somewhat of a mystery, through US conversions of JRPGs. The art style on the boxes always stood out and it converted beloved arcade classics into fully playable home versions. I think we can all remember the first time we saw *Street Fighter II* on a 14-inch CRT TV and went, 'No … WAY!' But most of all, for me, it still brings back more memories than any console I've had: my dad driving me for two hours on Boxing Day to track down a Datel Action Replay in some random indie games shop just so I could play my new US Import of *Final Fantasy III* … that one memory can never be beaten. Who knew a console could evoke so much love."

Martin Bryant

"For me, it's the music that stands out about the SNES. Not just the excellent processor that produced such luscious strings and dramatic orchestra hits, but the composition of many of the tunes, which seemed to be a world apart from anything before or since. From *Pilotwings* and *SimCity* to *Final Fantasy VI* and beyond, the SNES was home to more of my favourite game music than any other console."

Cheryl Lim

"When I was eight years old, I spent hours in epic long matches against my cousins in competitive *Tetris Attack* on the SNES. We each had our favourite characters and our reserve favourites and would yell at each other, gloat at each other, complain and sulk at each other when we won or lost, respectively. I can't remember a time when I was as close to my cousins as that – since then we've lived in other countries and gradually drifted apart, but I think if I brought my SNES to a family reunion we'd all sit around it on the floor, like all those years back then, and enthusiastically get right back into *Tetris Attack* with Yoshi, Poochy and crew."

Jason Williams

"I received the SNES as a birthday gift from my grandparents in 1991. Coming from the NES the visuals and depth of *Super Mario World* just blew me away – and that was just the beginning. Compared to the NES, SNES games like *Super Mario World*, *Super Metroid* and *Legend of Zelda* had so much more depth, and the improved visuals and sound made the games so much more immersive. Even to this day, I love the classic and timeless look of those 16-bit graphics. I spent my high school years and even part of college playing SNES with my friends. Such great times and so many great memories."

Mark Newheiser

"The Super Nintendo was where I first realised games could tell stories. There were RPGs with very simple combat mechanics that stretched themselves into a game by using text boxes and sprites to create whole worlds. Despite the limits of the technology, they were able to bring characters and worlds to life; using storytelling was their main tool for engagement. Some of the games might never have been built if they'd required the investment to create graphical assets up to today's standards; it was a period of time where you could tell a complex unique story relatively cheaply."

Zach Hansen

"In '93–'94, my mom was pregnant with my brother and she had the worst time finding sleep. My dad surprised her with a Super Nintendo so that she could spend her sleepless nights playing games. The game she played the most was *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. She had collected almost everything and made it all the way to Ganon but my brother came before she could defeat him. I remember my cousins would come over just to play *Donkey Kong Country* and they loved the Mine Cart Carnage level and played it over and over. Even after the N64 came out, my brother and I would still spend hours playing the 'downstairs Nintendo' because games like *Paperboy 2*, *NBA Jam* and *Clay Fighter* were so much fun."

> 66 *The SNES was a robust platform that focused on fun, and resulted in many memories that will last a lifetime.* 99
>
> *Adam Dufty*

Hamza Aziz

"The Super Nintendo was my very first console. One of my earliest memories is with my parents as we entered a Circuit City to buy the SNES. I remember holding the big box and just reading every word on the packaging over and over in the car ride home. The SNES opened up the world of video games to me, to the point where I have a career in games now. My happiest memories are of playing whatever game I could get, and the SNES was my only real comfort after an accident that sent me to hospital. I still have my SNES setup at the age of 32 and will play games on it to relax even after all these years. The Super Nintendo to me will always be the best console of all time!"

Jean-Marc Giffin

"I recall experiencing *Donkey Kong Country* for the first time. I couldn't believe the graphics I was seeing were actually a part of the game; they just seemed so advanced compared to the cartoony and pixelated graphics I was used to. But more importantly, David Wise's musical score for that game was phenomenal. I'd put the game on pause just to listen to it, and it was the first video game soundtrack I'd ever owned. It had such a strong impact on me that it is part of the reason I am now a professional video game music composer. Thank you so much, David Wise!"

Aled Evans

"My parents bought me a Super Nintendo for Christmas in 1992. I was ten years old. More than anything I wanted to play *Street Fighter II*. It felt to me like the whole world was going wild for that game. On Christmas morning, my folks told me the game was sold out everywhere (it was), which meant they couldn't get hold of a copy. I was disappointed but still super-excited to play *Super Mario World*, which came bundled with the console. I opened the rest of my presents quickly, dying to get hold of that crazily advanced controller (shoulder buttons!?). As I finished opening the rest of my presents, my dad gave me one last parcel to open – one that hadn't been under the tree. It was *Street Fighter II*. I lost my mind. I'm sure my parents were delighted to see the look on my face when I ripped open the wrapping paper to find Blanka's grimacing face underneath. I think my dad was a bit less pleased when I made him spend a fair chunk of Christmas Day standing in as my Player 2!"

Derek Paul Leiba

"I tore the wires on all the controllers and video inputs of my NES to pester my mother to buy a SNES for me. That's how desperate I was in owning that console. Beyond that, *Chrono Trigger* made a significant impact on my childhood thanks to its US commercial, where the Japanese announcer made his native pronunciation of the name, and I kept calling it 'Kurono Traiga!' for years."

Michael Smith

"I remember seeing the *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* for the first time and realising how bad I needed a SNES. I sat outside and looked at my issues of *Nintendo Power* all summer and yearned for one, day after day. Eventually, mid-summer, the whole street that I lived on decided to have a garage sale. Begrudgingly I pulled together every single one of my NES games, system and accessories, and set up my own little corner of the garage sale. By the end of the weekend I'd made enough money selling everything I had to go pick up a SNES bundle that came with the system, controllers and *Super Mario World*."

Justin Fenico

"During the SNES era, my gaming habits really took a big stride. I went from fumbling around a NES not knowing the complexity of games (or even how to read what was going on) to engaging myself in games like *Chrono Trigger*, *Super Castlevania* and even *SimCity*. I began to appreciate the increased fidelity of sprites, animations and music. The speed of *F-Zero*, the eeriness of *Super Metroid*, and the unforgettable adventure of *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* are gaming memories I will never forget. To this day I constantly hum tunes from *Super Mario* to my daughter, hoping to instil a sense of gaming DNA in her."

Nick LaLone

"My brother and I had been given a whole boatload of NES cartridges over the years from various members of our extended family. When the SNES came out, our parents told us that we'd just have to entertain ourselves with the NES games we had, as they couldn't afford a SNES. Around that time, my grandparents decided it was time to move out of the house they'd built and move into the city. They held an auction and so we convinced our grandma to let us auction off our NES and games. It was the first time we had ever tried such a thing and when we made enough to purchase the SNES and a handful of games from the auction, it made the console feel a heck of a lot more fun. I still have that thing here ... somewhere."

Cliff Hinze

"SNES to me means more than just a console. It means the warm feeling when I was sitting in front of the TV on a snowy Sunday morning on or shortly after Christmas. Everyone was still sleeping, but not me. I was wandering around on my search for the Master Sword in unbelievable Hyrule. SNES to me is childhood. Back in that time everything seemed to be possible; I had no fears, sorrows or anything like that... Everything was just fine and my only worries were whether I could beat my best friend in *Super Mario Kart* or not? Will I make it and rescue the princess? Where has Donkey gone? It was just perfect. And every time I play with my SNES nowadays (I'm now 33) my memory takes me back to those days. So why do I love the SNES so much? Because it's my very personal time machine, and when I push the power button, everything is possible again."

David Broyles

"The SNES was the first console that I saved up for myself and bought (lots of lawn mowing!). It came at the perfect intersection of childhood (plenty of time to play) and storytelling. I remember putting so many hours into *Final Fantasy IV*, and thinking that I was near the end, only to experience the shift to the underworld and then realising that there was still so much more left of the story. This console is still the one I remember the most fondly."

> 66 *I tore the wires on all the controllers and video inputs of my NES to pester my mother to buy a SNES for me.* 99
>
> *Derek Paul Leiba*
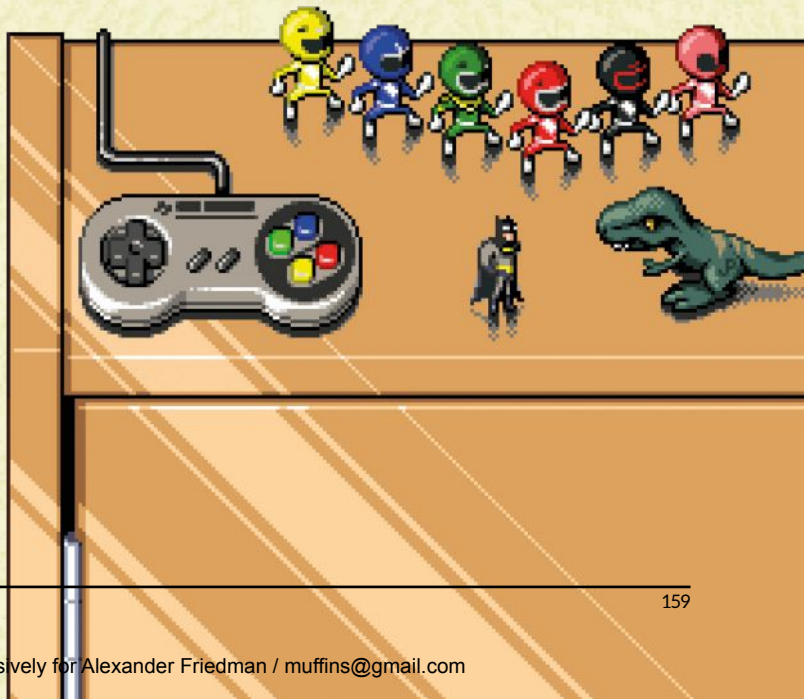
Firepower 2000 / Super SWIV

"We were like the apes in *2001: A Space Odyssey* when a Super Nintendo landed in our office. It was very exciting, and we were all instantly addicted to *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario World*.

"The feature that Ronald [Pieket-Weeserik] and I were most pleased with was the fact that you could now have transparent sprites! What we didn't like about *SWIV* on the Commodore Amiga were the solid black shadows. We had to have shadows in the game to distinguish between things that were in the air and what was on the ground. So the SNES version had a much cleaner, softer look.

"Being able to have separate palettes was a totally new thing then, so rather than sharing one palette for everything, which gave it a greyish look, *Super SWIV* was much more colourful. In some ways, it took away the edge that Amiga *SWIV* had and sort of 'cute-ified' *SWIV*, but that was the Nintendo style, and I still really like it.

"For the American version I believe they renamed the game *Firepower 2000*, and an extra level was added with graphics by Rob Whittaker. Rob also illustrated the opening scenes."

Ned Langman, graphic artist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
Developer
SCi Games
—
Publisher
Sunsoft

The Addams Family

"The Addams Family is a highlight in almost 35 years of game development. The freedom allowed me by both [lead programmer] James Higgins and [game designer and artist] Warren Lancashire was amazing. I drew whatever came to mind, and the vast majority of the sprites created found their way somewhere into what I consider a defining title for the Super Nintendo.

"Although all of the Nintendo machines look far more family-friendly than their console counterparts, the SNES for me truly looked the part. It was a games machine for gamers and probably had more titles that were worth playing than any Nintendo system before or since. It held a very special place in our household, and just about every family member had their personal favourite titles.

"My wife and I spent far too much time battling late into the wee small hours of the morning on *Bombliss* when we had small children to tend, and then get to our respective jobs. It was a truly great console and well deserves a place in any retro gamer's collection. Mine is long gone, but for *Zelda*, *Super Mario World*, *Super Metroid* and, of course, *The Addams Family 1* and *2*, I will always hold it in very high regard."

Simon Butler, graphic artist

First released
1992
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
**Developer
and publisher**
*Ocean
Software*

163

Brawl Brothers / Rushing Beat Ran

Known as *Rushing Beat Ran* in Japan, this follow up to *Rival Turf!* (a.k.a. *Rushing Beat*) features the same *Final Fight*-style gameplay in which your character strolls nonchalantly from left to right, defeating wave after wave of bad guys, using fists, feet, baseball bats, shotguns … whatever you can lay your hands on.

Brawl Brothers doesn't expand on the genre to any great extent, but does feature a two-player co-op mode and levels with multiple pathways – although these can be a pain when you're low on energy and can't find the exit. But its biggest issue is that of being too fussy when it comes to attacking enemies on the same plane as you. If you're not pretty much perfectly lined up, your blows have no impact. That, plus the inability to punch and move at the same time, makes combat a tricky and slightly exasperating affair. It doesn't take long before the number and power of your adversaries start to grind you down.

With the same baddies repeated throughout and some fairly predictable locations (suspension bridge, underground sewers, aircraft hangar, industrial complex et al.), Jaleco's effort never quite manages to elevate itself beyond the status of an 'also ran' in the brawling stakes.

First released
1992
—
Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Jaleco

164

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Turtles in Time

"In terms of arcade beat 'em ups ported to home consoles, *Turtles in Time* ranks up there with *Final Fight* on the SNES as one of the true standouts of the time. Aside from a few concessions (like the lack of four-player mode), the game looked and sounded pretty much on a par with its arcade predecessor. But the SNES version actually benefited from a few welcome additions, making this the overall better game – one that many point to as the best in the series.

"*Turtles in Time* repeated the formula of the popular original *TMNT* coin-up and basically improved on it in every way. It also introduced a time travelling storyline, which benefited the game with a greater diversity of enemies and backdrops. Konami then made this experience even better on the SNES. A great example of this was the addition of a Shredder boss battle in which you would throw foot soldiers at the screen in order to beat him, taking what was previously just a fun mechanic and turning it into something integral to the gameplay.

"Unfortunately, due to Konami's TMNT licence eventually expiring, obtaining *Turtles in Time* on modern consoles has become a challenge, making the SNES cart a must-own. Fan desire ultimately led to Ubisoft (which held the TMNT licence at the time) releasing a shoddy 3D remake in 2009 – however, this too was eventually removed from digital stores."

Sam Kennedy, games journalist

166

First released
1992

—

Genre
*Scrolling
beat 'em up*

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt

"The day *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* arrived in the *Super Play* office was the day we truly realised what a capable hunk of hardware the SNES was. Ocean had cranked up everything to the max, with a dazzling colour palette and special effects we'd never seen the likes of before. It made their first Addams Family game – itself pretty decent – literally pale by comparison.

"This was the first time, for example, that we'd played a level entirely within a crystal ball clasped by a wrinkly old granny. And we'd also never dodged deranged rubber ducks against a parallax background of gently undulating soap bubbles. Later we found ourselves exploring a basement by torchlight, years ahead of *Luigi's Mansion*.

"Structure-wise this was similar to, though simpler than, its predecessor, with the house forming a 'hub' from which you could initially access a choice of four areas. You'd have needed to have been pretty committed to unlock the rest, though, thanks to the lack of a save system plus a generally sadistic difficulty level. But it sort of didn't matter, because each level concealed all manner of hidden areas and secret bits, so replayability was assured."

Jonathan Davies, games journalist

First released
1992

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Ocean Software

LOOK I

CRYSTAL

Paladin's Quest / Lennus: Kodai Kikai no Kioku

"I wanted to study literature but instead I studied law. I was a pretty big fan of video games – I'd played *Dragon Quest* a lot – but the roots of my career date back to school, when I translated the Avalon Hill games, saw a bunch of influential movies like *Star Wars*, and read lots of science-fiction novels. Those novels especially inspired me, in terms of the types of worlds I wanted to create. When I wrote *Lennus* [released in the West as *Paladin's Quest*] I was around 28. At that time I was writing all sorts of proposals... When it was published by Asmik I was 30.

"When people ask what RPGs are like, I always think that the World's Fair Expo is the closest comparison. There are all these pavilions you can visit, and each is like another country, offering a completely different experience... Meanwhile in RPGs you travel the world, visiting a variety of towns and dungeons and having adventures. I was one of the early developers to really prioritise 'sekaikan' or world-building. Mechanically, *Lennus* has things in common with other RPGs of the time, but I wanted the world to be one that players wouldn't have experienced in any other game. When I'm creating a world, I'm really a stickler for avoiding familiar words and concepts when writing character names or monster names and such like."

Hidenori Shibao, writer

First released
1992
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Copya System
—
Publisher
Enix
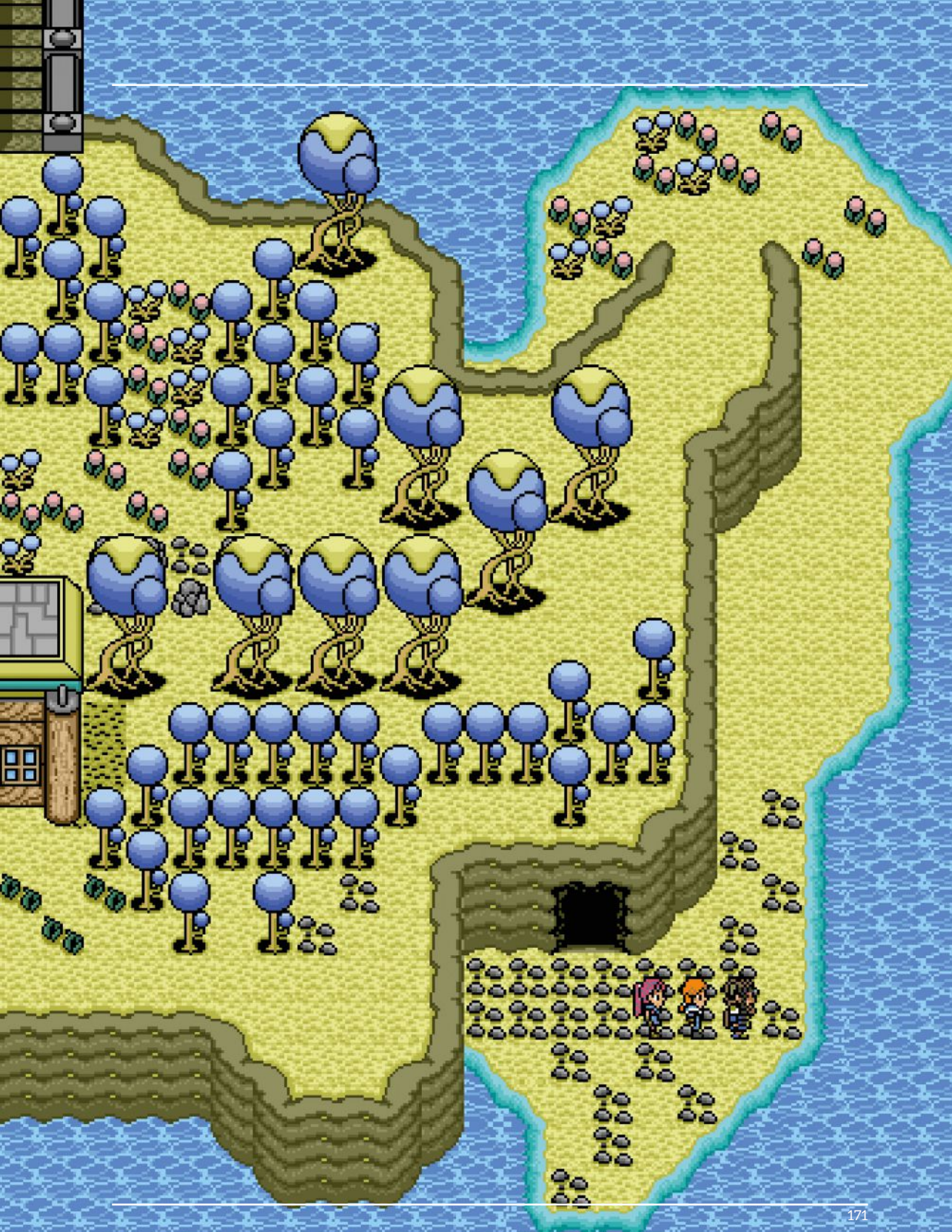
The power of Mode 7

When the SNES arrived, it came with a neat trick up its sleeve: the power to scale and rotate a background layer, which clever designers put to remarkable use.

We like to kid ourselves that modern gaming's tiresome obsession with graphical splendour is something that simply didn't exist in the simpler, humbler era of classic systems, but take a moment to really cast your mind back and it becomes abundantly clear that we were all just as fixated on visual delights as your average PlayStation or Xbox owner today – it's just that we didn't slavishly compare frame-rates, resolution or polygons per second, but instead endlessly debated such varied topics as simultaneous colours on-screen, maximum number of sprites and how many distinct shades of green each console was capable of displaying. Things never really change.

The arrival of the SNES in 1990 was accompanied by plenty of similar technical posturing, with Nintendo understandably keen to assert the power of its new home system over rivals such as the SEGA Mega Drive/Genesis and NEC PC Engine. Both of these systems had been available in Japan for some time and were clearly a huge leap forward when compared to the ageing Nintendo Entertainment System, the 8-bit forerunner to the SNES. Nintendo's 16-bit heavyweight comfortably outgunned both consoles in terms of on-screen colours and audio capability, but the Kyoto giant wasn't about to leave this particular console war to chance; as well as making sure the SNES could display more colourful visuals than its biggest rivals, it equipped the console with eight graphics modes – numbered from 0 to 7 – for displaying background layers. It would be the seventh and final mode which would, via a series of seminal games, elevate itself from being a simple entry on a spec sheet to a fully-fledged selling point; an unforgettable buzzword for the 16-bit generation.

Previously only witnessed in cutting-edge arcade titles like Namco's 1988 top-down tank shooter *Assault*, Mode 7 enabled a background layer to be rotated and scaled on a scanline-by-scanline basis, and this talent could be used to create a range of different effects – the most famous being the impression of a smoothly-scaling and rotating 3D landscape. There were limitations to this approach; the background was the only thing that could be manipulated in this fashion, so all other objects had to be rendered as sprites. In some cases, this forced developers to come up with clever workarounds, such as rendering boss characters as background objects so they could be rotating and scaled smoothly, while creating platforms and other objects in sprite form. Despite its rather narrow scope, it opened up a whole new world of realism back in the early '90s.

Mode 7 was front and centre when the SNES launched in 1990. Launch title *Super Mario World* made sparing use of the effect, reserving it for boss encounters with the cunning Koopalings and malevolent Bowser himself, so it would fall to fellow day-one release *F-Zero* to truly show the potential of Mode 7. A futuristic racing game with an appealing, comic book-style aesthetic, *F-Zero* didn't just harness Mode 7 for visual impact – its core gameplay was built around the effect. The entire track rotated smoothly as the anti-gravity cars (displayed as 2D sprites) skimmed over its surface. This was a revolution in home console racing; previous titles had used crude, bending lines to imitate turns and curves in the track, but now the entire course could be shown moving in relation to the player's vehicle, each bend and corner displayed with rock-solid precision. As well as being an incredibly playable and enjoyable release, *F-Zero* gave SNES owners a tantalising glimpse of the future, and would go on to sire a best-selling series of titles. *Super Mario World* may be seen as one of the best video games of all time, but there's a solid argument for claiming that *F-Zero* was the console's true 'killer app'.

With its ability to smoothly scale and rotate a background image, Mode 7 had obvious applications in the racing genre, but *Pilotwings* – also released close to launch in Japan – would comprehensively illustrate how it could be utilised in other ways. In this groundbreaking console flight simulator, the effect was

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Pilotwings – *1990*

exploited in order to render the earth many feet below, as the player took to the skies in a wide range of craft, including biplanes, rocket packs and even combat helicopters. In some segments – such as the tense skydiving routine – the ground was displayed as a flat rotating surface as the player's avatar hurtled towards it; in others – such as the biplane take-off and landing missions – a perspective similar to that seen in *F-Zero* was used, with the ground running off to the distant horizon, forcing the player to accurately judge distance and speed for a successful touchdown.

> ❝ *Previously only witnessed in cutting-edge arcade titles like Namco's 1988 top-down tank shooter* Assault, *Mode 7 enabled a background layer to be rotated and scaled.* ❞

The use of Mode 7 in *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* was remarkable in that it not only displayed a technical feat which was impossible on other consoles, but that it also genuinely enhanced the gameplay; the smoothly-scrolling landscapes allowed Nintendo's developers to take a tentative step towards the world of full-3D immersion.

With Nintendo showing the potential of this feature with its stunning opening salvo of SNES titles, it didn't take long for third-party developers to find ways of exploiting Mode 7 in their own software.

Konami was one of the first to convincingly harness its power, using it to superb effect in the platforming epic *Super Castlevania IV*. In one scene, the Golem-like boss Koranot is scaled and rotated smoothly, while in another level the entire level turns, forcing the player to latch onto a secured point or face plummeting to their demise. *Contra III: The Alien Wars* – also by Konami – used Mode 7 for its top-down levels, where the ground rotates smoothly around the player character as they stalk through a maze of corridors and rooms, hunting down enemies.

Axelay – yet another Konami effort – used the effect to create one of the most intimidating bosses in shoot 'em up history, the fearsome ED-209-lookalike found at the conclusion of level 2's Tralieb colony stage. Granted, some applications of Mode 7 were little more than window-dressing, designed purely to dazzle the eyeballs without augmenting the gameplay too drastically, but irrespective of the impact on the player's enjoyment, they almost always looked impressive and gave the SNES library a visual edge over the competition.

Secret of Mana / Seiken Densetsu – *1993*

> ❝ *It didn't take long for third-party developers to find ways of exploiting Mode 7 in their own software.* ❞

Even so, time and time again, Mode 7 came back to the racing genre. Seta's ridiculously polished *Exhaust Heat* picked up where *F-Zero* left off by delivering a driving experience a little more rooted in the real world. It put players behind the wheel of a high-performance F1 racing car, while its 1993 sequel expanded its scope by also including other racing categories and even going as far as to showcase an additional chip – the ST010 – which was dedicated to handling the intelligence of opponent cars. However, it would be 1992's *Super Mario Kart* that really demonstrated the power of Mode 7 in the genre. Bolstered by the inclusion of the DSP-1 chip inside the cartridge – which enhanced the 3D calculation power of the console – *Mario Kart* was so successful that it birthed an entirely new racing sub-genre.
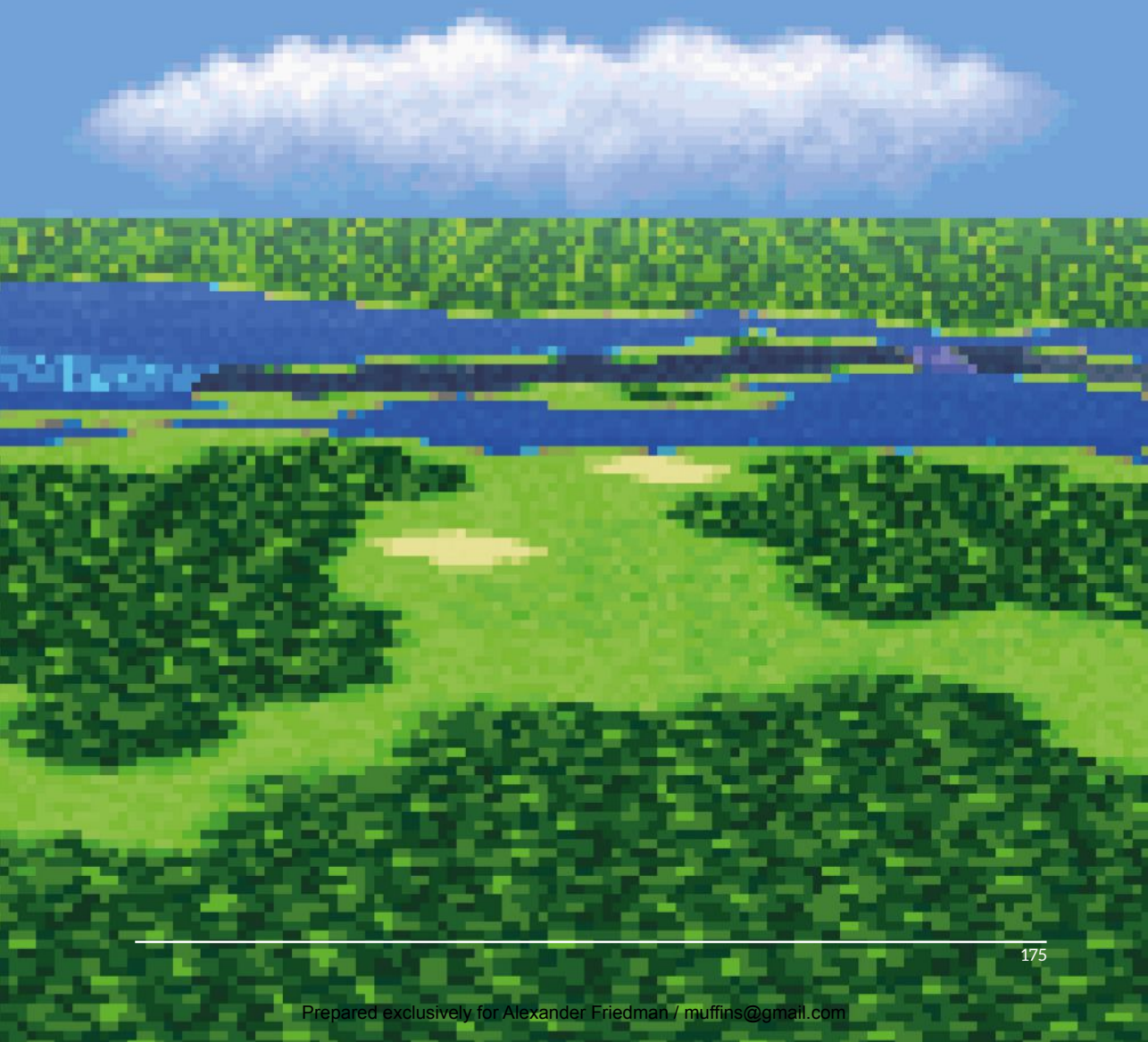
Super Mario Kart – *1992*

Assuming the roles of famous faces from the Super Mario universe, players could race on a range of colourful tracks while hurling weapons at the opposition – and their human opponent, when playing in split-screen mode. Launched at a time when the popularity of the SNES was exploding worldwide and featuring the most famous video game character of all time, *Super Mario Kart* remains perhaps the most well known example of a Mode 7 game.

As the SNES matured and expanded its library, it would enjoy a burgeoning selection of Japanese RPGs, such as *Final Fantasy V*, *Secret of Mana*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Secret of Evermore* and *Terranigma*. Many of these games utilised Mode 7 in some form or another; usually to display the massive, sprawling overworlds that players had to traverse outside of towns, villages and dungeons. While the effect was perhaps a little overused by this juncture, it was undeniably effective in lending each title a grand sense of scale; the presence of these vistas gave the impression of a much larger gameworld, one ripe for exploration and adventure. In *Secret of Mana* – arguably one of the finest RPG adventures available on any home system – the fantasy realm stretched out below the player as they rode on the back of a dragon, or were propelled from the muzzle of a cannon designed for fast-travel between locations.

As with all graphical tricks, Mode 7 eventually lost some of its lustre towards the end of the SNES' lifespan. By the time the middle of the '90s rolled around the world of gaming was taking its next confident step towards full 3D visuals, and primitive attempts to represent movement through 3D space – like Mode 7 – began to look somewhat tired and outdated. Even SNES titles were moving to the next level, with *Star Fox* using the Super FX chipset to render convincing 3D visuals made up of polygons – crude by modern standards, but groundbreaking at the time. There was still room for innovation – such as the way in which the Super FX 2 chip was used in conjunction with Mode 7 to create some dazzling scaling effects in *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* – but advancements made in arcades with polygonal games like *Virtua Racing* and *Virtua Fighter* – as well as the promise of powerful new games consoles on the horizon with the Sony PlayStation and SEGA Saturn – indicated that Mode 7's days were numbered.

Today, the SNES' Mode 7 is viewed with nostalgic curiosity by gamers too young to have experienced its charms back when it actually broke new ground and gave gamers a new perspective on the virtual worlds they chose to inhabit. Like pixel-heavy retro games, it's a relic from the past, a piece of visual trickery which, when taken out of historical context, lacks any real impact in an era where photorealistic visuals are fast becoming a reality. However, those who can still vividly recall the first time they laid eyes on *F-Zero*'s blisteringly smooth scrolling or stood open-mouthed at the vast world laid out in *Pilotwings* know that it was much more than that; not only did it give Nintendo fans something to feel genuinely smug about when chatting with their SEGA-owning pals, for one brief moment it felt like it freed gaming from its 2D shackles and gave millions of players a taste of worlds unbound by the limitations of the period's hardware.

First released *1992* / Genre *Action platformer* / Developer and publisher *Capcom*

The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse / Mickey's Magical Adventure

"Capcom were well known for their amazing Disney licensed games for the NES and luckily their SNES debut didn't disappoint.

"Playing as Mickey Mouse, you set off to rescue your dog Pluto who has been kidnapped by the evil Emperor Pete. Throughout your journey you get to discover three costumes, which, when used, give Mickey new abilities to help him on his quest to defeat Pete and save the land. As well as this, there are many hidden rooms to find, extra hearts for energy, and coins that can be used to upgrade your skills.

"Despite being an early SNES release the graphics still hold up well today. The characters are very well drawn, colourful and move along smoothly. The music is catchy and you easily find yourself humming along.

"*Super Play* magazine was a big fan of this game, ranking it at number 51 in their top 100 games, and it's easy to see why. There are many platform games available for the SNES but this one is definitely worth checking out."

Paul Monaghan,
guest reviewer

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First released
1992

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!

"Published and developed by Konami in 1992, and based on the Warner Bros. Animation and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment animated TV series, aspiring Looney Tunes star Buster Bunny plays different roles in six bite-sized themed episodes. The side-scrolling platform adventure begins at ACME Looniversity, where Buster busts loose on some mischievous animals roaming the halls before finding Dizzy Devil and stopping him from destroying the school's kitchen. He then appears as Sheriff Buster in 'The Western Movie', an unsuspecting hero in 'Spook Mansion', a star athlete in an American football game, a treasure hunter in 'Buster's Sky Jinks', and finally a knight of honour as he fights the evil empire army to rescue Princess Babs in 'Space Opera'.

"The cartoon graphics are detailed and bright, animations vivid, and music and sound crisp and upbeat. The controls are intuitive and responsive, cleverly designed in bunny fashion to dash, jump and rabbit kick.

"While relatively short, and with no scoring to enhance replay value, the game features a refreshing variety of platform game mechanics, light puzzle solving, inventive boss battles, and five short bonus games to earn extra lives, one of which is selected at the end of each episode. Furthermore, three difficulty settings are offered to appropriately challenge and delight the kid in all of us!"

Perry Rodgers, game producer and journalist

Top Gear / Top Racer

"Gremlin had done some NES games previously using their own hardware, and wanted to get into Super Nintendo development and get official developer status. Japanese developer/publisher Kemco had seen and liked the hugely popular *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* by Gremlin, which led to a collaboration to create a new racing game between us. The names '*Top Gear*' and '*Top Racer*' came about because of a craze in the office at the time of calling anything good 'top'. I'm not sure if this craze extended beyond the office, but I have recollections of another Gremlin programmer saying it a lot and possibly being the source!

"We started with a bit of a home-brew dev kit and later switched to a more official kit. We had very little documentation and what we did have was initially unofficial and poorly translated from Japanese. I managed to get the system up and running and figured out how most of it worked, including getting a first-pass rolling road working. No code from any other racing games was used or even referenced, though I did have a few chats with Lotus coder Shaun Southern who sometimes shared my office when he was visiting Gremlin."

Ritchie Brannan, programmer

First released
1992
—

Genre
Racing
—

Developer
Gremlin Graphics
—

Publisher
Kemco

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Whirlo / Xandra no Daibōken: Valkyrie to no Deai

Released in Japan as *Xandra no Daibōken: Valkyrie to no Deai* (*Xandra's Great Adventure: Encounter with the Valkyrie*), this is actually a prequel to the 1986 Famicom adventure *Valkyrie no Bōken: Toki no Kagi Densetsu* (*The Adventure of Valkyrie: The Legend of the Time Key*). However, the lead role passes to Krino Xandra, Valkyrie's green amphibian-looking sidekick, with a story that leads to their eventual meeting.

In this challenging platform adventure, *Xandra* – renamed as *Whirlo* for Western audiences – is on a quest to save his son from the toxic ash released by a volcanic eruption. It's pretty standard fare, with Whirlo brandishing a trident, able to jump and also perform a high jump to clear larger obstacles. He can strike with his trident from above and unleash a powered-up torpedo strike, which scythes through enemies and certain hazards, but leaves Whirlo dizzy, immobile and susceptible to attack.

The biggest problem with *Whirlo* is its press-and-hold control system, which never feels very fluid during play. With one-touch instant death – often at the hand of unforgiving boss fights and demanding platform sections – you're forever journeying back to the start of the level. With pretty graphics and some cute animation, it's just a shame that the difficulty level is so needlessly extreme.
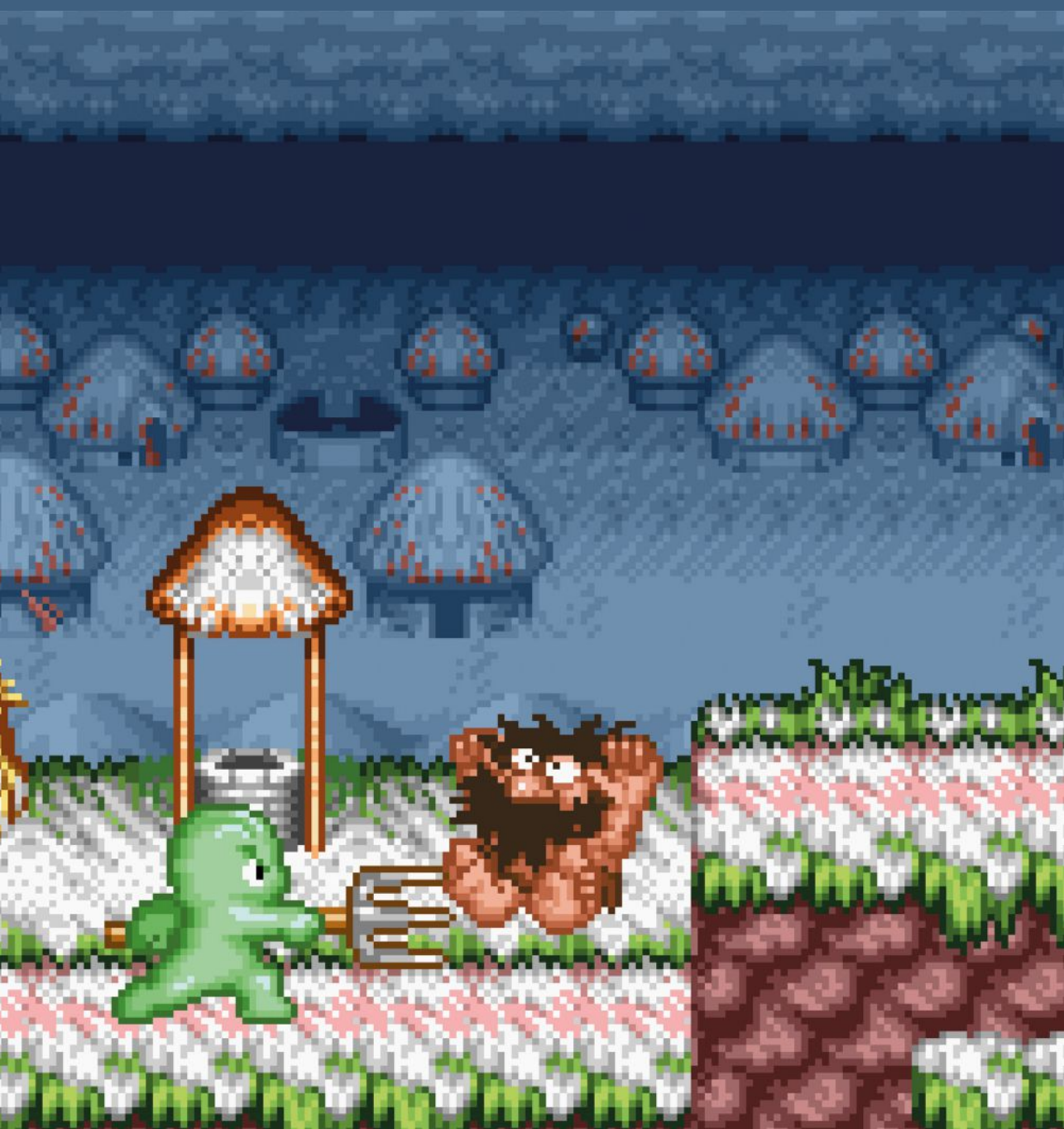
First released *1992* / **Genre** *Action platformer* / **Developer** *Nova Co.* / **Publisher** *Namco*

ActRaiser 2: Crusade to Silence / ActRaiser 2 - Chinmoku heno Seisen

"Enix USA had been open for a short time before I joined the company. I was one of the original game counsellors at Nintendo, and left there to join Enix. I wanted to have an impact on the development side and Enix had a very strong reputation in the industry at that time, so it felt like the right opportunity. Fortunately, they chose me out of the thousands of résumés they received.

"*ActRaiser 2* was one of the first – and most important – mistakes in my career. At the time, I was sure that players valued action over the simulation sequences. They wanted to be challenged; pushed to new levels of difficulty. I pushed Enix away from retaining the sim part of *ActRaiser* and toward a more challenging, visually beautiful action game. I made that decision because I believed I knew what the consumer wanted.

"The release of *ActRaiser 2* taught me about the need to really listen to consumers. You can't get caught up in making games for yourself believing that you speak for the consumer. You have to take the time to hear what people have to say, read all the feedback, read all the comments, and truly understand what people seek in their experiences. Though it was a very strong action game, I removed the soul from *ActRaiser* and that was a really hard but important lesson that I carry with me today."

Robert Jerauld, producer

First released
1993

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer
Quintet

—

Publisher
Enix

Super James Pond II

"A port to the home consoles was considered a mark of achievement for many Amiga developers. *Super James Pond* was the SNES port of *Robocod*, and while it was the first time that the underwater agent was seen on the Super Nintendo it was actually a sequel. The first *James Pond* game was similar to *Ecco the Dolphin*; however *Robocod* offered more traditional platforming fare, inspired by the console games that designer Chris Sorrell was playing in his spare time.

"However, alongside some cringe-inducing puns, surreal level locations, quirky rideable vehicles and Christmas music, was a fantastic original gameplay gimmick: James Pond's robotic suit enabled him to stretch his body upwards, providing the ability to grab on to platforms above his head. This presented some intriguing level designs, where vertical navigation was as important as horizontal progression.

"The Amiga version of *Robocod* is often called the best platform game on the system. However this was a genre flooded with games on the Super Nintendo. Although *Super James Pond* was a game loved by many, its offbeat, quirky British humour meant it failed to make a significant splash around the world."

Julian Hill, guest reviewer

mesPond

II

First released
1993

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer
Millennium

—

Publisher
Ocean Software

Street Fighter II Turbo

"Riding high on the success of *Street Fighter II*, Capcom wanted to release more games in the series. These included iterations such as *Championship Edition* and *Turbo* in quite quick succession. These were essentially the same game but with tweaks to make it feel new. The latter, *Street Fighter II Turbo*, added some new features such as increased speed, different outfits and improved moves. We thought it was a good way to refresh the franchise to bring another product to market, but we did, however, receive a little bit of blow-back from people who questioned whether the extra features were worth another 70 dollars. This was a relatively expensive piece of software, and with most purchasers being parents, it was a hard sell to get them to buy another Street Fighter game for their kids.

"Unfortunately it just wasn't different enough to reach the heights of the original *Street Fighter II*. This was all long before the Internet and being able to download new features into existing games, but Japan came out with it and we were obligated as a subsidiary to bring it to market."

John Gillin, director of marketing

First released *1993* / **Genre** *Fighting /*
Developer and publisher *Capcom*
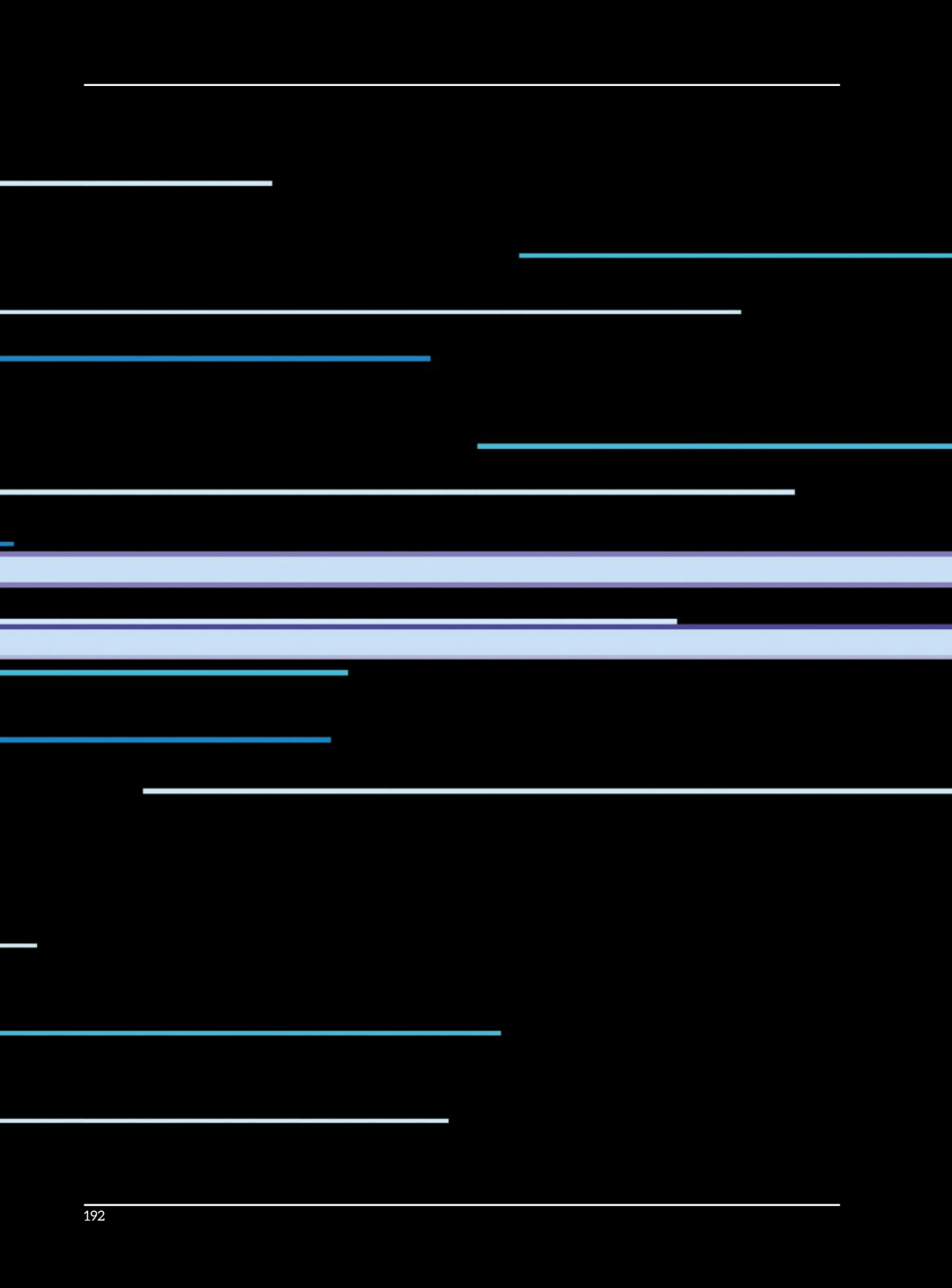
R-Type III:
The Third Lightning

"Released as a console exclusive, *R-Type III* takes advantage of familiar gameplay with an enhanced power-up system. While *Super R-Type* borrowed levels and enemies from the arcade version of *R-Type II* before it, *R-Type III* introduces a new way of handling the force pods. The Round Force, Shadow Force and Cyclone Force all give your ship new enhancements, abilities and laser types, depending on the kinds of power-ups you collect throughout the level.

"As in the prequel games, holding down the fire button charges up your power beam, but your ship can now switch to Hyper Mode, which turns your wave cannon into a hyper-wave cannon. When charged, this cannon has a rapid-fire ability, with huge, devastating firepower. The only drawback is that it overheats your ship quickly and you must cool down to use it again.

"The R-Type series is my all-time favourite, and *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* is the real deal. Fans will know the difficulty is high, as your ship is a one-hit wonder, and the skills needed to survive the onslaught of enemies are massive, but the reward is great. It's truly on par as one of the great classic shoot 'em ups of all time."

'Trickman' Terry Minnich,
games journalist

First released
1993

—

Genre
*Scrolling
shooter*

—

Developer
Irem

—

Publisher
Jaleco
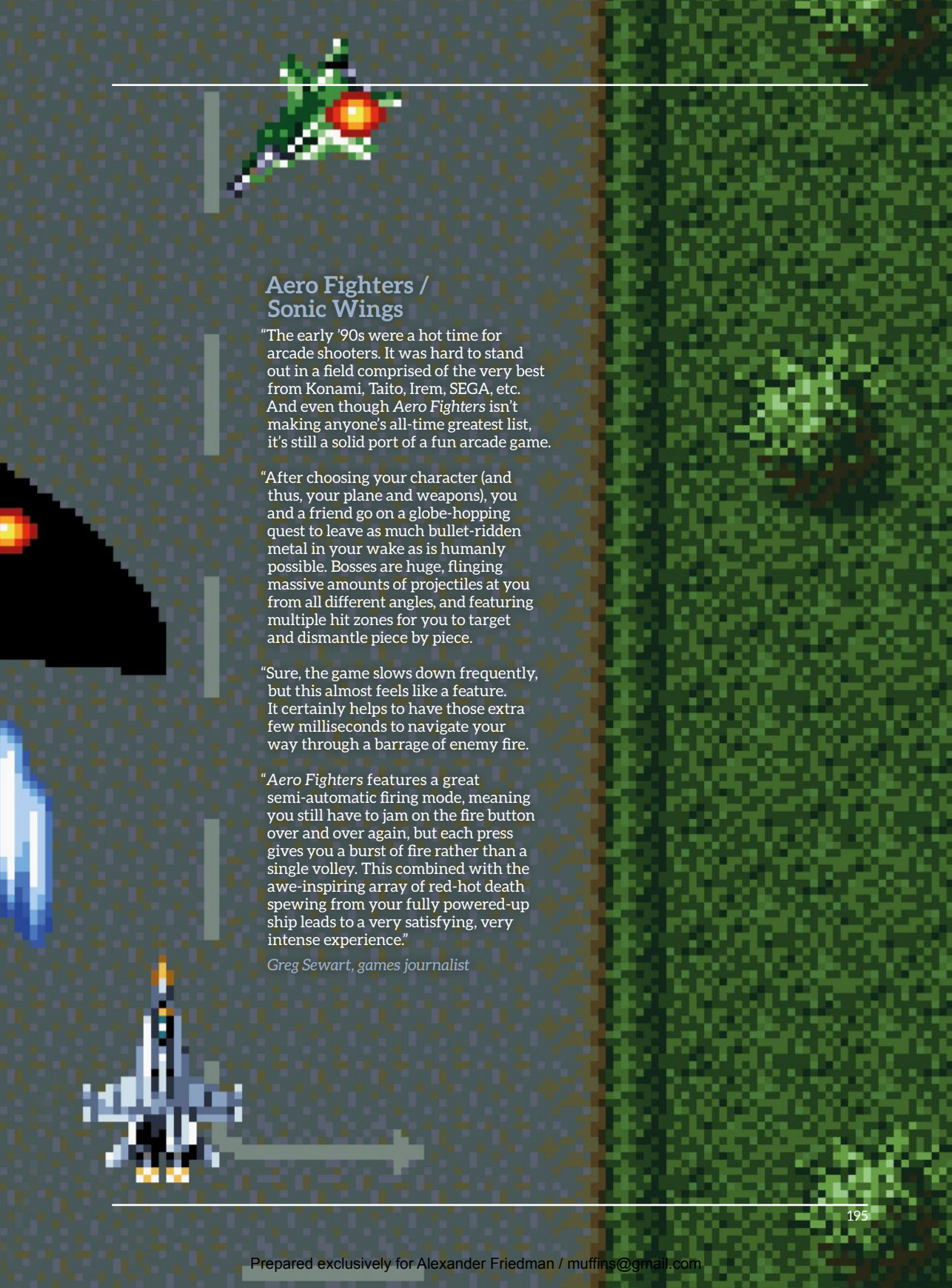
First released
1993
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
Developer
Video System
—
Publisher
McO'River

Prepared exclusively for Alexander Friedman / muffins@gmail.com

Aero Fighters / Sonic Wings

"The early '90s were a hot time for arcade shooters. It was hard to stand out in a field comprised of the very best from Konami, Taito, Irem, SEGA, etc. And even though *Aero Fighters* isn't making anyone's all-time greatest list, it's still a solid port of a fun arcade game.

"After choosing your character (and thus, your plane and weapons), you and a friend go on a globe-hopping quest to leave as much bullet-ridden metal in your wake as is humanly possible. Bosses are huge, flinging massive amounts of projectiles at you from all different angles, and featuring multiple hit zones for you to target and dismantle piece by piece.

"Sure, the game slows down frequently, but this almost feels like a feature. It certainly helps to have those extra few milliseconds to navigate your way through a barrage of enemy fire.

"*Aero Fighters* features a great semi-automatic firing mode, meaning you still have to jam on the fire button over and over again, but each press gives you a burst of fire rather than a single volley. This combined with the awe-inspiring array of red-hot death spewing from your fully powered-up ship leads to a very satisfying, very intense experience."

Greg Sewart, games journalist

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"Super FX was not only capable of 3D maths and vector graphics, but it was also able to do sprite rotation and scaling – something that Nintendo really wanted for their own games."

Jez San, Game programmer and founder of Argonaut Software

Alien³

"As a huge fan of the *Alien* and *Aliens* films, I was incredibly excited to be offered the job for *Alien³* with my good friend Nick Jones on board as programmer. At the time the movie was still in production so it was a bit of a shock when we finally saw a rough cut. Only one Alien, no weapons and Ripley dies at the end. How do we turn that into a fun Aliens game? We decided to ignore the setup of the movie and make an 'Aliens' game that just looked like *Alien³*. We didn't really tell anyone about this and expected to get some pushback from the publisher when they saw our updates. Thankfully no one even mentioned it, so we ploughed ahead.

"One of the challenges was a lack of material to work from. I was sent a package with a few photos of the sets and some very small photographic slides. Well I didn't have a slide projector (who does!), so I'm trying to match the look of the movie by squinting at these slides in front of a lamp!

"I had no art training and wasn't sure what I was capable of producing at the time. Thankfully the SNES colour range matched the movie's visual tone perfectly. It was the first time I had a console that could produce realistic art. I was surprised how close we came to matching the movie."

Nick Bruty, game designer

Batman Returns

"Everyone wants to be 'The Batman', but not everyone wanted to play his games. Prior to Rocksteady's Arkham franchise, The Dark Knight hasn't had the best track record to match his superhero appeal. *Batman Returns,* thankfully, bucked the trend back in 1993 as being not only a good superhero game, but also a quality movie tie-in.

"Akin to the Final Fight series, *Batman Returns* is a beat 'em up with a penchant for high-impact moves. Whether it be spiking a fat clown to the ground or bonking a couple of baddies' heads together, you almost start to feel bad for anyone who crosses your path. Couple the fisticuffs with Batman's patented gadgets, plus a driving section in the Batmobile, and you get a brawler that truly captures that superhero vibe.

"*Batman Returns* also does a nice job replicating the essence of the movie. There are cutscenes before and after levels, and some nice attention-to-detail moments such as using a piece of the wall to initiate the battle with Selina's captor. It's a rather short game, but does justice to the source material in a way many of Batman's games have not."

David Giltinan, games journalist

First released
1993
——

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up
——

Developer and publisher
Konami

HUDSON SOFT

Founded in 1973 by brothers Yuji and Hiroshi Kudo, Hudson – so named because the siblings loved locomotives – was initially concerned with retailing radio telecommunications equipment and artistic photography. However, a visit to the US convinced Yuji that the company's future lay in the new-fangled personal computer.

He leveraged the growing interest in programming – then achieved by typing out pages of code printed in magazines – by selling hand-typed programs on cassette tape, saving the end user many hours of effort. These proved to be incredibly successful, thanks in no small part to the PC boom in Japan, instigated by companies such as NEC and Sharp. Hudson started to crank out software on a regular basis, with as many as 20 titles a month hitting store shelves. The firm's expertise in this arena attracted the attention of Sharp, which commissioned Hudson to create the operating system for its new Sharp X1 home computer. This venture subsequently caught the eye of another Japanese company, which was just about to change the face of home entertainment forever: Nintendo.

With the Famicom on the horizon, Hudson worked with Nintendo on the Family BASIC programming language and would become one of the first third-party developers to support the new console, along with industry veteran Namco. One of its first releases was a conversion of Douglas E. Smith's 1983 computer title *Lode Runner*, but Hudson was also entrusted with porting Nintendo's *Mario Bros.* and *Donkey Kong 3* to the NEC PC-8801, one of Japan's most popular computers. Like so many of Nintendo's publishing partners during the '80s, Hudson benefited immensely from the near-dominance of the Famicom console in that region. *Lode Runner* shifted 1.2 million units, but 1984's *Bomberman* is perhaps the best known of Hudson's early Famicom output – it spawned a million-selling series, which continues to this day.

Around this time Hudson also gained a reputation for addictive and challenging 2D shooters, thanks to its popular Famicom port of Tehkan's *Star Force* as well as its own Star Soldier series. Such was the popularity of these titles that the firm held a Hudson Game Caravan event in 1985, which toured the south of Japan

allowing keen Famicom players to sample the latest games. These were hosted by Hudson staffer Toshiyuki Takahashi, better known as Takahashi Meijin, or 'Master Takahashi'. Another nickname was '16Shot', a title bestowed due to Takahashi's ability to hit the fire button 16 times in a single second, making him a fearsome shoot 'em up player. Takahashi became something of a mascot for the firm, even appearing in his own game series, *Adventure Island*. The first title in this series was a port of SEGA's *Wonder Boy* coin-op, developed by Japanese studio Escape (later known as Westone). Because SEGA only owned the rights to the characters and not the actual game itself, Hudson was free to create its own spin on the concept – with Takahashi replacing *Wonder Boy* as the hero. The Adventure Island series became one of Hudson's most famous properties, alongside the aforementioned Bomberman.

Hudson continued to actively support the Famicom – and, by extension, its Western equivalent, the NES – for the rest of the decade, with titles like *Milon's Secret Castle, The Adventures of*

Dino Riki, Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom and *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu* earning the company a new legion of fans, as well as a considerable amount of revenue. However, Yuji and Hiroshi Kudo weren't content simply producing games for other companies and had long harboured a desire to branch out into hardware development. Keen to craft the best software possible, the siblings knew that they would have to come up with their own technology so that the company's development talent could really shine.

With this objective in mind, Hudson designed a chipset of its own and began courting manufacturers with the aim of creating a new home console. It joined forces with NEC – one of the giants of the Japanese consumer electronics industry – and the PC Engine console was born. It was the perfect marriage: Hudson would benefit from working with hardware that was powerful enough to fulfil its lofty ambitions, while NEC had a promising route into the lucrative console gaming sector, which had remained closed off to the company until this point. Launched in Japan in 1987, the PC Engine was bolstered not only by Hudson's own properties such as Bomberman and Adventure Island, but also a raft of notable arcade conversions including *Xevious*, *Galaga '88* and *R-Type*, the latter of which caused quite a stir thanks to how faithful it was to the coin-op original. In its second year, the PC Engine managed to outsell the Famicom in Japan – an incredible achievement and the first time Nintendo had encountered genuine console competition in its homeland.

Driven by the desire to push technological as well as creative boundaries, Hudson and NEC released a flood of PC Engine variants over the next few years. Some were successful – such as the groundbreaking CD-ROM attachment, which arrived in 1988 – while others were unfortunate commercial disasters. 1989's SuperGrafx was intended to combat the recently released 16-bit SEGA Mega Drive and forthcoming Super Nintendo by offering beefed-up PC Engine hardware in a massive, futuristic-looking case, but only six titles were ever produced before the console was quietly forgotten. Subsequent hardware revisions – such as the Duo, Duo-R and Duo-RX – focused on combining the PC Engine and its CD-ROM add-on in a single elegant unit, and found plenty of favour with Japanese players.

But for all the success it had in its homeland, the PC Engine was not a global smash. The North American release – renamed TurboGrafx – failed in the face of the SEGA Genesis and Super Nintendo, and this may well have contributed to Hudson's decision to keep supporting rival systems even though it had a vested interest in the commercial performance of the PC Engine. Throughout the early part of the '90s the company produced a series of 16-bit titles that arguably outshone those it created for its own hardware. *PC Kid* (a.k.a. *Bonk*) and *Adventure Island* both enjoyed multiple entries on the SNES, while Bomberman received no less than five mainline titles on Nintendo's famous console, along with the 1996 Japan-only spin-off *Bomberman B-Daman*.

Super Bomberman launched in 1993 and was notable for being the first SNES game to offer four-player action at the same time, thanks to the Multitap accessory, while *Super Bomberman 5* arrived in 1997 – a year after Nintendo had released its next home console, the Nintendo 64.

> 66 Bomberman *is perhaps the best known of Hudson's early Famicom output – it spawned a million-selling series, which continues to this day.* 99

The Super Bomberman series was, for many players, an entry point for the franchise, arguably responsible for giving the character widespread fame in the West. Other 16-bit highlights included the gorgeous platformer *Milon no DokiDoki Daibōken* (1996) and the surprisingly dark and foreboding *Hagane: The Final Conflict* (1994). Hudson's talent simply refused to be confined to a single piece of hardware – even when the company's fortunes rested on the success of its own PC Engine range.

As the '90s wore on Hudson and NEC – like their hardware rivals SEGA and Nintendo – became acutely aware that a new generation was dawning, and cartridges were destined for the scrapheap. Revealed in 1992, the Tetsujin ('Iron Man') project was intended to leverage the power of CD-ROM and deliver a 32-bit

**Super Adventure Island /
Takahashi Meijin no Daibōken Jima** – *1992*

Super Bonk / Chō Genjin – *1994*

Super Bomberman 3 – *1995*

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure – *1996*

experience in homes all over the globe, but when it eventually appeared in 1994 under the name PC-FX it was a crushing disappointment, and certainly not the powerful PC Engine successor that fans had wished for. Somewhat foolishly, Hudson and NEC had built a console almost entirely preoccupied with Full-Motion Video – a fad that had, by this point, been suitably eclipsed by the real-time allure of true 3D graphics. The pair had simply backed the wrong horse and the PC-FX sold dismally, left in the dust by the likes of the Sony PlayStation and SEGA Saturn, both of which launched in the same year.

Typically, Hudson didn't allow this misstep to change its strategy, which – as was the case during the 16-bit era – ensured that all its eggs were never placed in the same basket. They supported the PlayStation, Saturn and Nintendo 64 with its biggest games and fostered new IP in the form of *Bloody Roar* (1997) and *B.L.U.E. Legend of Water* (1998) for the PlayStation, plus *Bulk Slash* (1997) and *Willy Wombat* (1997) for the Saturn. The Nintendo 64 received 3D fighter *Dual Heroes*, while all three consoles would be graced by high-profile Bomberman outings – the series was by this stage Hudson's most bankable property by quite some margin.

Around this time events outside of Hudson's control were taking place that would change the face of the company forever and ultimately lead to its retreat from the world of video game development and publishing. In 1997, the Hokkaidō Takushoku Bank in Japan collapsed as the Asian financial bubble burst. Operating on the naïve assumption that property prices would keep on rising, the bank had been offering finance at around 120% of real estate value when the accepted level at the time was more like 70 per cent. The bank was declared bankrupt and Hudson – which had loans with the institution –

found its finances thrown into disarray. The company was floated on the Japanese stock market and while the cash generated was enough to cover its outstanding loans, the Hudson that emerged on the other side was a shadow of its former self. Its knight in shining armour was rival publisher Konami, which invested in the company and enabled it to continue funding development of software. In 2005 Konami became Hudson's biggest shareholder with 53.99% of all Hudson stock.

The upheaval taking place behind the scenes had an impact on Hudson's productivity during this period; big-name releases began to dry up and the company took on a series of paid jobs to balance the books. These included assisting SEGA with the Dreamcast title *Sonic Shuffle* and working on several iterations of Nintendo's popular Mario Party franchise. In 2003 Hudson Entertainment was established in North America with veteran staffer John Grainer at the helm. An attempt was made to mine the company's back catalogue with revivals such as *Alien Crush Returns* and *Star Soldier R*, both for Nintendo's WiiWare service, but aspirations were deliberately kept small. This was not the glorious rebirth that Hudson fans had perhaps hoped for. 2006's Xbox 360 exclusive *Bomberman: Act Zero* is perhaps indicative of the tight spot the company found itself in. An attempt to update its most famous franchise with a dark, sci-fi storyline, the game was lambasted by critics and sold badly. 2007's *Fuzion Frenzy 2* was received just as poorly.

Pretty soon the familiar Hudson logo would vanish altogether. In 2011 it became a wholly owned subsidiary of Konami, while the US-based Hudson Entertainment was promptly liquidated. The following year Hudson effectively ceased to exist as it was absorbed into Konami Music Entertainment. The plan was to continue using the Hudson brand for relevant products but this seems to have been forgotten. 2017's *Super Bomberman R* – the first mainline Bomberman title for quite some time and a launch title for the Nintendo Switch console – features not Hudson's name on the cover, but Konami's. While the famous brand may no longer be part of the video game landscape, the properties created by this Japanese veteran will hopefully live on in the hearts and minds of those who enjoyed them the first time around.

> 66 *As the '90s wore on Hudson and NEC – like their hardware rivals SEGA and Nintendo – became acutely aware that a new generation was dawning, and cartridges were destined for the scrapheap.* 99

Super Bomberman 2 – *1994*

Battletoads in Battlemaniacs

Battletoads was UK developer Rare's attempt at creating its own gaming franchise as a rival to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Invented by Chris and Tim Stamper, it was also intended to be a solely-owned IP, including comics and a cartoon series, which they could exploit to their own gain, rather than having to license other companies'.

This third game in the series is pretty much an upgraded remake of the NES original, in which one or two players punch and kick their way across six stages en route to a showdown with the Dark Queen. As well as hand-to-hand combat sections, the game features vehicle racing stages and bonus rounds, with a variety of vertical and multidirectional scrolling.

Battletoads in Battlemaniacs is big, brash, loud and colourful. Rare is to be commended for its technical prowess and the inventiveness of the locations and characters. But the overall experience is marred by a combination of mindless button mashing interspersed with some of the harshest twitch-reaction gaming you'll ever encounter. The difficulty level in the later stages is pretty much off the chart, so unless you possess an excess of patience, a photographic memory and some spare controllers, you might want to give this one a miss.

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BioMetal

"I hired a sound engineer and music producer, Ali Lexa, for several games around that time. When we licensed *BioMetal*, it was actually his idea to license techno music as we were very into the early '90s rave scene in L.A. He personally knew Jürgen Korduletsch, the president of Radikal Records, which was 2 Unlimited's label. Ali made an introduction and I took it from there. The label and band were very involved in the music production, since the recorded songs had to be broken up into sound banks/patches so they could be played by MIDI sequencers and loaded into the native format for the SNES. We would FedEx everything between Athena and Activision, because we didn't really get email until two or three years after that. Back then we would have been shipping things physically.

"The group played the game and approved the music playback on the SNES – they loved it! The band, label and tour manager even collaborated with Activision to place a massive 20-foot screen behind the band during their live tour and project gameplay of *BioMetal* while they performed. When 2 Unlimited played at Prince's Club in downtown L.A., most of Activision's employees – including CEO Bobby Kotick and other executives – attended the show and met the two members of 2 Unlimited. We even produced limited edition 'rave' jackets with embroidered 2 Unlimited and *BioMetal* logos on the back!"

Kelly Rogers, producer

Bubsy in Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind / Yamaneko Bubsy no Daibōken

"*Bubsy in Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* – or *Bubsy* for short – was a 'sign of the times'. Mascot platformers were a dime a dozen by the time this title released in 1993, and the idea of a super-fast animal hero with attitude was nothing new.

"Despite a lack of originality, *Bubsy* proved to be a competent platformer with some slick animation and catchy music. The character's lines, as can be expected from the full title of the game, are largely made up of terrible puns. How much you enjoy the Bubsy character is largely dependent on your tolerance of corny, '90s-era humour. Since he's a bobcat, it's also worth noting that Bubsy starts a new game with nine lives as opposed to the standard three.

"Another fun fact is that this was the only Bubsy game in the franchise to make its way to Japan. Titled *Yamaneko Bubsy no Daibōken*, the Super Famicom version is virtually identical to the SNES version in every way minus the fact that Bubsy speaks in Japanese. Again, your tolerance for the in-game dialogue can either make this a good or bad thing."

David Giltinan, games journalist

First released
1993
—

Genre
Action platformer
—

Developer and publisher
Accolade

Hurry Ave

Captain America
and the Avengers

"SNES *Captain America and the Avengers* was one of the first games Realtime Associates created as a formal company. Before then, we were a loosely knit group of contractors working out of our homes; we'd just rented an office and started coming in to work together. The game was an arcade conversion and we got the arcade machine and, fortunately, a copy of the source graphics but not the programming. So it was up to us to play the arcade machine well enough to get the mechanics and tuning – a rough day at the office! (Hey, that was better than *Q*Bert* where we only got the machine!)

"Everyone pitched in. Even someone who just wanted to use our computers to practise art in the evening was assigned to develop the shadows under the characters – she went on to become a full-time employee for the next ten years or so. I would have never guessed that the Avengers franchise would become the box office giant it is today – so it's fun to say I made a game based on the Avengers!"

David Warhol, producer

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer
Data East
—
Publisher
Mindscape

Cybernator /
Assault Suits Valken

"This is another game that I did pretty much by myself. I'm grateful to the thoughtful friend who drew, among other things, the background for the final stage, but I was responsible for the mecha design, backgrounds and sekaikan ['world view'] – almost all the imagery. It was also my idea to destroy the floor and other objects by shooting them with the machine gun. It goes back to the prequel, *Assault Suit Leynos* on the Mega Drive: in that game if a bullet hits a gasoline tank it explodes like you'd expect. And if a bullet hits a cannon, the cannon also becomes damaged or destroyed. So I thought, if that's the case then why not also shoot out the floor? I remember the programmer hating the idea. I remember him being annoyed with me, saying, 'That's a pain to code!' But I suggested making minor things destructible in every stage, and we talked about how that had never been done before.

"Even as we were making the games, new ideas never stopped flowing. Like, whenever a programmer would come up with something, they'd get all excited and say, 'Look what I managed to get working – we should use this!', but then admit, 'We don't have time now, but if there's a *Valken 2* let's put it in that!'

"When we were staying overnight at work, we'd end up drinking until morning at a bar in Nishi-Azabu, talking about those ideas. Sometimes they found homes in other projects. Every day was a blur of 'This is fun!'… 'We need more time!' … 'I'm tired!'… 'I had another idea!' It was such a wonderful time. I'm so grateful I was able to be a part of that."

Satoshi Nakai, graphic artist

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer
NCS Corp
—
Publisher
Masaya Games
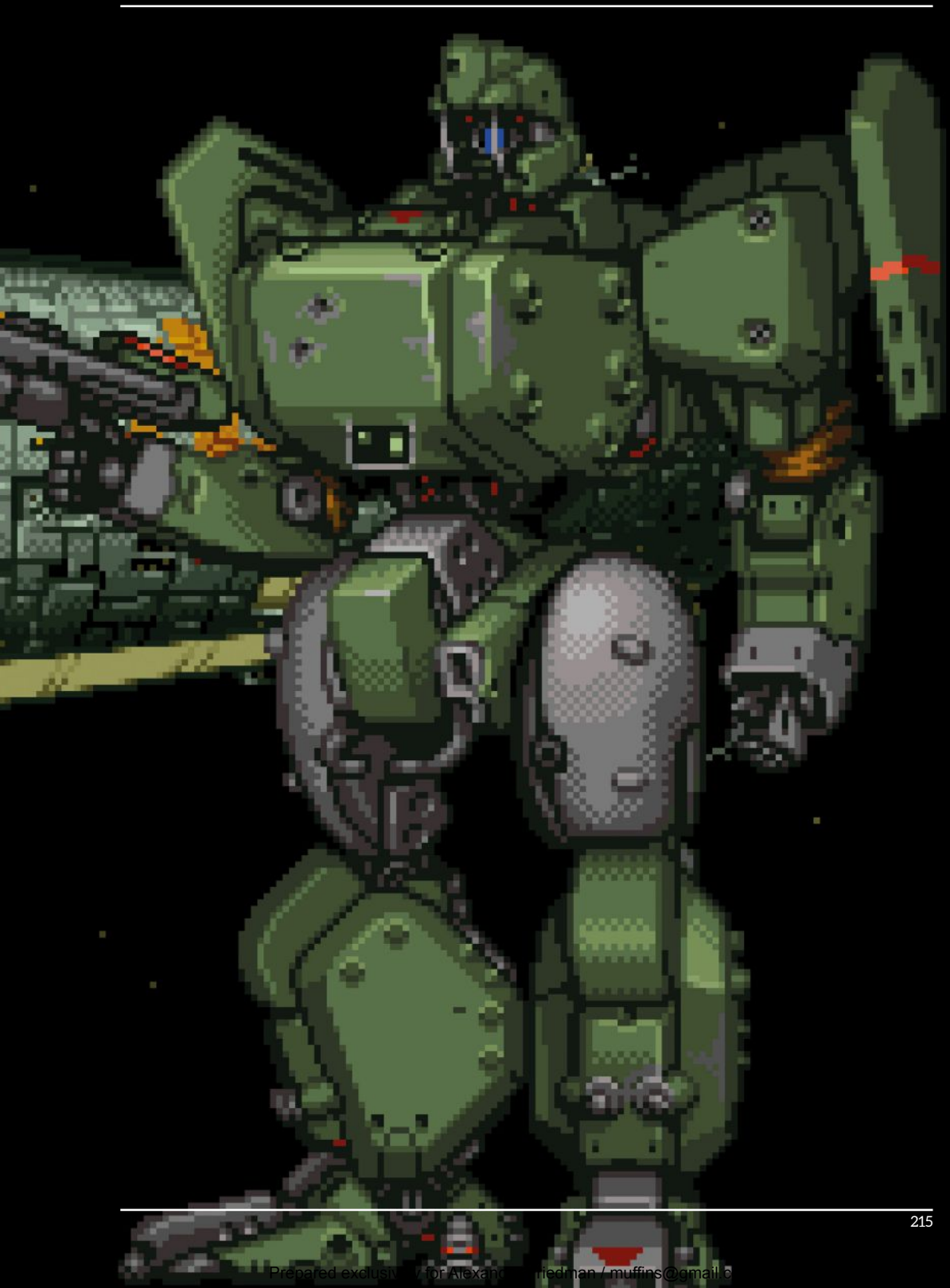
Disney's Aladdin

"*Aladdin* was one of many games we did with Disney and it was a big smash for us. We always got along with Disney and had a great working relationship with them. I think they preferred to work with a third party rather than Nintendo directly, as I believe they saw Mario as a competitor to Mickey Mouse. During development, there were Disney animators going to Japan and Japanese animators coming to Burbank all the time – there was a very tight collaboration between the two parties in making sure that everything met Disney standards. On my end, whether it was any type of advertising or packaging, there was quite a lot of approval I had to go through with Disney before we could bring anything to market.

"In a bid to market the game, we worked with Nintendo and sent well over 100,000 videotapes to subscribers of *Nintendo Power*, basically touting the game. We worked with some great talent in Hollywood to create it, and it was very effective direct marketing because the VHS tapes just showed up in SNES enthusiasts' mailboxes. The videocassette was expensive but it paid off – we had huge returns from it."

John Gillin, director of marketing
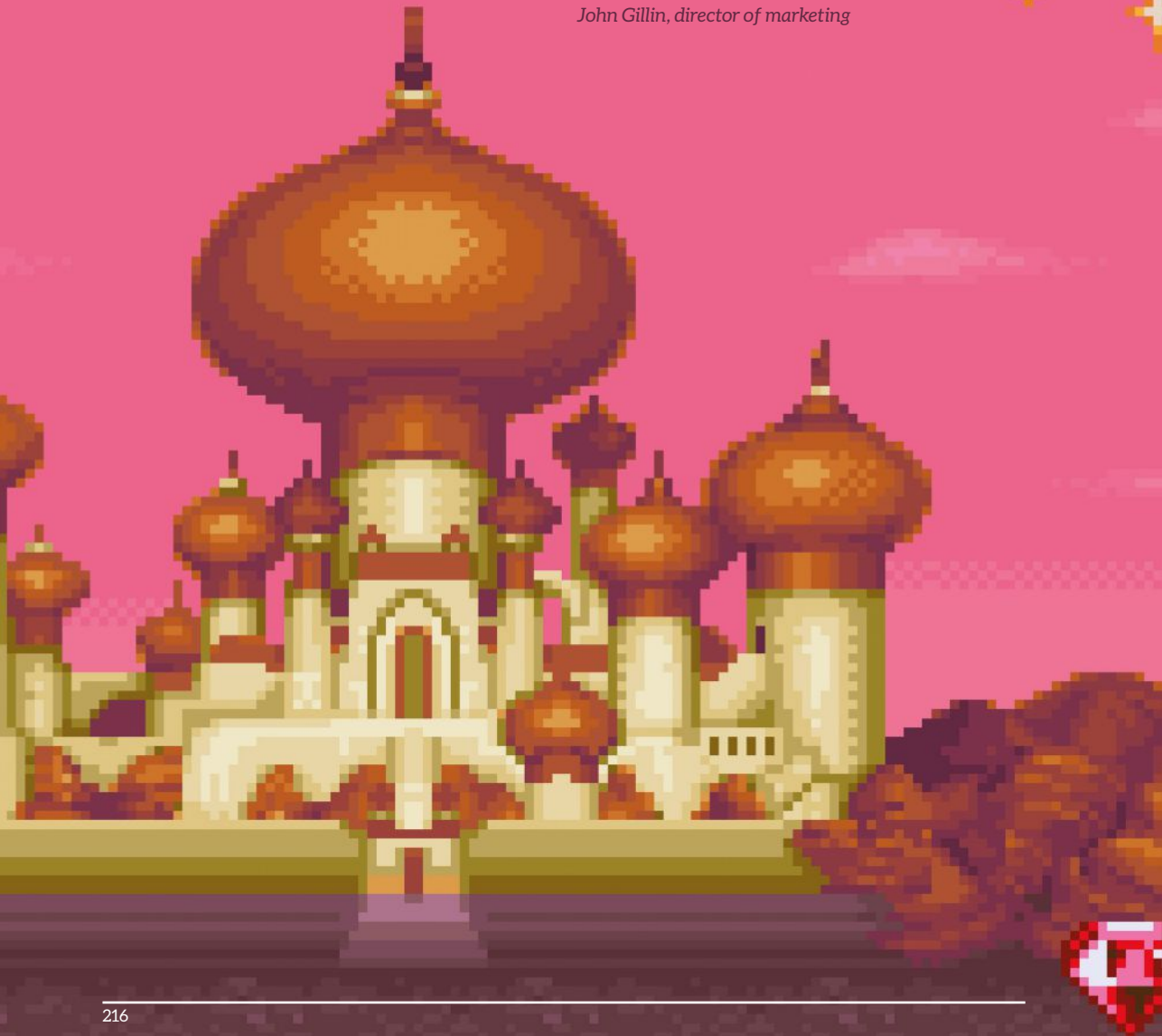
E.V.O.: Search for Eden / 46 Okunen Monogatari: Harukanaru Eden E

"As Charles Darwin taught, only the fittest species will survive. *E.V.O.: Search for Eden* interprets this foundation for modern biology as a battle royale: you kill everything in sight and use your earned experience points (EVO) on upgrading your creature so you can continue to kill… Will you spend your EVO on a Coelafish Tail or Ikustega's Tail? A Feeler Horn or a Dual Horn? These are the questions that plague both the gods and primordial fish monsters alike. Each upgrade takes you one step closer to Eden, a promised land for highly-evolved species.

"Before you can battle dinosaurs, however, you'll have to bite a whole mess of unsuspecting fish. Biting, and eventually tail-swinging, comprise almost the entirety of gameplay in *E.V.O.* Seeing your fish become a lizard, a mammal, and ultimately an abomination of your own design, is worth the many mouthfuls.

"Despite its loose foundations in evolutionary science, the whole procreation problem is glossed over in *E.V.O.* There's plenty of fight and flight, but perhaps the most popular 'F' word is left out entirely. Unscientific means aside, in the end you're left with a creation that's wholly unique: a swamp thing, a caveman, a pterodact-dude … whatever it takes to bite your way into Eden."

Samuel Claiborn, games journalist

First released
1992
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Almanic
—
Publisher
Enix

Jurassic Park

"*Jurassic Park* was something of a milestone for me. We paid around $1m for the licence – far more than anything previously – and so the pressure was on to try and make something special. In an effort to achieve this, I had a creative meeting with the man himself, Steven Spielberg, and was really impressed with his ideas and sheer passion and enthusiasm. We had a great meeting in his office where he actually demonstrated a reasonable knowledge of video games. He was one of my true heroes and so this was quite a special event for me. I also had an amazing meeting with Stan Winston, which included a tour of his studio where I watched them sculpting the raptors, whilst surrounded by props from the likes of *Terminator 2* and *Aliens*.

"Regarding the game itself, I had seen screenshots of a game then in production entitled *DOOM* (yes, that one!) and I thought it would be great to adapt the raptor scenario for that mechanic. Unfortunately, we only had about six to nine months to design and develop the entire game and so our ambition was slightly thwarted by the tight deadline but it turned out pretty well."

Gary Bracey, former VP of development at Ocean Software

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer and publisher
Ocean Software

Chō Jikū Yōsai Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie

This 1993 shooter by Zamuse is based on the 1984 movie *Macross: Do You Remember Love*, an alternate-timeline spin-off of the long-running TV series, *The Super Dimension Fortress Macross*. However previous knowledge of the franchise isn't really necessary, as you strap in and pilot a transforming 'Valkyrie Veritech' fighter in a battle against the alien Zentradi forces.

The action starts by selecting one of three ships piloted by either Hikaru, Max or Milia. Each one has a different weapon configuration and three transformable modes: Fighter mode is more agile but less powerful; Gerwalk is slower but offers a charge weapon; and the Battroid form is slower still but the most potent. Each form can be powered up three times, providing upgraded firepower and additional lasers, bombs or missiles. And if you stop shooting for a while, your fighter glows yellow – at which point contact with an alien ship causes it to switch sides and fight alongside you (although they don't seem to be an awful lot of help to be honest).

Scrambled Valkyrie is a spectacular shooter, fast and exciting with a varied range of enemy craft and backdrops, plus some great visual effects. So it's a shame that it's painfully, senselessly hard – even on Easy mode – and with just one life and no password or save system, the time and effort needed to reach the later stages feels like more effort than it's worth.
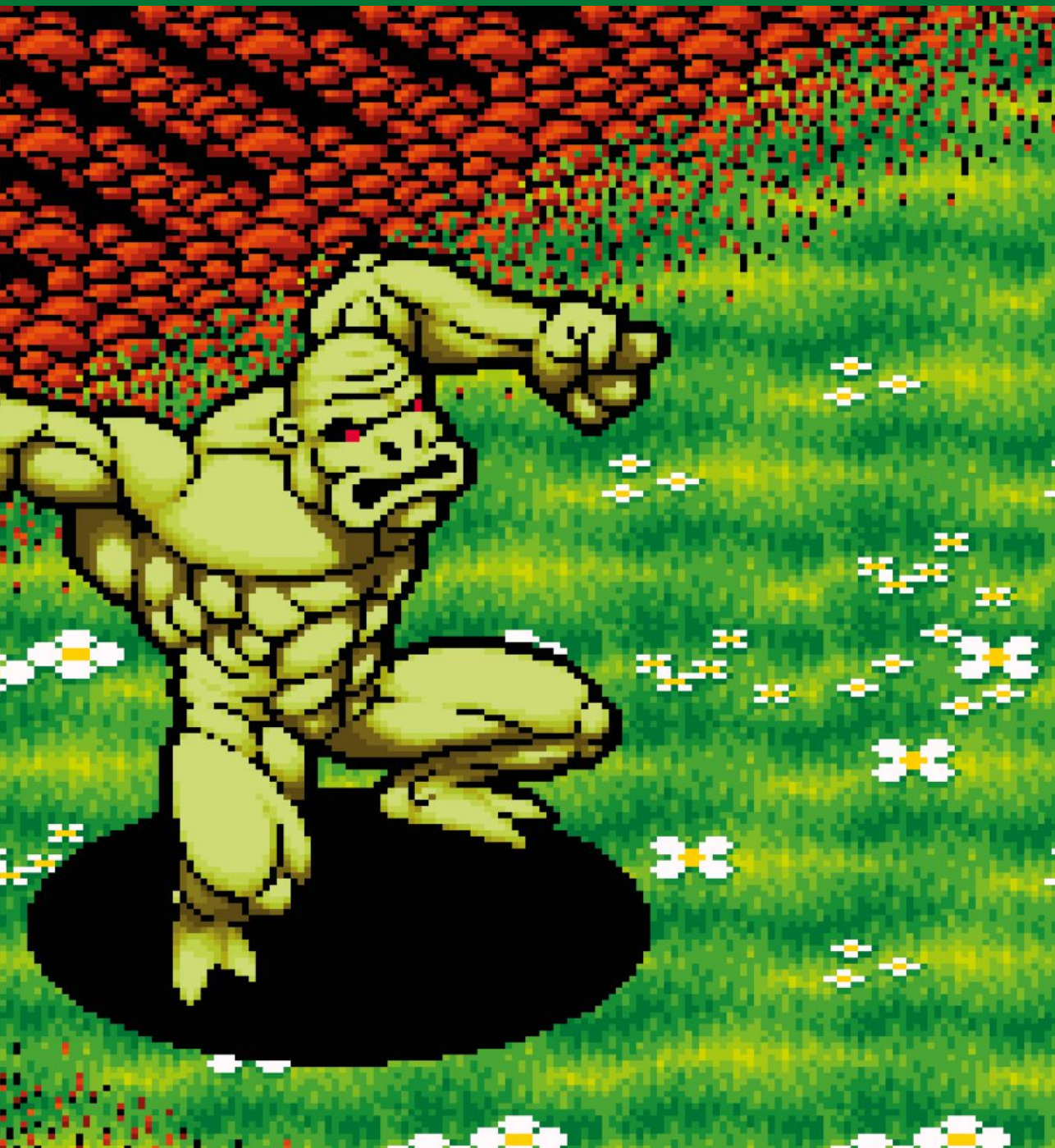
Equinox / Solstice II

"*Equinox* was designed to be a JRPG-style game. Development was running a bit late, so the publisher panicked and demanded we do something to get the game back on schedule. The only thing possible was to completely remove the RPG elements as these were the least developed sections. It's a real shame as the game could have been a classic if it was a full RPG.

"During development we discovered there was a bug in the SNES hardware which meant sprite priorities were backwards. We were using sprite priorities in an unusual way, and this led to parts of sprites disappearing in some rooms. Nintendo testers kept rejecting the game because of this, and we'd try to explain the hardware bug, tweak the odd room, and resubmit the game. Every re-submission required a video of the game being played from start to end, so every re-submission meant me buying a three-pack of 180-minute VHS tapes, and spending all day playing the game again. In the end we managed to get someone higher up at Nintendo to understand the issue, and he waved the game through. Nintendo testers sent us a certificate saying we held the record for the longest game ever in QA!"

Ste Pickford, game designer

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action adventure
—
Developer
Software Creations
—
Publisher
Sony

Magazines

Back at the beginning of the '90s, the Internet was basic to say the least. The World Wide Web had only been invented the year before and even by 1995 – when the SNES was about to be eclipsed by the N64 – only 2% of Americans had any meaningful Internet access. So in terms of information, games magazines ruled the day. Titles such as Nintendo Power, Electronic Gaming Monthly *and* Diehard GameFan *in the US,* Famitsu *in Japan, and* Super Play *and* Total! *in the UK were gamers' only real means of receiving the latest news and reviews for their beloved Super Nintendo. Here are some of the reminiscences of the editors, writers and publishers who made these much-loved magazines back in the day…*

Welcome to the magazine library...

▼

Magazine Library by Craig Stevenson *– 2017*

Perry Rodgers / EGM

"Steve Harris, Jeff Peters and myself had starting working together on a quarterly newsletter called '*Top Score*' in which we reviewed arcade and pinball games, profiled players and industry leaders, and, of course, listed the top scores on many arcade games. We published four issues, which were mailed to Amusement Players Association (APA) members. In 1987, our ambition grew to publishing a fully-fledged magazine, seeing an opportunity to serve the new console market consumer with the recent success of the NES. But what to call the magazine? One day the three of us went to Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park. While standing in line for a ride, we brainstormed the name. First we recalled the many arcade game magazines we enjoyed: *JoyStik*, *Video Games*, *Computer Games* and *Video Game Player*. As we couldn't very well then use 'video game' or 'computer game', we came up with 'electronic game', and then added 'player', so '*Electronic Game Player*'. Four issues were published under that name in 1988."

Tim Lindquist / GameFan

"One day, my friend George Weising told me that he had visited a game store in Tarzana, California that imported games from Japan and they had games that weren't out in the US yet — right then! This sounded like a dream come true, so I went with him at the next available opportunity, and it was an amazing game store. The place was called DieHard Gamers Club. We visited fairly often and got to be friends with everyone who worked there who were all hardcore gamers as well. We hit it off pretty well and helped them source arcade games for the shop and would just hang out and talk about games. I told the owner (Dave Halverson) that I did ad design/layout for a living and he mentioned that he wanted to put mail order ads in the gaming magazines of the day such as *EGM* and *GamePro*. I offered to design his ads in exchange for store credit. He was down for that and we started making ads like crazy!

"Dave was also not happy with the import coverage in magazines and asked me how much it would cost to make a game magazine. I had no clue but had to answer something, so I said '$30k' which was just a wild guess. We decided to do a test and made the next catalogue for the game club into a miniature magazine and called it *GameFan*."

Gail Tilden / Nintendo Power

"Before *Nintendo Power* there was the *Fun Club News*. It quickly grew out of control and had reached somewhere around 600,000 members who had joined by responding to a consumer warranty card inside the products. Funding the newsletter started to have a major impact on the marketing budget, so Mr. Arakawa decided to expand it to a full paid subscription magazine. He'd seen that gaming magazines in Japan were gaining popularity and that they had developed the expertise to create layouts and guides to help kids get through the tough spots. He wanted to use the magazine to help players finish their games and feel satisfied with their purchase and experience. He asked me to come in to meet with two different Japanese companies that we were considering working with and we ended up forming a partnership with Tokuma Shoten and their design team from Work House who produced all of the detailed game maps.

"Howard [Phillips] and I sat together and came up with things like classified information, video shorts … coming up with funny, interesting names for the columns and what kinds of content the magazine would have. We travelled to Japan together that first year maybe five times to work with the Japanese designers and come up with the look and feel of the columns and the magazine."

Steve Jarratt / Total!

"Myself and Andy Dyer were working on *Commodore Format*, when we were approached to launch a new magazine covering the NES, Game Boy and the soon-to-be-released SNES. I believe that Future had approached Nintendo to try and wrest the official licence from our rival publishers EMAP, but when Chris Anderson was rebuffed, he just decided we'd do our own magazine anyway.

"Because of the potential upset (and possibly a lawsuit), it was decided that the magazine would be developed and launched in secret. I'm not sure, but I think the logic was that it would be easier to defend the title if it was already in existence. We couldn't use Nintendo's name or logo anywhere and after much discussion, we eventually ended up with the name *Total!* I think it was the idea of our publisher Steve Carey, and to this day I dislike it; it's meaningless on its own (you always have to call it '*Total!* magazine') and it says nothing about the mag or its content."

Matt Bielby / Super Play

"We launched *Super Play* towards the end of '92. Future Publishing had been going about seven years at that point, but it had only relatively recently become crushingly obvious that the backbone of the company was going to be single format video game magazines of every stripe. So when a new generation of game platforms, like the SEGA Mega Drive and Super NES, came along, we clearly needed two new magazines.

"I'd been editor of Your Sinclair a few years before – and had recently launched *Amiga Power*, which had been a fair-sized hit – so I had something of a background in slightly left-field games mags; I guess that's why the Powers That Be thought I might make a fair fist of something like the Super Nintendo, which, while dominant in its home market, always looked likely to be more of a specialist taste in the UK. Once the button was pressed on it, *Super Play* was all systems go: we only had three months or so to find a team, decide what this mag should be like, and get our first issue out the door – so it was a race against time from day one. Perhaps because of this we were given pretty much a free hand, so every creative decision on the mag – from the idea to really push the Japanese thing as far as we could to finding Wil Overton to do the covers – came out of me and the team."

Greg Ford / EGM

"In 2002, *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (*EGM*) moved its offices from the Chicago suburbs to the centre of the US gaming industry in San Francisco. And with this move, I learned how both luck and persistence can help mould a career.

"A year prior, as a freelancer, I'd met eventual *EGM* editor-in-chief Dan 'Shoe' Hsu at an industry event (he was working for a gaming website at the time). We talked briefly, and he asked me to send him some writing samples. He didn't have the budget to hire me at the time, but he said he'd keep me in mind. He soon returned to *EGM*, and the magazine's eventual change of location resulted in some editorial openings. True to his word, Shoe reached out to me, and I made the cross-country move to become a copy editor for *EGM* and the other Ziff Davis Media gaming magazines. Demanding work and intense deadline schedules were just part of the story. Being part of an incredible team, making great friends, and becoming immersed in an exciting industry made it all worthwhile. I worked my way from copy editor to reviews editor and finally to managing editor of the magazine until it closed in early 2009."

Howard Philips / Nintendo Power

"I started out as the fifth person at Nintendo of America (NOA) when they first set up shop in Seattle. A school friend of mine, Don James, had just started working there and told me they needed help running the warehouse and shipping so I joined to manage both. I was never the corporate spokesperson; my expertise is in the games and so that's what I was regularly asked to talk to the press about. My 'day job' was to serve as the director of game creative at NOA, helping Miyamoto tailor games to the US and European players' tastes and to executive produce second party games such as the games from Chris and Tim Stamper at Rare. At the time I also managed the game evaluation system, which reviewed all the games using professional game players, the game counsellors and real players who came in to our lab to play new games. I was also senior editor of the *Nintendo Power* magazine; it was a busy time."

Tim Lindquist / GameFan

"Near the end of the first issue we still had no cover art, so George said that he'd met a guy who was a customer at another game store he used to visit, and that the dude drew art for Heavy Metal magazine. He said he'd give him a call. It was Terry Wolfinger. So we asked Terry if he could draw the art for the first issue. Greg Off brought out a character he'd been doodling, that he and Dave wanted to be the magazine's mascot (Monitaur). We showed it to Terry and asked him to draw Monitaur, Mario, Bonk and Sonic busting out of the cover. Terry agreed. We later found out from Terry that he actually drew the art for a series of Heavy Metal-themed videos — not Heavy Metal magazine. We didn't care. His cover art was awesome!

"Once the first issue was ready, I also got it printed at my day job. I think we printed 5,000 copies. We had no distributor, so Jay Puryear took a bunch of boxes and put them into the back of his pickup, and drove around to every newsstand in the San Fernando Valley and dropped off boxes as if he was just the magazine delivery guy, delivering the magazines!"

> **66** *The only thing that comes close to the fun of actually playing a game is sharing that fun with others. I hope Nintendo Power did just that.* **99**
>
> *Howard Philips*

Gail Tilden / Nintendo Power

"What happened generally was Howard [Phillips] played funny guy and I played bad cop, trying to get the work done. At the beginning we would have some big, crazy meetings with the design team to review all the layouts, which I hated. It's really weird how colour palettes in Japan and in the US are just so different, and the colour schemes that they were attracted to I just knew wouldn't work for the US audience. I would often be making them redo things and they would say, 'But Gail, it took 40 films to make this page.' And I'd reply, 'I don't care! It's just not attractive!' Then Howard would say, 'Don't mind her, she's the dragon lady!' Howard and I really did have had a great relationship and had a really great time. Making each issue of *Nintendo Power* involved lot of travel and we both had little babies at the time and it was very tiring but it was really fun and we hope we made a good product."

Martin Alessi / EGM

"In my youth, I had the awesome opportunity of going Japan twice for my job at *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (*EGM*). My first trip to Japan was in March of 1991, which was, interestingly enough, my first flight on a commercial airplane. At 18 years old, I was as green to world travel as they come. Ed Semrad and I travelled to Japan for the CSG Show, the precursor to the Tokyo Game Show. After our work was done for the day, our tour guides, Robert Hoskin and his wife Yasuko, took us game shopping and I was finally able to purchase a Super Famicom of my own at a small store in Shinjuku. I was in absolute heaven! I'd played the Super Famicom at the *EGM* offices for many of my previews and reviews, but having Nintendo's flagship 16-bit system at home let me really dig deeper into games like *Super Mario World* and *ActRaiser*, even though I couldn't read a word of Japanese. With *EGM's* hectic production schedule, I rarely had the chance to explore my favourite games thoroughly, but I still have that same Super Famicom complete in box to this day!"

Steve Jarratt / Total!

"I can't remember where the idea to use Andy and me as characters in the mag came from – I assume it was a way of adding personality without using Nintendo's own imagery. We were still scared the mag might be closed down as soon as it launched; we could do reviews under the UK's fair dealing doctrine (we always call it 'fair use'), but still had to be careful not to give Nintendo reason to come down on us. The illustrations were done by Mike Roberts who drew the Roger Frames character in *Commodore Format*. He did a brilliant job, but we didn't realise at the time what a nightmare they would become, as the mag grew and we did more and more reviews. They were painstaking to produce and add to the page layouts, and if I had my time over, I'd definitely do something different!"

"Looking back, I have very mixed emotions about *Total!* There's an awful lot about the mag I don't like, but it seemed to go down a storm with young kids and we were inundated with letters and drawings. The title enjoyed pretty good copy sales too, and even today I still meet people who were fans of the mag as a kid, so perhaps I shouldn't be too hard on it!"

Matt Bielby / Super Play

"With the Japanese theme established (in my head, at least) from the start, I began to get intrigued by a little independent mag called *Anime UK* that I'd found tucked away in some dark corner of Forbidden Planet. That's where we discovered both Helen McCarthy, who became our anime expert, and cover artist Wil Overton, whose fabulous anime-style art – I'm sure there was no-one else in the country who came close to him at the time – became such a memorable part of the magazine. He did all our covers, and some interior pieces too, and though I couldn't begin to claim that *Super Play* introduced anime to a UK audience completely, it was thanks to these guys that I like to think we did our bit to popularise it."

> 66 *We had a few months to launch the mag but the combination of* Super Mario Bros. 3, *the crazy working conditions and my lack of planning meant that we were slowly but surely falling behind schedule. To get the mag to press we started doing longer and longer days and eventually had to do something like a 44-hour stint without any sleep. By the end I was a broken man – and we had to immediately start on issue 2. Those days were not fun!* 99

Steve Jarratt

Tim Lindquist / GameFan

"GameFan had a ton of personality and the passion of the writers really showed. We took it as a badge of honour that we covered things no other magazine had ever heard of. We tried to do things no other magazine was doing design-wise, too — from giant-sized screen shots ('megashots' that looked amazing, because we knew the secret to video capture excellence), to shot-by-shot maps of entire levels, painstakingly cut-out character art from the game, way before there was transparency in layouts, and, of course, cool hand-drawn artwork from Terry Wolfinger. Every page was crammed full with as much art as we could fit – maybe a little too much, as the text sometimes got overwhelmed. I look at those layouts today and I can hardly believe anyone paid me a dime for some of that terrible work! But it was terrible in a good way."

Perry Rodgers / EGM

"The core value that we established early on for the publications is that our reviews would be direct and honest. By players, for players. For the most part, we included positive reviews, and as I recall, didn't even have a scoring system until the latter issues of *Electronic Game Player*, in which games were scored with a bullseye graphic for 'Direct Hit', 'Hit', or 'Miss'. I recall there was some pressure/threats from advertising publishers that they wouldn't advertise if a review for one of their games was poor, but we never succumbed to that pressure! Steve Harris really led the way in this regard as he handled most of the negotiations with publishers and I give him a lot of credit for not caving to that temptation whatsoever. I believe it's one big reason that its successor *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (*EGM*) became the number one magazine!"

Steve Harris / EGM

"I was listed as the 'founder' of *EGM* right up to the final issue published by Ziff Davis Media. I served as editor (and later publisher) during the early issues and put together the initial staff that produced the magazine's largest issues. The early issues of *EGM* were all about being first with the information and being honest in our assessment of the games and products we reviewed. My philosophy, born from earlier experiences writing for coin-op trade magazines, was that we had to know who we were writing the magazine for and focus on delivering to that audience regardless of the fallout. As long as we wrote the magazine for the readers I knew we would be fine."

Matt Bielby / Super Play

"It took some persuading to get anyone to agree to the name '*Super Play*' – my deliberate attempt at a sort of 'Japlish', copying the not-quite-right English phrases that occurred throughout Japanese gaming, Japanese magazines and Japanese culture in general. Then a number of designers struggled with the logo, not quite understanding the idea that we wanted it to look sort of Japanese and weird, until our most junior guy at the time, the very talented Jez Bridgeman, finally nailed it by putting a graphic reference to a joypad button between the U and the P."

Gail Tilden / Nintendo Power

"When launching the Super NES, we did have a lot of discussion about what to do with *Nintendo Power* and how to transition from having 30 million NES-using readers. Our job was to make sure that the readers were enjoying the games they already owned, so we were deliberately trying not to turn all of the content in the magazine immediately to the Super NES – whilst still getting excited about this new technology coming soon.

"As other magazines did start entering and becoming more of a force, like *GamePro* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, they also wanted information and materials that would cover Nintendo's games. The senior management were very protective and they didn't want other magazines having our assets or having the games before they were final or before they came out. They wanted to have *Nintendo Power* be the biggest and the strongest and be the real source. So there was a bit of a struggle between my group and the marketing group about the idea as to how those assets could be used or shared."

Jason Brookes / Super Play

"I think one of the main reasons that *Super Play* was so popular – and still has a following to some degree - was that it always possessed a genuine warmth and friendliness. As a *Super Play* reader you really felt part of a *Super Play* insider club where frequent trips to Akihabara to pick up the latest games were just part of the monthly excitement. Matt was great at instilling that warm cosy feeling into the mag along with a melting pot of great ideas from the team, and I guess we did feel we were doing something quite different. We tried hard to go the extra mile to make it all pretty special. I still think those little caricatured anime illustrations that Wil Overton did for us all were brilliant."
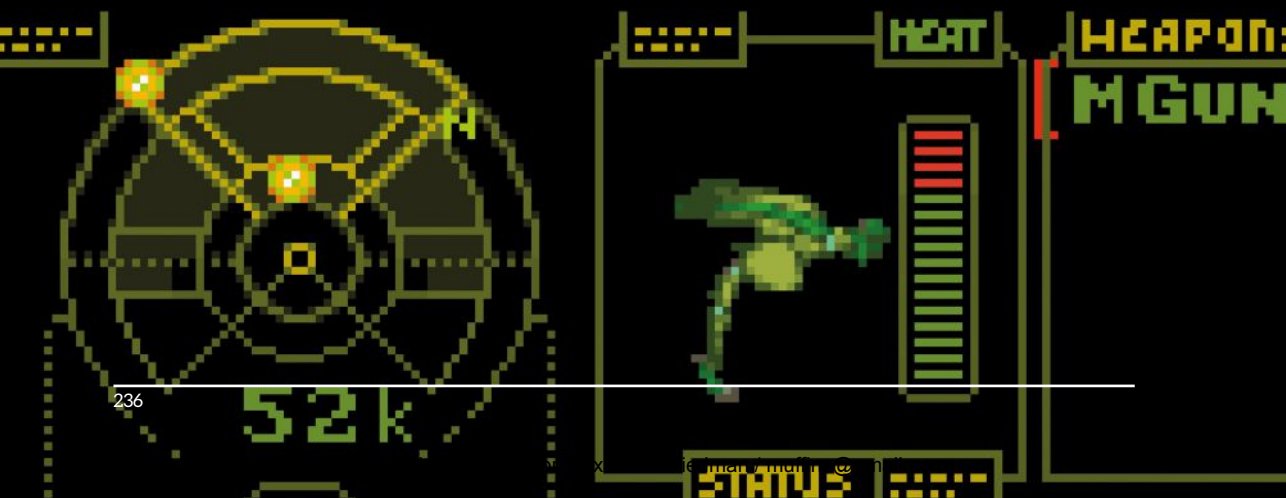
MechWarrior / Battletech

"Mercenary mech pilot Herras Regan sets out to gain revenge for his murdered father and to take down the mysterious Dark Wing, in this game set in the Battletech universe. From the hub, Herras can visit the canteen for information, head to the garage to repair and upgrade his Mech, or go to headquarters to accept a mission. Completion of each mission is rewarded with money, and the player can haggle to earn more.

"Eight mech designs unique to the game can be bought, repaired and upgraded with extra weapons, armour and heatsinks. Mode 7 is used for the 3D effects, zooming down as the Mech lands on the target planet from a dropship before showing the battle from the cockpit. The player is able to target specific parts of an enemy mech to cause damage, but must be careful to manage heat levels in his own mech as the action heats up. Jets enable the mech to fly short distances. Progress can be saved to the battery back-up from headquarters, either before or after a mission, and there's also a Practice option. Part of the series of well-liked MechWarrior games, the SNES version offers a long main story as well as optional side missions."

Andrew Fisher, guest reviewer

First released
1993

—

Genre
Simulation

—

Developer
Beam Software

—

Publisher
Activision

237

Mega Man X / Rockman X

"The original *Mega Man* was blue due to the 56 colours of the Famicom. From the very first pixel sprite design by Akira Kitamura it used that palette. There were reds, but they were very garish reds. However, if you look at things like Power Rangers and superhero groups, the red is always the leader, while blue is usually the support character's colour. But that was the way the Famicom worked. If we had not had those limits, perhaps Mega Man would have been red.

"So for *Mega Man X*, when I created the Zero character I made him red! When we were first developing *Mega Man X*, the original designer for *Mega Man* on NES, Akira Kitamura, had already left, so I took the lead. I wanted to take the opportunity to design a character I really liked, and make him the lead character. That character was Zero. I knew I couldn't really make Zero the new leading character, but I could make him seem like he could have been. I wanted a character that was more like Han Solo rather than Luke Skywalker. But if you make Han Solo, Luke still has to be the main character, right? So Mega Man still had to be the main character, but I gave Zero all the cool traits. Designing Mega Man was supposed to be my responsibility, but I gave that job to my subordinate so I could focus on Zero. He was my personal character, and I designed him that way. I made him red, a hero's colour."

Keiji Inafune, character designer

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer and publisher
Capcom

238
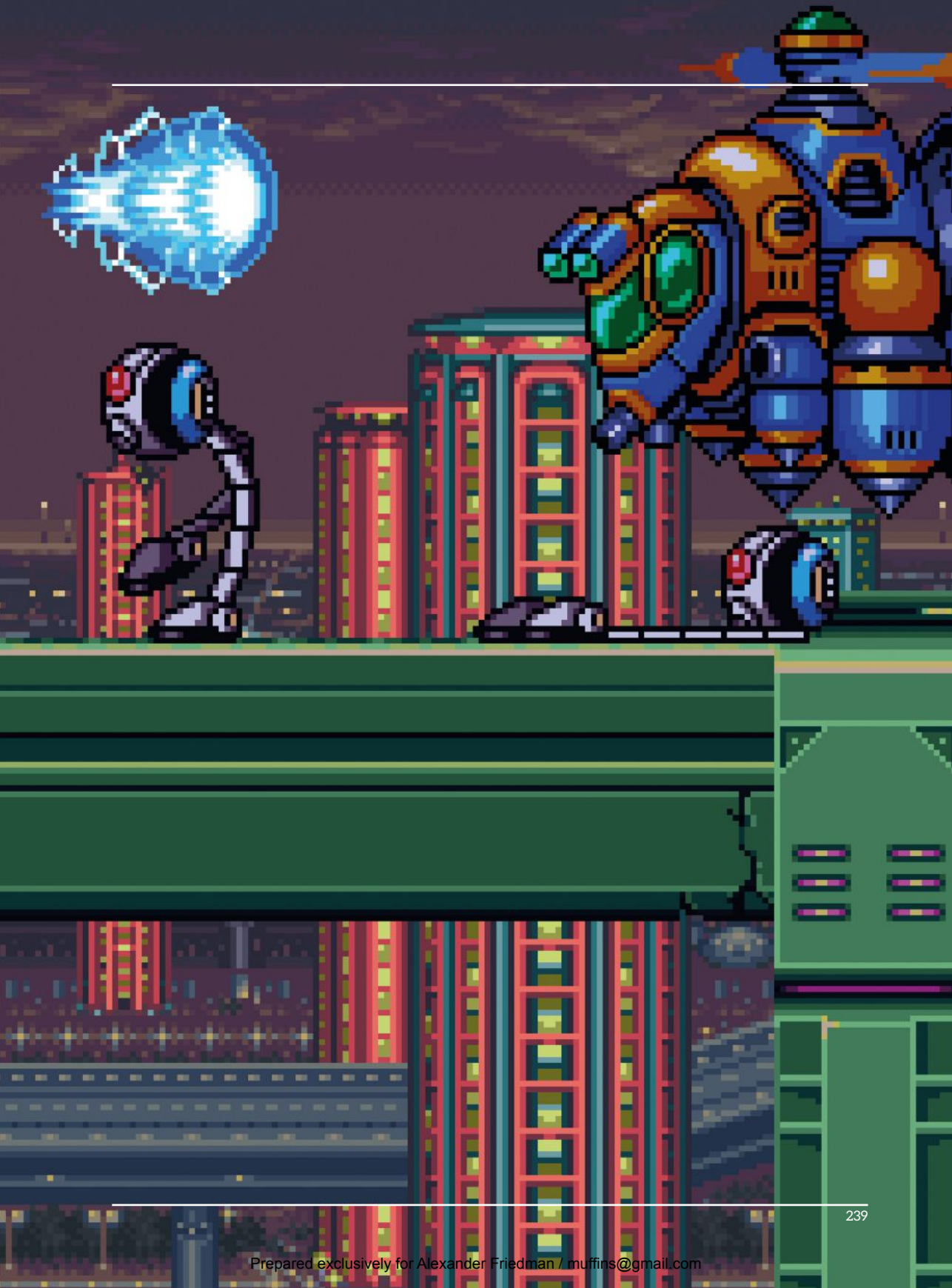
Mortal Kombat

"The opportunity came up to convert *Mortal Kombat* to the Super Nintendo with the ambition to challenge *Street Fighter II*, which was huge on the system at the time. The technical aspects of it were pretty daunting because like most Acclaim projects at the time, there wasn't any time to do it! It involved lots of scaling to fit onto a much smaller system, and we came up with a lot of unique techniques for compression, code conversion and a bunch of other things. Overall I think it turned out pretty good.

"Nintendo wouldn't allow us to include blood, as it didn't fit in with their 'family friendly' image, so it had to be replaced with 'sweat'. On the Mortal Monday launch, the game took $50 million and Nintendo soon relaxed its stance on the blood – reinstating it in *Mortal Kombat II*.

"At the time, we were located in Utah, which is considered one of the most conservative states in the country. We were making the most violent video game at the time and they were trying to pass laws to have it removed from the state completely. Kids in my neighbourhood found out that I was working on *Mortal Kombat* and their parents all insisted they shouldn't talk to me."

Jeff Peters, director

"Prior to my work on the original arcade version of *Mortal Kombat*, I worked on a game called *Smash T.V.* and its semi-sequel, *Total Carnage*. The mechanics of those games required very small character sprites to support many objects on screen at once. Those limitations pushed me away from exploring the digitising techniques that were being used on other games produced in our studio at the time.

"When the opportunity to create a one-on-one fighting game came about, I saw it as a chance to work with much larger characters on screen. Also, the tight schedule we were given gave me an excuse to take advantage of our studio's signature digitising tools and techniques. Ironically, the limitations of the screen resolution, analogue video capture and colour palette pushed me into making choices that would define *Mortal Kombat*'s visuals. We were forced into simple designs and one or two distinct colours or geometric shapes for each character. These were good, universal character design principles that are just as relevant today as they were back then, and I think a big reason why the characters remain pop culture icons 25 years later."

John Tobias, series co-creator

NHL '94 / NHL Pro Hockey '94

"As producer and designer of the initial EA Sports NHL video game series through *NHL '94*, I always strove to create 'games within the game', that weren't always documented but would be apparent as our customers played. Sometimes this meant tying special animations to the gameplay. So in the NHL series, this meant things like if you checked an opposing player into your own bench, it took him just a little longer to untangle himself and get back to the action. If you hit a certain pixel dead on behind the net with a slap shot the glass would shatter. If you checked an opposing player hard enough or beat him badly enough in a fight, he'd lay on the ice wriggling and might be out for the rest of the period or the game. Other times, this meant features like digital player cards to track which user had scored the most goals in a game using that particular player, or painstaking efforts to use the same organ music ditties that played in the actual arenas, or the crowd meter which was tied to how fierce the action on the ice was and impacted the players. I believe these nuances helped give the early EA Sports NHL games the popularity they continue to enjoy decades later."

Michael Brook, producer and designer

First released
1993

—

Genre
Sports

—

**Developer
and Publisher**
Electronic Arts

Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen

"With an exceedingly small production run, it was easy to miss *Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen* in North America. This amalgam of real-time strategy and traditional RPG battles has you lead the Liberation Army against the Zeteginan Empire, but your persona is not assigned automatically. Instead, your character's attributes are ascribed by a wizened sage through a series of questions based on dramatic draws from a tarot deck. As you answer each question, your character aligns closer to good – or evil. This moral alignment pervades all aspects of the game, influencing available classes, reputation, and even your strength by day or night. Fittingly, the game is host to 13 different endings based on your choices as you 'FIGHT IT OUT' to liberate the land.

"The game takes your position as 'leader' to heart as well. When enemies are met on the map, the ensuing RPG-style battles play themselves, with the player only able to arrange troops and give vague orders to affect how they turn out. But this belies the great strategic depth the game offers and is part of what makes it such a unique entry in Japanese strategy RPGs."

Clay Gardner, guest reviewer

First released
1993

—

Genre
Strategy

—

Developer
Quest

—

Publisher
Enix

Operation Logic Bomb / Ikari no Yōsai

"The problem with top-secret research facilities in the middle of the desert is that when the scientists within accidentally tear through the fabric of space and time and allow a swarm of denizens from another dimension to cross over into ours, some poor sap has to go in and save the day.

"The poor sap in question is Agent Logan, a futuristic soldier fitted with various high-tech implants which imbue him with enhanced analytical abilities, fast reflexes, and the ability to open pickle jars on the first attempt. If that wasn't enough, he's also equipped with a small arsenal of high-tech weaponry including machine guns, bouncing lasers, missiles and a trusty flamethrower. Take that, you pesky inter-dimensional robotic crustaceans.

"As you might expect, *Operation Logic Bomb* is a game that doesn't take itself too seriously; it's an unabashedly bold arcade romp with no airs or graces – the kind of delightful blast-the-crap-out-of-anything-that-moves action that could easily fool you into thinking you were playing an arcade game from the late '80s.

"Add in a smattering of bosses and a light sprinkling of Metroidvania-style puzzles, and you have all the ingredients for a classic top-down shooter. The downside? The lack of a two-player mode is positively criminal."

Andy Roberts, games journalist

First released
1993

Genre
Action

Developer and publisher
Jaleco

Plok

"*Plok* started off in the 8-bit days as a game called *Fleapit* that we created for Rare's 'Razz Board' arcade hardware. It was never completed, but Rare used it to demo a handheld machine they'd built by folding up their circuit board and sticking a Casio portable TV screen to it. They showed this to Nintendo, who responded by giving them the new, top-secret Game Boy they'd been working on!

"Years later we got *Plok* underway again as a SNES game at Software Creations. This version was shown to Nintendo, and apparently Mr. Miyamoto said it was the third best platform game after *Mario* and *Sonic*. If he worked with us he would help make it the second best! The deal never happened, and the game was published by Tradewest, although Nintendo picked it up for Europe.

"Cosgrove Hall, the animation studio in Manchester behind *Danger Mouse*, was having trouble around this time and making people redundant, so we decided to hire some of these TV animators at Creations. The *Plok* harmonica animation at the start of the game was one of the first things produced on computer by these new staff, and really added a touch of class to the game."

Ste Pickford, game designer

First released
1993

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer
Software Creations

—

Publisher
Tradewest

249

Founded by former Activision staffers Jim Scoroposki, Rob Holmes and Greg Fischbach in 1987, Acclaim's relationship with Nintendo can actually be traced back a little earlier, when Fischbach was still working at Activision as president of the company's international arm. Fischbach was present when Nintendo of America boss Minoru Arakawa and senior vice president Howard Lincoln came to meet with Activision in the hope of securing the publisher as a licensee for its freshly-launched Nintendo Entertainment System.

Convinced that the console market would never recover after the damage Atari had inflicted in the early '80s, Fischbach sent a memo to senior staff voicing the opinion that Activision shouldn't do business with the Japanese firm. When you consider the importance of Fischbach's subsequent link with Nintendo and its consoles, it's quite an ironic beginning to the Acclaim story.

Fischbach parted ways with Activision in 1986 for RCA but soon found himself jobless following a company buy-out. However, during this period he had maintained contact with his former Activision workmates

Scoroposki and Holmes, and the trio continued to harbour aspirations of shaking up the video game arena. Scoroposki had seen Nintendo's impressive booth at a recent Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and believed that the company Fischbach had previously cast doubt over was in fact onto something huge. Seeing an opportunity to build a profitable business off the back of the almost insatiable demand for NES software, the trio decided to form a company that, initially at least, would source Japanese Famicom games and localise them for North America. Fischbach's tune had well and truly changed, and he made contact with Nintendo to express interest in becoming a licensee for the NES – despite the fact that his company didn't officially have a name at this point.

The naming of Acclaim follows something of an industry tradition: when disgruntled Atari programmers David Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead left to form the industry's first-ever third-party publisher, they came up with the name Activision. Miller and Whitehead left in 1984 to establish Accolade – a name that was apparently chosen so that it would rank higher alphabetically

than both Atari and Activision – their two previous employers. Scoroposki, Holmes and Fischbach topped them all with the name Acclaim, which was officially unveiled at the 1987 CES.

> **66** *The company exploited the enduring popularity of* The Simpsons *TV show via a series of licensed titles, including* Krusty's Super Fun House. **99**

Acclaim was a trendsetter from the start. While Nintendo had licensed games in North America from the likes of Capcom and Konami – both Japanese companies with North American offices – it had a surprisingly hard time convincing pureblood US publishers to step on board; they were still badly burned from the crash of '83 and the personal computer market was buoyant enough to keep them profitable. This reluctance to take a risk – combined with Scoroposki, Holmes and Fischbach's combined belief that the console market would be reborn – meant that Acclaim were to become the first North American publisher to sign on as a NES licensee.

Acclaim's confidence in the NES reaped generous rewards. The firm's debut was *Star Voyager* – in reality the localised version of ASCII's Famicom title *Cosmo Genesis* – and it promptly sold 100,000 copies, while Square's *Tobidase Daisakusen* – rechristened as *The 3-D Battles of Worldrunner* – shifted twice that figure. Acclaim's strategy of licensing the software of other companies proved its worth when its third game – Taito's *Tiger Heli* – sold one million units in North America. It was a fantastic start but the company's bosses knew this couldn't last forever; the firms behind these games would soon wise up to the fact that the US market was huge and hungry for games, which meant that Acclaim had to start producing its own content.

Acclaim's first 'original' games were actually contracted out to external studios, as the company had no internal development talent at that time. The first major release of this nature was *WWF Wrestlemania*, developed in the UK by the legendary codehouse Rare, a company that enjoyed a productive relationship with Acclaim lasting into the early '90s. The WWF licence ensured that the game was a commercial smash hit, and this set the tone for Acclaim's output; along with Ocean in England, the company was one of the first publishers to truly see the benefit of attaching lucrative media licences to its products.

Over the next few years Acclaim signed deals to produce video games based on movies, comics and TV shows, but like so many of its rivals found itself limited by the terms of the deal it had signed with Nintendo, which only permitted it to publish five titles per year. This clause was included because the Japanese giant wanted to avoid the unchecked flood of terrible software which sank Atari – and the console market – in 1983. For major players like Acclaim, five games was simply not enough, so Nintendo allowed firms to overcome this limitation by operating secondary companies as additional licensees and therefore doubling the permitted number of yearly releases. Acclaim acquired the LJN brand in 1989 – itself an approved NES licensee at the time – and used it to gain those five additional publishing slots. The LJN name

appeared on a series of high-profile releases for the NES, including *Nightmare on Elm Street* (coded by Rare), *Back to the Future*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (also by Rare) and *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Acclaim later established Flying Edge – a brand used for its SEGA titles – to circumvent Nintendo's policy, which stated that licensees had to make their software exclusive to Nintendo consoles.

> ❝ *During the 16-bit era, Acclaim – and by extension LJN – were prolific with their licensed releases.* ❞

The early '90s were particularly profitable for Acclaim, which scored major hits with the likes of *Double Dragon II* (licensed from Japanese company Technōs), *The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants* and *Alien³*, as well as a string of comic book and sports releases. As the new decade dawned it became clear that cutting-edge games were still exclusive to amusement arcades, and Acclaim quickly snapped up the domestic rights to a string of coin-op classics, including *Smash T.V.*, *Trog!* and *Mortal Kombat* – the latter being the company's most successful home port up to that point. Created by Midway, this one-on-one fighter was a direct response to the popularity of Capcom's *Street Fighter II* and became infamous thanks to its use of realistic, digitised characters and gory 'finishing' moves which enabled players to slay their opponent with the right button combination. Acclaim enlisted the assistance of two of its traditional development partners when it came to creating the 16-bit editions of the game –

Probe in the UK handled the SEGA Mega Drive/Genesis version, while Sculptured Software was responsible for the SNES iteration. Due to Nintendo's policies regarding violence and gore on its systems, Acclaim was forced to drastically tone down the SNES version, while players of the SEGA edition – which was arguably inferior in visual and audio terms – could unlock all of the blood and finishing moves via a special code, the existence of which was of course common knowledge to any gamer who read one of the many video game magazines published at the time. Unsurprisingly, the SEGA port sold the best out of the two. Acclaim also ported Midway's *NBA Jam* coin-op to virtually every home console of the period, further proof that success in the arcades almost always translated to bumper sales in the domestic market.

During the 16-bit era, Acclaim – and by extension LJN – were prolific with their licensed releases. The company exploited the enduring popularity of *The Simpsons* TV show via a series of licensed titles, including *Krusty's Super Fun House* (1992), *Bart's Nightmare* (1992) and *Virtual Bart* (1994), all of which received SNES versions. It produced three 16-bit WWF titles in the form of 1992's *WWF Super Wrestlemania*, 1993's *Royal Rumble* and 1994's *WWF RAW*, while 1995's *Batman Forever* extended Acclaim's run of (sometimes questionable) comic book and movie tie-ins. In 1994 the firm posted a profit of $481 million, an indication of how well its strategy had worked up to that point.

However, the desire to reduce Acclaim's reliance on external contractors had become so great that in 1995 it purchased Sculptured Software, Iguana Entertainment and Probe Entertainment – companies

it had previously enjoyed long-standing relationships with – and turned them all into internal studios.

Acclaim became an important ally for Nintendo when it released the successor to the SNES, the Nintendo 64, in 1996. Iguana's *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* was an early release for the console and convinced many of its graphical prowess; it would go on to establish a fully-fledged franchise via N64 sequels *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil*, *Turok: Rage Wars* and *Turok 3: Shadow of Oblivion*. In 1999 the company's long-running alliance with the WWF came to an end, when rival publisher THQ secured the licence, forcing Acclaim to tie up a deal with the much smaller Extreme Championship Wrestling instead.

The loss of the WWF deal was indicative of issues that would eventually lead to Acclaim's downfall. The company's preference for dubious licences was forgivable during the 16-bit era, when even critically-panned films like *Alien³* could be turned into enjoyable action platformers, but during the late 1990s and early 2000s the company made some particularly poor choices in this field, pushing out shoddily-made software such as *Space Jam*, *Dragonheart* and *Batman & Robin*. Meanwhile, *The Simpsons* was supplanted by *South Park* as Acclaim's cartoon cash cow, producing *South Park* (1998), *South Park: Chef's Luv Shack* (1999) and *South Park Rally* (2000) in an attempt to scrape the bottom of the barrel in as short a time as possible. The period wasn't without its highlights, however; Probe's sublime *Alien Trilogy* in 1996 brought tense corridor shooting to the PlayStation, and Acclaim also published the first two entries in Criterion's much-loved Burnout series.

The final game to be published under the Acclaim banner was, fittingly, a throwback to the company's past. 2004's *Showdown: Legends of Wrestling* wasn't officially licensed by the WWE (as it had become known by this point) but it did feature famous faces such as Hulk Hogan, The Ultimate Warrior and Sting. Riddled with bugs and missing many promised features, the game met with mixed reviews and was hardly the most auspicious note to end on, but the writing had been on the wall throughout much of the year, with many key titles underperforming at retail.

Acclaim Studios Cheltenham (formerly Probe) and Acclaim Studios Manchester (previously known as Software Creations) were shuttered with many employees missing out on their final pay cheques. But despite these cost-cutting measures the debts became too much, and on September 1, 2004, Acclaim filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy, and all of its assets were liquidated in order to recoup the reported $100 million owed by the firm. Amazingly, co-founder Greg Fischbach was still CEO at the time the firm went under, a role he had fulfilled during Acclaim's entire lifespan.

In 2005 the name Acclaim was purchased for the sum of $100,000 and the following year Acclaim Games was launched, with a focus on online games aimed at pre-teen players. Sadly it failed to mark a resurrection for the famous brand as this new entity – Acclaim in name only – was acquired in May 2010 by Playdom, which then shuttered the company three months later.

It's easy to pour scorn on Acclaim with the benefit of hindsight, and even the biggest fan of the firm's output will readily admit that it published some truly terrible video games. However, it's also worth noting that Acclaim was responsible for some genuinely essential titles, too, and that without it the gaming landscape would have been a lot poorer during the 8- and 16-bit eras. Acclaim was instrumental in localising NES games from Japan that might otherwise have remained exclusive to the Far East, and its coin-op ports brought the thrill of the arcades to home consoles with generally high levels of success. Original IP such as Turok, Burnout, Re-Volt, Shadowman and Extreme-G proved that Acclaim had an eye for quality, and only the most cold-hearted of individuals could possibly say that the gaming world is richer without the name 'Acclaim' on store shelves. This was a company of its time, and remains intrinsically linked with one of the most beloved periods that video gaming has ever seen.

WWF Royal Rumble – *1993*

NBA Jam – *1993*

True Lies – *1994*

Batman Forever – *1995*

The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare – *1993*

Pop'n TwinBee

"I remember lusting over this Konami gem of a shoot 'em up in those crucial months of 1993 when my trusty Amiga 500 was in its twilight. Oh sure, I'd played *Super Probotector* and *Street Fighter II* at a friend's house, so I knew the hardware was capable of wonders. But more than the technical prowess, the new console had a major advantage over the old NES and Mega Drive: the SNES didn't hide its Japanese origins, and it was launching at the height of the early manga-anime boom in the West.

"And it didn't show it better than in this colourful cute 'em up, which seemed to have come straight out of a PC Engine on steroids. It had anime-like cutscenes, memorable music in pure Konami tradition, sound effects with sampled Japanese voices … it was pure heaven. The source of inspiration it drew from was not the crass, subversive and MAD-like humour you see in *Parodius* (another Konami masterpiece, of course), but rather the perfect blend of '80s fantasy anime, with plentiful Miyazaki-esque references and Toriyama-like details, all exquisitely painted in a pastel palette that was, crucially, only possible with those 32,768 colours of the SNES PPU. Truth is, Konami tricked me that time: the SNES wouldn't surpass the PC Engine when it came to shoot 'em ups, but *Pop'n TwinBee* remains one of a handful of masterfully crafted titles on the system."

Carlo Savorelli, guest reviewer

First released
1993
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer and publisher
Konami

255

Rock n' Roll Racing

"If you've ever screamed down a highway while blasting blistering hard rock or metal jams from your car speakers, then you'll understand why *Rock n' Roll Racing* works so brilliantly. One of the earliest examples of a game with a licensed soundtrack, *Rock n' Roll Racing* is propelled by hard-edged classics like *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath and *Born to be Wild* by Steppenwolf. Granted, they're synthesised MIDI renditions due to the limitations of the hardware, but the familiar riffs and rhythms still resonate.

"And *Rock n' Roll Racing* is notable for more than just its backing music. While it shares an isometric perspective with other racers like *R.C. Pro-Am* and *Micro Machines*, the frenzied driving action is a lot more volatile thanks to power-ups and weapons. *Rock n' Roll Racing* has a gritty, industrial look too, which pairs well with the pulsing music and amplifies the aggression.

"Legend has it that *Rock n' Roll Racing* was originally planned as a sequel to the generic *RPM Racing*, also from Silicon & Synapse (now Blizzard Entertainment). But a smart decision by Interplay to rebrand and reenergise the game helped elevate the excitement – and etch it in the hearts and minds of retro racing fans."

Andrew Hayward, games journalist

257

Romancing SaGa 2

"It was my first job, so I was a beginner. At that time we were using not only computers but also Nintendo's special 'pixel drawing machine', a big workstation called NEWS. It was made by Sony and the Nintendo development kit would only work with this. When I met the project leader of *Romancing SaGa 2*, and the director of the battle system, the designer, it really put everything in context. I had come straight out of university and so had someone to look up to. The leader of *Romancing SaGa* was very clever!

"Something I did for *Romancing SaGa 2* is in the battle scenes: when characters learn new attacks a light bulb will pop up above their heads. Originally it was an exclamation mark, but I saw that and thought, no, that's boring. Even though I was their junior, I said this to the designer, suggesting it should be a light bulb! And they changed it, and they kept that all the way through the series. So I had an effect on the entire series of Romancing SaGa, which now has that light bulb! So every time in any Romancing SaGa game, when I see the light bulb, I'm reminded that I was involved."

Yoshiro Kimura, graphic artist
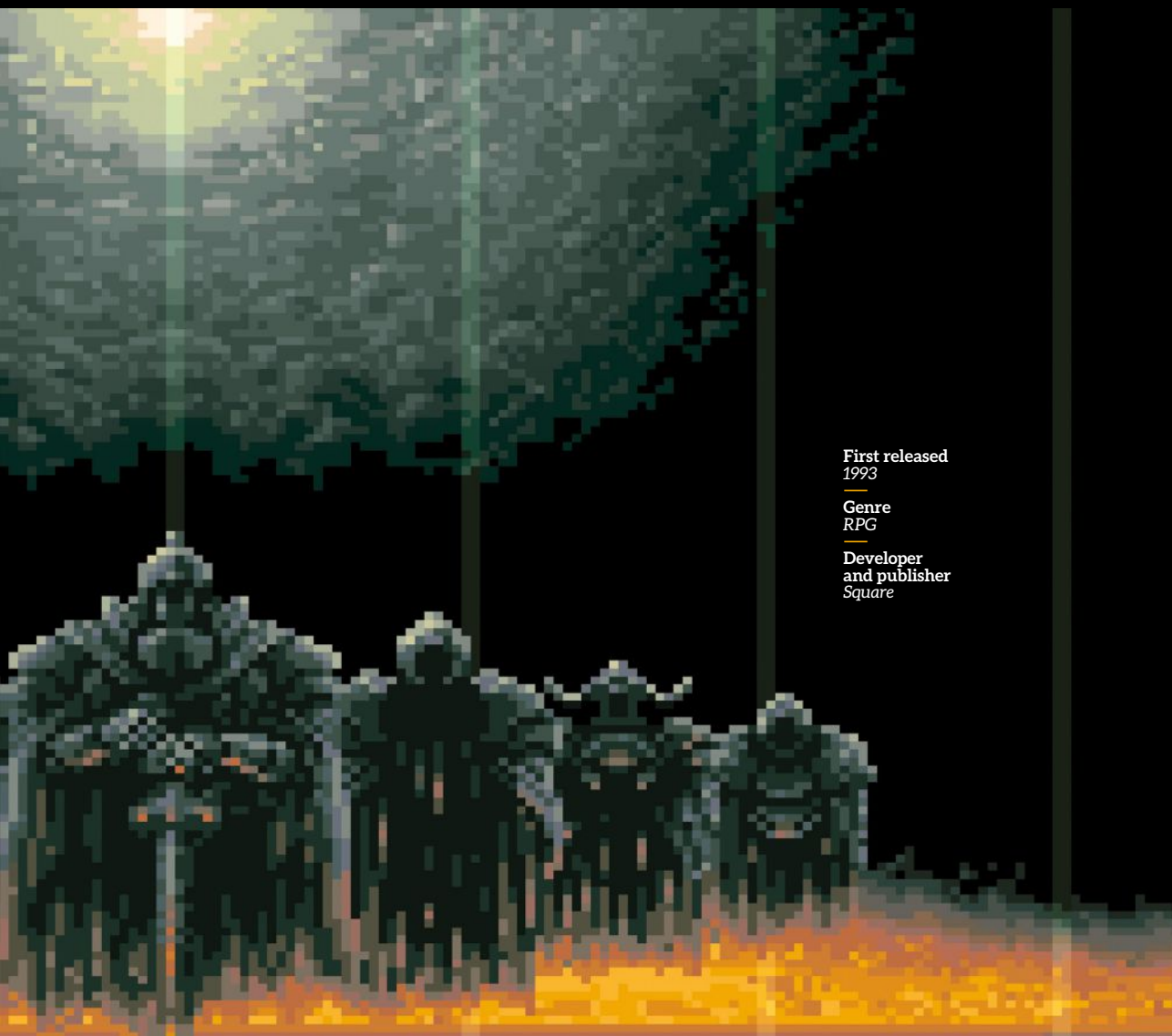
Saturday Night Slam Masters / Muscle Bomber: The Body Explosion

"If you were a wrestling fan in the '90s, chances are that you may have missed out on this Capcom title in favour of the WWF-branded releases at the time. And that would have been a huge mistake.

"*Saturday Night Slam Masters* is a fun and accessible wrestling game by Capcom with a cool cast of characters and slick sense of style. The roster of fighters is made up of the likes of British giant Titanic Tim, Mexican luchador El Stingray, American brawler Gunloc (fun fact: brother of Street Fighter character Guile), and *Final Fight* hero Mike Haggar.

"There's a low learning curve to get into the action with a mix of strikes, grabs and finishers. Simply knock your opponent(s) around until their energy is depleted and get the submission or three-count pin to win. The game can be played in either one-on-one or – using the four-player Super Multitap accessory – two-on-two modes in an effort to become the world champion(s).

"Despite being a relatively simple game, the outrageous moves and over-the-top presentation makes *Saturday Night Slam Masters* truly shine. It's a fun romp whether by yourself or co-op with a friend. Once that's over, go against each other to see who is the true king of the ring."

David Giltinan, games journalist

First released
1993
—
Genre
Sports
—
Developer and publisher
Capcom

Secret of Mana /
Seiken Densetsu 2

"Probably 40% or more of the screen text was nuked for *Secret of Mana* – there just wasn't space in the ROM. That meant lots of story elements, nuance, personality and so on, also had to be stripped out. It was hard to do that, especially after I'd finished a translation and was told then it was way over. At some point, due to time constraints, I just had to turn away from the screen text and focus on my English translation. I had to pare down from that. There is a lot I wish I could have done, but to be honest, I'm just glad the game was re-released – it is a great experience.

"*Secret of Mana* was, in some ways, the hardest project I worked on. I was there in Japan for over a month, and the screen text was still being modified quite a bit every day. Things that I translated often got 'edited' and when I read them the next day, I realised I needed to go back and change them again to make them grammatically correct. I loved that game, but I am probably the person most dissatisfied with the final result. Certainly I tried my best, but that thing nearly killed me! Though I did love being in Japan with my family for that length of time – that was a gift!"

Ted Woolsey, translator

"Many hours were devoted to re-writing and polishing each song until I was finally satisfied with the end result. Outside of those occasions when I had a synthesiser programmer for support, for those albums I did almost all the work myself, including working on the sound selection, editing, effect design and final data encoding. During the two-year production period, I spent almost 24 hours a day in the office, alternating between composing and editing. The fact that I could spend such a luxurious amount of time on the project led directly to the high music quality of *Secret of Mana* and [its sequel] *Seiken Densetsu 3*.

"To go into further detail, in order to create the sense of a fully immersive sound, I would use two tracks of the same instrument, and give only one side vibrato to create the sense of three-dimensional sound. I chose the placement of each instrument, and its melody, after a long process of trial and error. The best of what I discovered is in there. I believe the end product is something that people can enjoy listening to, hopefully for a long time to come."

Hiroki Kikuta, composer

SOS / Septentrion

"Human Entertainment was my first job. I attended Human Creative School, and was a member of the school's second graduating class. I created *Septentrion* [known as *SOS* in the West] as a student, as part of a school project. I was part of a team of course. I did the character design and created the pixel art. I joined the team as an artist, but ultimately I just created the pixel art directly, without drawing anything on paper. We were still students, so our roles weren't really fixed; we discussed and collaborated on most aspects of the game. Back then we worked collaboratively without any kind of design documents. We were running entirely on enthusiasm, and we were able to create the game only because it was for the Super Famicom – the methods we used back then would not be effective at all today.

"The Mode 7 overturned ship effects were thanks to Kimura-san. He proposed using Mode 7 to recreate *The Poseidon Adventure* and his ideas were great. We narrowed it down to about five different effects or behaviours, and although ultimately the final game was completely different from his original proposal, his core concepts were solid. So we were able to deliver a complete game smoothly and without any major disagreements, even though we were just students."

Masatoshi Mitori, graphic artist

Shadowrun

"*Shadowrun* was my last project at Beam Software before setting off on my own. I'd agreed a storyline and design with FASA [tabletop role-playing game] – not a trivial process, as they were meticulous in verifying the provenance of every idea used – before passing on the baton.

"My take was to bring noir elements heavily into the mix, something not previously seen in games. This included a trampled-on lead character who had lost his memories and had literally no idea what was happening – let him and the player figure it out together. And of course, I didn't spare the self-reflective narration. There was also a concerted effort to adapt RPG conventions often seen in home computer games, but not yet in consoles. Some worked – the keyword conversation system for example – and some were dropped along the way.

"*Shadowrun* started as a highly ambitious project that was seriously hampered with development and internal issues along the way – it was lucky to survive. The game made it though, and critics often refer to *Shadowrun* as being ahead of its time. This is one case where the destination is what counts and the journey is best forgotten!"

Gregg Barnett, game designer

First released
1993
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Beam Software
—
Publisher
Data East
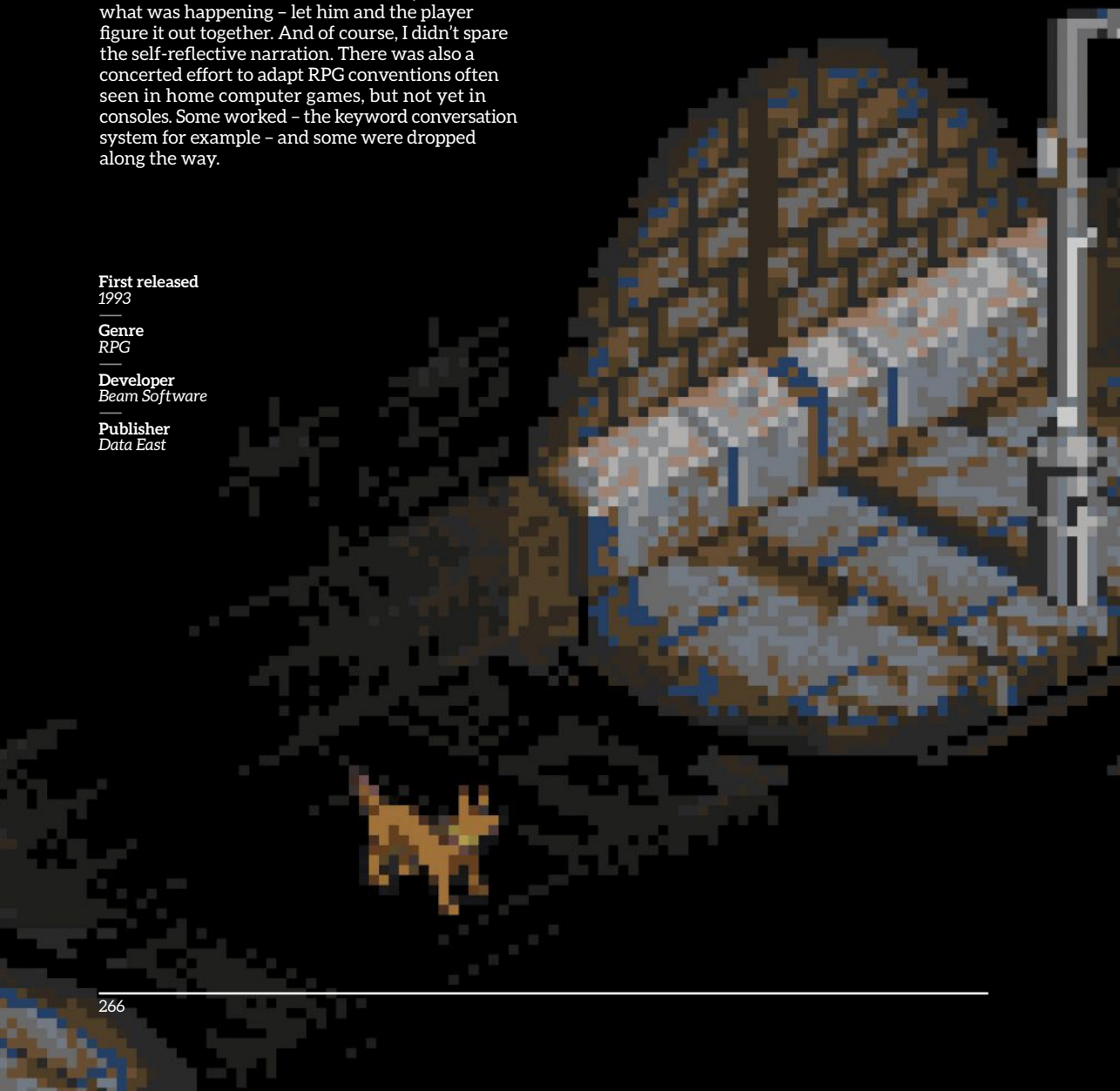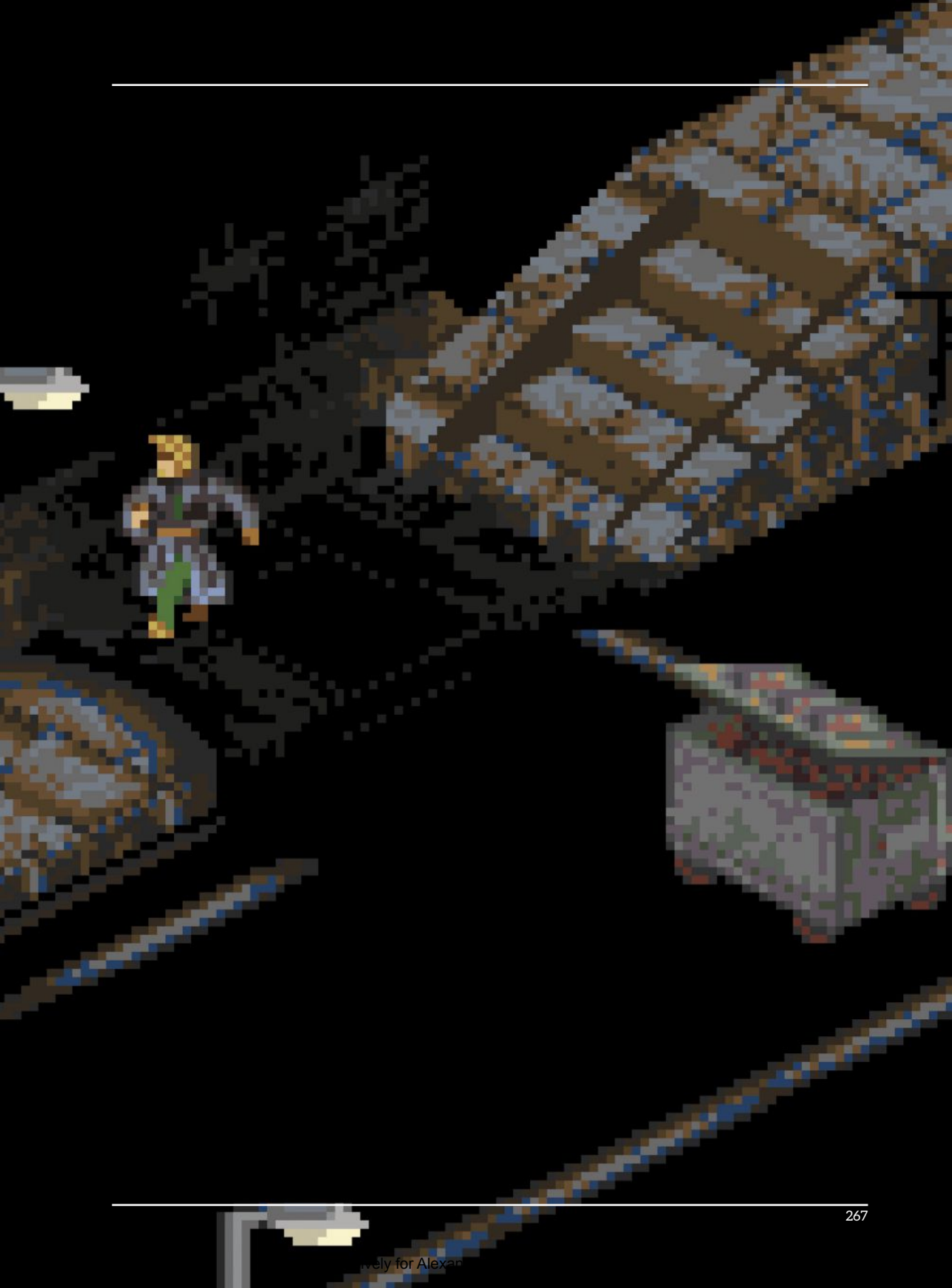
Star Fox

"We'd done a demo of *NesGlider* in 3D running on the NES. They [Nintendo] gave us a SNES to play with – long before its release – and we ported it to that. We showed it to them and said this was pretty much the best 3D their console could produce, and that they hadn't designed the SNES with 3D games in mind. Then I suggested that if they wanted better, they should let us design a 3D chip for them. We'd never designed a 3D chip before, but we had done some hardware so it wasn't a completely bullshit idea. I promised them that we could design a chip that would accelerate the 3D graphics to ten times what their wimpy CPU could do. The 'ten times' figure was a complete over-promise on my part. We didn't really know if that was even possible, but it was a nice target to aim for.

"Nintendo liked the idea of souping up their hardware – there was even talk of putting [the chip] inside the USA version of the SNES, which hadn't been released at that point – but in the end it had to go into the cartridge to keep the initial cost of the console low. It would have been awesome if it was standard on every SNES, so it's a shame that didn't happen.

"Instead of achieving just ten times the 3D graphics performance, we actually made things about 40 times faster, which was amazing. And in some areas – like 3D math – it was more like a hundred times faster. Super FX was not only capable of 3D maths and vector graphics, but it was also able to do sprite rotation and scaling – something that Nintendo really wanted for their own games, like *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*."

Jez San, founder of Argonaut Software

First released
1993
—

Genre
Shoot 'em up
—

Developer
*Argonaut Software
and Nintendo*
—

Publisher
Nintendo

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Sunset Riders

"If you never played *Sunset Riders*, imagining *Contra* with cowboys wouldn't put you too far off (its director worked on both, after all) – but that would be selling it short. While at its core *Sunset Riders* is a side-scrolling run and gun shooter in the vein of *Contra*, the game's Wild West setting and light-hearted tone make it a fun experience of its own.

"As an arcade port, *Sunset Riders* on the SNES does an admirable job of bringing things home (far better than the scaled back Genesis version, that's for sure). While it immediately strips such features as the four-player mode, offering only two at once, most of the game remains intact, and it largely looks and sounds just as good. The most noticeable changes actually come in the form of censorship by Nintendo, forcing Konami to change names and remove enemies that could be deemed as insensitive to Native Americans as well as altering scantily clad prostitutes to fully dressed.

"The gameplay is great, but what really sets *Sunset Riders* apart is all of the Old West charm. Whether it's riding horses, targeting enemies in shooting galleries, or avoiding getting trampled from stampeding cattle by sprinting across the herd, it's an over-the-top cowboy experience that's sadly just too short."

Sam Kennedy, games journalist

Super Back to the Future Part II

This movie-tie in is real oddity. Firstly, because we never saw a *Super Back to the Future Part I* or *Part III*. Secondly, because Toshiba EMI presumably paid handsomely for the licence but never released the game outside of Japan. And thirdly because, well, it bears more of a resemblance to SEGA's Sonic the Hedgehog games than to the Robert Zemeckis film.

The player guides Marty McFly on his hoverboard around a series of vertiginous landscapes, populated by floating platforms, elevators, catapults, enemy characters and collectible coins that can be traded in for extra health. Marty is unarmed, but can perform a spin attack to defeat the various enemies inhabiting each level. Reach the end and there's the inevitable boss battle with Biff Tannen or one of his goons.

It's an unusual game to play, too: with the camera zoomed in on Marty, all too often the sprawling platforms are off-screen, leaving you to take massive leaps of faith in the hope of landing on something that doesn't kill you. It's waste of a good licence really; it's quite a good looking title, but you could reskin it and no one would ever make the *Back To The Future* link. Throw in some stodgy controls and you begin to understand why it never made it beyond the shores of Japan.

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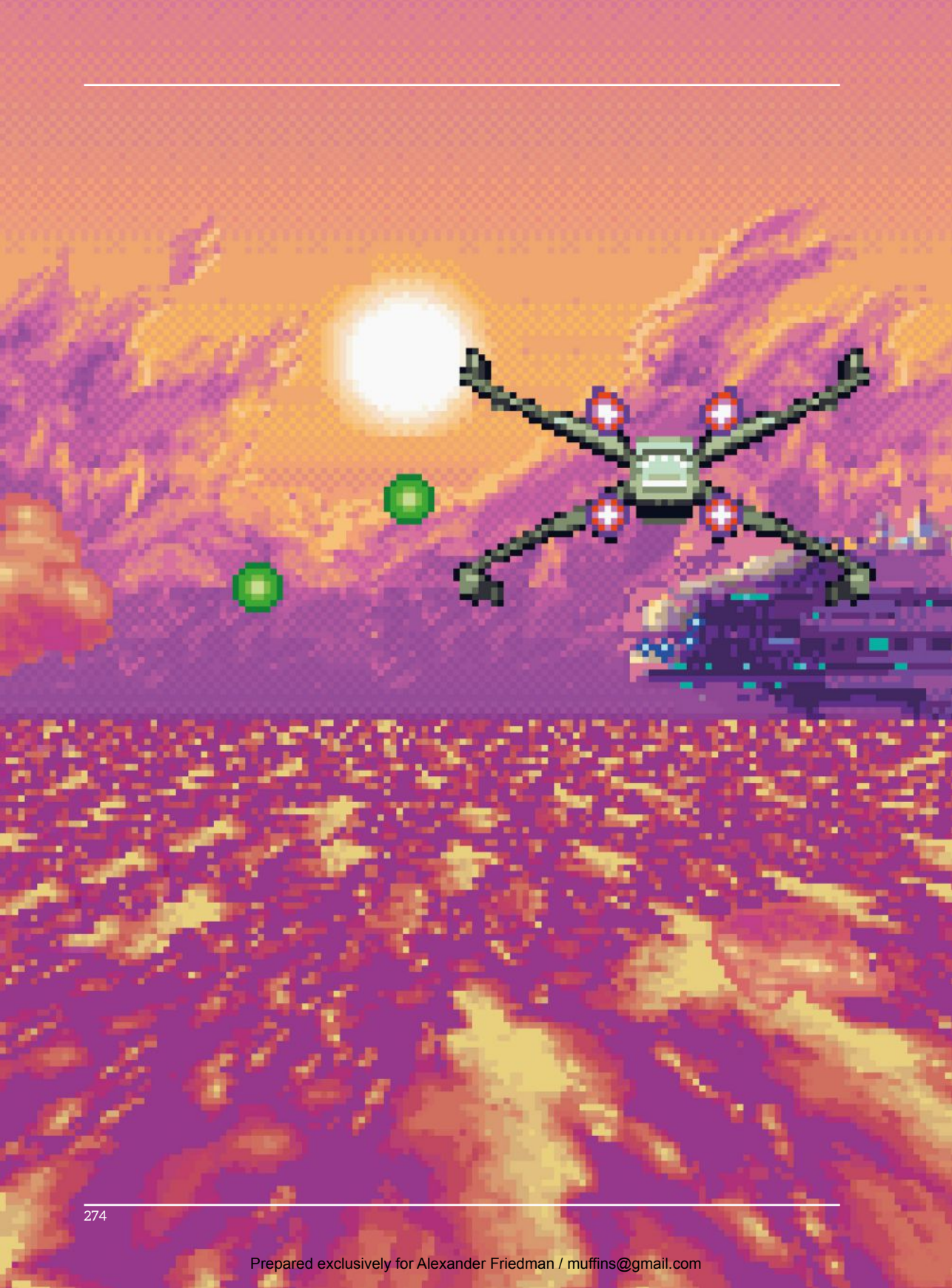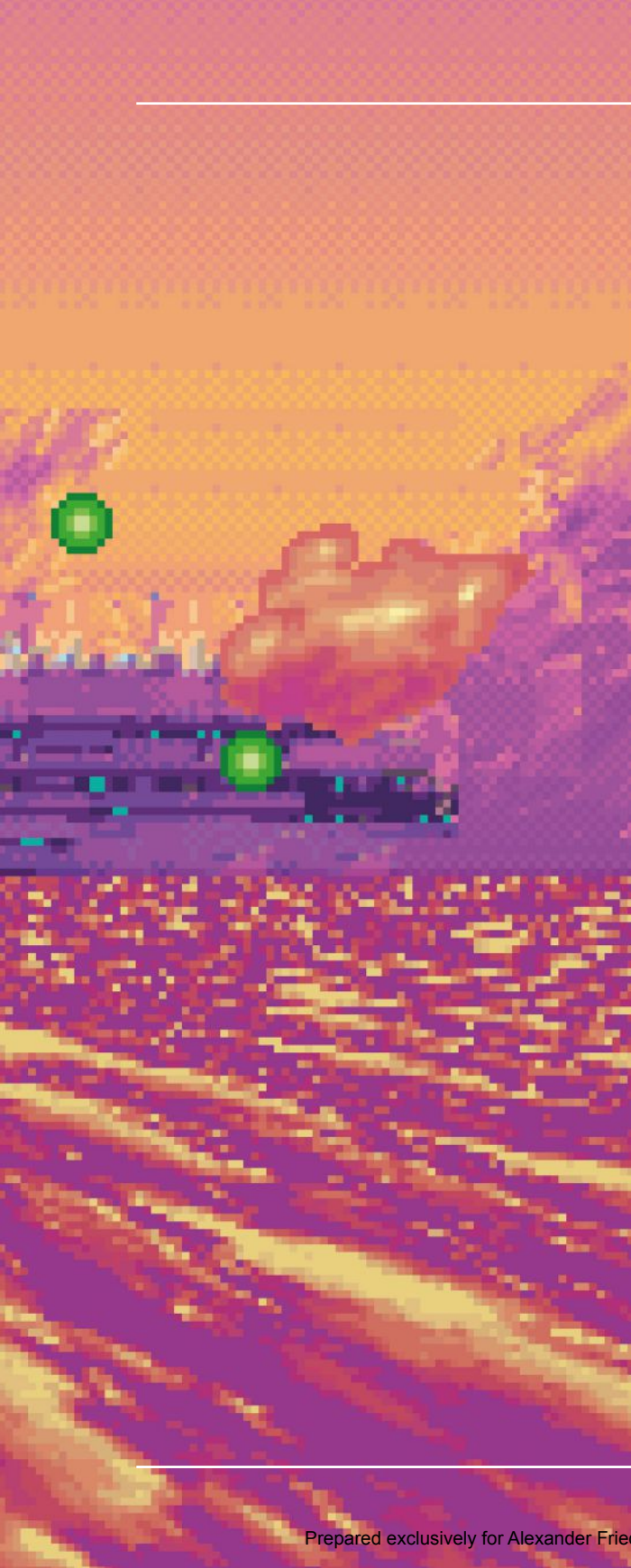
Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

"Aside from some lacklustre home computer versions of Atari's 1983 arcade game, there wasn't much in the way of Star Wars games until the early '90s. Indeed, it's fair to say that the Super Star Wars trilogy was a turning point for fans of the movies, ushering in a new era of games that could finally do justice to George Lucas's sci-fi franchise.

"After the huge success of *Super Star Wars*, Sculptured Software would have to repeat that winning formula all over again; much like the movies, however, *The Empire Strikes Back* would turn out to be the best of the bunch.

"Like its predecessor, the game is an action platformer which follows the plot of the movie fairly closely. That said, the developers have taken a few creative liberties and expanded the scope considerably in order to give players as much diversity as possible. From the ice caves of Hoth to the bowels of Cloud City, the game is immense, boasting hundreds of screens of action.

"Thankfully, each character has a number of different weapons and abilities, which keeps the action fresh as you flip from Luke to Han to Chewie. All that said, it's the flying sections which really shine, from the snowspeeder battle, to Luke's run on Cloud city, this was the closest you could get in 1993 to feeling like you were in a Star Wars movie."

Andy Roberts, games journalist

First released
1993
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer
Sculptured Software
—
Publisher
JVC

"I joined Nintendo because I wanted to create a product that people would talk about and remember."

Shigeru Miyamoto, game designer and producer

SQUARE

One of Japan's most famous creators of video games, Square began life in 1983 as the computer game software division of Den-Yu-Sha, a power line construction company based in Yokohama. Masafumi Miyamoto established the group with the permission of his father who owned Den-Yu-Sha.

Square's approach from the outset was somewhat unorthodox: at the time it was customary in Japan for games to be developed by a single individual who would handle all elements of production, comprising design, graphics and music. Miyamoto decided that it would make much more sense for the company to hire several developers who specialised in these areas and have them collaborate on projects. Staffers including Hisashi Suzuki – who would later become Square CEO – and Hironobu Sakaguchi – the creator of *Final Fantasy*, one of Square's most famous series – were employed to accommodate this new company structure.

Square's early titles were text-based adventures for the popular NEC PC-8801 personal computer. *The Death Trap* (1984) and its sequel *Will: The Death Trap II* (1985) were the company's first two pieces of software, and Square followed up with *Cruise Chaser Blassty* (1986), *Alpha*

(1986), *King's Knight Special* (1986) and *Genesis* (1987), all on the PC-8801. However, in 1985 the decision was made to license Game Arts' *Thexder* for publication on the Nintendo Famicom, which launched in 1983 and had quickly come to dominate the Japanese home games market. In 1986, Square parted ways with Den-Yu-Sha to become a totally independent company, trading under the name Square Co., Ltd. Sakaguchi joined the company full-time – he had been only a part-time employee up to this point – and assumed the role of director of planning and development. He was to become one of Square's most important members of staff, not to mention a legend in the video game industry as a whole.

1987 was a year of considerable change for Square: not only did the company relocate to Tokyo, it produced the game which transformed its ailing fortunes and earned it a place among Japan's most influential software houses. Up until this point, a commercial smash hit had eluded the firm, putting its long-term future in jeopardy. Square supported the Famicom's expansion device – the Famicom Disk System – by forming the Disk Original Group along with fellow studios Micro Cabin, Thinking Rabbit, Carry Lab,

System Sacom, XTALSOFT and HummingBirdSoft. Eleven titles were released under the DOG banner, with Square acting as publisher on each one, even though it was only actively involved in developing four of them. With the exception of *Highway Star* (released in North America as *Rad Racer*) and *Tobidase Daisakusen* (also known as *The 3-D Battles of WorldRunner*), each of which sold half a million units, the DOG alliance was a commercial disappointment. To make matters worse, Sakaguchi was becoming disenchanted with game development and was seriously contemplating an exit from the industry altogether. The breakthrough success of Enix's *Dragon Quest* – released in 1986 – piqued Sakaguchi's interest in the RPG genre, and he assembled a core team to create what was thought to be Square's swansong before the company succumbed to its financial dire straits.

> 66 *Square's approach from the outset was somewhat unorthodox.* 99

Final Fantasy defied expectations to become a commercial and critical phenomenon in its homeland, selling 400,000 copies. The North American port – released in 1990 with Nintendo's marketing juggernaut behind it – did even better, shifting 700,000 units. Square was saved, and in 1988 its sequel arrived, selling 800,000 copies in its homeland. The third Famicom game was released in 1990 for the Japanese audience only. Square declined to release the second and third instalments in North America, despite the strong performance of the original. The reasoning is easy to understand: by the time the first game was localised for the Western market in 1990, Nintendo was about to launch its 16-bit SNES. As a result, the fourth Final Fantasy title – released in Japan in July 1991 – was published in North America in November of the same year under the title *Final Fantasy II* to avoid confusion.

In its homeland, *Final Fantasy IV* took the series to new heights in terms of sales, shifting 1.44 million copies. *Final Fantasy V* would follow in 1992, but due to the game's stern difficulty level it wasn't released in North America, even though there were provisional plans to do so.

Chrono Trigger – *1995*

Instead, Square released *Final Fantasy Mystic Quest* in the US and Europe, a spin-off title which was aimed at Western players who had never played an RPG before. It wasn't a critical or commercial success, and Western fans had to wait until 1994 for the next mainline outing in the series; *Final Fantasy VI* was re-named *Final Fantasy III* to ensure continuity in North America. The title sold 2.55 million copies in Japan and became the eighth best-selling SNES title that year in America.

> 66 **As well as being incredibly productive when it came to making its own games, Square continued to act as a publisher.** 99

The astonishing success of the Final Fantasy series would have been cause for many other publishers to sit back and rest on their laurels, but Square went into development overdrive during the 16-bit era, producing a slew of classic titles for Nintendo's hardware and cementing its place as one of the console's greatest supporters. Unsurprisingly, the company played to its strengths, producing a series of RPG titles, many of which never made it out of Japan due to the costs involved with localising so much text,

plus the fact that the genre had not yet achieved mainstream popularity in the West. Games like *Romancing SaGa* (1992), *Romancing SaGa 2* (1993), *Live A Live* (1994), *Bahamut Lagoon* (1996) and *Treasure of the Rudras* (1996) all remained exclusive to Square's homeland, although in recent years fans have taken the time to painstakingly translate these titles to ensure they can be fully appreciated by English-speaking players.

Thankfully, some of Square's output during this incredibly productive period did make it to Western audiences. *Seiken Densetsu 2* was localised in 1993 as *Secret of Mana* and saw a release in both North America and Europe, where it was lavished with praise by the gaming press for its exquisite visuals, gorgeous music and exciting gameplay. In 1995, Square arguably went one better with *Chrono Trigger*, which benefited from a US launch and is regularly cited as one of the best RPGs of all time. Such was Square's desire to truly crack the North American market that it established a US-based team to create a game that would truly appeal to Western gamers, overcoming the perceived problem with translating Japanese cultural sensibilities for a foreign audience. *Secret of Evermore* arrived in 1995 to positive reviews but the general consensus was that it didn't quite match Square's Japanese-made

output, and the team behind it didn't make another game under the Square banner.

As well as being incredibly productive when it came to making its own games, Square continued to act as a publisher during this period. Among the games it released in Japan and America were HAL Laboratory's *Alcahest* (1993), Capcom's *Breath of Fire* (1993), G-Craft's *Front Mission* (1995) and also Sting Entertainment's *Treasure Hunter G* (1996). *Treasure Hunter G* marked the end of one of the company's most important periods; shortly after the release of the game, it was confirmed that the Final Fantasy firm would be working with Sony on its PlayStation console. Although Square had created a 3D demo based on *Final Fantasy VI* using Silicon Graphics workstations – the same base tech which was being utilised in Nintendo's 64-bit successor to the SNES – it refused to commit its long-term support to the ally it had worked so profitably with during the first half of the '90s. With Sakaguchi's vision for the seventh Final Fantasy title far outstripping the limitations of the cartridge format Nintendo had opted to use with its N64 system, Square had little choice but to create the game on the CD-based PlayStation, where it would span three CD-ROM discs and eventually sell almost 10 million copies worldwide.

Final Fantasy III / VI – *1994*

Romancing SaGa – *1992*

Secret of Mana /
Seiken Densetsu 2 – *1993*

Square's alliance with Sony was even more prolific than the one it had enjoyed with Nintendo, resulting in classics such as *Final Fantasy Tactics* (1997), *SaGa Frontier* (1997), *Einhänder* (1997), *Xenogears* (1998), *Parasite Eve* (1998) and *Vagrant Story* (2000). Amazingly, the company wouldn't work with Nintendo again until the Game Boy Advance era. Having turned its back on the Kyoto firm during the latter part of the '90s and therefore deprived itself of working on the Game Boy Color portable console – the market leader by a considerable margin – Square decided to support Bandai's WonderSwan handheld instead, updating many of its classic Final Fantasy entries for the machine.

As the new millennium dawned, reports emerged from Japan that Square and Enix – two of Japan's RPG behemoths – were considering a merger. This plan may well have gone ahead had Square not aspired to become a major force in the world of movie-making, a venture which was to plunge the company into more financial uncertainty, despite the stellar commercial performance of its video games. In 1997 it formed the Hawaii-based Square Pictures and the following year announced that it would be creating a feature-length film based on the Final Fantasy series. Directed by Sakaguchi himself and painstakingly rendered on almost 1,000 Silicon Graphics

workstations, 2000's *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* cost a whopping $137 million but only made back $85 million at the box office. The financial failure of the movie impacted Square's bottom line, putting any chance of a merger with Enix on hold. Things became so dire that Square had to appeal to its ally Sony for a capital injection in 2001, and Sony duly purchased a sizable 18.6% stake. Major restructuring took place the following year to get things back on track, with CEO Hisashi Suzuki stepping down as company president to be replaced by COO Yoichi Wada. Wada wasted no time in reshuffling the company, and introduced a number of changes aimed at reducing production costs and making development more efficient.

The restructuring was a success, and in 2002 Square reported the highest operating margin of its entire history, made possible partly by the incredible success of *Final Fantasy X* and *Kingdom Hearts* on Sony's PlayStation 2 console. With the ship now steady, the merger with Enix could proceed, although some shareholders – including founder Masafumi Miyamoto – expressed serious doubts about the deal, largely because they would end up 'owning' less of the newly-formed company. Miyamoto's permission was eventually granted after it was decided to adjust the exchange ratio of one

Square share for 0.81 Enix shares, and on April 1 2003, Square Enix was founded. Square – or SquareSoft as it was sometimes known – was no more, but the company which replaced it is now one of the biggest publishers of video games in the world, and presides over million-selling franchises such as Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest, Hitman, Tomb Raider, Thief and Deus Ex. In 2005 it purchased the legendary Japanese company Taito – creator of *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Darius* – and in 2009 acquired Eidos Interactive, home of Lara Croft, Legacy of Kain and many other big western franchises. In 2017 it announced a partnership with the Disney-owned Marvel group to produce video games based on the globally popular Avengers characters, hinting that the firm's future could be even brighter than we've experienced so far.

> 66 *The astonishing success of the Final Fantasy series would have been cause for many other publishers to sit back and rest on their laurels, but Square went into development overdrive.* 99

Breath of Fire – *1993*

Seiken Densetsu 3 – *1995*

Secret of Evermore – *1995*

First released
1993

—

Genre
Sports

—

**Developer
and publisher**
*Human
Entertainment*

Super Formation Soccer II

"When we started working on a soccer game, I asked if I could be the director, which basically meant I could go around and tell everyone my opinions! We didn't have a rigid hierarchy of game development: if you named yourself a director, you were a director! I was mostly working on soccer games while I was at Human; I took over the role of series director from Ryouji Amano, my senior at the time, and handled the series up to the release of *Hyper Formation Soccer* on PlayStation.

"For *Super Formation Soccer 2* we didn't have much time, and simply polished the soccer elements. For example, we updated the character data and added a versus mode with better competitive play. So it was basically a more polished version of the first game with some improvements that fans had requested.

"This was right at the time when the J-League was formed and Japan was experiencing a soccer boom. The UEFA European Football Championship was also held in 1992, so I wanted to help new fans learn about the sport. I used online services to gather data on different soccer players which wasn't available in Japanese sports magazines, and added that data to the game. This was one of the things that people really liked about *Super Formation Soccer 2* and we sold huge numbers of copies."

Masatoshi Mitori, director
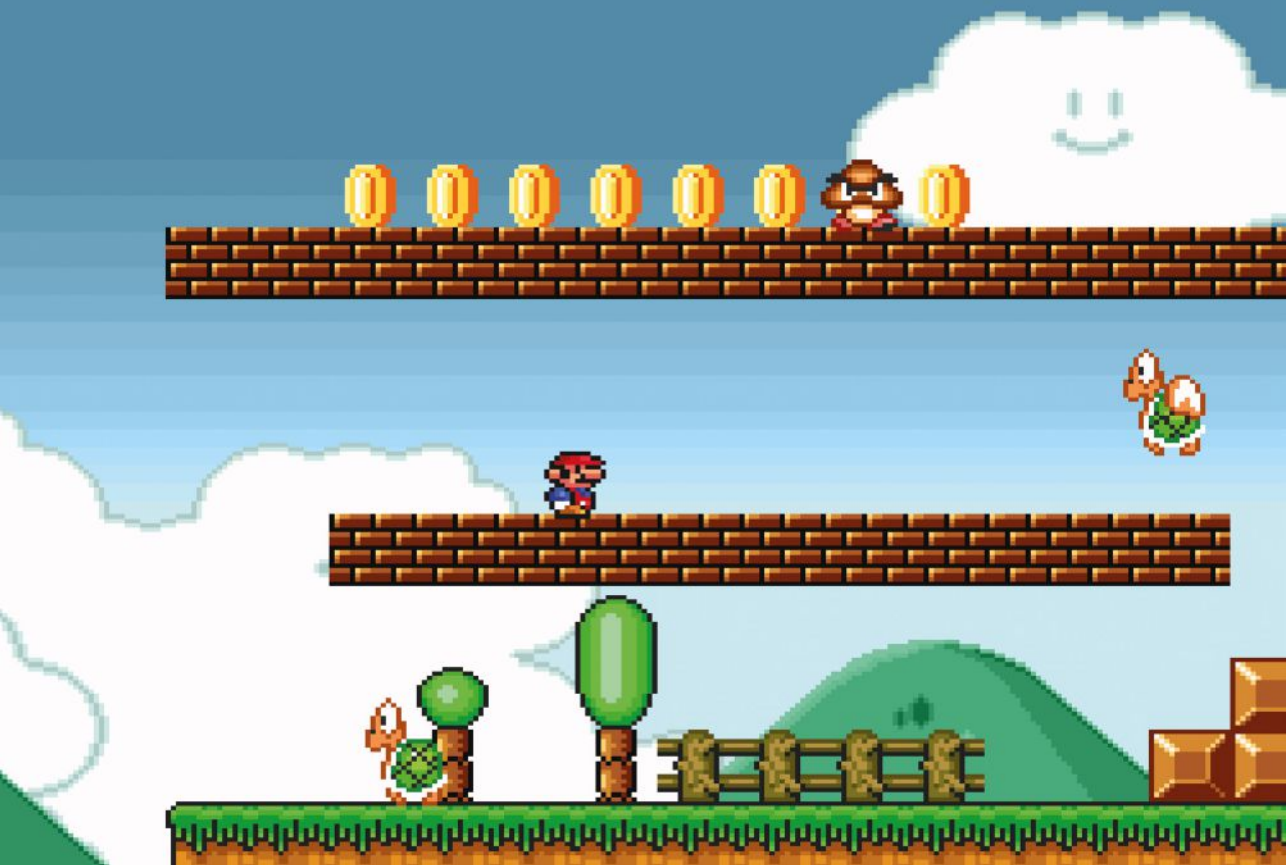
Super Mario All-Stars

"In this day and age, remakes of classic video games are commonplace. But back in 1993 they were almost unheard of – especially when it came to cartridge systems. However, Nintendo provided one of the surprises of the year when it released *Super Mario All-Stars* – a collection of NES classics starring everyone's favourite plumber. All four of Mario's top-selling 8-bit scrolling platformers were included: *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2* (which was released in Japan as *Super Mario Bros. USA*), *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels* (known as *Super Mario Bros. 2* in Japan).

"Each game featured upgraded graphics, parallax scrolling backdrops, improved 16-bit music, a save game feature and minor gameplay tweaks and fixes – as a collection it represented quite astonishing value.

"For me, the star of the show is *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which I still consider one of the greatest Mario games of all time. But let's not discount the brilliance of the original *Super Mario Bros.*, and the entertaining gameplay innovations of *Super Mario Bros 2*. Plus there's the notoriously tough *The Lost Levels* to provide a real challenge once you've mastered the other three games.

"And if you thought *Super Mario All-Stars* couldn't get any better, Nintendo released a new edition of the game in December 1994 that also included *Super Mario World*. When it comes to platform games, you really can't get any better than that."

Julian Rignall, games journalist
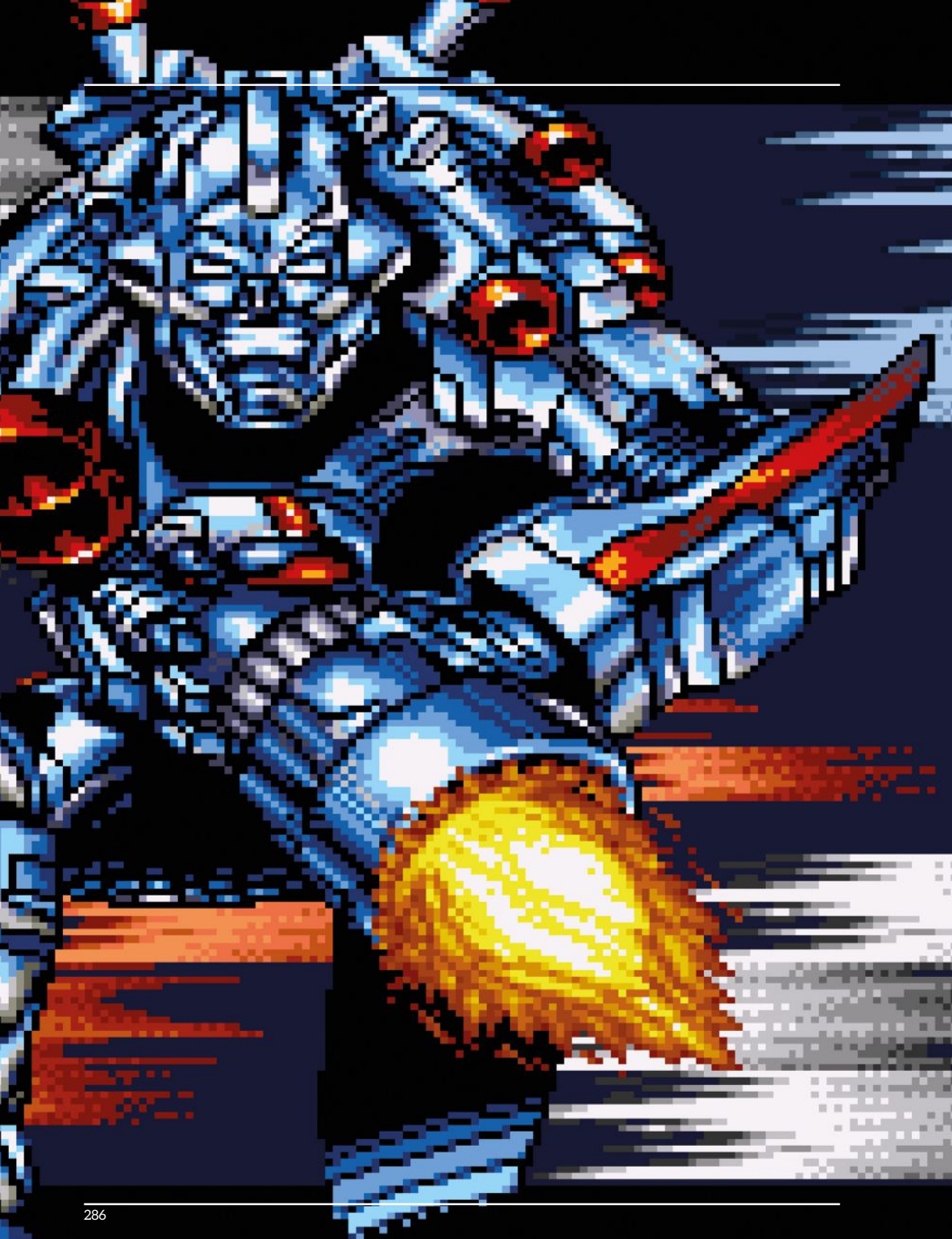
Super Turrican

"I fondly remember being instantly blown away by the fidelity of the SNES visuals – the amount of colours available on screen and the additional 'tricks', such as the transparency option, set it apart from competing video game systems at that time. Additionally, there was something special about the console's video output: the SNES pixels had a specific lush signature look that was unmatched by SEGA and co. back then.

"*Super Turrican* was a lot of fun – but also quite challenging as the publisher was adamant that we had to use the smallest available cartridge size, which didn't really suit our aspirations very well. That's why the game only shares a few assets with the SEGA Mega Drive *Turrican* game that was developed in parallel (*Mega Turrican* – later ported to the Amiga as *Turrican 3*). I'm still happy with the outcome, though – despite the limited available memory the game is colourful and fairly rich in variety. The gameplay was designed around a 'best of' concept, re-interpreting content from the original Commodore 64 and Amiga variants with SNES technology rather than doing a true sequel. On the other hand, this gave multi-platform-owning Turrican fans two new games at pretty much the same time."

Frank Matzke, graphic artist

First released
1993

—

Genre
Run and gun

—

Developer
Factor 5

—

Publisher
Seika
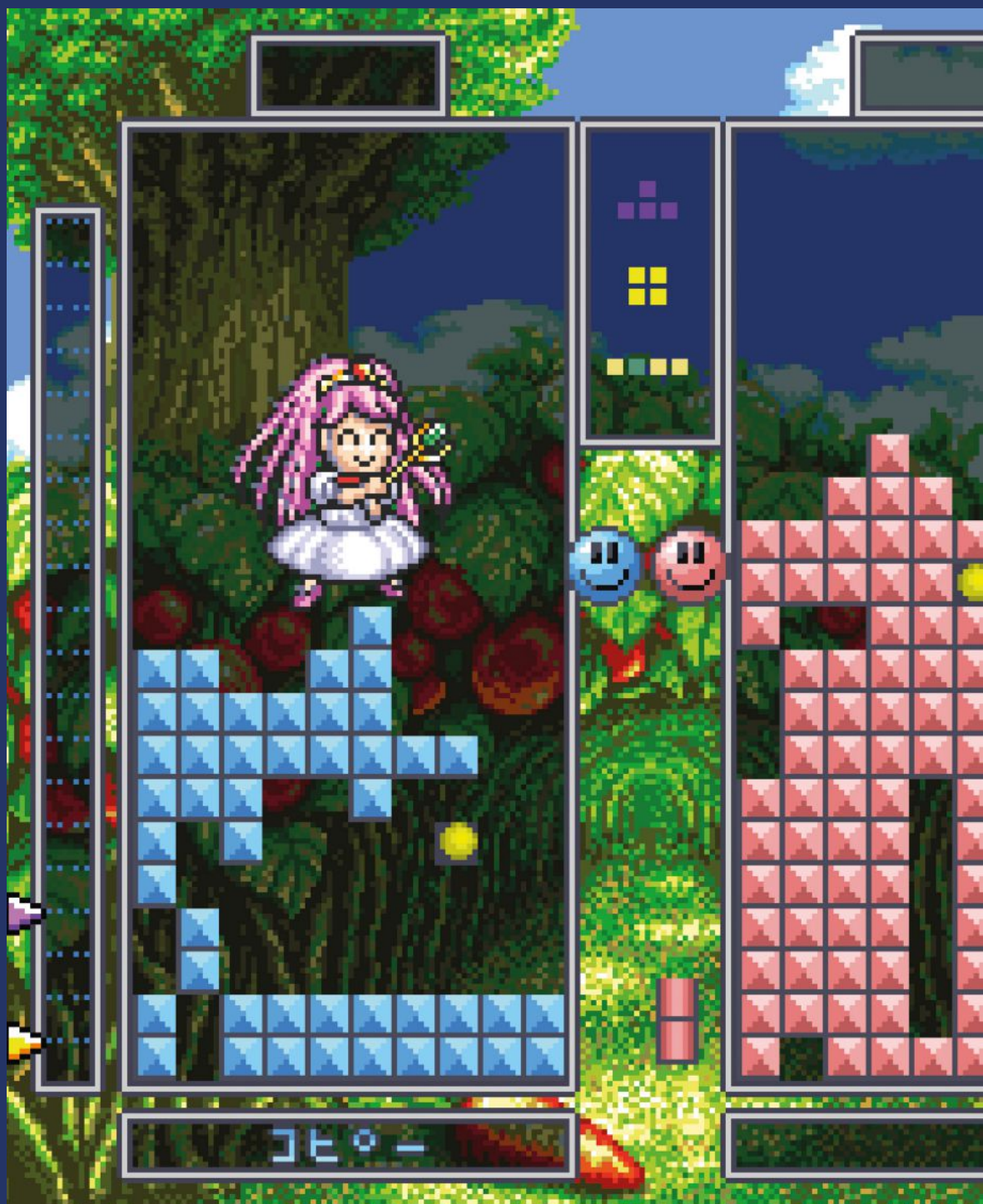
Tetris Battle Gaiden

One of the many Tetris variants published by Bullet Proof Software, *Battle Gaiden* uses a head-to-head setup in which players compete to clear lines faster than their opponent. As with the original Tetris, the aim is to slot the tetrominoes together to form a solid row of blocks, which then disappear. Successfully clearing two or more horizontal lines sends 'garbage' blocks to the opposing player's grid, cluttering the screen and making it harder to work with.

Battle Gaiden also spices things up with the addition of magic orbs. The game features nine cartoony characters each of which has four increasingly powerful magical spells, activated by collecting the requisite number of orbs. This enables you to turn the tide of play by darkening your opponent's screen, inverting their controls, stealing their orbs, making big holes in their neatly-stacked grid and so on.

Presentation overall is good, with a colourful map showing the location of the various stages, attractive intro screens for each setting and a charmingly bizarre collection of animated characters. The competitive elements add extra depth to the all-too-familiar gameplay, while fiendish computer opponents offer up a decent challenge for solo Tetrinauts.

First released
1993

—

Genre
Puzzle

—

**Developer
and publisher**
*Bullet Proof
Software*

The Lost Vikings

"Interplay released a few great titles in the early '90s and *Lost Vikings* was no exception. Developed by Silicon & Synpase – now known as Blizzard Entertainment – you'll be quite surprised if you think this is a hack and slash Viking bloodbath. Quite the opposite actually: you have to really use your brain here.

"Principally this is a puzzle platform game but with a twist of Valhalla – and yes, when you die, you do literally get sent off in a burning Viking ship! This was Blizzard in its early days, of course, but it still had a touch of genius in the character design, artwork (with its beautifully drawn pixels) and the idea behind the game itself, which was pretty original.

"Playing as three characters at once might seem strange, but that's really part of the charm. And rotating quickly and easily between them is a seriously cool bit of gameplay that works well throughout. Erik the Swift is my favourite with his all-round smashing and head banging abilities. Sure, it's not going to give you the 100 hours of gameplay that Blizzard games provide now – but who cares. Along with the in-game jokes and funny one-liners, you can happily kick back for a short while and enjoy this game, with its funky soundtrack and easy-on-the-eye graphics."

GamesYouLoved, guest reviewer

Yoshi Safari /
Yoshi's Road Hunting

"Did you ever sit down with *Super Mario World* and wonder what the game would be like if played from a first person perspective? Probably not. However, some of the most interesting ideas are those that come from unexpected places. Utilising the Super Nintendo's Super Scope light gun peripheral, *Yoshi's Safari* isn't a platformer so much as an on-rails shooting game. In fact, it's the only game of its kind in the entire Super Mario series.

"The controls are simple: aside from jumping, players merely point and shoot using the Super Scope while Yoshi automatically runs forward. It's an effective control scheme that leaves you marvelling as you take down all kinds of classic Super Mario enemies, including Goombas, Koopa Troopers and even Bowser himself, all through a first-person perspective.

"That's not the only difference, either. This time, Mario and Yoshi aren't even saving Princess Peach. Instead, they're heading to the neighbouring Jewelry Land to stop Bowser's invasion, and save fellow royals King Fret and his son Prince Pine. All in all, it's a unique side-quest in the Super Mario series, and one that definitely needs to be seen to be believed. It's also an effective shooter that gives a unique viewpoint to Super Mario's quests, while also being a much-needed experience for the under-utilised Super Scope."

Sophia Aubrey Drake, games journalist

First released
1993
—
Genre
Shoot 'em up
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo

292

Zoku: The Legend of Bishin

It's the year 2020, and the dystopian city of Neo-Tokyo has become a cesspit of vice and villainy, ruled by the exclusively female Bishin gang. The player's mission is to take down the gang, one brawl at a time. Play is split between Mode 7 driving sections – in which you race between points on a maze-like map – and scrolling beat 'em up sections, which occur if you're thrown from you car while racing, or whenever you arrive at your destination.

It's a neat concept, and the game gets off to a great start with some beautiful intro screens. But once you're into the game proper, neither element has enough quality or depth to hold the interest for long. The driving sections are particularly average,

with clumsy sprites and a labyrinthine map that's frustrating to navigate. There's no real racing, either: it's simply a test of your manoeuvring skills to reach the destination before the clock runs out or your car gets destroyed.

Arrive at the next stop and you simply beat up a meagre handful of bad girls before taking on the boss character. These button-bashing segments are similarly basic, with punches, kicks, grabs and a humourously large jump. Defeat the boss and it's back on the road to the next destination. *Zoku: The Legend of Bishin* was never released on the SNES, and the only thing Western gamers missed out on is some rather classy box art by Katsuya Terada.

First released
1993

Genre
Action

Developer
LucasArts

Publisher
Konami

Zombies Ate My Neighbors

"In this cult-classic from the brains of Mike Ebert and the LucasArts team, your job is to assume the role of teenage kids Zeke or Julie and run and gun in solo or co-operative play to save your oblivious neighbours from an ongoing onslaught of zombies and other B-movie horror creatures.

"Like the bad guys, the humour comes fast and furious, from level names like 'Mars Needs Cheerleaders' and 'Dances With Werewolves' to a scoring system that gives 1,000 points for rescuing a cheerleader and 10 points for saving an evil school teacher. LucasArts fans are treated to an appearance by Purple Tentacle from *Day of the Tentacle* along with a credits level in the LucasArts office where George Lucas himself tells you to get back to work.

"For all its humour, the game battled with censorship. Outside the United States the title was shortened to *Zombies*, and all chainsaw references were removed. Additionally, both SNES versions were denied the blood red game-over screen that was allowed in 16-bit SEGA versions on either side of the Atlantic.

"A fun and addictive game, *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* will have you staying up way past your bedtime trying to finish just one more level."

Jeff Witt, guest reviewer

Zombies Ate My Neighbors

"Published by Konami in 1993, LucasArts' cult classic is a humorous homage to beloved campy horror flicks. In single player or two-player co-op play, Zeke and/or Julie search the town to save their clueless neighbours from a host of monsters that have been unleashed by the mad scientist, Dr. Tongue, who is intent on taking over the world.

"Featuring an inviting cartoon-like graphical style and light-hearted creepy music, the game requires wary navigation of 48 maze levels, such as suburban neighbourhood yards and department stores. All the while, you and your neighbours are relentlessly attacked by an multitude of creatures including vampires, evil dolls, chainsaw-wielding maniacs and, of course, zombies. Each monster type exhibits a different behaviour and vulnerability requiring thoughtful choice of one of the many swap-on-the-fly weapons, ranging from soda cans to crucifixes, and timely use of power-ups, such as a bazooka to blow a shortcut through a wall and a potion to temporarily become monstrous yourself.

"Starting with ten neighbours, the game is over if the monsters kill you three times, or you fail to find and save at least one of your neighbours in a level before the monsters get to them. Graciously, a password is given after completing every four levels from which you can continue."

Perry Rodgers, game producer and journalist

Aero the Acro-Bat 2

"Aero the Acro-Bat was created by David Siller to
be the coolest mascot character of his time with
an 'edge'. If he could talk, he'd say, 'Talk to the hand'
as originally conceptualised – a popular phrase in
the early '90s. Aero's signature Drill-Attack move
and jump combo gave him a fun and unique way
of navigating and attacking enemies.

"In this sequel, I designed the game to be darker,
with bold and abstract level locales and a story
that takes the player on a longer journey, meeting
new friends and foes. Aero's perseverance led him
down a misdirected path set by the evil industrialist,
Edgar Ektor, keeping Aero distracted so that
'Plan B' could be enacted.

"The SNES was my personal machine of choice.
I liked how sharp and bright the graphics seemed
compared to the SEGA Genesis. Even with cartridge
space limitations, we packed a lot of content and
replayability into the game. Back then, art files had
to be transferred via 3.5-inch floppy disk from artist
computer to game programmer computer since
the workstations weren't linked to a network."

Nigel Cook, director

"I originally started out beta-testing games when
I first joined Sunsoft, but my career path was always
going to be on the art/development side as that's
why I was brought on board in the first place. My
role on *Aero the Acro-Bat 2* consisted of character
development art, environments and a couple of
pieces I did for an article in *Electronic Gaming
Monthly*. I did get a chance to create an original
character for the game, a voodoo-inspired minor
level boss, who can be seen on the box – I think they
named him 'Marvin'. I was surprised and honoured
when they chose to use him on the box art.

"Looking back on my work is both fun and painful –
I needed formal art training and you can see it.
I was just a kid right out of high school with zero art
training. That time in my career was total blue-sky
and fun. I got to pretty much do whatever came to
mind as long as it served a purpose in moving the
game story forward and made sense within the
worlds we were creating."

Mario Zavala, art director

First released *1994* / **Genre** *Action platformer* /
Developer *Iguana Entertainment* / **Publisher** *Sunsoft*

Fatal Fury Special / Garō Densetsu Special

The third entry in SNK's Fatal Fury series first appeared on the NEOGEO hardware before being ported to the Super Famicom by Takara. Known in Japan as *Legend of the Hungry Wolf*, the series was SNK's answer to *Street Fighter II*, which took the arcades by storm in 1991. Although clearly influenced by Capcom's brawler, *Fatal Fury* does bring a few new things to the party, including dual-plane combat in which players can move in and out of the screen.

A remix of *Fatal Fury 2*, this 'Special' edition includes all the characters from its predecessor plus three from *Fatal Fury*, providing a roster of 16 playable characters in all. It also introduced a new Desperation Move that can only be employed when you're low on health – although this is incredibly complex and only of interest to hardcore fighting fans.

The biggest shortcoming of the Super Famicom release over the NEOGEO is simply screen resolution: it lacks the finesse of the original, but in terms of colour palette, characters and moves, everything else is pretty much there. It's a great one-on-one beat 'em up, but just be warned: solo fighters have tough competition in the shape of some truly vicious computer-controlled combatants.

First released
1994
—
Genre
Fighting
—
Developer
Takara
—
Publisher
SNK
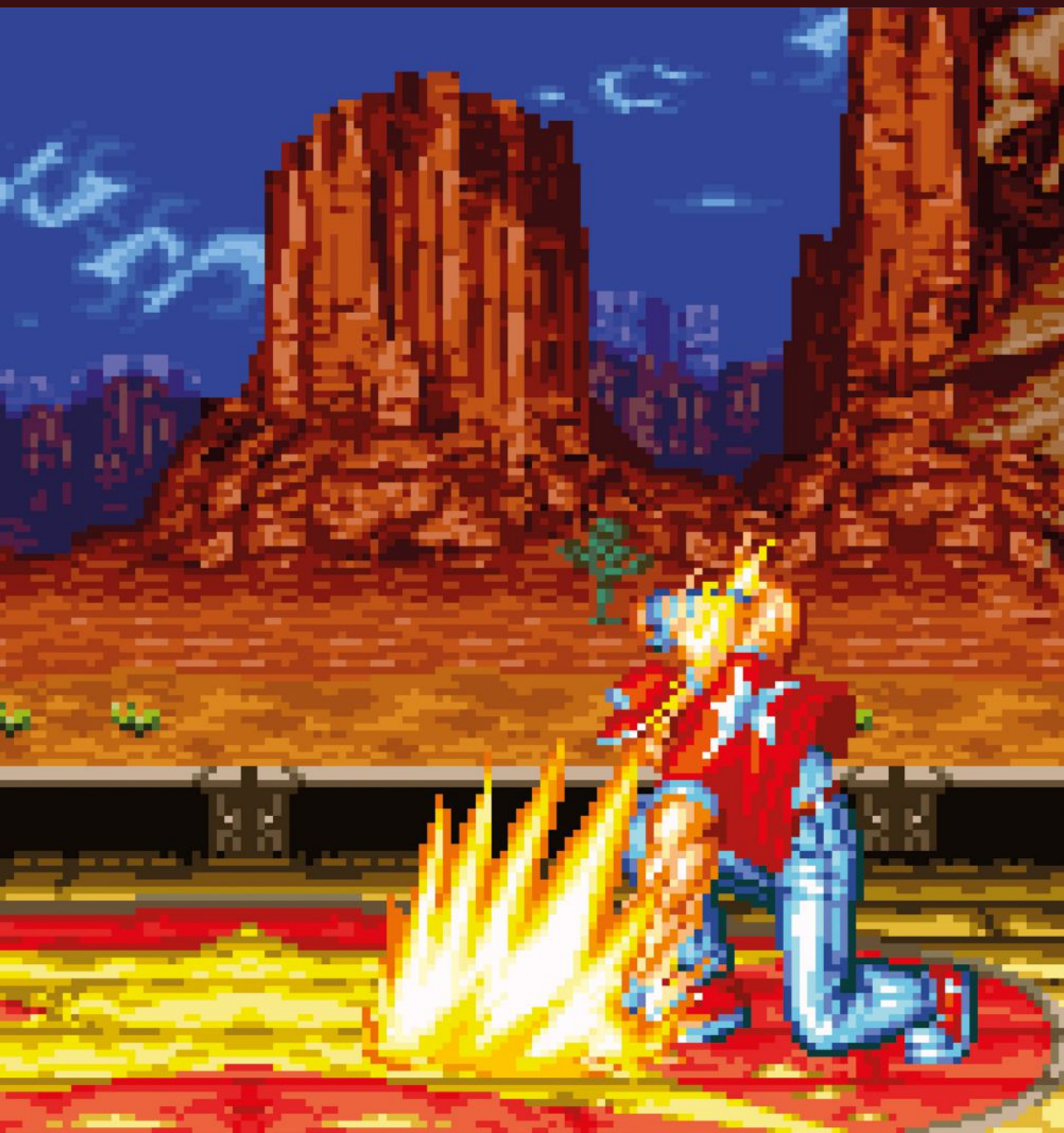
Wild Guns

"A criminally forgotten gem of the 16-bit era, Natsume's *Wild Guns* is one cult classic that you should definitely jump into, whether you've played it before or not. In this steampunk-infused Wild West shooter, players take control of either heroine Annie or her bounty hunter Clint as they go on a quest for revenge against those who murdered her family. The action is frantic, fast-paced and, most importantly, a tremendous amount of fun.

"Interestingly, the gameplay is inspired by the Wild West setting just as much as the story is. In what's best described as an interactive American Wild West-style shooting gallery, players control Annie or Clint as they sidestep their way through six challenging stages, dodging bullets and taking down enemies. There's a range of power-ups and special moves, and even a two-player co-op option. It also looks fantastic.

"One interesting point worth raising about *Wild Guns* is the fact that its five-month development was not only completed by a five-person team, but it was done on an extremely small budget, making it even more of an impressive achievement. If there's one game in the Super Nintendo back catalogue that deserves more attention than it got on release in 1995, it's *Wild Guns*."

Sophia Aubrey Drake, games journalist
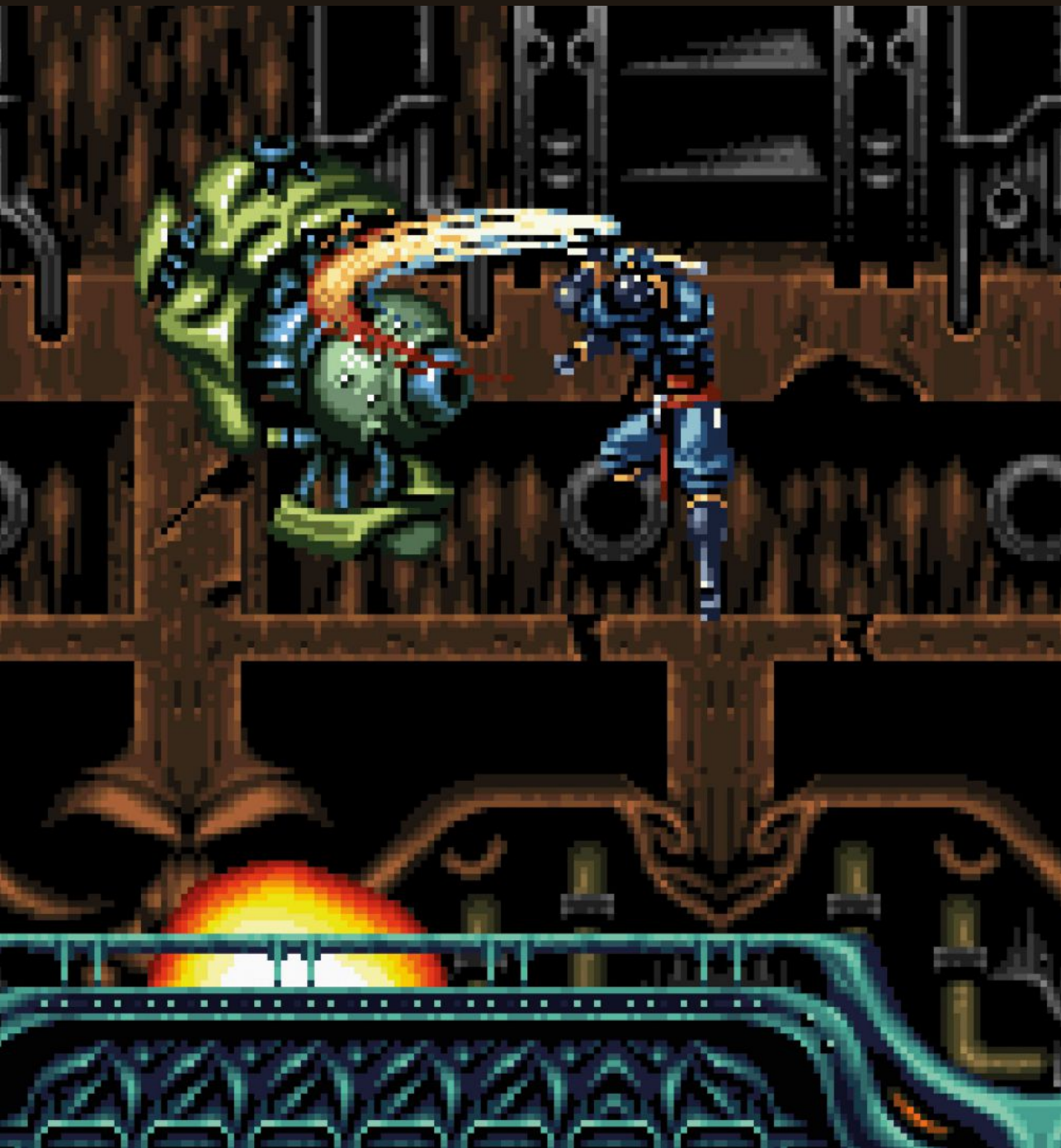
Hagane: The Final Conflict

"Probably better known for its ludicrous resale value, *Hagane* is a gorgeous action platformer that hides a cornucopia of evil gameplay designs behind its beautiful façade. With character designs by Keita Amemiya, who would later work on the Onimusha series, you control the titular cyborg ninja on a mission to retrieve his clan's Holy Grail, stolen by the rival Koma clan.

"With access to various abilities such as a sword, bombs, magic, a double jump and a grappling hook to grab and swing around, Hagane is a nimble fellow for a robot and you'll need to master his skillset to negotiate some of the infuriating leaps and obstacles present. Did we say evil designs earlier? That does a disservice to a difficulty level that at times borders on the teeth-gritting, pad-throwing, swear-inducing level of the *Ninja Gaiden* kind.

"*Hagane* has become a bit of a cult classic today and it's not hard to see why. Ninjas are cool and hip, the aesthetic is inspired, there are some great ideas bursting forth and the game is generally fun to play. It merely lacks in the overall execution, and that's what separates the true classics from the nearly-maybes."

Mat Allen, guest reviewer

First released
1994

Genre
Action platformer

Developer
CAProduction

Publisher
Hudson Soft

307

Nosferatu

"The '90s suffered no shortage of games clearly influenced by *Prince of Persia*. *Flashback*, *Out of This World* ... heck, even Konami's fantastic port of Jordan Mechner's 1989 rotoscoped classic on the SNES.

"SETA's *Nosferatu* is very clearly a part of this family. Indeed, this vampire-hunting adventure plays so similarly to *Prince of Persia* that at times it seems almost like a reskin. The only major gameplay difference is *Nosferatu*'s focus on fisticuffs – the main character features a serious set of attack moves and each level ends with a mano-a-mano battle with one of a rogue's gallery of classic movie monsters.

"In fact, the entire game feels like a love letter to old-school monster cinema. The gothic levels are littered with ghouls, zombies, wailing humans reaching through barred doors and the corpses of the not-so-lucky.

"*Nosferatu* oozes atmosphere. The audio is a disconcerting mix of sinister musical notes and sound effects like clanking chains and heavy breathing. And the muted colour palette doesn't look like a SNES game, but rather something more akin to the sepia tones one thinks of when discussing the golden age of cinema. Nosferatu is truly a sight to behold, and has an incredibly unique style, if not the gameplay to match."

Greg Sewart, games journalist

First released
1994

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
SETA Corporation

Biker Mice from Mars

Based on the 1993 TV show, this cartoon racer once again shows Konami at its technological best as the player pits his racing skills against a series of looping, isometric courses. You start by selecting one of six playable characters from the show – Throttle, Modo, Vinnie, Lawrence Limburger, Dr. Karbunkle and Grease Pit – before racing against the other five in order to earn prize money. Your accumulated winnings enable you to soup-up your bike, improving speed and handling, and bolting on better armour and weaponry. With ramps, water hazards and speed-up/slow-down areas, it's very much like *R.C. Pro-Am* crossed with *Mario Kart*.

The game features a Main Race mode in which you battle your way through the ranks, plus Practice and Battle Race modes, as well as a neat split-screen two-player option. The isometric view and steering system can be off-putting at first (you always steer left and right on the D-pad no matter which direction your character is facing), but once you get to grips with the controls the game offers some engaging, fast-paced racing action. It's not the finest of Konami's SNES releases, but *Biker Mice from Mars* is attractive, slickly presented and surprisingly entertaining.

First released
1994
—
Genre
Racing
—
Developer
and publisher
Konami

Mortal Kombat II

"Once Nintendo removed the shackles from us, *Mortal Kombat II* was one of the most fun projects I worked on in my career. All of the technical advances that we used in the original *Mortal Kombat* were now mastered – we even had time to add a bunch of new features that eventually went into the arcade game, like the heavy battles where you could select more than one fighter. These features originated with the Super Nintendo and were used in *Mortal Kombat 3* in the arcade, which is kinda cool.

"Converting the graphics was much simpler with *Mortal Kombat II*, as by now we could import the code direct from the arcade machine instead of doing it by hand line by line, pixel by pixel. This made the whole process much more seamless and meant we had more time to really hone the gameplay and overall presentation.

"The original was a great proof of concept for the tech that we were doing, and with *Mortal Kombat II* and *3* we pretty much nailed it as we had perfected the process. If you had the arcade game sitting next to the Super Nintendo you wouldn't know the difference."

Jeff Peters, director

"*Mortal Kombat II* gave us an opportunity to improve upon the techniques we used in the original *Mortal Kombat*. We still had limitations with palette and screen resolution, but our schedule wasn't as tight, which let us spend more time touching up character frames. We also upgraded our camera and began capturing video digitally, which gave us much crisper raw images. This is also where background artist Tony Goskie joined the team and helped define the look of *Mortal Kombat*'s Outworld. I think those are the things that helped *Mortal Kombat II* stand out visually from its predecessor.

"Because of these graphical improvements, we were a bit pickier with the game's eventual console ports. Fortunately, Sculptured Software had improved its processes as well, fully taking advantage of the SNES' capabilities. And, with the violence controversy behind us, both Acclaim and Nintendo were more relaxed in allowing Sculptured to use red blood, rather than the green of the *Mortal Kombat* SNES port. I still feel that the colour of blood sprites was always a superficial issue and that the playability and quality of the SNES port played a much larger role in the game's success."

John Tobias, series co-creator

Blackthorne

"On a console packed with side-scrolling action games, it took a lot to stand apart from the crowd. But Blizzard's *Blackthorne* hit like a shotgun blast to the chest – in large part because of the hero's own staggeringly effective firearm. As Kyle 'Blackthorne' Vlaros, a skilled mercenary on an intense quest to reclaim his planet, you'll wield a pump-action shotgun as you mow down freaky foes throughout the cavernous stages. The ability to fire behind his back, without looking, remains one of the absolute coolest moves in a 16-bit game.

"Despite the startling power of the shotgun, *Blackthorne* isn't especially speedy or arcade-like: it's more methodical, as you precisely clear areas of foes and even use background cover to avoid attacks. Granted, the slower pace and slightly awkward controls take some getting used to, but once you adjust to its quirks, *Blackthorne*'s unique tone, detailed graphics and satisfying violence take hold.

"It's also one of the earliest examples of Blizzard's knack for world-building, with the slick opening sequence regaling us with the tale of the planet Tuul and the conflict over its rightful leader. It's a shame we never got more *Blackthorne*, but the original game still warrants attention today."

Andrew Hayward, games journalist
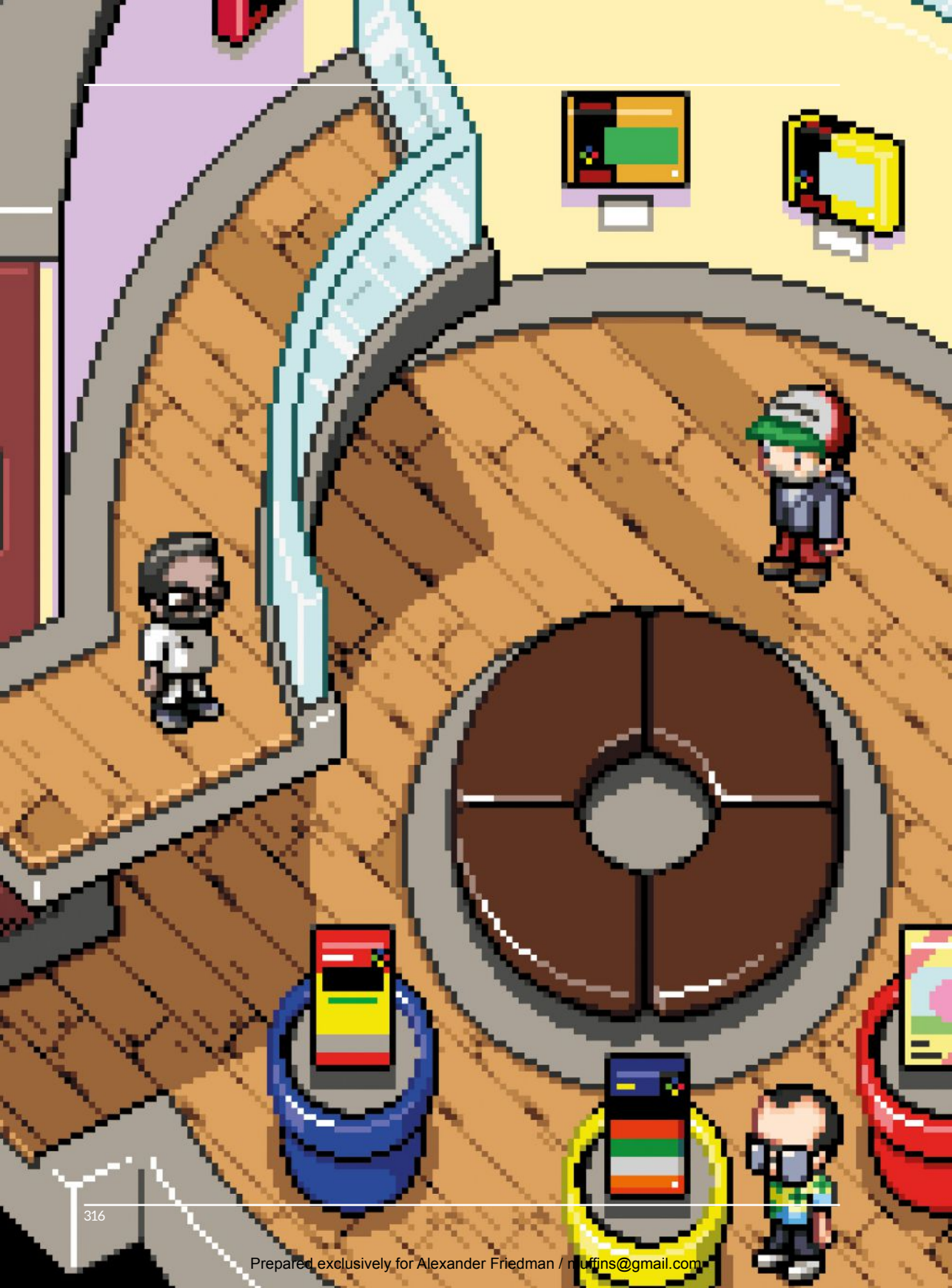
Welcome to the box art museum...

▼

Box art

Back in the pre-Internet, pre-digital delivery days, a game's box art was sometimes the first sight a buyer might have of a new title. So it was important that it was attractive, exciting, and gave some indication of what the game inside was about. With the advent of the Super Famicom and the grey import market, many gamers were introduced to Japanese artwork, typography and design for the first time, kindling love affairs that influenced interests, hobbies and careers, and which continues to resonate to this day. In this section we take a closer look at some classics from the US and Japanese game libraries.

Box Art Museum by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

Earthworm Jim

"I was brought on at Shiny Entertainment to be an art director and create a fresh new look for the gaming industry, giving a bold, three-dimensional look to this wacky 2D character called Earthworm Jim. A gun-toting worm in an astronaut suit was something the industry was familiar with and I needed to paint something that was relative, yet still weird and funny like the character and story.

"In the mid-'90s, graphic novels were the 'in' thing and there was no one doing steroid-induced, freakishly large muscle characters like Simon Bisley. Bisley was my inspiration for where I needed to take our Earthworm to the next level of game cover art. Unfortunately, I was just learning the ropes of the industry, and [was surprised] how many reviews and revisions there were for pleasing the Playmates publishers with the first *EWJ* cover. I felt that the art and true character of *EWJ* didn't come to fruition until the posters and magazine covers came out afterwards.

"A funny side note, that only a few people know, was that when the second game came out I shocked Playmates at first by giving them an almost all-white cover. But they weren't ready for bold and simple; they wanted to throw 'everything' on the cover. So, I not only gave them everything, but I threw in the kitchen sink. And that is why Jim and his sidekick Snot are standing on the kitchen sink for the cover!"

Mike Koelsch, artist

Secret of Evermore

Although Square had enjoyed some success with localised versions of its games, in 1994 it decided to create a home-grown title especially for US gamers, filled with B-movie quotes, pop culture references and dialogue more suited to a Western audience. The result was *Secret of Evermore*, a huge 24Mbit cart that tells the story of a boy and his dog on a quest to explore the four historically-themed regions of Evermore in order to escape back to their own time zone. Despite a positive reception – with particular praise for its graphics and animation – most critics felt that it still fell short of the company's usually high standards; Square's North American team never made another title for the SNES.

The box art for the game focuses on the first boss you encounter, the giant insect Thraxx. And, for once, the artwork is an honest representation of the game's protagonists, with the boy and his dog attempting to attack the creature's heart, which is revealed when his monstrous fanged thorax opens up. It's accurate down to the creature's puny limbs and huge insectoid eyes, and even the dappled, cell-like cave system he dwells in. While the art style is a little crude (the mutated wolf is rather disturbing), the use of colour and composition is pretty solid. The combination of the image with red and orange logos set against the black border elevates the whole package into something greater than the sum of its parts.

Released
1995
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer and publisher
Square

Released
1992
—
Genre
*Scrolling
beat 'em up*
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

Released
1991
—
Genre
*Scrolling
shooter*
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

Released
1993
—
Genre
Racing
—
Developer
Silicon & Synapse
—
Publisher
Interplay

Released
1991
—
Genre
Racing
—
Developer and publisher
Nintendo

Street Fighter II - The World Warrior

"When creating the US promotional art for *Street Fighter II*, all we received from Capcom Japan in the way of reference were five or six Polaroids of some gameplay. Our brief was to re-create the characters making sure we kept the basic proportions and what they wore. We had to create something 'American looking' as they didn't think it would sell well if it looked like it was coming from Japan for some reason. Back then the games didn't have high-resolution graphics and lots of detail, which made my task even more difficult just working from Polaroids!

"I remember the toughest part was deciding on the background scene, as there were so many to choose from. I don't know what screen or Polaroid I saw but it looked like an alley with a spray-painted brick wall, which we thought would be perfect. On the cover we decided to include Blanka doing his iconic cannonball move and Chun-Li who was going to be fending off his attacks. And so it wasn't just two people going at each other, we added Ryu to the scene surrounded by a lot of trash cans and boxes getting knocked over."

Mick McGinty, artist

Released
1992

Genre
Fighting

Developer and publisher
Capcom

Street Fighter II Turbo

"I remember that Capcom specifically asked to have E. Honda doing his 'Hundred Hand Slap' move on the cover, as they were proud of his really quick special move. They shared some stills of the move with me, and after sending my initial sketches they asked for changes and said that it's got to look more like 'multiple punches'. It was a challenge but we got it right in the end. I do remember that this was a major point for them. I especially enjoyed replicating the in-game bathroom scene and including little details such as the bar of soap, dripping water and wet patches on the ceiling.

"As well as including the new playable character Sagat on the cover, they also wanted to include Dahlsim. I remember that they wanted me to put him in the background, just starting to emerge into his fighting environment, as one of his special moves was teleportation. You can just about see him, sitting crossed legged behind the main characters. Including Dahlsim was a bit of an afterthought from the developers in Japan, and the end result is extremely subtle – I'd imagine that most people never even noticed him!"

Mick McGinty, artist

Released
1993
—
Genre
Fighting
—
Developer and publisher
Capcom
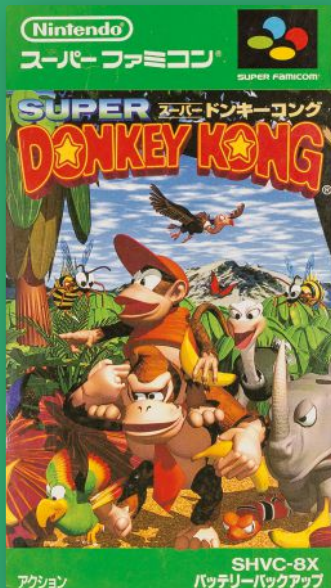
Assault Suits Valken

Known in the West as *Cybernator*, *Assault Suits Valken* is the second instalment of the Assault Suits series, which started with *Assault Suit Leynos* on the SEGA Mega Drive. A number of sequels and remakes were released on the SEGA Saturn and PlayStation 1, 2 and 4.

The action in this side-scrolling shooter takes place in the year in 2101 (it's technically a prequel to *Assault Suit Leynos*), where a war is being waged between the Axis colonials and Federation forces over territorial rights to the moon, which is rich in natural resources. The player controls Jake Brain, pilot of a Federation mechanised assault suit and is tasked with destroying the Axis military.

This beautifully executed artwork is suitably military in its palette, with earthy tones and metallic greys, but rendered in a matter-of-fact style that belies the sci-fi gameplay within. Despite the static nature of the assault suit, the illustrator cleverly creates drama with a series of angled forms and lines that all lead the eye inward to the mech. The inclusion of ground crew, busying themselves with repairs and refuelling, both adds scale and tells a story; this is clearly a moment of calm before the oncoming storm...

バッテリーバックアップ　　　　SHVC-RI
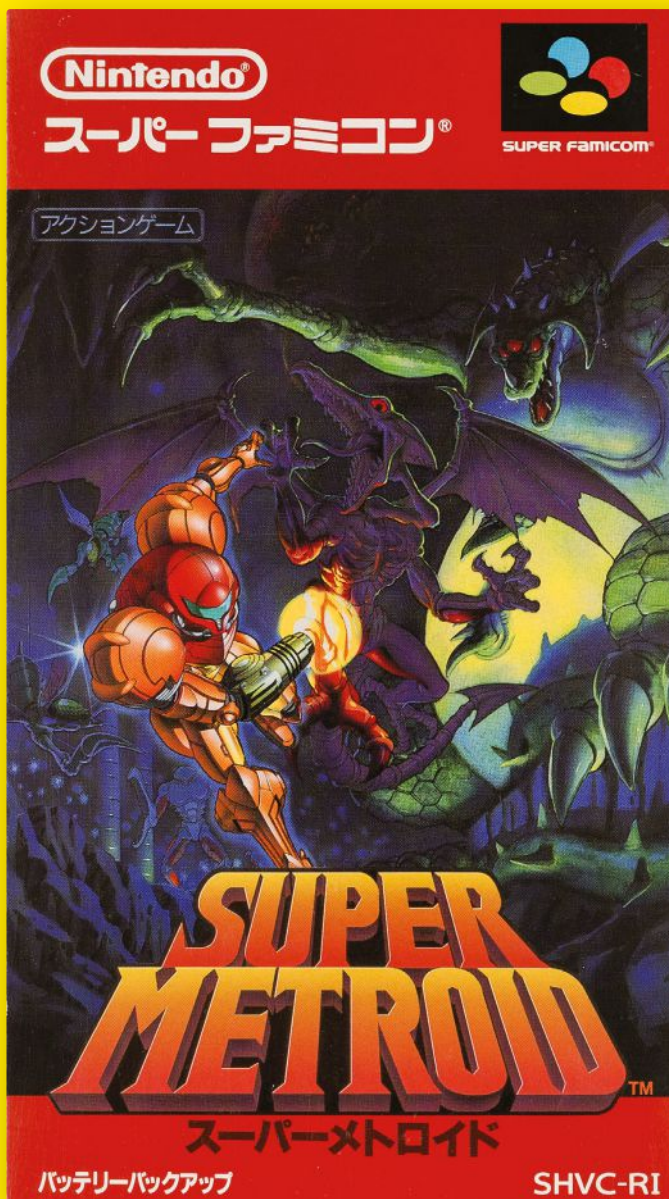
Super Metroid

At the time of its release, *Super Metroid* – the third outing in the Metroid series – was the largest Super Famicom game available, weighing in at 24Mbits (although *Star Ocean* and *Tales of Phantasia* would later eclipse this with 48Mbit carts).

The story picks up after the events of *Metroid II*, in which Samus Aran transported a Metroid larva back to the scientists on the Ceres Space Colony. But no sooner has she embarked on a new bounty, she receives a distress signal: the colony has been attacked and the larva stolen by Ridley, leader of a group of space pirates. Aran immediately sets course for the pirates' home planet of Zebes, where she attempts to infiltrate their base and prevent them from gaining use of the Metroid's powers.

The original Japanese artwork features the three major protagonists: Samus Aran in her orange armour; the shadowy winged figure of space pirate Ridley; and the massive reptilian form of Kraid. The use of dark blues, greens and purples lends the image an eerie feel, and is perfectly in keeping with the game's alien, subterranean setting. The form of Ridley is a little difficult to make out, which might explain why the image was reworked for the Western release, but in making him a garish bright red, it also removed any sense of atmosphere or menace.

Released *1994 /* **Genre** *Action adventure /* **Developer** *Intelligent Systems /* **Publisher** *Nintendo*

Released
1992
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer
Arsys Software
—
Publisher
Masaya Games

Released
1993
—
Genre
Action
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Magifact

Released
1992
—
Genre
*Scrolling
beat 'em up*
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom
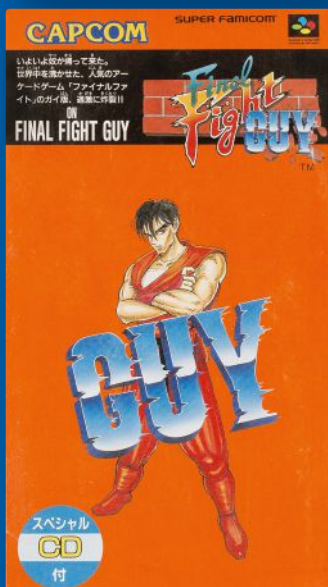
Released
1990
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo

Released
1993

Genre
RPG

**Developer
and publisher**
Square
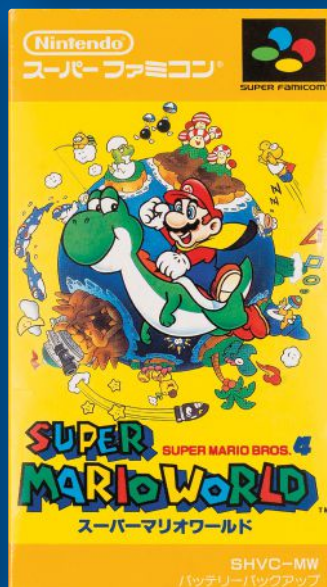
Released
1994

Genre
Action

Developer
CAProduction

Publisher
Hudson Soft

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
Quintet

Publisher
Enix

Released
1994

Genre
Shoot 'em up

Developer
*Beam
Software*

Publisher
Victor

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Released *1994* / **Genre** *Action platformer* / **Developer and publisher** *Capcom*

Rockman X2

This second instalment of the Rockman spin-off series is set in the 22nd century in a world populated by humans and mechanical beings known as Reploids. Blessed with human-level intelligence and free will, some Reploids are inclined to engage in criminal activity and are referred to as 'Irregulars' (or 'Mavericks' in the Western version, *Mega Man X*). The game's storyline picks up six months after the events of its predecessor, in which *Rockman X* becomes the head of a paramilitary force called the 'Irregular Hunters' and sets off on a mission to defeat *Sigma*, the Irregular overlord who's hell-bent on defeating humanity.

Amid the usual platforming action, *Rockman X2* introduced the ability to pilot vehicles, including a massive robot and a hover bike. The game also benefits from the inclusion of Capcom's Cx4 math coprocessor.

This Japanese release takes the series' 'busy' motif to the extreme, with box art practically bursting with colourful characters. As usual, Rockman is front and centre, surrounded by the many 'Irregular' robots he encounters during the course of his mission, while Sigma lurks in the background, an ominous dark form amid the clutter. The artwork is slightly more refined than its forerunner, and though crammed with detail is still nicely balanced. Its joyful, vibrant nature is also more in line with the earlier Rockman series.

Brain Lord

"You'd probably expect me to say something clichéd like, 'Brain Lord will always have a special place in my heart', but honestly, *Brain Lord* will always have a special place in my heart. There was always something so refreshingly different about it: the combination of elements that, when combined, just made a really good game.

"At the beginning, I loved the idea and the conceptual art, and throughout the entire time on that project, build after build, I just kept thinking, 'You know, this is just a really well designed, solid game'. The more I worked on it, the more I wanted to keep playing it. The more I played it, the more I found things to love about it. The music, the puzzles, the mechanics that were so simplistic but so satisfying – everything just worked so well together to create this strangely unique but amazingly good game. I remember feeling that way about a few other titles we were publishing at the time – *Robotrek*, *E.V.O.*, *Paladin's Quest* – games I knew probably wouldn't be getting a ton of attention or critical acclaim in the market, but I believed that when players discovered them they'd discover uniquely good games."

Robert Jerauld, producer

First released
1994
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer
Produce!
—

Publisher
Enix
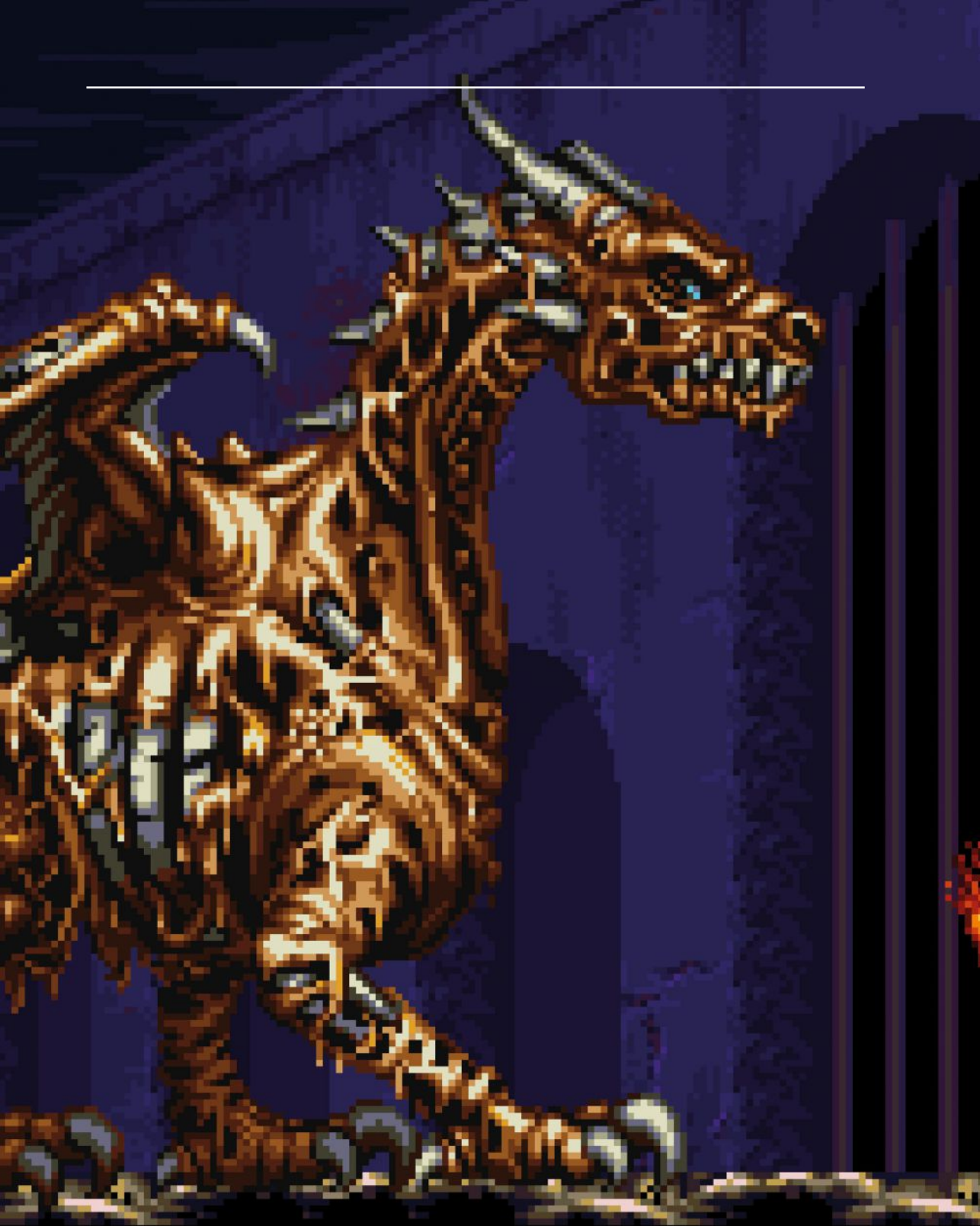
Demon's Crest / Demon's Blazon

"A spin-off character from Capcom's Ghosts 'n Goblins series, Firebrand is your average demon who loves long walks on the beach, spooning on the couch, and protecting the Demon Realm from unspeakable forces of evil.

"The first two Firebrand games, *Gargoyle's Quest I* and *II*, appeared on the Game Boy and NES respectively, so it's fitting that the third game in the saga should debut on the SNES, rounding off one of the most underrated trilogies in video game history.

"Firebrand's quest concerns six magical Crests stolen from him by Phalanx, a demon hell-bent on total domination. Once collected, the Crests give Firebrand additional powers, enabling him to revisit earlier levels to reach previously inaccessible areas. He can also collect potions and talismans along the way, and purchase spells from stores dotted around the kingdom.

"Graphically, the game is arguably Capcom's finest hour, with visuals that hold up against any arcade platformer of that era. Sonically, however, the game is nothing to write home about (unless you love sinister organ music, in which case you're in for a treat).

"While the game might seem like just another action platformer, it's the subtle RPG elements which put Demon's Crest in a class of its own; there are a hundred ways to equip your demon, a multitude of secrets to uncover, and three different endings to unlock. Make no mistake, though, it's one tough cookie."

Andy Roberts, games journalist

Der Langrisser

"I was a big war game nut and very into military affairs. I created all of the characters and story for the original *Langrisser* on Mega Drive. I did the original designs for the game systems and characters, did the graphics, wrote the story, designed the levels and balanced the game difficulty all by myself – it's the title to which I made the most significant contribution. For the rest of the series I was involved with the story up to *Der Langrisser* on Super Famicom; for *Langrisser III*, I only did the designs for the characters, the sound planning and the difficulty balancing. However, my favourite game in the series has to be *Der Langrisser* for the Super Famicom. I was the one who came up with the idea of a branching story that allowed the player to join the enemy side. I also balanced the special abilities of each army.

"The word 'Langrisser' comes from my original design document, where it was originally 'Light Ritter', using the German word for knight. But 'Light Ritter' didn't sound good to me, so I just sort of came up with a more mellifluous title. As for choosing a German name, maybe it was a case of chūnibyō! In Japan we often use the phrase chūnibyō, which means 'middle school syndrome' [a reference to teenage kids who become know-it-alls or believe they posses special powers]."

*Masayuki Suzuki, planner
and graphic artist*

First released
1994

—

Genre
RPG

—

Developer
Masaya Games

Publisher
*Nippon Computer
Systems*

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Donkey Kong Country

"We first produced graphics for the SNES by tracing our digitised sketches, pixel by pixel, on our own custom-built editor and art package. This changed when Tim Stamper researched high-end graphics software used by the likes of ILM and we looked at ways to incorporate those graphics into future games. He was always thinking of the future and how we could improve our quality, but we started using this technique a lot sooner than I'd envisioned. Tim wanted to show what we could produce to Nintendo – perhaps on the SNES – when they next came to visit us in Twycross.

"Immediately they saw the potential of this and after a lengthy meeting they eventually flew back to the USA. A few days later Tim came back to me with a fax containing sketches of Shigeru Miyamoto's original Donkey Kong character. 'How would you like to re-design and model this?'

he asked, and explained that Nintendo had given us permission to use the character in any way we wanted to create a platform game. I remember purchasing videos of gorillas kept in captivity to study some of their movements and tried to re-create these by moving the character in the same way, and it all looked pretty special.

"Nintendo referred to the game as 'The Country Project' as a working title, due to our location in the British countryside. Eventually the name seemed so appropriate that it was of course called *Donkey Kong Country*. It was a fantastic time to be experimenting with new techniques and we were very privileged to have such amazing hardware and software available to do the job that was required."

Kev Bayliss, character artist

Earthworm Jim

"We had just set up Shiny Entertainment and were mulling over ideas for our first game. We met [comic book artist] Doug TenNapel when we were all working at Virgin Games and he came by and showed us his Earthworm Jim character. It was love at first sight. Doug created such a wide range of eclectic characters that we could build any crazy environment and it would just work. Licensed work restricts your creativity but with Jim the handcuffs came off. My favourite character was Evil the Cat so I made sure that the level I was going to work on first was Heck. We were still using *Deluxe Paint* for pixel work along with our custom map tool 'Tume' for laying out the maps using tilesets.

"I was learning *3D Studio* [now *3ds Max*] at the time and thought I'd surprise everyone with a rendered 3D version of *Earthworm Jim*. It looked promising although I think the animators wanted to lynch me for that one so I dropped it! They were right of course: Jim looks great because of all the expression and character that comes through that great animation.

"*Donkey Kong Country* came out around the same time as *Earthworm Jim* with its pre-rendered sprites. I thought it looked great but still loved our animation more."

Nick Bruty, art director

First released
1994

—

Genre
Run and gun

—

Developer
Shiny Entertainment

—

Publisher
Playmates Interactive Entertainment

Final Fantasy III / VI

"Even today, *Final Fantasy III* (*Final Fantasy VI* in Japan) feels strikingly ambitious. Take the celebrated opera scene: it's not a random quirk of the plot, but the cornerstone that sets the tone of the unfolding events. The opera being staged at the theatre looks suspiciously similar to all the JRPGs of the past decade, all cast from *Dragon Quest*'s mould. By staging such a representation, *Final Fantasy III* simultaneously looks back at the genre's roots while taking a leap forward. It does so while still being sprite-based, with no gargantuan CD-ROM storage space, and no full-motion video cinematics. Yet, everyone who played it in 1994 unmistakably felt this was a glimpse into the future of things.

"The opera subtext (which permeates the whole game, with each character having his/her specific music theme), and the slightly Belle Époque setting deriving from it, added those layers of sophistication that were much needed, arguably granting JRPGs relevance for another decade.

"*Final Fantasy III* is a product of Square's full maturity, reaching the boundaries of what 16-bit machines would ever do. Uematsu's stunning ending theme, 21 minutes long and reprising all the characters' themes, is a testament to Square's ambitions: one ponders if they have ever been surpassed since."

Carlo Savorelli, guest reviewer

First released
1994
—
Genre
RPG
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Square

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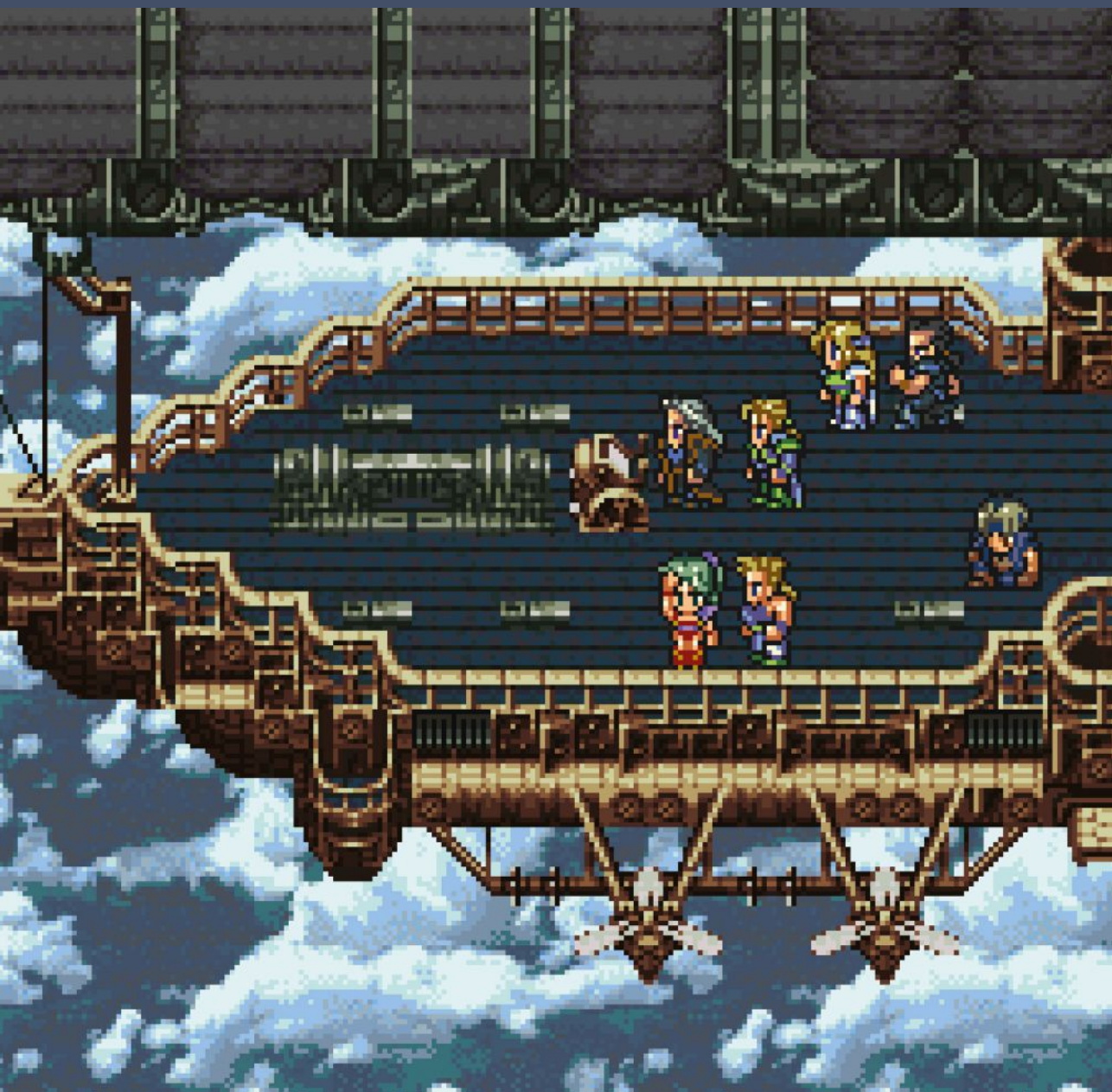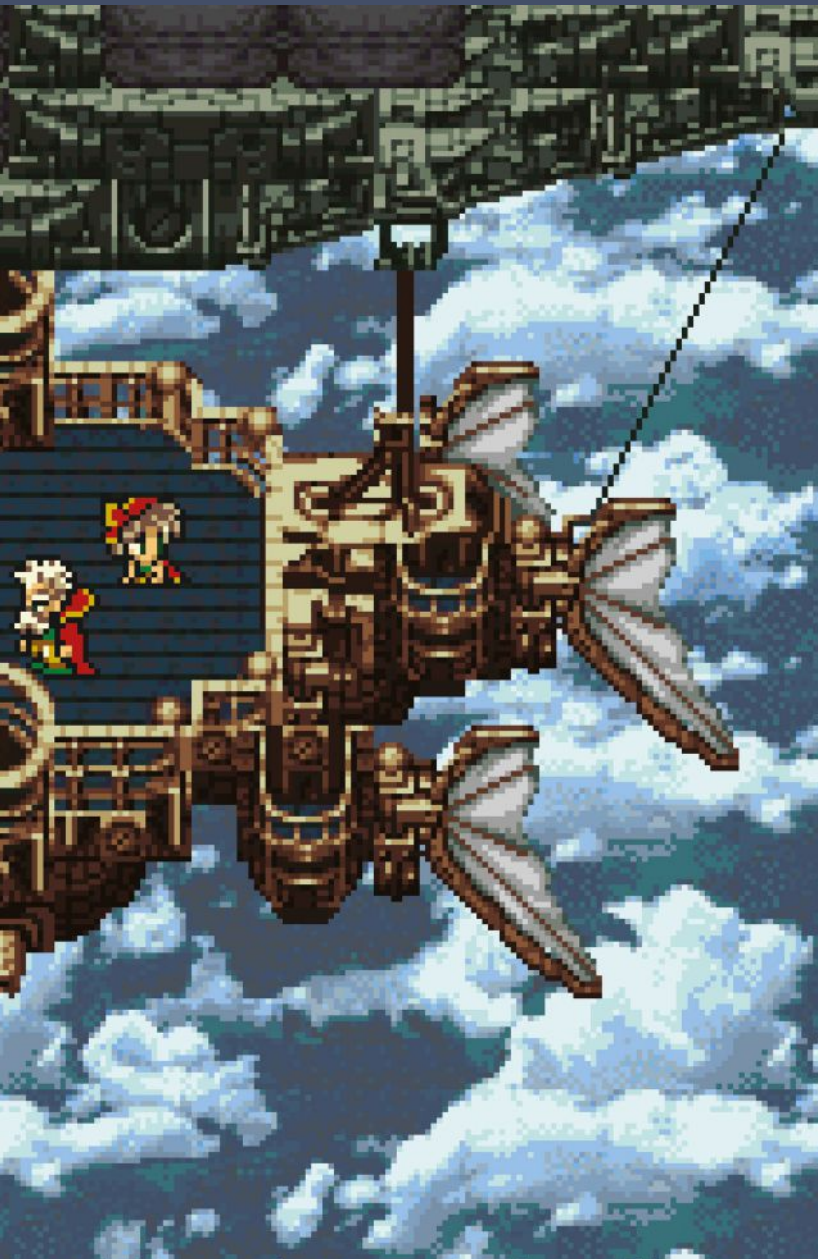
Final Fantasy III / VI

"Final Fantasy III – released as *Final Fantasy VI* in Japan – is an epic game that still holds up in today's gaming landscape. The characters, of which there are 14 playable, are compelling and their motives and roles are well presented.

"The wonderful score by Nobuo Uematsu is one of the greatest of any video game, but what really sets *Final Fantasy III* apart from any other game ever made is its main villain, Kefka Palazzo. There had never been a villain like him in any video game up until that time, and I don't believe there has been a character like him since. He poisons a town, he kills Espers, and he kicks his emperor off a floating continent to his death. Kefka just wants to destroy anything and everything, and cares about nothing. He alone should have people playing this game, but let's not forget the story; it was grand but at its core it was very simple: save the world from Kefka.

"Final Fantasy III is one of the greatest RPGs ever made. It absolutely stands the test of time and is better than the majority of titles released today."

Greg Panzo, guest reviewer

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Illusion of Gaia / Gaia Gensōki

"With *Illusion of Gaia* I was responsible for the characters and designing the world. The initial plan was to make *Soul Blazer 2*, but Enix wanted a hook, and wanted some celebrities for the game, so famous shōjo [aimed at young women] manga artist Moto Hagio was brought in for character designs, along with award winning science-fiction writer Mariko Ohara for the story. Also don't forget Yasuhiro Kawasaki for the score. All three came to meet with the development team and were directly involved. Ms. Ohara came up with the broad outline of the world and the story she wanted for the game. In *Dragon Quest* if you enter a house and go up the stairs it switches the graphics, but when we worked on *Illusion of Gaia* there was a smooth transition to the second floor. We worked hard to create graphics that wouldn't look 'cheap'.

"For *Illusion of Gaia*, a normal boy turns into a warrior. There were many ideas, including the idea that he would transform three times. Initially the idea was similar to The Corsican Brothers [a tale of conjoined twins by Alexandre Dumas, who when separated can still feel the other's pain]. So there were twins, a boy and a girl, and we thought maybe we can make a game based on this story. There was also the idea for Will's hair to move when near secrets. We thought it was quite interesting if the hair moved, because no one had done it before. The hair moves because of the wind coming from holes or certain secret places in caves, and by using this you can search the secrets out."

Kouji Yokota, graphic artist

First released
1994
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Quintet
—
Publisher
Enix

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures

"I was initially extremely excited to do an Indiana Jones game, but that excitement waned a tad when I learned that LucasArts wouldn't be able to get us any meaningful assets from the Skywalker Ranch archives to work with. So I had to buy books, movie magazines and graphic novels myself, and in the pre-Internet era that wasn't as simple as it sounds today. I asked friends and went to jumble sales and second-hand bookshops just to get some original movie stills and concept illustrations. Fortunately I already owned VHS copies of the movies that I watched over and over. Although repeatedly pausing the tapes at all the key scenes ruined them completely!

"Sci-fi and fantasy action games were what I was used to illustrating for, but Indiana Jones' world required mostly 'real world' enemies and backgrounds. Without access to a flatbed scanner at that time, I used my low-tech alternative and traced true-to-pixel-scale concept drawings onto transparent plastic sheets that I then taped to my monitor – and traced them again with my pixel software. Cramming three movies into one cartridge was tough, though, so we were constantly fighting to save memory while not compromising the game's visual fidelity altogether."

Frank Matzke, graphic artist

First released
1994
—
Genre
Action platformer
—
Developer
Factor 5
—
Publisher
JVC

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J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Vol. I

"Released to distinctly lukewarm reviews and poor sales in 1994, this Interplay-developed action RPG might seem like an odd choice for inclusion in these pages, but it has since gained something of a cult following thanks to the subsequent release of Peter Jackson's epic movie adaption of Tolkien's legendary fantasy novels. Ironically, this SNES title draws much visual inspiration from the oft-ignored 1978 Ralph Bakshi animated adaption of the first two books – *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* – and it even uses character portraits based on those from the film. Rotoscoped animation lends each sprite a unique personality, while Charles Deenen's sumptuous soundtrack captures the spirit of Middle Earth perfectly. Sadly, the game's tiresome fetch-quests, bland environments, poor AI and lack of battery back-up mean this is a slog for all but the most devoted of Tolkien enthusiasts, although the gorgeous music almost makes you forget about all of that. While exploring the wind-swept wilds of The Shire it's impossible to deny the feeling that you're genuinely immersed in a living, breathing replica of literature's most celebrated fantasy world."

Damien McFerran, games journalist

First released
1994

—

Genre
RPG

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Interplay

The boom in personal computers during the '80s saw the birth of many new companies and the arrival of the so-called 'bedroom coder' – young and enthusiastic individuals who loved these new-fangled machines and put their passion to good use by pushing the boundaries of the next great medium of home entertainment: video games.

British coder Jez San was one such pioneer; he took stock of his first computer – a Tandy TRS-80 Micro Computer System – at just 12 years of age, and used it to teach himself assembly language. Bitten by the bug he established Argonaut Software in 1982 (the name was a play on his own: 'J. San', as in Jason and the Argonauts), with the initial objective of working in a consultancy capacity with large corporations like British Telecom and Acorn Computers.

It didn't take long for San to notice the burgeoning video game market. A keen player himself, San created Argonaut's debut release Skyline Attack for the Commodore 64 in 1984. However, it would be 1986's *Starglider* that really put San and his company on the map. A futuristic flight combat simulation with fast-moving wireframe 3D visuals inspired by Atari's classic 1983 *Star Wars*

coin-op, it served as a perfect advert for the graphical prowess of the latest 16-bit systems, Atari's ST and the Commodore Amiga. *Starglider* was a commercial smash hit and the game's considerable royalties enabled San to expand Argonaut dramatically and begin work on the inevitable sequel. 1988's *Starglider 2* improved on its predecessor in every possible respect: the crude wireframe visuals were supplanted by solid 3D polygons and it was now possible to fly into space and explore other planets without having to wait for new sections to load.

Despite his success on the home computers of the period, San was keenly aware that a new breed of Japanese games consoles was starting to appear and decided to approach Nintendo – the sector's biggest hardware manufacturer – regarding the possibility of working together. San's aspirations were high, but the humble nature of his firm was a stumbling block – Argonaut was operating out of his London home at the time and as a result getting an audience with the Japanese giant wasn't easy. To capture Nintendo's attention San decided to show the talent of his company by cracking the copy protection system on the newly-released Game Boy handheld and forcing

the word 'Argonaut' to scroll down the screen instead of the usual Nintendo logo. Armed with this impressive demonstration of technical know-how – as well as a 3D demo created by programmer Dylan Cuthbert for the console itself – San travelled to the Consumer Electronics Show to locate the most senior Nintendo staffer he could find. He ran into Don James, who was so impressed with what he saw that he called over fellow Nintendo of America staffers Wayne Shirk and Tony Harman, both of whom were equally intrigued by the results.

San's bravado paid off: he pitched his company as an expert in the field of 3D visuals and this message was clearly passed on to the top brass. Shortly after returning to London he was asked to attend a meeting in Japan with none other than Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi. After much discussion – after all, Argonaut was not only small but also from outside Japan – San agreed to sign a partnership deal with Nintendo, with the focus of helping the Japanese firm master the art of 3D visuals. Cuthbert's Game Boy demo evolved into *X*, a 1992 title with the distinction of being the first 3D game on any portable console, but Argonaut's first task was porting *Starglider*

to the 8-bit Famicom/Nintendo Entertainment System. This became known as *NesGlider*, a technology proof-of-concept rather than a fully-fledged game.

The company was then given early access to the Super Nintendo and expressed the opinion that its 3D muscle was lacking. San rather cheekily suggested that Argonaut could design a 3D chip that would dramatically enhance the polygon-pushing power of the console and could be inserted into any game cartridge. Enlisting the assistance of Ben Cheese, a veteran of the abandoned Konix Multisystem, and a team of technical experts, San came up with the RISC-based Super FX chip, cheekily codenamed 'MARIO' (Mathematical, Argonaut, Rotation & Input/Output). His initial claim to Nintendo was that his chip could give the SNES ten times the 3D power it already had; in reality, it was almost 40 times more powerful. In other areas – such as 3D maths – Super FX was around 100 times faster than the SNES on its own. And its talents

didn't begin and end with polygon visuals: it also boosted the console's 2D rotation and scaling capabilities, something that was put to excellent use in *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*.

Due to the distances involved, Cuthbert – along with fellow Argonaut staffers Giles Goddard and Krister Wombell – relocated to Nintendo's offices in Kyoto so they could be closer to the core designers of what would become Star Fox, the first SNES title to utilise the Super FX chip. Working alongside such luminaries as Shigeru Miyamoto, Katsuya Eguchi and Yoichi Yamada, this trio of Brits provided invaluable experience in the realm of 3D visuals and eventually secured positions within Nintendo itself, living in the country permanently.

Star Fox was a critical and commercial success and work began on the second collaboration, this time in the racing genre. *Stunt Race FX* again used the Super FX chip to create visuals that were beyond anything console players had previously seen, while 1994's

Vortex used the chip to put players in control of a massive morphing battle robot. Other companies put the Super FX to good use as well: Elite produced *Dirt Racer*, an off-road driving game, while Acclaim's *Dirt Trax FX* – programmed by Sculptured Software – took the same core idea but featured motorbikes instead of cars. Sculptured Software also ported id Software's *DOOM* to the SNES at the behest of Williams, a conversion made possible by the Super FX 2, an enhanced version of Argonaut's chip.

> 66 *To capture Nintendo's attention San decided to show the talent of his company by cracking the copy protection system on the newly-released Game Boy.* 99

Star Fox – *1993*

Argonaut's meteoric rise was nothing short of remarkable, but its deal with Nintendo was arguably holding it back. Bound by the terms of the exclusivity agreement, the company quickly found itself restricted creatively, despite having some groundbreaking ideas. A speculative pitch was made for what potentially could have been the world's first full-3D platformer featuring the Yoshi character from the Super Mario series. Nintendo wasn't keen, however, and turned down the concept. It also shelved the futuristic 'Super Visor' system created by Argonaut, which would have delivered full colour 3D graphics with head tracking to the consumer sector, choosing to release the ill-fated Virtual Boy instead. For San, this was when the previously beneficial agreement between the two firms began to splinter. A sequel to *Star Fox* was ultimately finished but Nintendo declined to release it, possibly in fear

that it would be unfavourably compared to the next-generation 3D titles arriving on the Sony PlayStation and SEGA Saturn, both of which launched at the end of 1994.

Despite declining the idea for a Yoshi game, Nintendo famously laid down the blueprint for the 3D platformer with 1996's *Super Mario 64*. By this point, Argonaut had managed to extract itself from the deal with Nintendo and was hard at work on *Croc: Legend of the Gobbos*, an evolution of San's previous Yoshi idea, which would end up becoming the company's most successful IP. Published by GT Interactive on the PlayStation, Saturn and PC in 1997, *Croc* sold over a million copies in the US alone and showed that Argonaut had the potential to be successful without Nintendo's assistance.

Argonaut had taken steps to secure its future by splitting the company into two divisions the year before *Croc* arrived at retail: Argonaut Technologies Limited and Argonaut Software Limited. The former worked on Super FX chip-style projects for clients such as Philips and Hasbro while the latter developed BRender, Argonaut's proprietary software 3D engine. BRender powered the studio's 1995 PC brawler *FX Fighter*, but was also licensed out to other studios; Stainless Games' controversial 1997 racer *Carmageddon* is perhaps the most famous title to use the engine. In 1999 Argonaut Software Limited became Argonaut Games and was floated on the London stock market.

Despite the production of original IP in the form of *Buck Bumble* for the N64, *Red Dog* for the SEGA Dreamcast and the inevitable *Croc 2* in 1999, Argonaut remained partly dependant on development deals with other publishers. Between 1994 and 2004 the studio worked on a wide range of licensed properties, such as *Ren & Stimpy*, *Catwoman*, *Scooby-Doo*, *Bionicle*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Disney's Aladdin* and *Alien Resurrection*, the latter of which is widely credited with inventing the twin-stick control setup which is now commonplace in console-based first-person shooters. By far and away the most prestigious licence the company was entrusted with at this time was Harry Potter; Argonaut worked on the first two games in the series on the PlayStation – *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* – before publisher Electronic Arts took development of the home console versions in-house for future instalments.

Licences like Harry Potter were, at this stage in Argonaut's life, essential to keeping things afloat; losing such a lucrative deal was massively detrimental to the business and a profit warning was issued early in 2004. By October the writing was on the wall: receivers David Rubin & Partners were called in, 100

Scooby-Doo Mystery – *1995*

staff were laid off and the entire company was put up for sale. The following year Argonaut Games was liquidated and in 2006 it was dissolved entirely. However, the spirit of Argonaut lives on in some of the studios associated with it, such as Ninja Theory, the UK firm behind *Heavenly Sword*, *DmC: Devil May Cry* and *Hellblade*. Founded as Just Add Monsters in 2000, the company had been acquired by Argonaut but was sold back to San and its founders in 2004 after the collapse of the company. Morpheme – another associated subsidiary to live on after Argonaut's demise – became Morpheme Wireless Ltd and was absorbed into Eidos before eventually being shuttered in 2009.

Resourceful and always brimming with ideas, Jez San's career didn't end with the death of Argonaut. He now runs the highly successful online poker site PKR, which he established in 2004 following the collapse of the studio he founded way back in 1982. San's incredible achievements have rightly been acknowledged – he was awarded an OBE in 2002 in recognition of his services to the computer game industry, the first time the award had been issued in such a capacity – and while the studio that created *Starglider*, *Star Fox* and *Croc* no longer exists, it has left behind a remarkable legacy. Not only was it one of the first British companies to truly leverage the incredible power of three-dimensional graphics, it also helped Nintendo – arguably the world's most famous and revered creator of video games – enter the 3D realm for the first time. Few companies or individuals could ever hope to make such a lofty claim.

Star Fox – *1993*

**King Arthur's World /
Royal Conquest** – *1992*

Stunt Race FX / Wild Trax – *1994*

**The Ren & Stimpy Show:
Fire Dogs** – *1994*

Vortex – *1994*

Killer Instinct

"Because the SNES had such a great colour palette compared to its predecessor, we knew that visually *Killer Instinct* would look great on it. Converting the character sprites wasn't really a problem as we already had our software in place to reduce the amount of colours by averaging the values used throughout a sequence of frames. This had worked well with *Donkey Kong Country* and so with only a few tweaks and improvements we were able to replicate the characters with no problem. Apart from resizing sprites slightly, the only real character work to do would be to reduce the amount of memory taken up by the animation frames. Some of the moves in the coin-op original had over 30 frames of animation so of course many frames were removed and various timings were altered to ensure they looked and behaved as close to the original as possible.

"Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to reproduce the background graphics in the same way because we used a whole sequence of the camera moving from left to right in the coin-op game, and this took a huge amount of memory. So we broke the backgrounds into layers and set them to move at different speeds when the player moved left and right, creating a parallax effect and giving the levels depth.

"Although I didn't work directly on the conversion itself, I created box artwork and assisted the conversion team, who did an excellent job in putting it together. One thing I was really happy about was the decision to release a SNES *Killer Instinct* hardware bundle, which was something I never thought would happen. In fact, I still can't believe that we managed to get the game looking and playing so well on a home console at all, when I think of how much graphical content went into the original. Many years after the game was released I was lucky enough to receive a well-looked-after *Killer Instinct* SNES bundle as a gift, and I've also still got my shrink-wrapped, unopened cartridge at home, too. I'm very proud to own both, just as I am to have worked on the original!"

Kev Bayliss, character designer

First released *1994* / **Genre** *Fighting* /
Developer *Rare* / **Publisher** *Nintendo*

Knights of the Round

"During Capcom's renaissance of arcade-to-SNES ports – which also brought us *King of Dragons* and *Captain Commando* – the company opted to bring over this unique medieval beat 'em up, in which you choose from one of three knights (Lancelot, Percival and, of course, King Arthur) and battle against a number of evil soldiers, using your particular blade of choice.

"Like other brawlers of this ilk, *Knights of the Round* relies on a simplistic game style, with jumping, the ability to land strikes on the ground and in mid-air, and, should the situation get hairy, a special attack where the ground charges up around you as you perform a manoeuvre that knocks everyone back. But it works very well, and the way you stick and move with certain enemies is good fun, especially bosses.

"The presentation is also noteworthy, as the game is nearly an exact port of the arcade game (apart from some slight missing animation), and the music is excellent as well. It's also a good game to invite a friend along for the ride, as the SNES version happily supports co-op (two players compared to three in the arcade, but no biggie). *Knights of the Round* is a pretty sharp game to have in your collection. Hail Excalibur!"

Robert Workman, games journalist

First released
1994

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

Developer and publisher
Capcom

Live A Live

"We'd just completed *Final Fantasy IV*, and RPGs had become massively popular. We'd added elements of various movie genres to *Final Fantasy IV* and *V*, and I thought it might be interesting to isolate each of those genre elements and make a little story around them. Also, doing it in an omnibus format would be a way to really emphasise the strengths of each genre. Another major inspiration was shattering the story-map-battle structure of RPGs; we wanted to have each chapter break that structure in different ways.

"We were developing *Chrono Trigger* more or less concurrently, so it was a time when we were experimenting a lot with how to take advantage of additional memory, as well as how best to approach long-form storytelling. Squaresoft had already made the Romancing SaGa games with the 'free scenario' system, in which you choose a character and begin the game from his or her section of the world.

"The concept for the Present Day chapter was to focus solely on battles, and getting *Street Fighter II* composer Yoko Shimomura to do the music for it made it feel all the more like *Street Fighter II*! And the idea of defeating characters and then gaining their abilities, in order to defeat other characters, was very much like *Mega Man*."

Takashi Tokita, director

First released
1994
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer and publisher
Square

EarthBound / Mother 2

"*Mother 1* was three megabits, and *Mother 2* started off at eight megabits. We realised that eight megabits didn't quite fit our demands, but we wondered if 12 would even be enough. The issues with space were settled as the ROM performance improved, though. The graphics gave us a hard time. It took some seriously fine craftsmanship to connect the entire map with that diagonal birds-eye view style – like staying frugal while also taking some big chances. But the graphics took five years to work on, which might have ended up being a good thing. We started working on the graphics from the very beginning of production, and managed to finish them by the end.

"The people who worked on the music have much broader tastes than I do, although it's more 'disorderly' than broad [laughs]. We'd like something we heard, and before we knew it the sound was taking up eight megabits! That would take about two CDs to release on a soundtrack. But I'm proud of it – I don't want anyone complaining about the music. I think that was the first time there'd been string-bending in video game music. This time there was fretless bass in it, and more songs that were a bit on the jazzy side.

"When *Mother 1* was completed, I wanted to take things into outer space. That would actually make the story more clichéd, though, so I decided against making a spectacle out of it. When I play RPGs, I can't help but feel like the screen is stuck on the same static image the entire time. It's not as attractive as a cartoon – the scenery doesn't even change. I didn't like that, so I wanted to make a game that involved traveling all over the place and enjoying different kinds of sights along the way."

Shigesato Itoi, game designer

First released
1994
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Ape and HAL Laboratory
—
Publisher
Nintendo

Mega Man X2 / Rockman X2

"When making the shift to Super Nintendo, the venerable Mega Man series went through a rebranding, coming out as the well-received Mega Man X series. And so it's not a big surprise that *Mega Man X2* falls in line: it's enjoyable and reliable, if unspectacular.

"Given a set of solid controls for any Mega Man entry, often a particular game sinks or soars on its cast of boss robots. In this case, *X2*'s animal theme works to good effect, with the Blue Bomber facing off against the likes of Magna Centipede, Overdrive Ostrich, Wheel Gator and Crystal Snail. Not every boss is a winner, and the battles range from simple to cheap, but the characters avoid the 'cheesy' label seen in some of the lesser Mega Man games.

"It's a similar story with the stages, which, on the whole, offer an enjoyable mix of platforming and shooting. The peaks deliver, such as cutting through dirt with the Spin Wheel to find optional paths. Or sets of vertical, rather than horizontal, platforms creating suspenseful scenes over spiked beds. Or dodging a targeting reticle to weaken a mid-level boss. The rest, however, is standard fare – sometimes tense, sometimes frustrating – before culminating in a final set of stages and demanding boss showdowns.

"Like any good entry in the series, the shooting, dashing and wall-jumping action dovetails effectively. *Mega Man X2* may not match sibling *Mega Man 2* at the top of the mountain, but it's a solid effort."

Greg Ford, games journalist
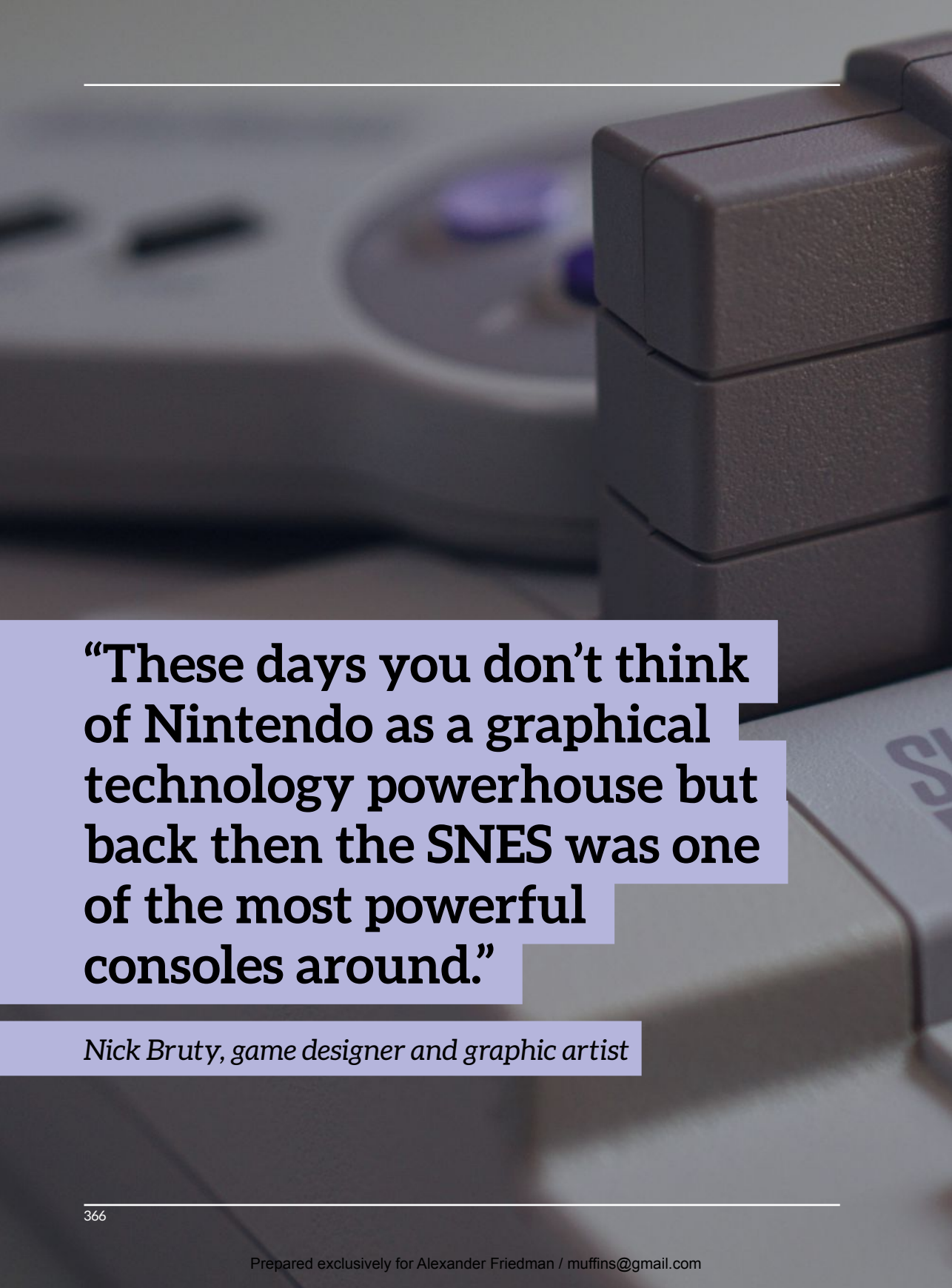
> **"These days you don't think of Nintendo as a graphical technology powerhouse but back then the SNES was one of the most powerful consoles around."**
>
> *Nick Bruty, game designer and graphic artist*
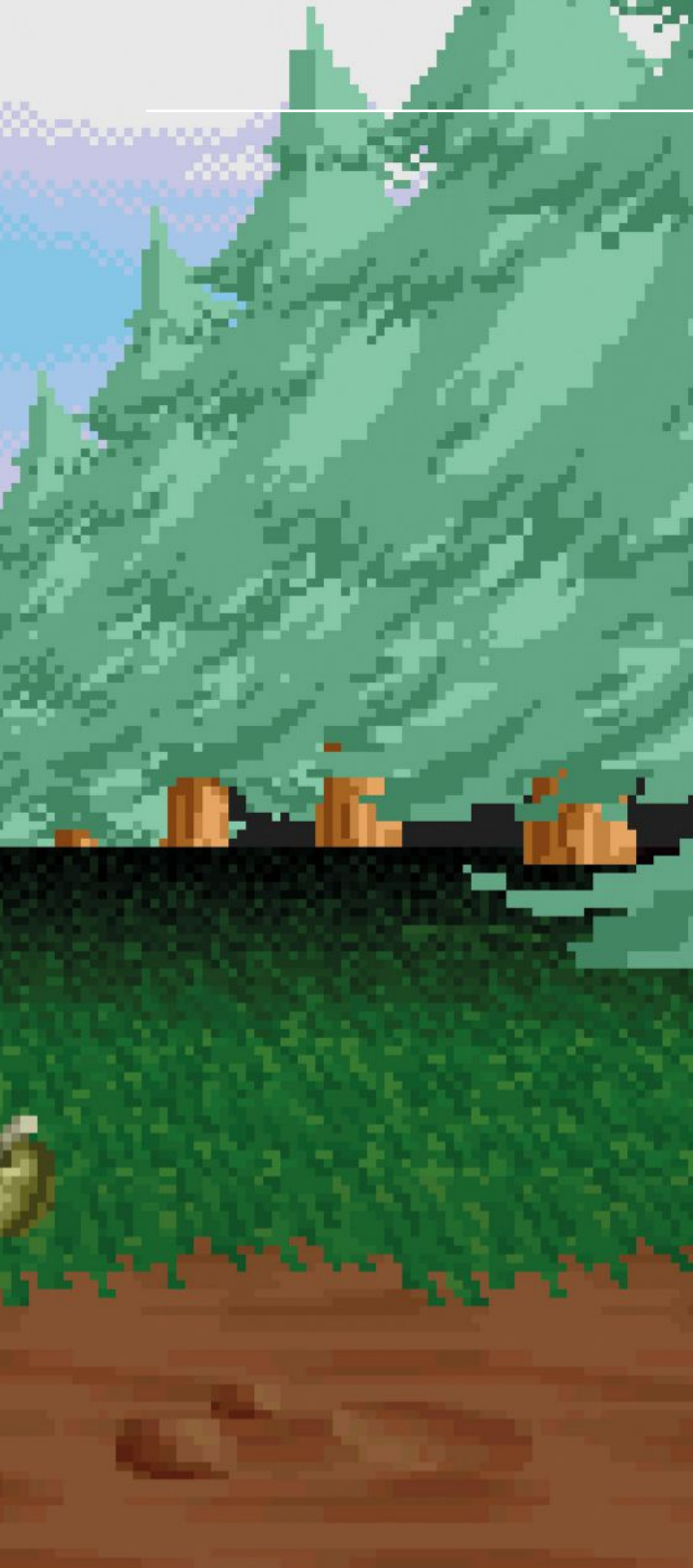
Mickey Mania: The Timeless Adventures of Mickey Mouse

"*Mickey Mania* was the first game ever to feature an 'out of the screen' chase. *Crash Bandicoot* did something similar once 3D-capable consoles came along, but we did it using every trick in the book to create the 3D effect on the SNES. The graphics in many parts of the game were pre-rendered using the then state-of-the-art Silicon Graphics machines running Softimage.

"All the animations for every character were hand drawn first by a Disney-approved animation company. We then scanned in each frame, cleaned it up, anti-aliased it, and coloured it. An in-house tool then enabled us to build each frame from the fewest number of sprites for optimal draw efficiency.

"Disney was working with Virgin on *The Lion King* game at the same time as we were producing *Mickey Mania*. Disney was constantly amazed at how much bigger and more detailed we could make all the characters and animations compared to *The Lion King*. I think that went a long way towards us securing *Toy Story* as our next project for them.

"*Mickey Mania* remains the only product in which Mickey Mouse has ever been depicted dead. When it was 'game over' you saw him fall onto his back with his eyes as 'x's and holding up a lily."

Jon Burton, game designer

First released
1994

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer
Travellers Tales

—

Publisher
Sony

369

First released
1994

—

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

—

Developer
and publisher
Sunsoft
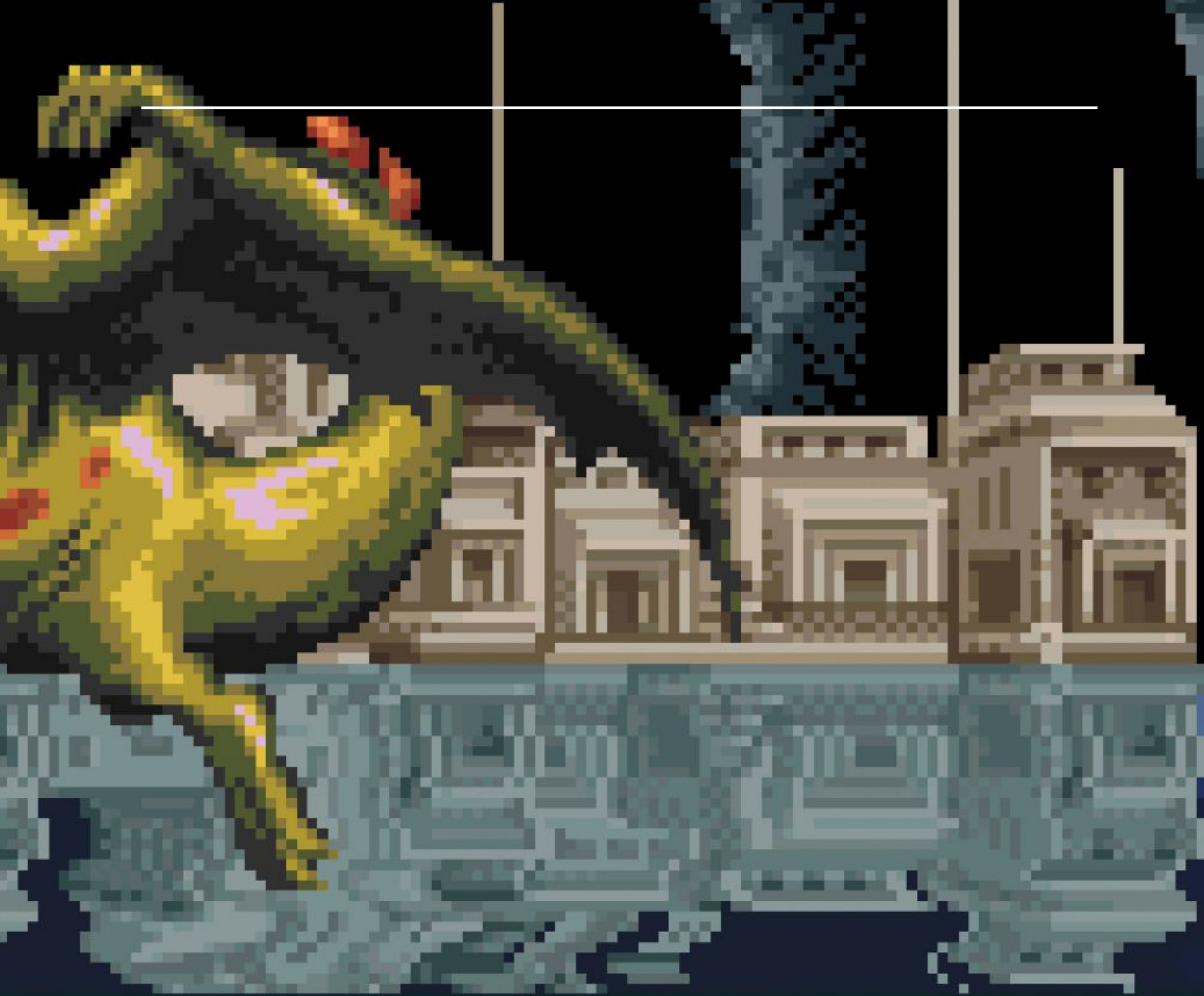
The Pirates of Dark Water

"This game was based on an early '90s Hanna-Barbera TV show which didn't really set the world alight and failed even to get to the finale of a second season. Perfect fodder for a cunning, fast-paced and sassy adventure game, you'd think. In fact, Sunsoft opted to make it a sideways-scrolling beat 'em up. Huh.

"Okay, so you head off in two dimensions, to the side, to find some treasure. You're a pirate, you see. In fact you're three pirates, each with very different abilities. You do need to think carefully about which one to be, though, as it does matter.

It's not that the game is tough, it's simply relentless. Waves of pirate guys swarm at you from start to finish, and the carnage you have to wreak is biblical.

"That's great, but what really stands the test of time are the graphics. Back when the SNES was king, we still recoiled if a game attempted to include cartoony graphics based on an actual animated series. But you know what? *Pirates of Dark Water* pulled it off. It captured the feel of the show, played well and looked fresh and crisp. I'm glad they didn't attempt an adventure game."

James Leach, games journalist

Pocky & Rocky 2 / Kiki Kaikai: Tsukiyo Soushi

"Sure, it's named *Pocky & Rocky 2* for simplicity's sake, but Natsume's sequel could really be called Pocky & Rocky & Bomber Bob & Tengy & Scarecrow & Little Ninja … and that's not even the full list of adorable new friends that joined the fray as Pocky's alternating pals.

"The fundamentals are about the same as the original: *Pocky & Rocky 2* acts like a slow-paced run and gun shoot 'em up, with the uncommon ability of free movement around the stages. As Pocky, you'll navigate the traditional Japanese terrain, tossing talisman cards to dispel the various cartoonish demons and spirits that surround you. However, this sequel adds a lot of tweaks by letting you team up with that larger array of buddies, each with their own unique magical assist.

"Whether you play solo or with a mate, these extra allies bring a lot more strategic depth to the game, allowing for additional tactics in battle – and that's great, since *Pocky & Rocky 2* puts up a serious challenge in spots. Even as a sequel, *Pocky & Rocky 2* feels like a totally fresh, one-of-a-kind experience, which might explain why it's still one of the most sought-after SNES cartridges after all these years."

Andrew Hayward, games journalist

First released
1994
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer and publisher
Natsume

Popful Mail

"After being assigned to game development at Nihon Falcom, I was first involved with the development team for *Ys III*. I don't know why, but after development of *Ys III* almost all the staff quit Falcom. So I was the only one from the team, alone, and the section manager said, 'Since you're capable of programming, why not come up with something?' But I was the only programmer left and I had no graphic data to work with, so I was really at a loss as to what to do! But he said, just, you know, fiddle around with whatever was already there and come up with something. So I was told to make a game, but I had no planner and no designer to help, and so focused on creating a prototype by reusing assets from Falcom's previous games.

"I came up with a prototype that looked like a horizontally scrolling action game. During this time, Yoshio Kiya gave me a lot of advice, and I remember him being a very generous and caring person. Once the prototype started moving, a graphics designer was assigned to the project, and all of a sudden came up with this character design. We decided to call the main character 'Mail'; the 'Popful' name was thought up by somebody who belonged to the PR department. He used hiragana script for the 'Poppuru' portion, and the 'Mail' portion was written in katakana. I knew it had to be written in alphabetical characters, so I came up with the English spelling myself."

Jun Nagashima, programmer

Samurai Shodown / Samurai Spirits

Known in Japan as *Samurai Spirits*, this one-on-one brawler is probably the most famous of SNK's NEOGEO releases and one of the most popular beat 'em up series of all time. By taking the *Street Fighter II* model and introducing weapons, it created its own sub-genre of fighting games.

Takara was on conversion duties again, following its work on SNK's other beat 'em up franchise, *Fatal Fury*. However, while the Fatal Fury games are faithful visual representations of the originals, *Samurai Shodown* – at least on the face of it – appears to hamstrung by the limitations of the hardware. The scaling effect of the NEOGEO original has been removed, and so the characters have been reduced in size to fit within the scene. The blood spurts and grisly fatalities have also been excised, as well as some frames of animation, so it looks and feels like a somewhat watered down version of the original. However, all the moves and combos of the coin-op classic are present and in play it will feel very familiar to fans of the NEOGEO release. If you can ignore the visual shortcomings, *Samurai Shodown* still lays down some mean hand-to-hand combat.

Robotrek / Slapstick

"For *Slapstick* I was doing the design for the robots. The game was quite light-hearted. The reason was because one of the planning staff was a woman, I don't recall her name, but she used to belong to Nihon Falcom as well, and she was previously involved in a computer game called *Dinosaur*. I was actually responsible for the graphics of the military guard in that game, and I did designs for characters as well. I wasn't heavily involved, but I helped. Well, *Dinosaur* was quite a dark RPG, so she wanted to do something completely different and come up with something very fantastical and light-hearted – it's why she came up with this new game, *Slapstick*. She intentionally made it light and happy with a sort of pop sensibility.

"The game involves an inventor, but they didn't want it to be about cutting-edge technology, so they aimed for a more approachable and endearing, somewhat vintage atmosphere. With that kind of world in mind they outsourced the scenario and character designs to Quintet. I created the robot designs based on that request – to design something quite retro – and so it's got an old-fashioned feel to it. All my designs were sketched on pieces of paper, to be drawn in pixels later."

Kouji Yokota, graphic artist

First released
1994
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer
Quintet
—

Publisher
Enix

Skyblazer / Karuraou

"It's tough being a hero: one minute you're eating breakfast, the next Raglan – the self-proclaimed King of Destruction – commands Ashura Lord of War to abscond with the sorceress Ariana. That sort of thing can really put a downer on your day, believe me.

"Fortunately this particular hero is a feisty young 'un called Sky, a descendent of the sorcerer Sky-Lord, and, with the help of a mysterious old man, he's ready to discover an array of magical power-ups and take on anything that Ashura cares to throw at him.

"As an action-platformer, *Skyblazer* certainly ticks all the boxes: there are ice stages, lava levels and flying sections, as well as some rather nifty *Nebulus*-style rotating towers to navigate, all tied together by an interactive map of the kingdom.

"In practice, *Skyblazer* feels like a conversion of a lost Capcom arcade game; there are shades of *Bionic Commando* and *Black Tiger*, and even a dash of *Forgotten Worlds* for good measure. Visually, it's a stunner, too: the sprites are exquisite, and some of the Mode 7 effects used on the boss stages are utterly superb. A true diamond in the rough, *Skyblazer* manages to hold its head high among a sea of also-rans and Mega Man wannabes."

Andy Roberts, games journalist

First released
1994
—

Genre
Action
—

Developer
Ukiyotei
—

Publisher
Sony

380
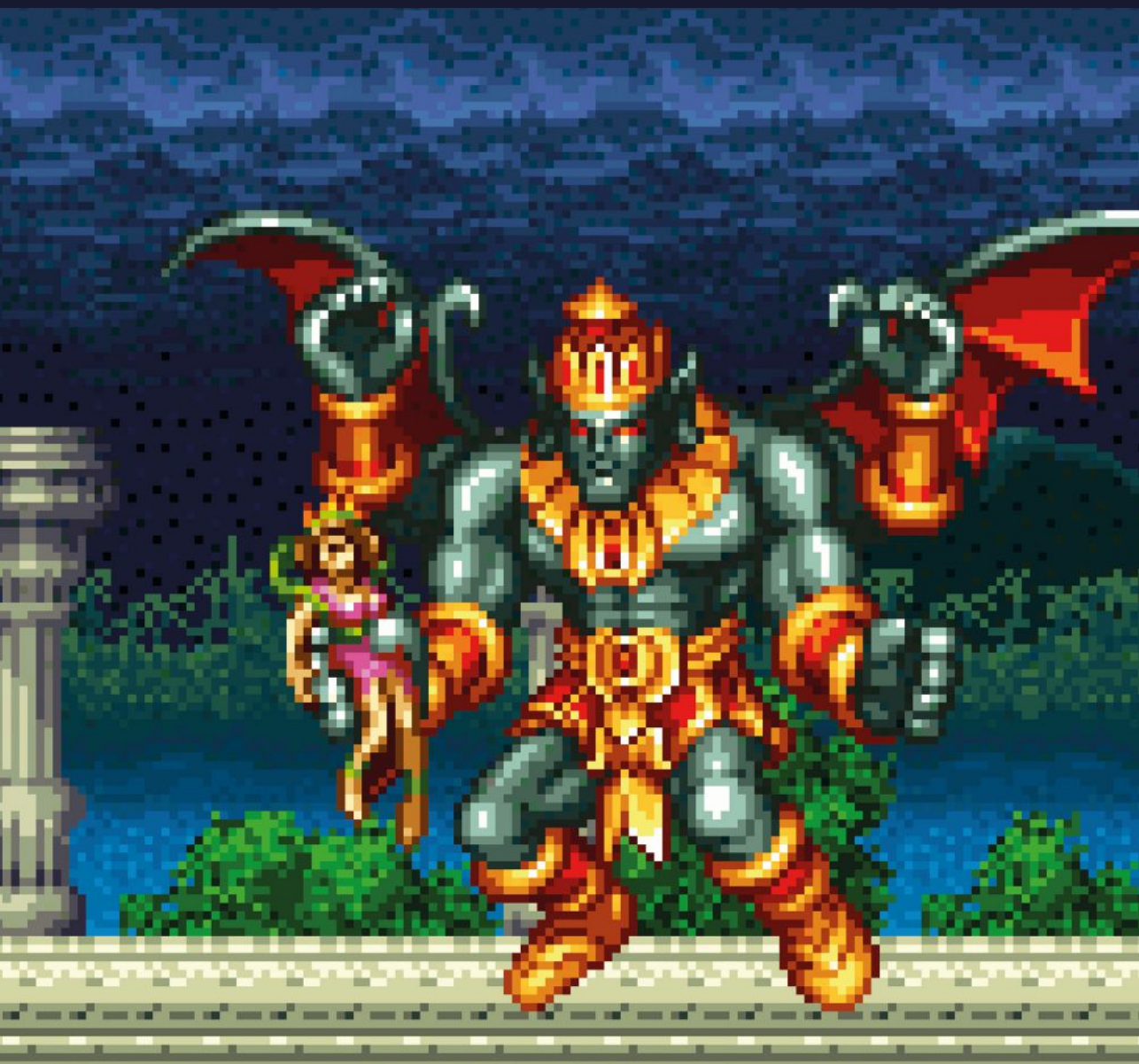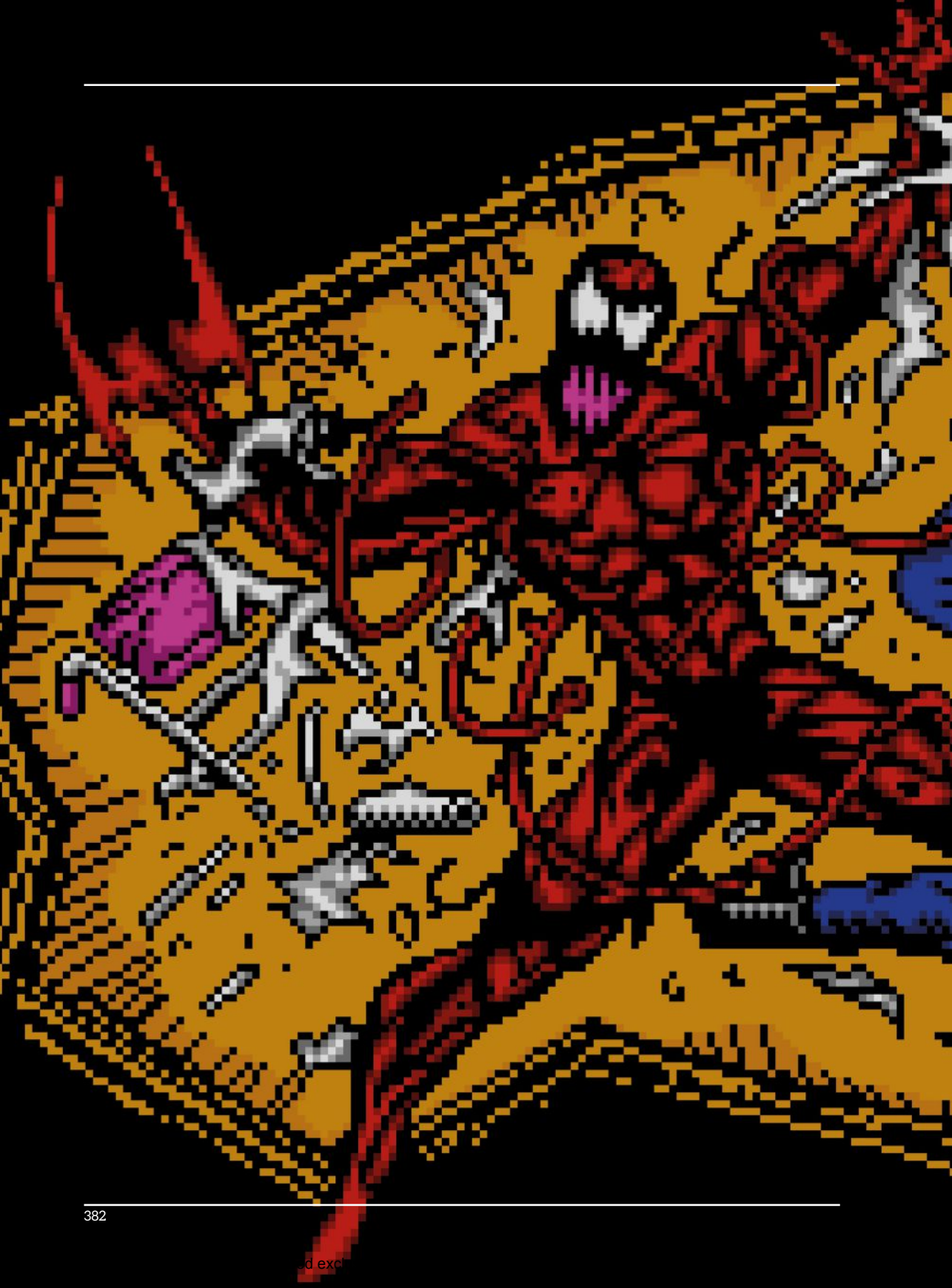
Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage

"Seeing the LJN Rainbow on a box was enough to give discerning players pause back in the day. But *Maximum Carnage* has to be its most remembered – and perhaps most revered – release.

"Though the title may hint otherwise, *Maximum Carnage* is a single-player beat 'em up in which, at different points, you play as both Spider-Man and Venom in their uneasy alliance to take down the insane Carnage and his villainous 'family' of fellow baddies. While most of the game is played from left to right, you still spend a decent amount of time climbing and swinging.

"*Maximum Carnage* is an oddity for the time in that the game features a soundtrack performed by a known band. Green Jellÿ's logo pops up on screen almost immediately upon boot up, and its chunky rock style gives the game a very identifiable sound.

"*Maximum Carnage* is based on a 14-book comic series from 1993. The story scenes in the game can be a bit jarring at times, since the drawing style can vary wildly between screens. But when you realise this is because every single image is based on an actual panel from a Spider-Man comic (usually drawn by different artists), the variance becomes less annoying and more like a sly nod to true fans."

Greg Sewart, games journalist

First released
1994

—

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

—

Developer
Software Creations

—

Publisher
LJN

Stunt Race FX / Wild Trax

"Nintendo's 16-bit hardware certainly wasn't designed for 3D, but as the 32-bit era inched closer, the crafty Super FX cartridge chip helped bridge the gap. As *Star Fox* showed, the technology could drive solid 3D graphics without the need for a new console – and *Stunt Race FX* proved to be an impressive follow-up from the same dream team of Nintendo EAD and Argonaut Software.

"On the surface, *Stunt Race FX* seemingly lacks the obvious personality of *Super Mario Kart*, but producer Shigeru Miyamoto's whimsical influence still comes through as you zip around the angular courses. The cars' big, cartoonish eyes spin around during races, for example, and when you ram into a barrier, the vehicle's blocky sides briefly split apart in an exaggerated fashion before it becomes whole again. The Stunt Trax mode also offers some delightfully wacky obstacles for you to overcome.

"*Stunt Race FX* never attained the same kind of legacy as *Star Fox*, in part because Nintendo never bothered to give it a sequel. But it remains a testament to the company's technical ingenuity and the surprising capabilities of the console, and I still can't help but grin at Nintendo's myriad playful touches after all these years."

Andrew Hayward, games journalist

First released
1994
—

Genre
Racing
—

Developer
*Argonaut Software
and Nintendo*
—

Publisher
Nintendo

SPEED

093 MPH
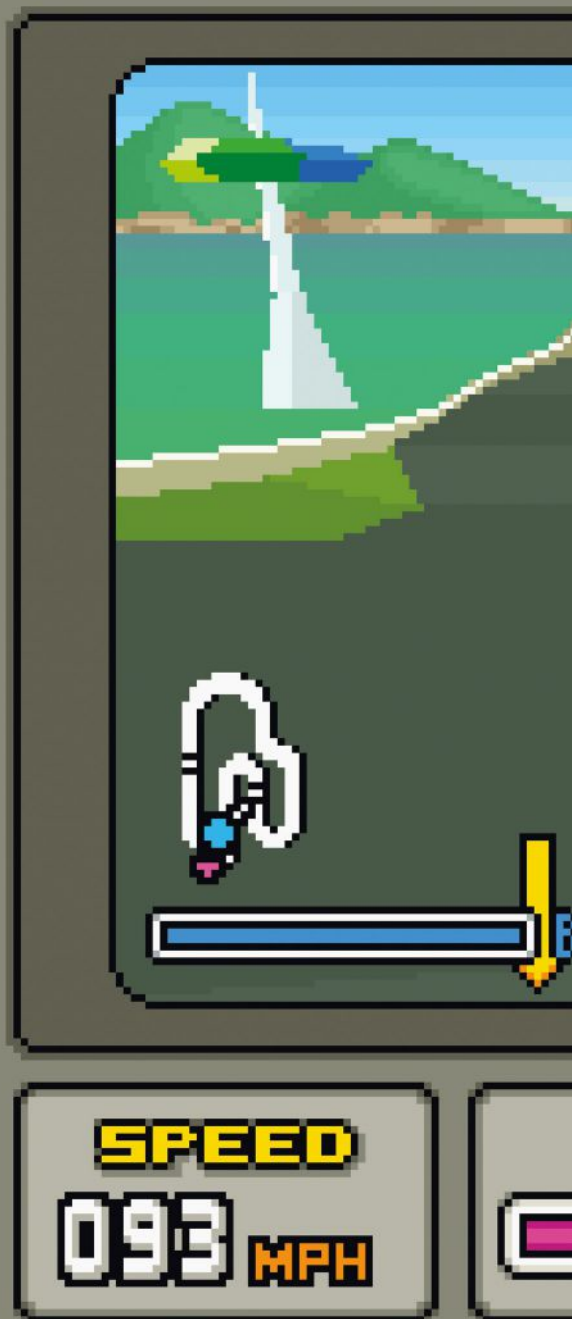
Super Street Fighter II:
The New Challengers

"For Blanka's song, the 'taka-tan-tan'
kind of rhythm came to me really quickly.
The rhythm was basically done, but
I couldn't think up a melody even late
in development. I was anxious that
I couldn't make a melody fit well.

"So, on the morning train I was thinking that
if I didn't finish Blanka's song soon there'd be
trouble, that I wouldn't make the deadline.
I was standing near the door, and you can
see the rack on the top where you put your
luggage when you sit down. There was a
yellow-green paper bag on top of that, and
as soon as I saw it, I thought about Blanka's
colour, and the melody just came into my
head like that. 'Tararirarin' was in my head
and I thought, 'This is it!' After that I was
humming 'tararirarin, tararirarin' the
whole time on the train.

"For people who study music seriously,
Blanka's theme has some really unusual
parts. So, when it's arranged, people often end
up correcting those parts. The rhythm for
Blanka's theme itself is in a major key, but the
melody is in a minor key. Basically, you hear
an A natural and an A flat at the same time.
It's really something that should be fixed,
but if I fixed it, it'd become a different song
entirely. That strange, broken feeling is what
made the song for me. People said the music
was wrong at the time, but if so many people
tell me they love it now, then I don't think it's
wrong. I'm finally able to believe that now."

Yoko Shimomura, composer

First released
1994
—
Genre
Fighting
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom

Super Punch-Out!!

"In 1984, Nintendo landed a knockout blow punch in the arcades with its aptly titled game *Punch-Out!!*. Defined by colourful opponents and a clever design that brought fresh challenge and excitement to each bout, the series further garnered its reputation with the release of *Punch-Out!!* on the NES in 1987. An iconic, charming, and tight console adaptation, lighter on arcade flair, we were introduced to Little Mac, with his coach Doc Louis in his corner, as he ascended the WVBA ranks.

"The 1994 SNES version of *Super Punch-Out!!* returned to its arcade game roots, sans Mac and Doc and the NES's more elementary yet cherished 8-bit style. The game instead features fast-paced,

three-minute one-round matches, four powerful knockout punches, an expanded line-up of outlandish pugilists, and flashy in-fight status graphics. A detailed score breakdown and bonus tally at the end of each bout, personal record-keeping and a Time Attack Mode offer further depth, replay value and arcade game appeal.

"*Super Punch-Out!!* still retains the series' patented core play mechanics: discovering each opponent's tactics and weaknesses, patiently executing cat-and-mouse defensive manoeuvres, and then opportunistically attacking with precisely timed punches is, just as ever, really satisfying!"

Perry Rodgers, game producer and journalist

Super Metroid

"Although *Metroid* was released eight years
before, I wanted to please those who got
to play the Famicom Disk System version,
who would investigate it and say, 'They
have the items from here...' I thought
that also seeing an enemy character and
saying, 'Ah, I know this guy!' would be
an enjoyable reunion.

"This time I wanted to complete the Metroid
series. Also, I wanted to bring back an old
enemy. A nemesis would be revived, and
for the sake of portraying an image of this
showdown with Samus, this time it could
only happen on Planet Zebes. This is what
I thought. The battle between Samus and
Mother Brain would come to an end.
I wanted to show what happens at the
end of *Metroid*.

"It was decided that when the game begins,
we wouldn't tell the whole story using text.
The story had to be told in a minimal way.
However, it wouldn't convey atmosphere.
I thought the game's atmosphere was done
completely through sound. I thought it
would be good if we could do it like a silent
movie. It means that inside Samus's helmet,
she has a sober face. I wanted the player
to think about that facial expression."

Yoshio Sakamoto, director

First released
1994
—

Genre
Action adventure
—

Developer
*Nintendo and
Intelligent Systems*
—

Publisher
Nintendo
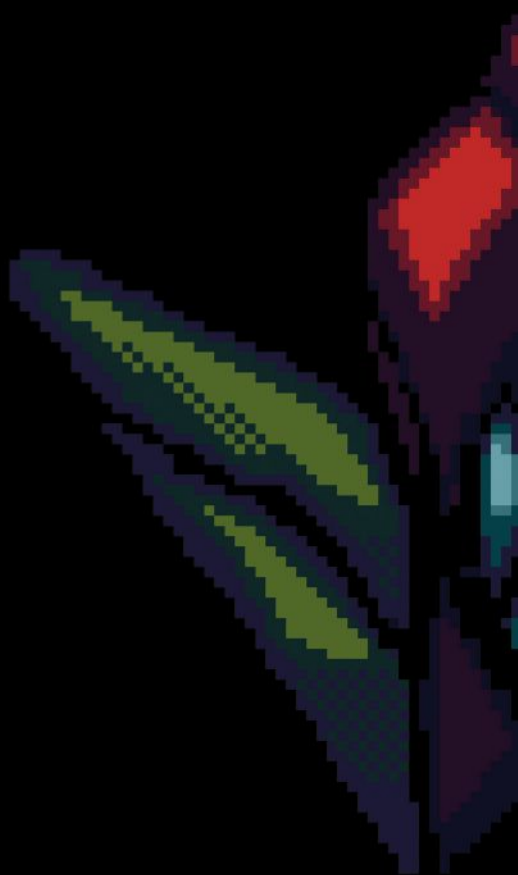
Super Metroid

"*Super Metroid* is a game that manages to reward players for both exploring every corner of its map and for finishing the main quest as quickly as possible. Managing to collect all items and finish the game in less than three hours was an accomplishment that few could meet with ease. Yet it's more than just racing the clock and collecting power-ups: the planet Zebes is home to many different environments, each with their own unique creatures to combat and pathways to figure out how to navigate.

"It's also home to some of the most satisfying boss battles. Feeling the massive scale of Kraid, realising you can electrocute Draygon, pushing back the Crocomire

into the lava, and seeing the unsettling aftermath of the broken container for the Metroid hatchling after Ridley is defeated ... players can't help but get excited.

"This all culminates with the confrontation with Mother Brain. Samus is on the ropes and suddenly the whole purpose of her quest, the Metroid hatchling, comes to her aid, only to be killed in front of her ... but not before bestowing a gift of the ultimate weapon to finish off the big bad. One can almost feel the game telling the player, 'You've made it this far. Now it's time to have some REAL fun.'"

Doug Wilder, guest reviewer

Rare: the inside story

Kev Bayliss, Gregg Mayles, Steve Mayles and Chris Sutherland tell us about the influential UK codeshop.

Rare enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with Nintendo during the NES and Game Boy years, producing a staggering number of titles for both machines. During the SNES era the company's founders, Tim and Chris Stamper, decided to embrace the cutting-edge world of computer-generated imagery to pioneer a wave of pre-rendered games that looked unlike anything that had gone before. 1994's Donkey Kong Country *was a groundbreaking piece of software, and we spoke to former Rare staffers Kev Bayliss, Steve Mayles and Chris Sutherland – as well as Rare's creative director Gregg Mayles – to find about what made it so special and what they thought about the SNES in general.*

When was the first time that you heard of the SNES and what was your initial reaction to it?
Steve Mayles (SM): I wasn't all that aware of it to be honest. I was working on the NES to start with, and I could see there were these other games that were in development that used more colours, had bigger sprites – they just looked better. I asked what system they were for and was told 'the Super Nintendo', but it didn't really mean anything at the time, for me anyway.

Kev Bayliss (KB): The SNES came over to us with *Super Mario World* and it just blew us all away. I remember coming into work and hearing the music and thinking, 'That sound quality is fantastic,'

and it looked superb too. Then when I saw Mode 7 – wow! As a company we therefore had to make the transition from creating graphics traditionally on paper to creating digital artwork. It would have taken too long to draw everything on paper with 16 colours and so much more detail than previously seen on the NES.

Chris Sutherland (CS): I remember it was exciting from a technical point of view – from the specs it was clear there was much more you could do with it than NES or Game Boy. In particular, Mode 7 was cool because of the rotation and scaling that could be applied – however, just from the specs we could see there were some limitations when it was enabled, which is why some games either avoided it or restricted its use to boss battles.

Gregg Mayles (GM): I didn't know much about it, either. *Super Mario World* was certainly a great game and system seller, but I was a hardcore *Super Mario 3* fan and it took me quite a while to adjust to the 'friendlier' difficulty level.

Rare didn't have any pre-release access to the hardware?
CS: I can't recall any pre-release information, but I had been tied up with finishing *Battletoads* Arcade until around August 1993, which I think is when I started on *Donkey Kong Country*.

GM: I was on *Battletoads* with Chris, so all my time was taken up with 'toadally rad' humour that's dated really badly – puking rats and cheating cyborgs. If Rare did have any pre-release access, I never saw it.

KB: They were still squeezing everything out of the NES, so we had projects in development with companies like Tradewest and LJN. We were still finishing off games, and that sort of overshot the release of the SNES.

SM: There didn't seem to be a big push to have a release game out there early, and if there was, it'd be something that would have been converted from the NES anyway – the NES was still lucrative.

Rare was so prolific on the NES and the Game Boy, but didn't really do that many SNES games in comparison. Is that because Tim and Chris Stamper decided to move towards computer-generated visuals?
KB: Yes. I can remember I walked into Tim's office one day, and he had all these expensive-looking brochures on his desk showing movie special effects from James Cameron's movie *The Abyss*.

I couldn't understand why he was looking at CAD software (Computer Aided Design) and so I asked, 'Why are we looking at this 3D stuff for super computers?' He said, 'I'm just looking into the future.' (Which was something he was always doing!) Shortly afterwards we spent a lot of time meeting different sales companies to get the best deal with the software for creating these new 3D graphics but I was concerned about how we were going to make them look good on SNES. Just around this time, Disney was working on *Aladdin* for the Mega Drive, and Nintendo needed something to pitch against it because it boasted fantastic traditional animation and looked really special. Some of the main guys from Nintendo soon arranged to come over and see a demo I'd created featuring a CG cyborg character that looked like the Terminator who was street fighting with a boxer. Tim made a quick, rough background, and the guys from Nintendo were so impressed they asked us if we could do anything like that for

their SNES. That's when we started thinking how we could get this into just 16 colours.

CS: I think the other reason we didn't see that many SNES games is they did take a bit longer to produce as more was expected from them in terms of visuals and gameplay content. Also, *Donkey Kong Country* landed in 'peak SNES' in 1994 – I think that was the year with the most SNES releases. This also meant that *Donkey Kong Country 2* and *3* were released at the tail end of the SNES lifecycle.

GM: Rare was also focusing more on creating our own IP, rather than creating games based around existing licensed IP. Completely new ideas always take a lot longer!

Did Nintendo ask you to work on Donkey Kong?
KB: Yes. I don't think they wanted to risk using Mario in this way just in case it didn't look right. I remember getting Shigeru Miyamoto's sketch

of Donkey Kong, which was a pretty generic-looking monkey that they wanted to develop further. DK had never really starred in anything else himself as a main playable character. But Donkey Kong Junior had, and because of that I think he was more appealing. I was still thinking it was going to be a platform game similar to *Castlevania* and that everything was going to be very block-orientated, but then Tim took the graphics away and started creating backgrounds; we got some perspective in there on the floor, and then added the character for the demo.

> ❝ *Rare was also focusing more on creating our own IP, rather than creating games based around existing licensed IP. Completely new ideas always take a lot longer!* ❞
> *Gregg Mayles*

Unused ideas for *Donkey Kong Country* promotional art.

Work in progress mock-up of Japanese title screen for *Super Donkey Kong 2*.

GM: I was sitting outside at lunch on a bench, when Chris Stamper sat down next to me and basically just said, 'How do you fancy working on a game with Donkey Kong in it?' I said 'Yes,' and that was pretty much the end of the conversation.

Was it exciting to be working on such a famous Nintendo property?
SM: It was incredible. We were so excited working on it; some people on the team would work five extra hours every night without fail – and the weekends, as well. We did so much on our own time, just because we were so excited and we love what we do. I remember always being nervous; I hoped that somebody didn't beat us to the punch with these CGI visuals, but we didn't think they would because, next to Boeing, Rare had the most Silicon Graphics machines in the world!

KB: I seem to remember we actually received a phone call from the Ministry of Defence asking why we'd got all of this powerful hardware, and what we were actually doing with it! The results were so rewarding, though. You couldn't wait to render things up; you felt like you were moving one step closer to companies in the film industry like Pixar, because you were no longer drawing these flat images anymore.

> 66 *It was exciting as we knew we were creating something special in terms of visuals, something that to begin with, we weren't even sure was going to be feasible.* 99
>
> Chris Sutherland

SM: The first time I saw it, the background was still hand-drawn, but we had the Donkey Kong character. He looked so great as a character. I remember thinking when this whole thing is rendered it's going to look absolutely amazing, because the animation you could get from this pre-rendered 3D stuff just blew everything away. And so long as you had a reasonable technical aptitude it was almost like cheating – you could create something that looked awesome just by rotating it on screen, which you couldn't do by hand. Smooth animation was easier too, because often we'd render 32 frames, and the programmers would take out every other frame to make 16, or they could take out every two and make eight, but if we needed to render 64 frames we could do that. You could make a change instantly, which with hand-drawn stuff was impossible – to do these in-between frames, it was literally impossible.

KB: When you drew it on paper, you were completely blind to time and frames per second, you were just drawing it. I'd have to go upstairs and sit with the programmers and say, 'This frame needs to be on for another half a second,' and so on. With this new method, what you saw was what you got and you had instant control over timing.

CS: It was quite a reversal! In previous games we had to make do with smaller numbers of frames than we'd like because it would be too costly (in artist time) to create lots of hand drawn in-betweens. With pre-rendered technology it was like being connected to a fire hose of frames; artists would often create twice as many 'just in case'! This was great as it meant the visuals were so smooth, but we did have to cut back on some because of cartridge space. And sometimes you just need to hold a particular frame for emphasis.

GM: I wasn't a big fan of the Donkey Kong games in the arcade, so the property didn't initially mean that much to me in the same way that Mario and Zelda did. I just wanted to make a great game. But as we started to develop the IP from what it was to what it was to become, my excitement grew. As Steve says, we were soon working very long hours because we wanted to make something special. I remember one Saturday morning near the end when Tim and I went to Chris' flat and threw stones at his window to get him up. Twenty minutes later, we were all in the studio putting the finishing touches to the game.

CS: It was exciting as we knew we were creating something special in terms of visuals; something that, to begin with, we weren't even sure was going to be feasible. That may be one of the reasons it hadn't been done much before; we were taking 24-bit colour images with millions of differently-coloured pixels and squeezing them down to 15 colours, which on the face of it sounds a little bit crazy!

GM: I must have spent thousands of hours trying to reduce the graphics down to something that could be used to build the game's worlds and levels on a SNES cartridge. One image from the CGI machine was more than the capacity of the biggest cartridge! It was touch and go whether it would be possible to make it look good, but once we'd made a single screen of the jungle level on the SNES we knew we'd cracked it and then it was just a matter of pouring an immense amount of time into it.

Roughly how long did the rendering process take?
SM: It depended – if you were just doing a little sprite, it wasn't too bad. You wouldn't render them big because you knew they were going to be shrunk down, but if you were doing one of the massive promo renders for the front of a magazine, it could take a couple of days or at least overnight. It often paid to be last to leave, because if there were two renders running simultaneously on this joint render engine it could really slow down, so sometimes – and, let me say, I never did this myself – the last person to leave would cancel somebody else's render to speed theirs up! And you could see they'd cancelled it, but they'd usually say it had crashed!

KB: Tim would do it sometimes! I'd go and say, 'Did you kill my render?' and he said 'I had to.' Another thing we would do was render on other people's machines in the evenings. Once we were all on this network, you'd start taking advantage of the fact that some people went home at five.

SM: Yeah, rendering locally was a no-no, because you just couldn't work with a frozen machine. The render engine was massive; we called it the 'Death Star' I think.

KB: It cost about £800,000! I remember this guy came over from Canada to set it up, and he spent about a week making sure that it ran before he went back home. As time went on the machines got smaller and cheaper and more powerful anyway, so it was redundant before too long. We had to buy the Death Star when *Donkey Kong Country* was in full swing. Nintendo said, 'We're going to supply you with all these machines, just tell us what you need because this game has to look extra special.' But the Death Star was very necessary; we wouldn't have got all those levels rendered without the extra power.
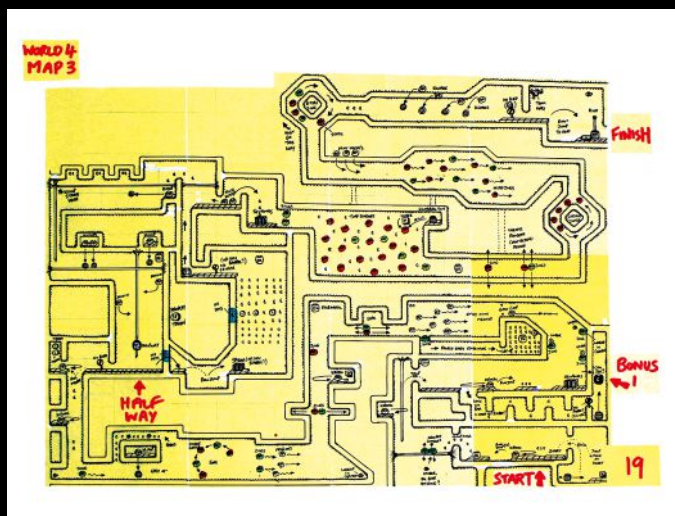
Bramble Scramble level design from *Donkey Kong Country 2* made from Post-it notes.
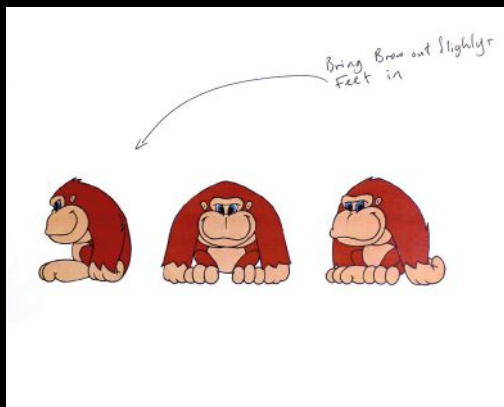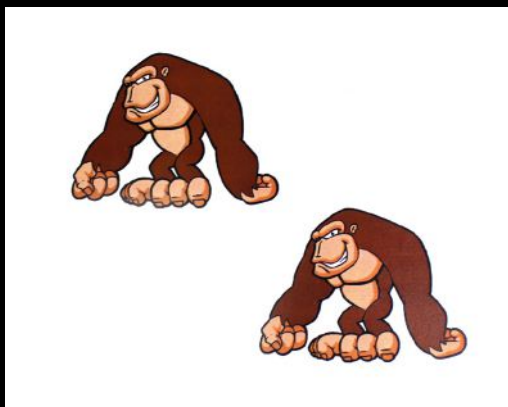
Early concept ideas for a reimagined Donkey Kong.
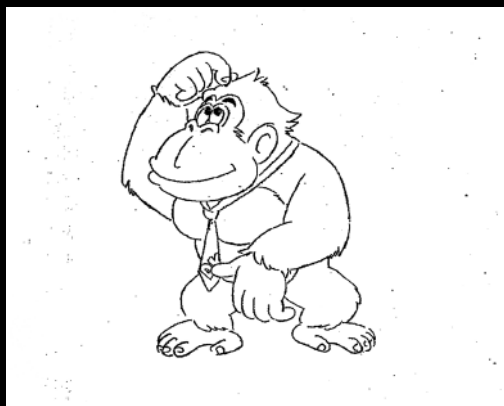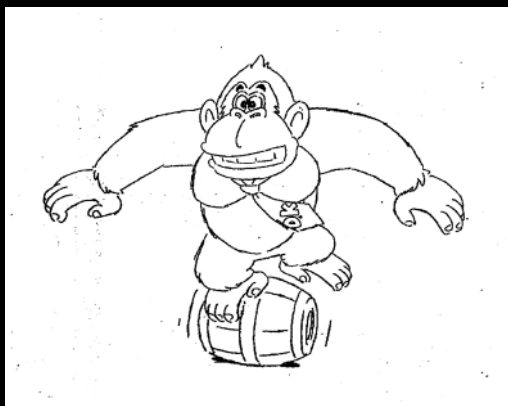
Donkey Kong concept sketches by Shigeru Miyamoto.

SM: *Donkey Kong Country* was such a massive step forward. When we showed it off at the 1994 CES, the crowd thought it was for what was then known as 'Project Reality' and would become the N64. And then Nintendo of America's Peter Main came on stage and dropped the bombshell that it's coming out on Thanksgiving on the Super Nintendo. It was just an amazing moment. We didn't mention the music for *Donkey Kong Country*, did we? We had a massive advantage there because David Wise somehow managed to massively up his game, despite not having anything to work with. We had all the fancy graphics, but the tunes for the Donkey Kong series are just out of this world – God knows how he managed that.

GM: I think I was the only one in that press conference that wasn't clapping and cheering. I was just thinking, 'How the hell are we going to get this ready for Christmas?' We still had a colossal amount of work to do, but seeing people play and enjoy the game at CES gave us the confidence to up our effort even further.

You almost can't imagine the graphics without the music.
SM: It was like a new style of graphics – somehow he managed to do a new style of music, even though it was with the same tools as everybody else.

GM: The 'water level' music still remains in my top two pieces of music to come out of Rare. It had that 'goosebumps' feeling that doesn't come along too often. Grant Kirkhope's 'Night 3' piece for Viva Piñata is my other favourite, so I'll leave it to Dave and Grant to debate which one was the best.

about three-and-a-half-million copies. The Killer Instinct games must have been coming out at that time as well?

KB: There was a conversion to SNES which I helped out on while working on *KI2* for the arcade.

Was it a challenge to port **Killer Instinct** *to the SNES?*
KB: We literally just stripped frames out, and the backgrounds weren't all animated rendered sequences as they were in the arcade due to memory, but it held up well! I wasn't overly involved in the conversion; I oversaw it, but it was a pretty straightforward port because we knew the SNES inside and out by then. Actually, before *Donkey Kong Country* I spent a lot time experimenting with SNES projects that never even saw the light of day.

What were they?
KB: We were going to do a beat 'em up game called *Wrestle Rage* featuring the Ultimate Warrior from WWF. It never happened, but I can remember it was going to be a bit like *Double Dragon*. We were just looking for ways to use the features on the SNES like the transparency. I thought it'd be great if we could use water as a weapon during a fight, holding your opponent's head below it! It was a bit gruesome! We were also looking for ways to make Mode 7 a feature as it wasn't really used in *DK*. In terms of other games, there was one that involved a man that could turn into a dinosaur. That's all I can say.

SM: Oh yeah, I remember that. I remember the concept of it, anyway.

KB: You don't have to be a genius to work out what it would have been called.

SM: Did it get as far as being a playable thing?

KB: Yes I seem to remember it was pretty cool, but it stopped production because then it was all hands on deck with *Donkey Kong Country*.

SM: You should say the name, no one's going to care.

> **❝** Donkey Kong Country 2, *despite being a better game, got a bit lost in all the noise of the N64.* **❞**
>
> *Steve Mayles*

KB: I think the working title was *Dinoman*, because he could turn into a dinosaur. We'd look at all these games and see which one looked like it was going to go somewhere, and those two unfortunately never made it past the demo stage. Had we managed to get *Donkey Kong Country* out earlier, it might have been different. We didn't want to let Nintendo down, and we only had two teams. There was a team that did *Donkey Kong Country*, and there was a team for *Killer Instinct* because we'd also promised that that was going to be ready for Ultra 64, which of course became the N64. Apart from the odd Game Boy game, there weren't any other major projects going on. But some of those that we canned would've looked fantastic using rendered graphics; I can just see them now. But as soon as we got the go-ahead for *Donkey Kong,* the other games went on the back burner and then stopped I guess.

GM: I was the designer on *Dinoman*! We spent so long trying to make a cool level using the shiny Mode 7 feature that we neglected the basic gameplay. Although I do think a dinosaur that could climb any surface called 'Clingonadon' remains the pinnacle of my character naming.

After **Donkey Kong Country,** *did you move straight on to* **Donkey Kong Country 2?**
GM: We had a holiday first! We agreed to give up all our holidays (and pretty much our lives) in order to get the first game finished, so in return Rare paid for us to have an amazing holiday in the Caribbean. Once we got back, we took everything we'd learnt to try and make *Donkey Kong Country 2* even better. After *Donkey Kong Country 2*, I was feeling burnt out and needed a change, so the core of the team moved on to something new.

CS: For *Donkey Kong Country 3*, the team was split, with some starting on that and others moving to *Project Dream*, which later became *Banjo-Kazooie* on the N64.

SM: We went to Japan in 1995 to see the unveiling of the N64 and we had *Donkey Kong Country 2* then. I think I was a bit disappointed because Nintendo didn't seem to push the sequel. I think they were gearing up for the N64 launch, which is probably natural. *Donkey Kong Country 2*, despite being a better game, got a bit lost in all the noise of the N64. Obviously at that time they were showing playable versions of *Super Mario 64*. So even then, we were thinking that the future's in polygons, yet Rare went on to make *Donkey Kong Country 3*, which still sold pretty well –

Concept art for *Donkey Kong Country 2*'s swamp level.

Was canning these games a sensible business decision?

GM: These failures actually helped make *Donkey Kong Country* a success, because the first thing we did was ensure the basic gameplay was sound.

KB: Everybody was learning too, because nobody had any 3D experience – we were having to take on people from places like Bournemouth University who had been doing a degree in computer graphics. But the core staff hadn't had any training – all we had was a set of thick, grey user manuals each!

SM: They were all really technical, and really badly laid out. It was almost impossible to decipher.

KB: Once in a blue moon, the man who sold us the software to begin with would come over and say, 'What are you struggling with?' But we had no training; we just sort of had to teach ourselves. Before CGI, when we used to sketch something, we used a little camcorder and you pressed freeze on it and it digitised the picture, and then you pixelated it using our editors. Then came Tim's bright idea to get the SGI machines – you didn't have to draw or anything, you just had to build stuff; but you had to learn all about 3D geometry, materials and lighting etc., and we had no experience with that. Whereas before you would conceptualise, draw and animate all at the same time, now you had to draw a sketch of something before you spent two or three weeks modelling it.

SM: And because you were pre-rendering stuff, if you changed the model, you'd have to re-render everything. Not like today, where you change a model and it all filters through and everything works. The plus side of that was that you could botch stuff as well, frame by frame. If a leg wasn't quite in the right position, you could just go in there, move it a little bit, because it wasn't part of the global model like it is now, with animations attached to it.

> 66 *Nobody had any 3D experience – we were having to take on people from places like Bournemouth University who had been doing a degree in computer graphics.* 99
>
> *Kev Bayliss*

What are your lasting memories of the SNES from a gamer's perspective?

CS: I remember playing *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* in Japanese on the Super Famicom, despite not knowing the language at all – but that seemed to make it all the more exciting! Unfortunately I became totally stumped after entering the dark world, as there was some key information I needed to proceed. I didn't mind replaying it in English though, because it was a LOT easier!

KB: I had a Mega Drive with *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* on it, and I thought it was fab. And then I remember Chris bought a SNES. Out came *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* on the SNES, and it just looked so much better than the Mega Drive version. I was a massive

SEGA fan and didn't want to let go or admit to Chris how great it was! But as a machine, the SNES was so much nicer looking than the NES. It was pretty much an arcade machine at home, but not as much money as a NEOGEO.

GM: Two stand out: *Super Punch-Out!!* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. Aonuma-san visited Rare not long after *Donkey Kong Country* and after a few beers in a restaurant told us that Link's iconic sword spin attack that first appeared in this game was not part of the original design and was only put in at the last minute. I loved that Nintendo were always willing to do whatever it took to make their games the best.

Donkey Kong Country 2 sketches by Shigeru Miyamoto.
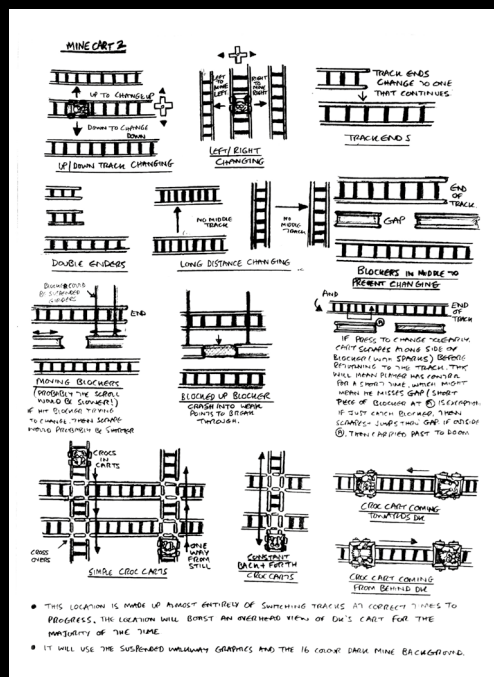
Unused level design concept for *Donkey Kong Country 2*.

The Death and Return of Superman

"Superman has many amazing abilities, of course – but one he seemingly lacks is the capacity to star in a great 3D game. The DC Comics hero has headlined a couple of infamously terrible games over the last couple of decades, but look a little further back and you'll find a pretty solid beat 'em up from the 2D heyday.

"*The Death and Return of Superman* ties in to the epic comic book saga of the early '90s, in which the seemingly invincible Superman is finally slain by Doomsday. In his place appear four different replacement heroes who claim some link to the Man of Steel, and that premise provides this *SNES* brawler with a bit of welcome variety. After Superman's apparent demise, you'll take the reins of stand-ins like Superboy and Steel, each with his own moves, and the game's aerial sequences help break up the button-mashing mêlée action.

"It's mostly similar to other comic battlers of the era, including *Spider-Man* and *Venom: Maximum Carnage* and *Batman Returns*, but *The Death and Return of Superman* endures as a high point for the comic legend. And fun fact: it was developed by Blizzard Entertainment, the now-legendary studio that went on to make *StarCraft*, *Diablo* and *Overwatch*."

Andrew Hayward, games journalist

The Firemen

"*The Firemen* was a student graduation project. One or two titles were chosen every year by Human Creative School and Human Entertainment from the planning documents made by the students. These underwent changes to develop and then sell them. A game's developers were also chosen from the students themselves. I was designated as a planner, and three programmers and three graphic designers were chosen for my team. It was partially inspired by the film *Backdraft*, but another film, *The Towering Inferno*, made even more of an impression on my ideas! Also, there was a fire station near Human Creative School, and I would think to myself that the equipment was so cool.

"My most important job was planning the game and explaining to my fellow team members what I would like to be made and what the goal was. I created the scenario and all the maps and other gimmicks, such as falling through holes, an intelligent sidekick, smashing windows and vases with your water jet, radio dialogue, and so on. My team and myself had many such ideas. The game was built around one concept: all the enemies were fire, and things would happen based on fire situations that take place in buildings. The most difficult thing was creating different types of fire enemies. I made the game's setting the future, which helped because I could then include new ideas such as robots and 'water bombs.'"

Taichi Ishizuka, game designer

First released
1994
—

Genre
Action
—

**Developer
and publisher**
*Human
Entertainment*

The Ninja Warriors /
The Ninja Warriors Again

"I have fond memories of visiting an arcade circa 1987 and feasting my eyes on a wondrously large machine with three contiguous screens. That game was *The Ninja Warriors* – a side-scrolling beat 'em up with two ninjas against a multitude of armed forces. Fast-forward to 1994 and Natsume released a remake of the game called *The Ninja Warriors Again* on the Super Famicom, with the US version retaining the original title of *The Ninja Warriors* for the Super Nintendo.

"You have a choice of three different ninja androids, each with different abilities, speed and weapons with which to dispose of your enemies. The first character (ironically) called 'Ninja' is large and slow, but powerful. The second, 'Kunoichi' is quick and agile, and with the newly-added third character 'Kamaitachi', you get a mix of both, with a quick and powerful android.

"Of course the remake does not utilise screens in triplicate, nor does it have two-player co-operative action, but it does have some improved features over the arcade original, such as enhanced moves, throws and combos as well as interactive objects that can be picked up and hurled at enemy forces. Also, a blaster meter can be built up to destroy every adversary on the screen. All of this adds up to one of the better side-scrolling games on the system."
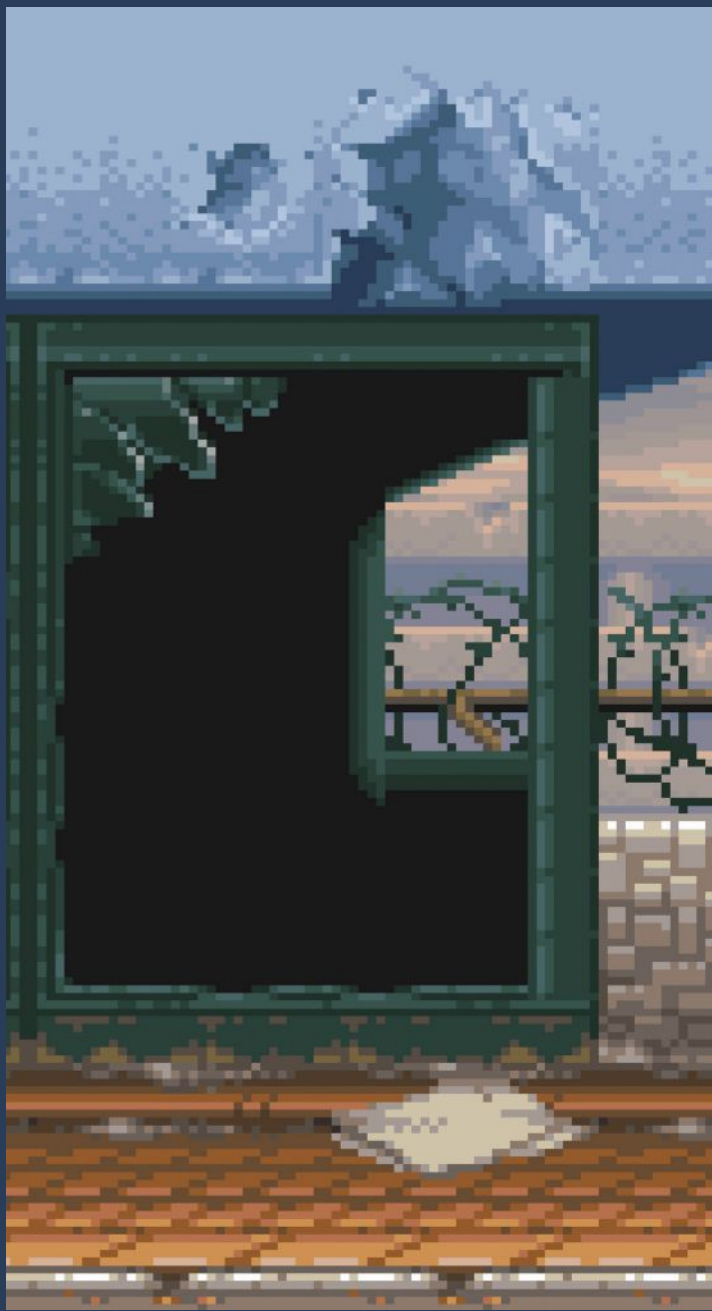
'Trickman' Terry Minnich, games journalist

First released
1994
—
Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up
—
Developer
Natsume
—
Publisher
Taito

406

True Lies

"'Yeah, but they were all bad.' Although Arnie's famous quote is in reference to the film's baddies, it can also apply to the state of licensed video games in the 1990s. The end result (usually) produced a barely analogous and lamentable experience. Beam Software's *True Lies* snuck past these conventions only to become a hidden gem.

"It's a tried-and-true formula: players take on the role of secret agent Harry Tasker as he shoots his way through nine action-packed levels, battling the terrorists of the Crimson Jihad to locate and defeat their leader, Salim Abu Aziz. Presented using a top-down perspective, these labyrinth-like stages are riddled with the usual things to shoot and the usual things to pick up. Pixelated screen-grabs from the movie break up the gameplay and coach you towards the explosive ending. And, yes, you do get to fly a Harrier jump jet in a *1942*-inspired mini-game.

"However, two welcome additions set the game apart: Harry can roll under bullets, and the game ends if you shoot three civilians in a single level. Combined with limited ammo, eight angles for aiming, and a not-so-forgiving health bar, players end up white-knuckling their way through scenes ripped straight from the film."

Chas Pangburn, guest reviewer

First released
1994
—

Genre
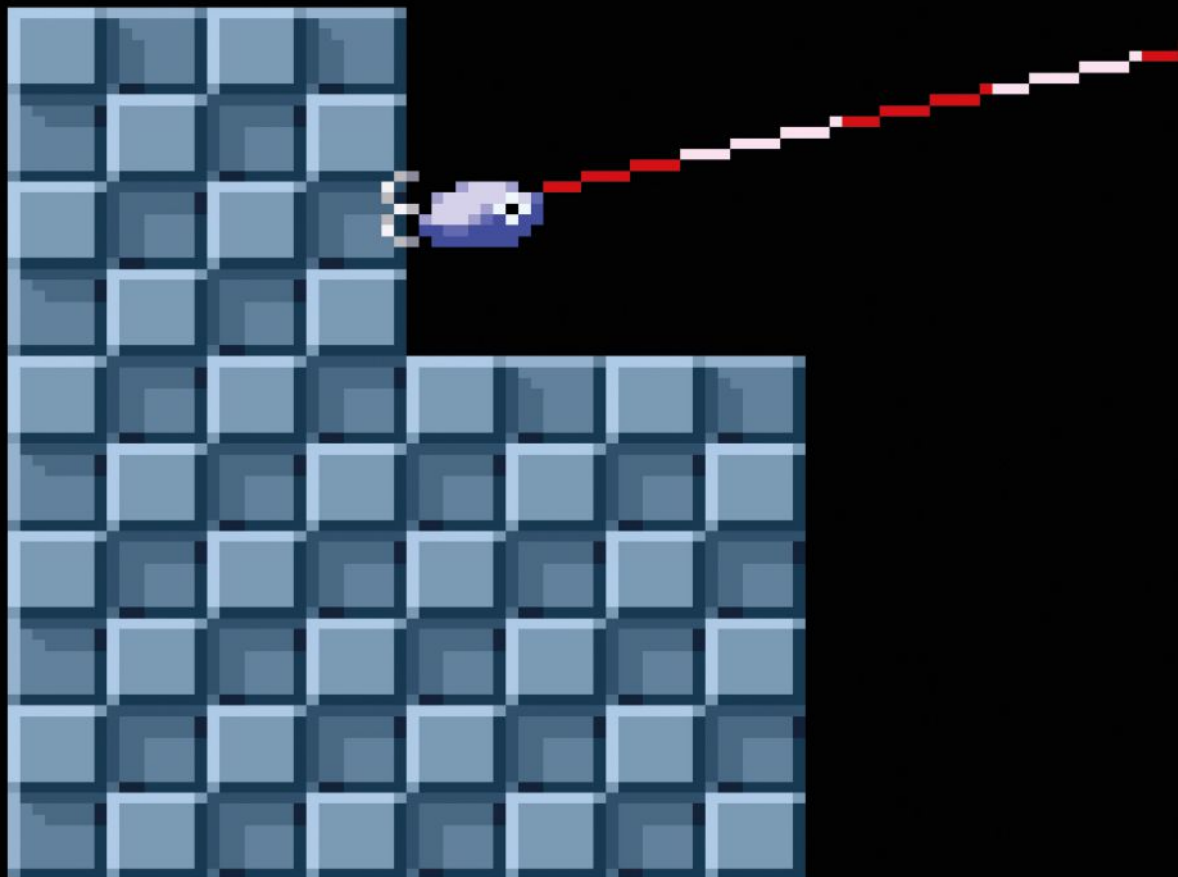*Action*
—

Developer
*Beam Software*
—

Publisher
Acclaim

Umihara Kawase

Released in 1994 for the Super Famicom, this is the first in a series of games starring the title's hero, 19-year-old schoolgirl, Umihara Kawase (a reference to the old Japanese saying, 'Sea fishes are fat in the belly, river fishes are fat in the back').
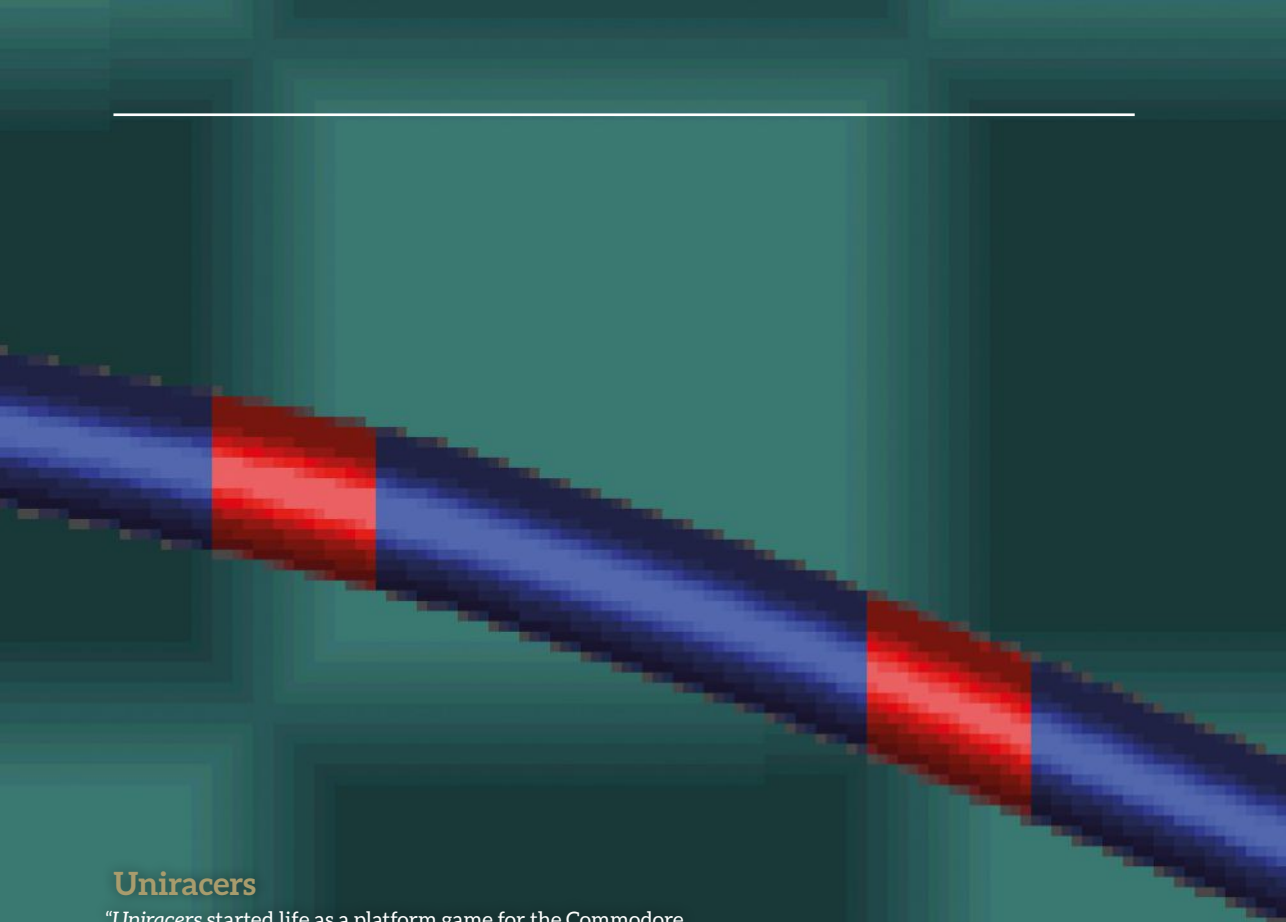
Clad in her school outfit and signature pink rucksack Umihara embarks on a mission to navigate a series of abstract play areas, or 'fields', full of ladders, moving platforms, spikes and overgrown mutated salt- and fresh-water creatures. Yes, really.

Umihara's main technique for moving around is to jump and use her fishing line, which acts like a rubbery version of the Bionic Commando's arms. But as she can't climb, you'll need to master the art of bouncing up and onto platforms. The line attaches to pretty much any surface, freeing you up to explore each level in your own way. It's also used to stun enemies, which Umihara then stores in her rucksack.

It's a fascinating premise, and agreeably satisfying once you master the grappling mechanic. But it's also mercilessly, maddeningly difficult, with randomly spawning one-touch enemies and the ever-present spectre of fatal traps and bottomless pits.

However, with its branching pathways, secret levels and unremittingly stiff challenge, *Umihara Kawase* is held in high regard by retrogamers, and is now something of a cult classic.
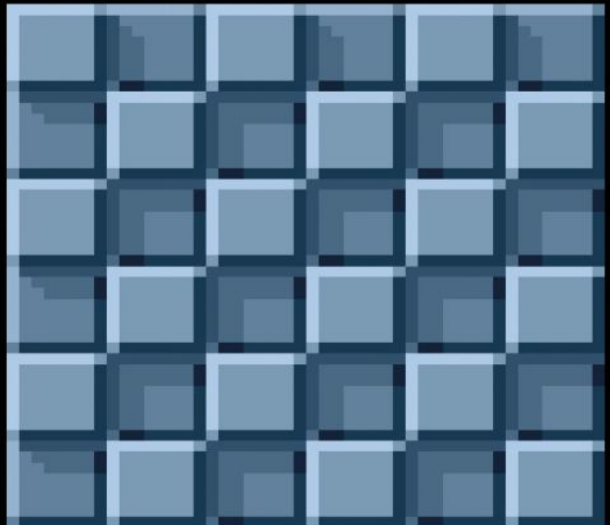
Uniracers

"*Uniracers* started life as a platform game for the Commodore
Amiga called *1×1*. The player controlled a unicycle, which
had to be balanced as they hopped around each level from
platform to platform. It was quintessential DMA Design –
charming, quirky, and unlike any other game I'd seen.
However, once Nintendo came on board as the publisher
they wanted a side-scrolling racing game for the SNES that
would be 'faster than *Sonic*'. Balancing was replaced with
stunts and the core mechanic of the game then formed
around a 'stunts make you go faster' focus from then on.

"We decided that if it was going to play well then it needed to
be great fun for two players to race along a completely flat
track. All the jumps and twists could add to the excitement,
but they wouldn't matter if players didn't think the game
felt fair in a flat, straight-line race. So that became our acid
test, with weeks and weeks of playtesting and tweaking
to get the straight-line experience feeling just right.

"I'm especially proud of how Uniracers turned out, as the
team was made up of recently hired graduates who had
never made a game before. The chance to learn 'on the job'
while working directly with Nintendo on our first game
was a dream come true."
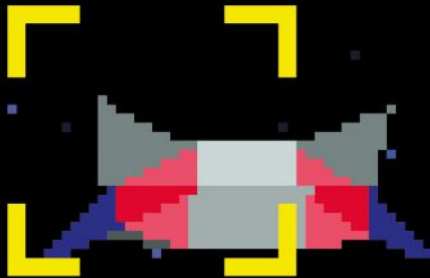
Colin Anderson, composer

> **"It was the first 2D machine to have enough power, enough RAM, enough colours and enough screen layers to allow you to make the games you wanted without fighting the machine."**
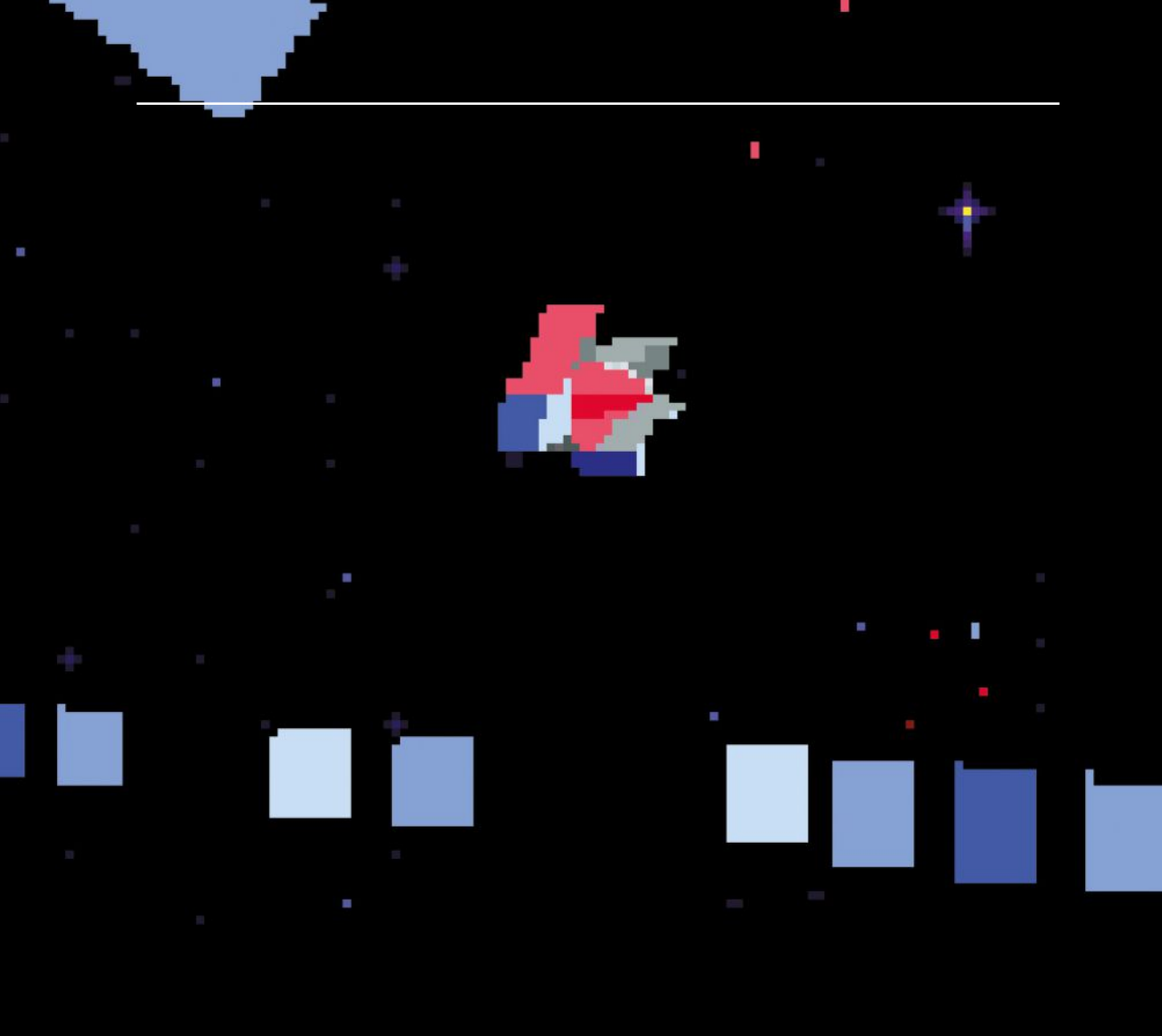
Ste Pickford, game designer and graphic artist

First released
1994

—

Genre
Shoot 'em up

—

Developer
Argonaut Software

—

Publisher
Electro Brain

Vortex

"*Vortex* was the brain-child of Michael Powell who also created the classics *Powerdrome* and *Subwar 2050*. It's sometimes confused with the cancelled *Transformers* game, but they were completely separate.

"When Mike joined forces with Argonaut to produce the game I was originally managing its testing. However, I'd also designed some 3D objects using Argonaut's in-house editor, which Mike really liked, so he asked me to do models for his game. I designed and modelled some enemies, the elevators and the tunnel system. The morphing robot with its four modes was a pretty advanced concept, and the

robot itself took about half the available polygon budget. I also designed the level access and cheat codes. Nintendo didn't allow you to use vowels just in case they were used to spell naughty words, which made coming up with memorable codes very tricky.

"The game has an amazing techno soundtrack by Justin Scharvona, which remains one of my all-time favourite game soundtracks. *Vortex* was also one of the first games to use Dolby Surround Sound where the sound effects of the enemies, etc. were properly positioned in 3D space. It was extremely impressive as most games only used stereo."

Stephen Robertson, graphic artist

Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel

"Iguana Entertainment and Sunsoft did some of their best work in the 16-bit era with their *Aero the Acro-Bat* games, but it's what came next – *Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel* – that was even more satisfying. Built as a 'hardcore' platformer with some crazy violent elements, *Zero* delivered on every front, and far more differently than *Aero* ever could.

"The gameplay is fantastic, as you deliver nunchuck blows, hurl throwing stars and dive bomb onto enemies. In fact, that dive bomb technique also comes in handy later on in the game, as you'll have to get through chasms by relying on quick button presses to avoid certain death, using momentum to fly. Just don't hit the ground – ouch.

"*Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel* also packs secrets galore, like inflatable bonus rooms (no, really, you blow them up to go in), as well as hidden 1UPs and more. And the enemies pack a punch, too, from ridiculous beanie-wearing lunatics to more deadly foes that require some cunning to get around.

"This game also has excellent visuals and sound for a SNES platformer, differentiating itself from the rest of the pack with superb animation – and even a little bit of carnage. *Zero* is a perfect ten for anyone's game library."

Robert Workman, games journalist

First released
1994

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer
Iguana Entertainment

—

Publisher
Sunsoft

Brandish

Originally released for the Japanese PC market back in 1991, *Brandish* is a classic dungeon crawler in which the central character, Varik, becomes trapped in the labyrinthine ruins of the kingdom of Berimya. To ensure his escape, Varik is forced to explore the ruins in search of hidden rooms, keys to chests, weapons and magical spells, while defeating any monsters he encounters.

Brandish displays its ancient gaming heritage in its austere visuals, hoary old gameplay and bizarre control system. Instead of navigating the maze-like levels as normal, Varik always faces north and pushing left and right on the D-pad rotates the world around him in 90-degree chunks. This is initially disorienting but your brain does eventually adjust, and holding the shoulder buttons switches into strafe mode so you can move normally.

If you're willing to stick with it and overlook its flaws, *Brandish* does become quite compelling. There are puzzles to solve, shops to discover and other characters to find, trapped in this mysterious underworld. As the story unfolds and your character begins to level up, you may find that this relic of PC gaming has more to offer than its unassuming appearance might suggest.

First released
1994
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer and publisher
Koei
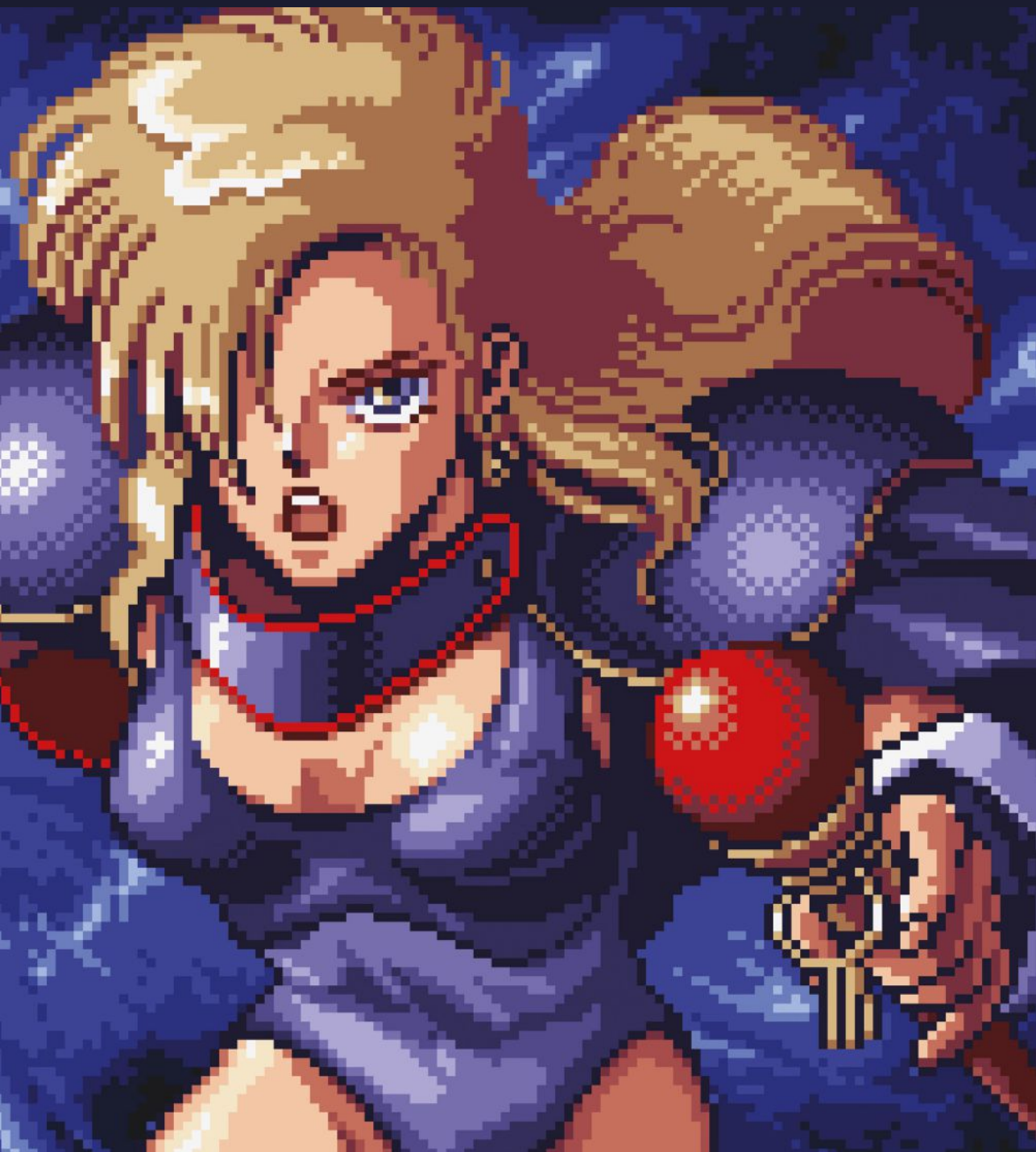
The rise of Factor 5

Julian Eggebrecht discusses the origins of the studio.

As one of the founders of Factor 5, Julian Eggebrecht has a strong connection with home computers of the '80s and '90s, such as the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST. However, as his company outgrew its demoscene roots it became preoccupied with a much larger industry: home consoles. Factor 5 enjoyed an active relationship with some of the biggest games companies in the world and produced SNES titles such as Super Turrican *and* Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures *before working closely with Nintendo on the GameCube. We sat down with Eggebrecht to talk past, present and future, following the exciting news that Factor 5 is back in business.*

How did you become involved in game development?

A few high school friends and myself became obsessed with not only playing but creating games during our last two years of school. With that in mind I cold-called my favourite game companies at the time, Lucasfilm Games and Electronic Arts, via long-distance from Germany. In 1989 that was prohibitively expensive, so all credit to my parents who accepted a $1,000+ phone bill that summer! To my own astonishment, I connected with the right people at the time, and by August 1989 was invited to visit Skywalker Ranch and the San Francisco Bay Area for the first time; the rest, as they say, is history. By November of that year, when the Berlin wall fell and the Cold War ended, I had started work as a producer/director for several games, including one that would turn into *Turrican*.

What are the origins of Factor 5?

Factor 5 originally started back in 1987 as a gaming project by three members of a hacker group called The Light Circle, who worked on the 16-bit Amiga home computer. There were early attempts at game demos based on our favourite arcade games of the time: *Gradius*, *R-Type*, and others from the hugely popular shooter genre. And of course it wasn't called Factor 5 at the time but Factor 3. As more people joined the group, the number changed, but we stopped at 5. Why? Because it sounded great and our logo artist had done a nice stylised '5'! In 1988 the first game, *Katakis*, was finished and published to quite a bit of fanfare and controversy. The game resembled *R-Type* a bit too closely. Fast-forward to 1990 and the first *Turrican* was done and became a great success. By 1993 the hobby had become serious and we formally incorporated the company.

Factor 5's early work was focused on home computers – why did you choose to switch to consoles in the early '90s?

The 16-bit Amiga, and to a lesser extent the Atari ST, provided so many more possibilities than the 8-bit Commodore 64 and were starved for games, so we really tried to focus on them. Nowadays you would call it the classic Blue Ocean strategy; back then it came naturally because we wanted to make games on the level of arcade machines, and the Amiga came close enough. Of course, at the same time we owned, imported and played the SNES, SEGA Mega Drive/Genesis and PC Engine/TurboGrafx.

With the Amiga in decline worldwide the writing was on the wall. By 1992 we also thought we had exhausted that platform and the success of the Turrican games gave us a unique opportunity to jump over to the consoles.

Is it true that you built your own development kits for the SNES and Mega Drive/Genesis, as well as your own development software?

That is a true story that goes like this: with the help of a friend who was a hardware specialist at the German Secret Service, we reverse-engineered the SNES and the Mega Drive and built our own development kits. We even developed our own cross-platform development system called Pegasus, which consisted of a whole suite of low-level tools like assemblers, level creation tools and other bits. We simply had no other chance of getting easy access to development hardware. Official dev kits were prohibitively expensive; one had to become a licensed developer in the US or Japan, and for an unknown studio from Germany, that seemed insurmountable – so we just did everything ourselves. Of course, years later, working closely with Nintendo on the GameCube and Wii hardware designs, we all had a good chuckle about those early hacking days.

What was the Super Nintendo like to develop for, compared to the Amiga and Atari ST?

The SNES was an absolute dream in terms of colour palette, the amount of objects it could display and effects like Mode 7 that

Super Turrican 2 – *1995*

provided scaling and rotation. On top of that, there were lots of smaller but very cool graphical effects, be it the mosaic effect, coloured half-transparent layers, and so on – it truly was a magical device. The sound was the second big strength – coming from the Amiga with only four digital voices our team fell in love with the SNES's audio capabilities right away. The Amiga and Atari ST were extremely limited in comparison, especially the Atari ST, which had barely any graphical capabilities for arcade-like games. The Amiga had a lot more tricks up its sleeve but still paled in comparison to the SNES. The one big drawback

of the SNES was the main CPU. It was an 8-bit chip disguised as a 16-bit chip – something born out of the backwards-compatibility to the NES that was killed by Nintendo late in the design process. That CPU was also relatively slow – that's why so many games had moderate to severe slowdown problems. We circumvented these CPU issues by sticking to pure assembly language and using every code trick in the book, but many other teams that were used to the 16-bit Motorola 68K, from the Amiga, ST, and Genesis, had a very hard time with the SNES's CPU.

> ❝ *Factor 5 originally started back in 1987 as a gaming project by three members of a hacker group called The Light Circle, who worked on the 16-bit Amiga home computer.* ❞

Super Turrican – *1993*

Super Turrican *was your first SNES release. What are your fondest memories of working on this Nintendo debut?*
How quickly it came together. We were behind in our schedule because the development kit for the SNES had taken much longer than anticipated. To avoid running out of money and somehow make it by the end of 1992, we all decided to hole up at the house of Holger Schmidt, *Super Turrican*'s lead engineer and Factor 5 co-founder. We breathed, ate and slept with our Turrican character for three straight months until the game was done. It shows here and there, but overall the frantic pace of development has helped make it the classic that people feel it is.

How did you become involved with LucasArts, and start working on **Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures?**
I knew the LucasArts team from my original visit to Skywalker Ranch in 1989, so when *Super*

Turrican was done, we reconnected at the CES winter trade show in Las Vegas in January 1993. They loved the game, pulled me into the LucasArts booth, and offered a whole range of Lucasfilm and LucasArts IP for us to work on. Of course I asked for *Star Wars*, but that was the one property that was not available since Sculptured Software was already working on the Super Star Wars series. *Indiana Jones* was definitely just as high on the list – we could not believe our luck and within a few weeks we had a contract and work started on Indy.

Was it difficult cramming all of the key moments from the Indiana Jones trilogy into a single video game?
It was very difficult, but not so much on a technical level since our cartridge was certainly large enough. The issue was the amount of levels needed to touch upon every story beat. It was my goal to have each level of the game have a new mechanic or new mix-up of existing mechanics, but the sheer amount of levels made that impossible due to time, budget and programming constraints. In hindsight the game would have benefited tremendously from a 'best-of' Indy structure as opposed to 'let's try to tell the whole trilogy in an interactive way'.

> 66 *We breathed, ate and slept with our Turrican character for three straight months until the game was done.* 99

Super Turrican 2 *felt like a massive leap forward when compared to its predecessor, with a raft of impressive Mode 7 effects and more technical polish. Is it fair to say that Factor 5 had become more comfortable with the hardware by this point?*
We usually pick up most features – obvious or subtle – of new hardware very quickly, and after playing early masterpieces like *Castlevania*, *Mystical Ninja* and of course Nintendo's own games, we knew exactly what was possible and how to push it. Having said that, when using all features of the SNES the game has to be designed around that, and Super Turrican's free-roaming structure did not lend itself to perfect timing and the necessary constraints of Mode 7's rotation and scaling. A showcase game for the SNES had to be somewhat more linear than the classic *Turrican* template, and that's why we shifted the structure for *Super Turrican 2*. Once the decision had been made to go with a more Japanese design sensibility and pre-plan very focused events and beats, using the hardware to the maximum came pretty easy. We also had a lot more time – *Super Turrican* was a three-month project, *Super Turrican 2* took a whole year.

During this time Factor 5 was also commissioned by Konami to port the SNES title **Contra III: The Alien Wars** *to the Game Boy. Was it a challenge producing a faithful conversion of this cutting-edge release on such underpowered hardware?*
We actually discussed *Contra* and *Castlevania* with Konami, and almost ended up doing *Castlevania* for the SEGA Mega Drive. Our hook in both discussions was that we made a pretty good case that, despite both games' perfect use of the SNES hardware, we would pull

off perfect-as-possible ports. On the Mega Drive/Genesis that meant Mode 7 scaling and rotation effects; on the Game Boy the multi-jointed middle and end bosses in *Contra*, which were extremely hard to do with the limitations of the system. But to be honest, we never had a system that we felt was underpowered. One just needs to understand it, be creative about solutions, and everything is possible.

Why did you decide to move Factor 5 from Germany to the US? What challenges did this relocation bring with it?
We always felt a bit alien in Germany since the rest of the game development community at the time did not care about working on consoles. By 1993 we certainly were the odd ones out – very successful internationally, but more celebrated in our home country. TV shows and print media made a lot of stories about us, but our heart really was beating to an international taste, so when the relationship with LucasArts developed further and CD-ROM – with its gigantic storage space – became the

industry standard, it suddenly made a very-long-distance relationship problematic. We decided to pack our bags and move to California. And as funny as it might sound, the bad weather in Germany vs. the California sun did also play into the decision!

Factor 5 enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Nintendo during the '90s and 2000s, creating groundbreaking titles and even contributing technical help. How did this partnership evolve during this time?
We became very close with Nintendo, and to this day, with our current endeavours, are staying in close touch, usually receiving development hardware and briefings quite early. I believe Nintendo was impressed by what we were able to achieve technologically, and we complemented each other since they always had a weak spot when it came to sound. So when we proved on the N64 that they could trust us with the technological crown jewels, the microcode, and we delivered real showcases of what the hardware could do in terms of both sound

and graphics, they pulled us even closer for the GameCube and Wii chipset design. It was mutually beneficial, as everyone could see with *Star Wars: Rogue Leader* as a GameCube launch title.

Factor 5 was reported to have closed in 2008 but you recently announced that the company has been resurrected. What plans do you have for the future, and will we be seeing the return of any classic Factor 5 series soon?
Only the US studio closed that fateful year; the German side of the company stayed around and was very much alive all those years. What has changed now is that we simply have time to be even more active and want to make the best of it – especially considering the strong retro community around the world. People still fondly remember a lot of our games, which is something very special to have and very special for me personally. We poured our hearts and souls into these games and it feels so good that 20, 30 years later, fans out there still connect with that heart and soul.

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures – *1994*

Super Turrican 2 – *1995*

Castlevania: Dracula X / Akumajō Dracula XX

"Castlevania: Rondo of Blood on the PC Engine was practically legendary in the West: the best Castlevania game ever! The one we never got to play! So when it made the leap to the SNES in 1995, expectations were high.

"Castlevania: Dracula X (known as *Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss* in Europe and *Akumajō Dracula XX* in Japan) isn't an exact port of the PC Engine game, and perhaps it's a bit worse for it. It still stars Richter Belmont, but the game excises a lot of the bits that made the original unique, including the ability to play as secondary character Maria. Nonetheless, you still get a solid dose of vampire-slaying action on the SNES.

*"This entry in the series feels like a throwback. You won't find the bells and whistles of *Castlevania IV* here: no rotating rooms, scaling bosses or free-swinging whip in Richter's adventure. But what you do get is classic Castlevania action that feels like a bridge between the NES and SNES eras. The simple visuals feature a few nice effects, like the burning city background in the opening stages, and the palette stands out. Some areas almost look as if they've been painted in watercolours.

*"Of course, with any Castlevania game comes classic Castlevania tunes. *Dracula X* doesn't disappoint in the audio department, pumping out great music that gets you in the mood to take down legions of Drac's minions."

Greg Sewart, games journalist

First released
1995

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer and publisher
Konami

427

Terranigma / Tenchi Souzou

"Because the player is alone in the story, we figured there should only be one character the player controls. That also makes it easier for you to empathise with the protagonist. One advantage was that since limiting the characters increases the memory available, we were able to do more complex and detailed movements and animation for [lead character] Ark that we couldn't do in the previous two titles. The controls are a step-up in that regard, I think.

"*Terranigma* is an RPG through and through. The player roleplays the character Ark in the world of Terranigma, but the reverse also occurs, in that Ark roleplays the player. Therefore, as the creators of this game, we didn't want to impose a single conclusion on the story – or better to say, we couldn't even if we'd wanted to. If the player chooses the Overworld Elle, perhaps Ark is reborn and returns to Elle's side. If he chooses the Underworld Elle, maybe he says farewell to Overworld Elle and is reunited with Underworld Elle after reincarnation. Maybe the player doesn't like either Elle, and something different happens altogether. We left the conclusion up to the player's imagination: everything has been your own fantasy."

Tomoyoshi Miyazaki, game designer

First released
1995
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Quintet
—
Publisher
Nintendo

NBA Jam: Tournament Edition

"During the early '90s, coin-ops were enjoying a bit of a renaissance, buoyed by the enormous popularity of beat 'em ups such as *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. Another highly successful arcade game of the era – particularly in the US – was NBA Jam, a two-on-two basketball game that featured licensed teams, stylistically digitised players, and larger-than-life action.

"The great thing about *NBA Jam* is that you don't really need to understand the intricacies of basketball to enjoy it: Midway's sports title features simplified rules and straightforward mechanics that make it incredibly easy to pick up and play. Lightning-fast passing, massive slam-dunks, heroic long shots, and the ability to push and elbow opponents out of the way are all part and parcel of the action, and helped made the game incredibly fun, especially when played with multiple participants.

"The *Tournament Edition* of the game was basically an update to the original coin-op with refreshed player rosters and a smattering of additional gameplay features. Both versions were converted to the Super Nintendo, and while there isn't a huge amount of difference between the two in gameplay terms, the *Tournament Edition* is slightly more refined and has more secrets and Easter Eggs to find."

Julian Rignall, games journalist

First released
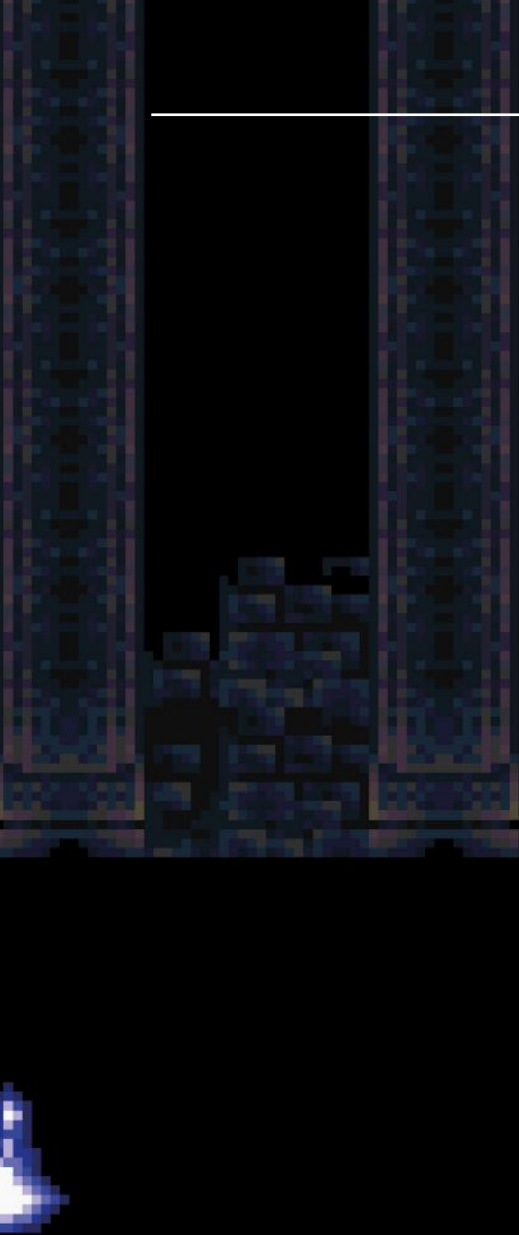*1995*
—
Genre
Sports
—
Developer
Midway
—
Publisher
Acclaim

Chrono Trigger

"Picture a teenager obsessed with the SNES and its RPGs, who grew up with *Dr. Slump* and *Dragon Ball*, and who was fascinated by time travel stories. Now, imagine what game would best fit that picture. You'll probably end up here.

"Way back when the Internet wasn't a thing and little news made it across the ocean from Japan to the West, I read about *Chrono Trigger* in a random *Hobby Consolas* magazine: a 32Mbit cart, Akira Toriyama artwork, unique gameplay and what felt like a very exciting plot. And while these were promising premises, nothing could have prepared me for the romance that was about to begin. One that still lasts.

"What I found in the game was the most compelling tale about character bonding that I've experienced as a gamer, narrated through an intricate web of mind-blowing plot twists. The revolutionary combo system, the gorgeous art direction, a timeless soundtrack and the multiple-endings structure all added the last bits of polish that set the title apart.

"Jumping eras on a kick-ass spaceship, visiting mysterious locations and the End of Time, meeting charismatic weirdos like Masamune and Spekkio (my all time favourites), grinding with Nu under the rain, Magus' twist … It's hard to choose my favourite from the endless array of ideas. But one thing is certain: *Chrono Trigger* is the game of my life."

Victor Hugo Balmaña Andrés, guest reviewer

First released
1995
—
Genre
RPG
—
**Developer and publisher**
Square

Chrono Trigger

"Sakaguchi, Horii and Toriyama started talking about making an RPG together. At that time, it was more of an offhand, casual thing, like, 'Hey, wouldn't it be great if we could all work together on something?' The actual planning didn't start until about two years later, when our staff sat down with Horii and hammered out the general outline of the story. We first thought *Chrono Trigger* was going to be on CD-ROM, actually. We wanted to take advantage of the space afforded by that medium, and make a game where you visit multiple different worlds. So the time travel idea, where the map would change as you visited different eras, was decided on very early. Ultimately we ended up switching from CD-ROM to a ROM cart, but with the 32Mbit cart size, we were able to include most of our ideas."

Kazuhiko Aoki, producer
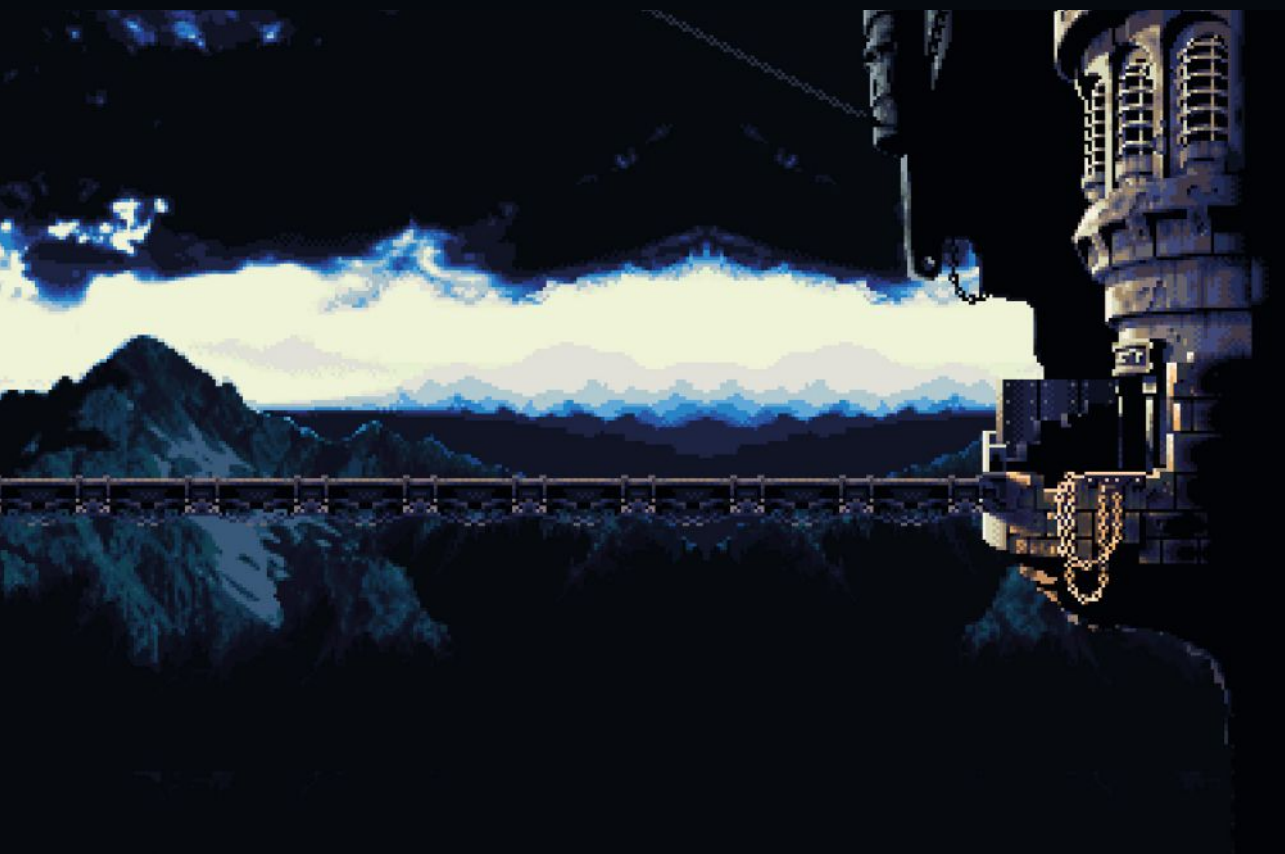
"This was my first time working on monster designs since *Final Fantasy III*. I really love strategy RPGs, and I think some aspect of that leaked into *Chrono Trigger*. I like it when enemies have some specific weakness you can defeat them with, like in a strategy game where the tanks are strong versus infantry, but weak against air units. I had actually set things up to be a lot more severe at first, but others at Square complained that it was way too difficult... [laughs] So I made it easier.

"But yeah, I imagine if you don't know the enemy weaknesses, it could be very hard. Once you know it's easy. That's why the playtesters at Square, on their second playthroughs, were all asking me to make it harder. I was like, 'Weren't you just whining about how difficult it was?'"

Hironobu Sakaguchi, supervisor

Boogerman:
A Pick and Flick Adventure

"I think *Boogerman* is still the most beloved and remembered game I've worked on, and one of the best times in my game development career. It was the only time I was given full and free control over the design and development of a game and it was a blast. The game is lighthearted, simple fun and, for good or bad, stands out in a crowd.

"Brian Fargo, the head of Interplay Productions, asked me to create a 'gross' game. I was thrilled, as gross products were peaking in popularity at that time. Designing a game that was gross but not too offensive was a challenge and my thought was that a superhero using gross bodily functions would make such a concept acceptable. Super smooth 2D animation had become a must for a game at this time, so we contracted a company who did hand-drawn film and television animation to do the game art. Chris Tremmel, who co-designed the game with me and was a huge fan of cel animation, took on the task of managing the art production.

"Whenever I wear my old *Boogerman* shirts to conventions, people still recognise Boogerman and shout his battle cry, 'BOOGER!'"

Michael Stragey, game designer

BURP

Clay Fighter 2: Judgment Clay

While the beat 'em up phenomenon was still in full flow, and *Street Fighter II* had shown what the SNES could do (largely in terms of sales), everyone wanted a piece of the action. And so the market was deluged with an array of fighting games – some good, some bad, and many, like *Clay Fighter 2*, happy to inhabit the middle ground of mediocrity.

The unique selling point of Interplay's comedic entry was its graphics, which used images of stop-frame animated 'Claymation' models in place of hand-drawn or CG-rendered sprites. It's an interesting idea, which certainly gives the game an aesthetic edge, but beyond the distinctive graphics, there's little here to excite beat 'em up fans. With a small roster of eight characters, minimal combos, imbalanced characters and forgettable tunes and backdrops, it feels like a game going through the motions. Its multiplayer tournament mode could well provide an evening's diversion for a handful of rowdy mates, but once *Clay Fighter 2*'s novelty has diminished, what remains is shallow and uninspired.

Amazingly, the series remained popular enough to sire a third outing for the N64, which is regarded with the same lethargic ambivalence as the previous two.

First released
1995
—
Genre
Fighting
—
Developer and publisher
Interplay

Clock Tower

"Human had a number of different teams working simultaneously –
Clock Tower had a seven-person team, as I recall. One of the
fundamental concepts of the project was not simply to add a horror
theme to the game design, but rather to apply horror films to the game
system itself. In horror films, it would be strange to see the heroine
running indefinitely. At some point, she'll run out of breath and be
unable to run, and you feel a sense of crisis as she risks becoming
trapped. So the game mechanics came about by trying to make
the game seem real.

"Optional mouse support would have been good, but making the
mouse necessary to play the game would have created difficulties
from a business perspective, since the mouse peripheral had a
low install base. Another thing is that the original *Clock Tower*
was quite an experimental project that didn't have a large budget or
development staff. So we didn't have the extra resources to include
mouse support. We also had to cut the map down significantly for
the Super Famicom version.

"It would be cool of me to say that I simply followed my convictions
without wavering, but that wouldn't be true; I have doubts of my
own. But when I write a game proposal I simulate the total game in
my head in detail, to the point where I can mentally play and see it
unfold in my mind. When the game in my head is fun, I know that
the real game will also be fun, as long as I follow the design in my
head. That gives me the inner confidence to proceed. I actually played
Clock Tower recently! My girlfriend wanted to play, so we played
through it together."

Hifumi Kono, director

First released
1995
——
Genre
*Point and click
adventure*
——
**Developer
and publisher**
*Human
Entertainment*

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

"I enjoyed the pirate theme; art-wise it gave us more to work with, but of course the sequel was never going to have the same impact as the first *Donkey Kong Country*. *Donkey Kong Country 2* was the last released game Tim Stamper did any graphics for. He contributed a little at the start, but it's a real shame he didn't do more on the game as nobody did graphics even close to Tim's standard.

"I remember *Donkey Kong Country 2* feeling more straightforward; not so much experimentation needed as the original and we were more at home with *Alias* (3D art software). People have said it was a risk to not have Donkey Kong as a playable character, but it wasn't an issue for us. The game was still called *Donkey Kong* after all, and with a sequel there's always a desire to do something a bit different – and Dixie turned out great!

"My favourite animal buddy was Squitter the spider, but the geometry-heavy trainers (×8!) really made *Alias* grind to a halt when animating! *Alias* had introduced fur at this point, but we only ever used it for promo renders; you just couldn't see it in game, and it took longer to render each frame, so we didn't bother. We also had connecting 'fillets' for knees, elbows, etc. Before this, the geometry just intersected. But again, at game resolution, these visual improvements couldn't be seen.

"I think David Wise outdid himself with the soundtrack; every level offers up a memorable tune, with some absolute classics. It's my favourite soundtrack of any game."

Steve Mayles, character designer
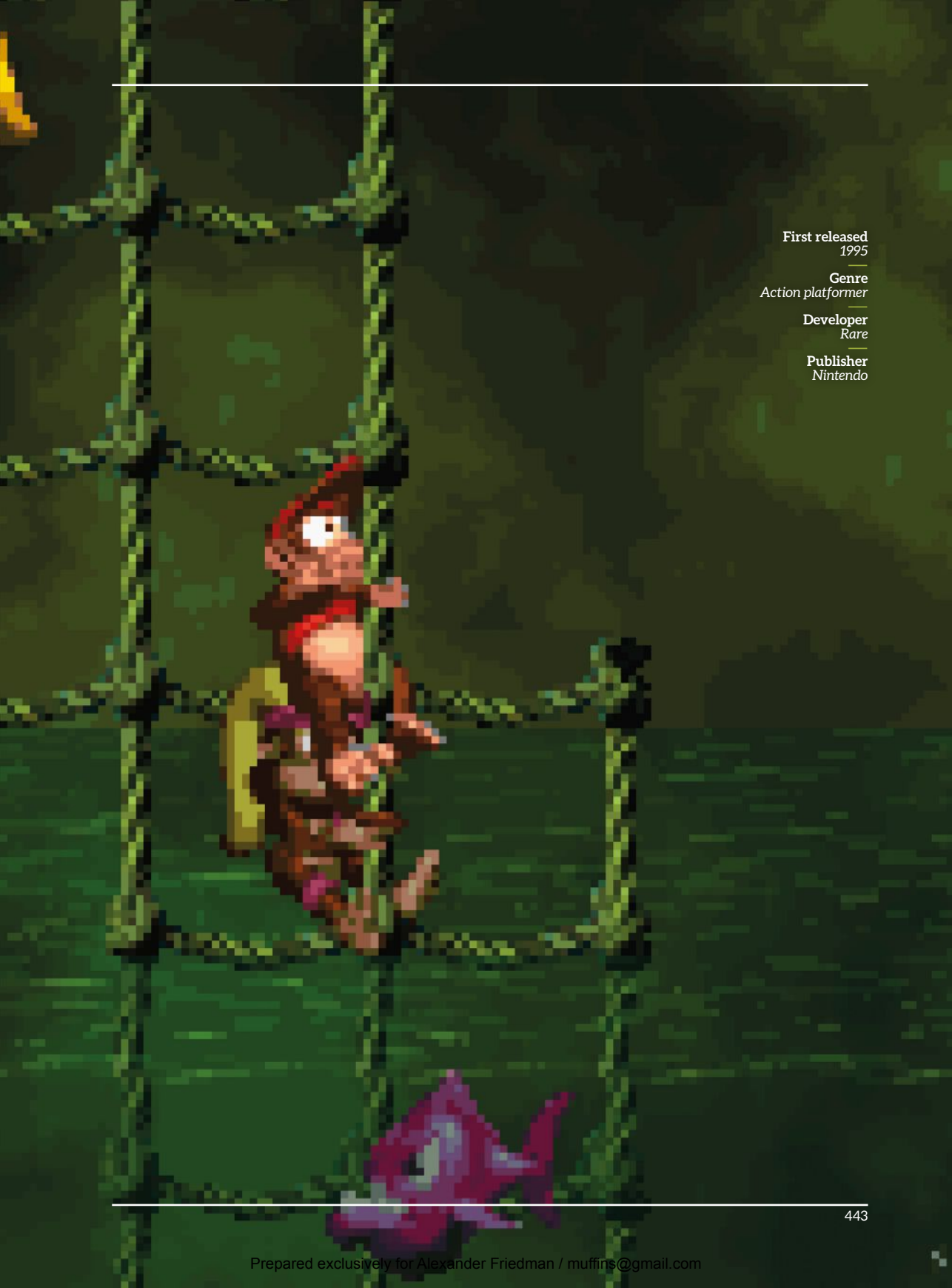
Dragon Quest VI - Maboroshi no Daichi

"For the Dragon Quest series, control itself is not the main focus of the games. When we design the game, it's just like driving a car. When you're driving a car, you don't really get concerned about how you control the car itself; you just enjoy the drive. You know how to drive it without thinking about it – that's what we're trying to do. We want to let people enjoy the content without really worrying about the control, so we keep maintaining the same kind of gameplay system people are used to playing, so they still play the game and enjoy the content. That's how *Dragon Quest VI* maintains the fun part of the game, even after 13 years.

"In Japanese, in a short sentence, we can actually express a certain sense of humour, and have a very good personality for the characters, which makes the game really more fun – but localising that into different languages has been hard. It's been a challenge, but we also heard that since *Dragon Quest IX*, the localisation has really improved, the quality got better, and the humour is actually really communicating well to the American market too."

Yuji Horii, game designer

First released
1995
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer
Heartbeat
—

Publisher
Enix

444

International Superstar Soccer Deluxe / Jikkyou World Soccer 2: Fighting Eleven

"For years *Sensible Soccer* had been the undisputed champion when it came to football games. However, that all changed when Konami released *International Superstar Soccer* (ISS) for the Super Nintendo, a game Konami updated less than a year later when it released *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe* in 1995.

"Offering gamers a middle ground between the addictive arcade action of *Sensible Soccer* and the realism of the newly released FIFA series from EA, *ISS* is a game that's still considered to be one of the best football games of all time. Taking what makes football so great, *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe* captures all the drama, tactics, and fast-paced action of the sport, while at the same time infusing it with gameplay and controls that are both instantly accessible and hugely enjoyable.

"On top of this, while they may not have had the rights to license player names, Konami also included numerous additions that helped cement *ISS Deluxe*'s offering. This includes in-match commentary, a range of different countries from around the world to play as, and even a wealth of different game modes, such as penalty shootouts and a season mode. All in all, *ISS Deluxe* balances content, immersion and gameplay to create one of the most rewarding sports simulators of not just the 16-bit era, but of all time."

Sophia Aubrey Drake, games journalist

First released
1995

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Konami

447

The making of Star Fox

We speak to Dylan Cuthbert, Giles Goddard and Krister Wombell.

The sight of Western developers working within Japanese game studios isn't an odd thing by modern standards, but back in the early '90s it was unique – and Dylan Cuthbert, Giles Goddard and Krister Wombell were arguably three of the pioneers. All worked at UK firm Argonaut and would eventually end up in Nintendo's Kyoto HQ, where they helped create Star Fox. *In a neat twist, Nintendo has recently confirmed that* Star Fox 2 *– a 1995 title Cuthbert worked on during his time with the company that was finished but never released – is finally seeing the light of day as part of the SNES Classic Edition, to be launched at the end of 2017.*

How did you come to start working at Argonaut?

Dylan Cuthbert (DC): I applied for a job while I was in sixth form and took along my ZX Spectrum demos, which were 2D at the time, and even though they liked what they saw they needed a 3D programmer, so I didn't get the job immediately. I started making a 3D polygon rasterizer on the Amiga and a month or two later sent that in via old-fashioned snail mail. The next day Jez San called to let me know I had a job.

Giles Goddard (GG): I left school before my A-Levels so had to find a job. By this time I was coding demos for the Amiga and was experimenting with 3D wireframe stuff. I really wanted to do filled polygons but didn't have a clue how to render them. Around that time *Starglider II* came out and it was one of the

first games to use filled polygons so it blew me away; a couple of months later I saw an advert looking for programmers at Argonaut. It was really good fun when there were about six of us, working in San's house in North London being paid to do stuff I was already doing as a hobby in my bedroom back home. It was the ideal job.

How did Argonaut's relationship with Nintendo come about?

DC: Argonaut was in the business of getting 3D running on any hardware, big or small, and when the fledgling Game Boy appeared I got assigned to make a 3D engine on it, and at the same time another couple of guys got 3D running even on the NES. Jez showed Nintendo at CES that year and a young producer called Tony Harman made it his mission to connect Jez to the Japanese side of the company. A week later they flew Jez and I over to Japan for talks. It was during these talks that Shigeru Miyamoto explained they wanted better 3D for *Pilotwings* on SNES as drawing the sprites for every rotation was cumbersome and memory consuming. Jez called ex-Flare Technology guy Ben Cheese, who we'd gotten to know while making games for the abandoned Konix Multisystem – I had spent many a long night knocking up a 3D rasterizer on that, using the 12-bit audio digital signal processor it had.

Is it true that you had early access to the SNES hardware?

DC: We were given a prototype SNES to take back with us to England on the plane – something

that would never happen these days! We were also given a pre-release copy of *F-Zero*. We played the hell out of that!

How did the Super FX chip develop, and how much difference did it make to the power of the console?

DC: While I was making *X* for the Game Boy with Gunpei Yokoi's group, the Super FX chip was being developed by Ben's consultancy, and Pete Warnes and Carl Graham at Argonaut. It took a year, but once the prototype chip was ready Pete and Carl had a very rudimentary engine running on it, primarily to make sure the instructions they had designed actually worked. At that point the project was a simple, all-range 3D game like *Starglider* and the code name was *'SNESglider'*. That's the point when myself, Giles and Krister Wombell took over the project and started working with Nintendo directly on the game itself.

Krister Wombell (KW): The SNES used a 16-bit, 3.58Mhz CPU. I'm guessing that's probably 100,000 times slower than even the most modest desktop CPU today and probably millions of times slower than a modern GPU. The only comparable polygon game I remember at the time was Driller and its performance was measured in seconds per frame, rather than frames per second. The Super FX is a much faster CPU; it's more efficient, it runs faster, and adds a cache and a memory interface designed to fill polygons quickly. Fun fact: before Nintendo threw itself into it we just assumed we'd be writing the

Star Fox – *1993*

gameplay ourselves. The first Super FX game written was a *Battlezone*-like clone.

During the development of Star Fox, you were relocated to Japan to work more closely with Nintendo. What was it like working in the company's offices?
DC: I'd been going back and forth for six to seven weeks at a time for my work on *X*, but in early 1992 Miyamoto asked us to come over more permanently so they could work consistently and directly with us. Kyoto was awesome, so we said yes and started working daily. At that time Miyamoto would take us to lunch every day so he could practise his English on us. That was fun and helped us to get to know him quite well.

KW: In 1990 a lot of UK game development studios were still small operations running out of a home or small office. Walking up to NCL in Kyoto with these gleaming white buildings with hundreds if not thousands of people was quite a different experience. Not to mention the office 'uniforms': these white Nintendo jackets that seemed to be all around us. Nintendo likes to compartmentalise projects and even while working within Nintendo we didn't know about projects going on elsewhere in the same building. We were cornered off even within the secretive EAD office. Employees outside of EAD that might have been casually walking around would not even have been aware of our project or existence.

What elements of Star Fox did you guys handle, and what was Nintendo responsible for?
DC: We dealt with the tools, the game, game design and even had a limited hand in some of the art. For example, I think the in-game radio font is still the one I designed.

> 66 *We were given a prototype SNES to take back with us to England on the plane – something that would never happen these days!* 99
>
> *Dylan Cuthbert*

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What was it like working with people like Shigeru Miyamoto and Katsuya Eguchi?
DC: A lot of fun, they were always really friendly and had great ways of thinking when it came to game design. They gave me a lot of inspiration and taught me a lot of what I now know.

KW: I think everyone can see that they have these fun and imaginative personalities that shine through in the games they produce. It's the same working with them; both are extremely enjoyable to work with and often came up with these quirky ideas that made all of us smile. Despite being some of the biggest names in game design they are both humble and open to ideas you might propose. Less appreciated, I guess, is how much attention they pay to details. It's one thing thinking up a grand plan for a game but quite another building it and planning all the details. Eguchi-san would spend days sketching level designs on paper before they even reached us and I can think of one time where Miyamoto spent days with Giles just tuning the mechanics of how the ship banked side to side. Both of them really own the work they produce; nothing is left to chance.

Did the inevitable language barrier present any issues?
DC: Surprisingly not as many as you'd think. Katsuya Eguchi and Miyamoto really stepped up their efforts to learn English and we, very slowly, began to learn Japanese. We used a lot of visual aids and waving arms and facial expressions to get our points across. In some way, any miscommunications we had added to the game, because instead of just doing the things they said, Giles and I would extrapolate in different ways

and invent completely different ideas, which would surprise the Nintendo team.

KW: It was more difficult when we were trying to work remotely (Argonaut in London, Nintendo in Kyoto) and communicating via fax. Once we moved to Nintendo's offices it improved dramatically; lots of hand gestures and diagrams on whiteboards seemed to help.

What was the Super Nintendo like to develop for?
KW: The entire game is written in assembly, very low-level instructions that tell the CPU exactly what to do, in excruciating detail. It's extremely laborious and error-prone but that was simply the norm at the time. Nowadays, high-level languages express a developer's intent much more succinctly. Nobody in their right mind would wish to go back to assembly, but it was rewarding at the time. During the development of *Star Fox* we realised that our existing tools were taking longer and longer to compile the game, taking minutes for even small changes. Eventually we had to write our own toolchain from scratch, mid-project, just to handle the overwhelming amount of data involved.

DC: I enjoyed it a lot. It had its limitations of course, but programming is the most fun when you are trying to find sneaky shortcuts to pull off crazy ideas.

Did you encounter any cultural clashes during your time working at Nintendo?
DC: I don't recall any. I think we were in awe of Japanese culture and Nintendo in general. In retrospect it was a very short crunch and the game came together remarkably well as a result. We mastered up the ROM

and got it passed through the Uji factory Lot Check the day before Christmas Eve, and we were able to be back for Christmas.

GG: Apart from the usual 'gaijin' stuff, I was pretty much treated like anyone else. I think by the time I joined Nintendo I'd already proven myself with the two Super FX games. Also, a lot of Japanese business is done through 'shoukai'; being introduced to another company by a company you're already doing business with.

When did it become apparent that you wouldn't be returning to Argonaut, or the UK?
DC: I knew I wanted to live in Kyoto during that first week I came here. The vibe just felt right and there was so much energy everywhere. The people were really friendly and to be honest going back to North London afterwards felt like I was returning to dystopia after discovering utopia.

You also worked on Star Fox 2, which was never released; why do you think Nintendo decided against publishing it?
DC: The PlayStation and Saturn had come out and their graphics blew away anything we could do, even on the second revision of the Super FX chip. Nintendo had strong rivalries with Sony and SEGA and didn't want to be seen to be weaker in any way. So they moved up their schedule and started making *Star Fox* for the N64. We fully mastered up *Star Fox 2* though, fortunately as it happens, because it's going to be included on the new SNES Mini, which is really quite remarkable when you think about it.

What do you make of Nintendo's decision to release Star Fox 2 *after all these years?*
KW: I think it's an awesome idea. I didn't work on *Star Fox 2* but I think we're all thrilled that Dylan won't get constantly wound up over it!

What are your lasting memories of your time at Nintendo, and how did it influence your future career?
DC: I really enjoyed myself and probably would have stayed there if it wasn't for the anti-poaching agreement Jez quickly put in place after Giles got married and joined NCL as an employee after *Stunt Race FX* finished. Miyamoto offered me the chance to work with HAL and Satoru Iwata, but they were based near Mount Fuji and I wanted to be in Kyoto if I was going to stay in Japan. So I made the decision to join Sony and work on the PlayStation because it was such a great machine for 3D and it would allow me to see more of the world – California, basically!

KW: My time at Nintendo opened up many doors for me. I really enjoyed writing a lot of the technology on *Star Fox*, and afterwards I concentrated on areas such as game engines, rendering technology and toolchains. At a personal level I enjoyed my time in Japan immensely and after *Star Fox* ended up living in Tokyo for many years.

GG: After leaving Nintendo and doing freelance for a while I was quite eager to get a team together again. Our first game, Theta, started as one of our DS control experiments. We were trying out various ideas that required two screens and touch input. I really like working on things that are unique to the hardware. I'm proud of the games I've worked on.

> **❝** *We fully mastered up* Star Fox 2 *though, fortunately as it happens, because it's going to be included on the new SNES Mini, which is really quite remarkable when you think about it.* **❞**
>
> *Dylan Cuthbert*
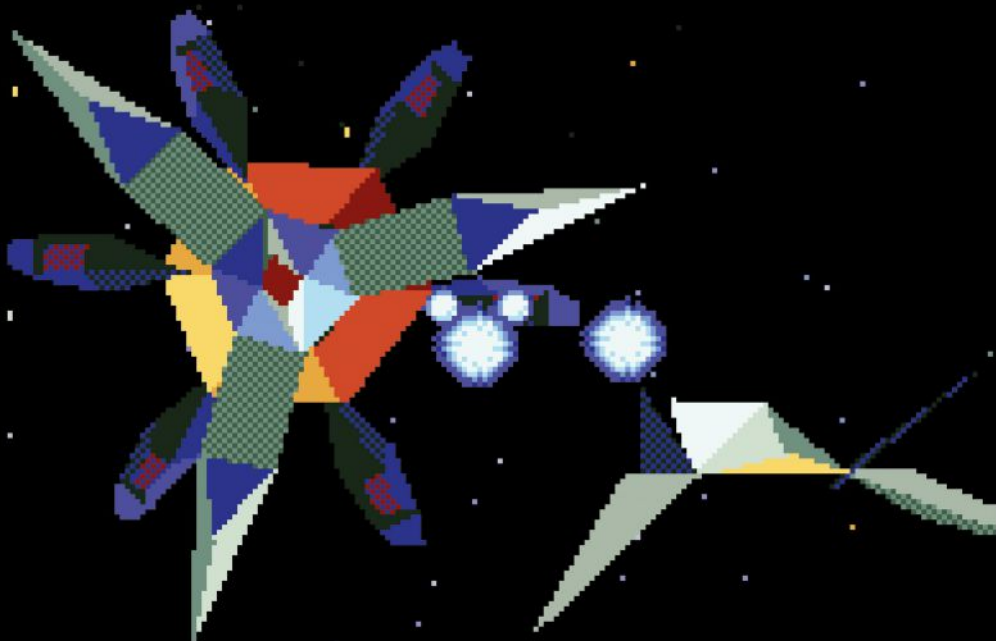
Star Fox – *1993*

Final Fight 3 /
Final Fight Tough

"By 1995, when *Final Fight 3* released exclusively on the Super Nintendo, the beat 'em up genre was well established, if not long in the tooth. And despite being part of one of the genre's stalwarts (along with *Double Dragon* and *Streets of Rage*), *Final Fight 3* feels like an also-ran; instead of innovating, the game coasts.

"One or two players have some of the old crew to play as – Haggar and Guy – as well as newcomers Lucia and Dean, neither of whom pops. An interesting option enables a solo player to team up with a computer-controlled companion, although said companion can be more nuisance than help.

"Per the series' standard, *Final Fight 3* delivers visually: large, detailed characters stand out well against mostly worn-out and desolate (yet good looking) backdrops, which play host to standard-fare cannon fodder. Among the opposition, Andre the Giant stand-in Andore makes his expected appearance, and the game goes for an easy gag with the roly-poly enemy archetype named Arby, tongue planted firmly in cheek.

"When it comes to gameplay, *Final Fight 3* runs the same treadmill seen in dozens of brawlers, and some special moves and branching gameplay can't offset the punch-and-push-forward monotony. It's certainly not a crime, but in an overloaded genre, it leaves one wanting."
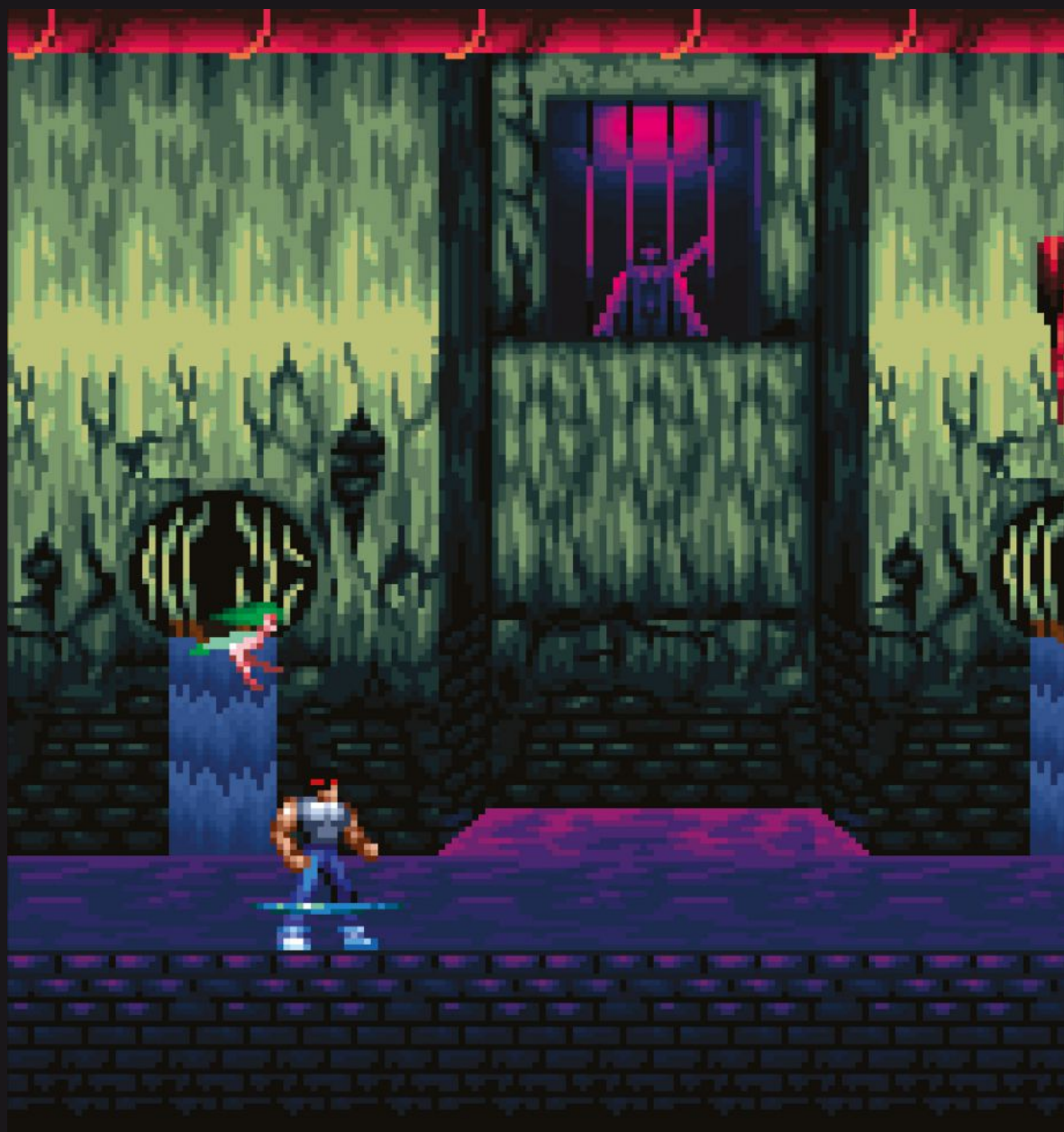
Greg Ford, games journalist

First released
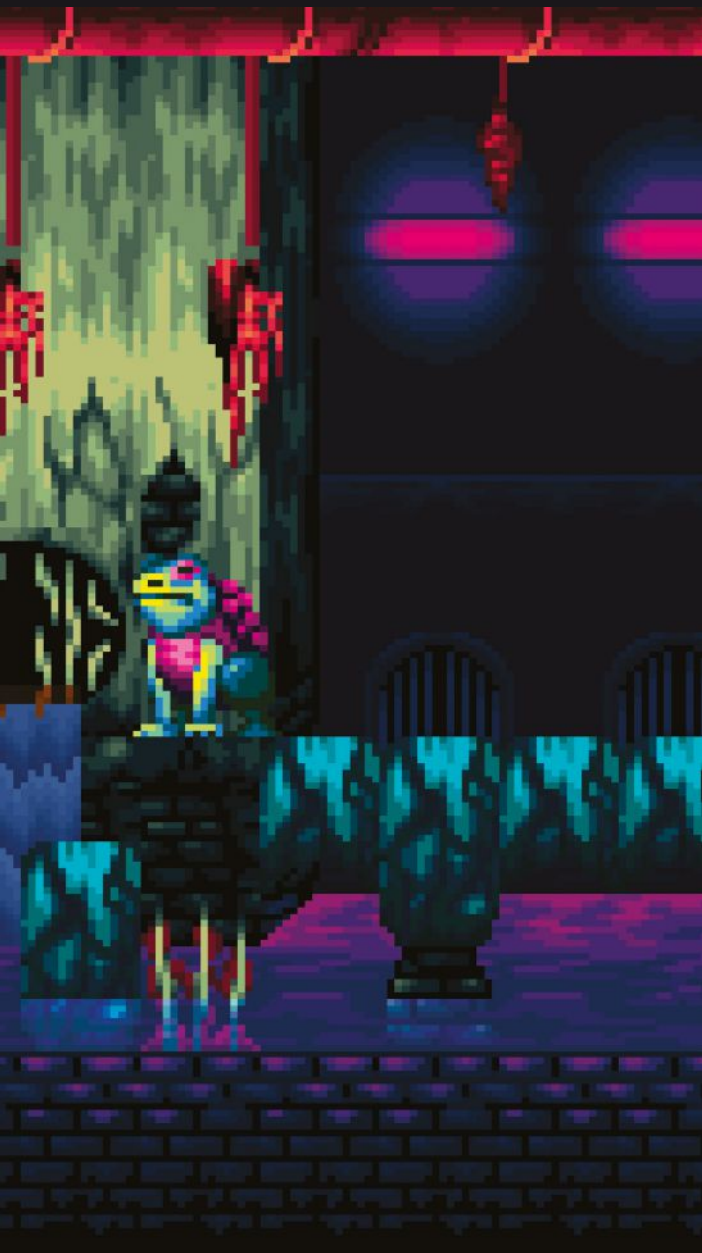*1995*
—
Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom

Majyūō

Translated as *King of Demons*, this oddity from KSS has the look and feel of a Castlevania with guns, thanks to the animation of its main protagonist and the scrolling platform combat.

The lead character, Abel, is on a mission to save his daughter who is trapped in hell – a series of beautifully rendered areas with colourful scenery and uniquely bizarre mid- and end-of-level bosses. Accompanied by the protecting spirit of his deceased wife, Abel can walk, duck, shoot left and right and perform a double jump. To add some variety to proceedings, defeated end-of-level bosses drop a coloured jewel which, when shot, transforms Abel into one of three demons: a laser-shooting lizard, a fire-breathing dragon or a boomerang-lobbing harpy. Select the same species three times and you'll morph into a more powerful version of that creature.

Because Abel only ever moves at walking speed, the action never becomes too frantic – but then you'll desperately wish he moved a bit quicker when there are giant bosses homing in on you. With its grisly gunplay, disturbing creatures and scenes of torture, it's no surprise (though something of a shame) that *Majyūō* never made it to Western game stores.

First released
1995

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
KSS
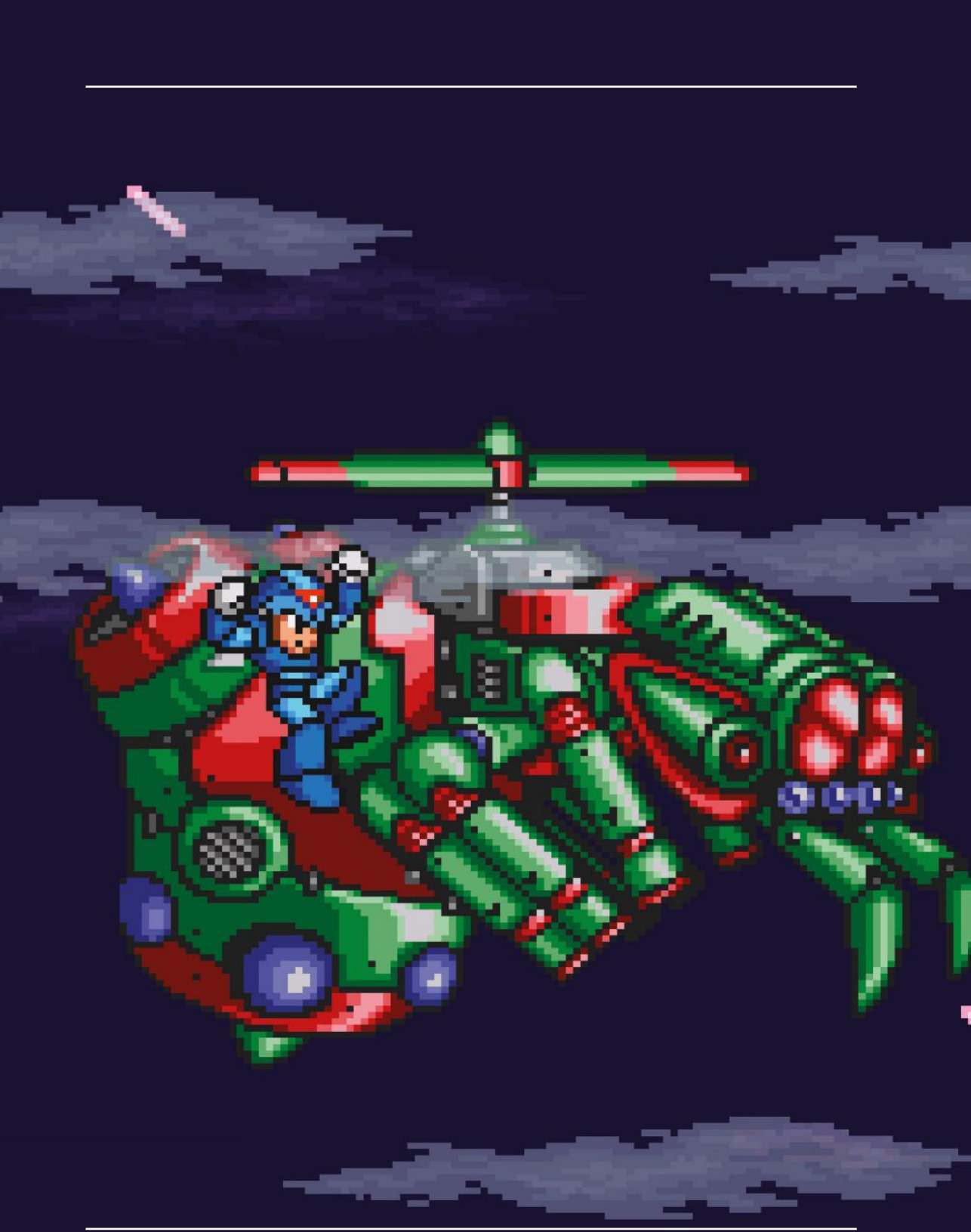
Mega Man X3 / Rockman X3

"I composed all of the music and made the data for the original SNES release of *Mega Man X3*. Scoring the game was really fun; I could compose at home whenever I wanted and convert the music to data. Also I liked Mega Man, and so I felt that I was so lucky to get the offer.

"I was never part of the Minakuchi Engineering staff. That was actually the name of the company that requested the work from me, and I suppose they were credited in the album. No other composers were involved in the SNES release, though a team from Capcom was responsible for rearranging my music for the PlayStation and Saturn versions.

"When I'm writing music for a lot of action-based games, I see the image of the character and I really want to make something very cool that matches that atmosphere. And so perhaps that ignites a fire within me, I really don't know. In order to make something cool, I imagine guitar riffs, drums and a lot of fast-paced music. The storyline [of the game] is a very big part of what influences my decision. I always keep an image of the story, the plot, the setting and maybe even the characters' personality traits in my head at all times and that creates inspiration for me."

Kinuyo Yamashita, composer

457

Metal Warriors

"At a glance, *Metal Warriors* seems like a generic Gundam-inspired platformer, and it was largely ignored at the time. This is a shame because Metal Warriors is a gem of a game: an unusual anime-inspired but US-developed project from the great LucasArts, the now-defunct game development wing of Lucasfilm. It's somewhat vindicating for Metal Warriors fans that it has since become a prized cart for collectors.

"*Metal Warriors'* complex level design has two layers. You can probe sprawling areas for secrets as a tiny, defenceless astronaut, or hop into one of six armoured suits, outfitted with different abilities of movement and warfare, to joust with huge enemy mechs. Some suits enable you to fly, clamber upside-down like a spider, or roll like a ball, and, this being a LucasArts project, at least one packs a lightsaber. The detail and craft behind *Metal Warriors* is top notch: tiny soldiers man battlestations but dash for armoured suits when you approach; dreadnaughts have an interior and exterior to explore; and cutscenes are executed in cinematic anime that could pass for PlayStation visuals.

"Best of all, *Metal Warriors* includes a split-screen deathmatch mode where you and a friend can bash each other until your suits detonate. But the match isn't over if you can escape to another hidden suit in the level, dodging bullets and ducking into ventilation shafts as a tiny, vulnerable soldier, just a handful of pixels tall. It's *Titanfall* in two dimensions!"
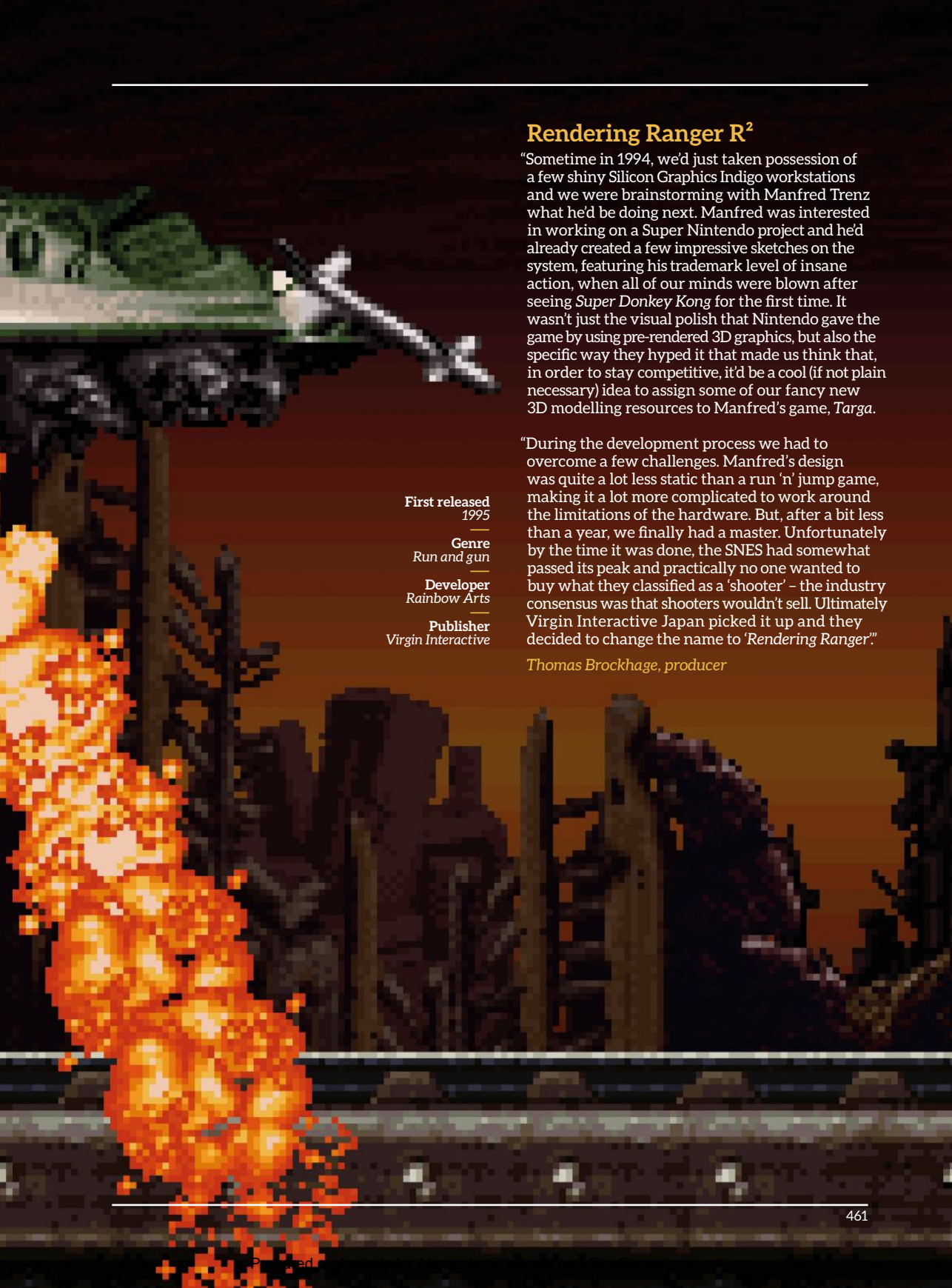
Samuel Claiborn, games journalist

First released *1995* / **Genre** *Action platformer* /
Developer *LucasArts* / **Publisher** *Konami*

Rendering Ranger R²

"Sometime in 1994, we'd just taken possession of a few shiny Silicon Graphics Indigo workstations and we were brainstorming with Manfred Trenz what he'd be doing next. Manfred was interested in working on a Super Nintendo project and he'd already created a few impressive sketches on the system, featuring his trademark level of insane action, when all of our minds were blown after seeing *Super Donkey Kong* for the first time. It wasn't just the visual polish that Nintendo gave the game by using pre-rendered 3D graphics, but also the specific way they hyped it that made us think that, in order to stay competitive, it'd be a cool (if not plain necessary) idea to assign some of our fancy new 3D modelling resources to Manfred's game, *Targa*.

"During the development process we had to overcome a few challenges. Manfred's design was quite a lot less static than a run 'n' jump game, making it a lot more complicated to work around the limitations of the hardware. But, after a bit less than a year, we finally had a master. Unfortunately by the time it was done, the SNES had somewhat passed its peak and practically no one wanted to buy what they classified as a 'shooter' – the industry consensus was that shooters wouldn't sell. Ultimately Virgin Interactive Japan picked it up and they decided to change the name to '*Rendering Ranger*'."

Thomas Brockhage, producer

First released
1995
—
Genre
Run and gun
—
Developer
Rainbow Arts
—
Publisher
Virgin Interactive

Secret of Evermore

"We were, simply put, to make an American-flavoured *Secret of Mana*-like game. The exact details of how we did it were up to us, but what we did had to be infused with that essence. That was the basis for the creation of the new Seattle studio and its team.

"We really did everything, absolutely everything, with little or no prior experience and no outside help, and that's something to be proud of, all by itself. I'm also proud of the fact that we managed to mimic the *Secret of Mana* engine pretty faithfully, to the point that most people think we inherited the code and tweaked it for our own purposes.

"We spent a lot of time on data compression. *Secret of Evermore* was probably 50–70Mbits, uncompressed, maybe more. We had different ways of compressing nearly everything: maps, map tiles, sprite tiles, scripts, dialogue, etc. Some of them had to be decompressed very, very quickly, every frame. That was a real challenge. Beyond that, it's hard to say. An RPG is inherently a tricky thing, and the SNES is a wacky piece of hardware; everything we did was kind of tricky in its own way.

"I also got a little personal thrill when a few people from Japan came round to visit and looked at an early version of our map editor, and then went back and made one of their own that looked just like it. I chuckled."
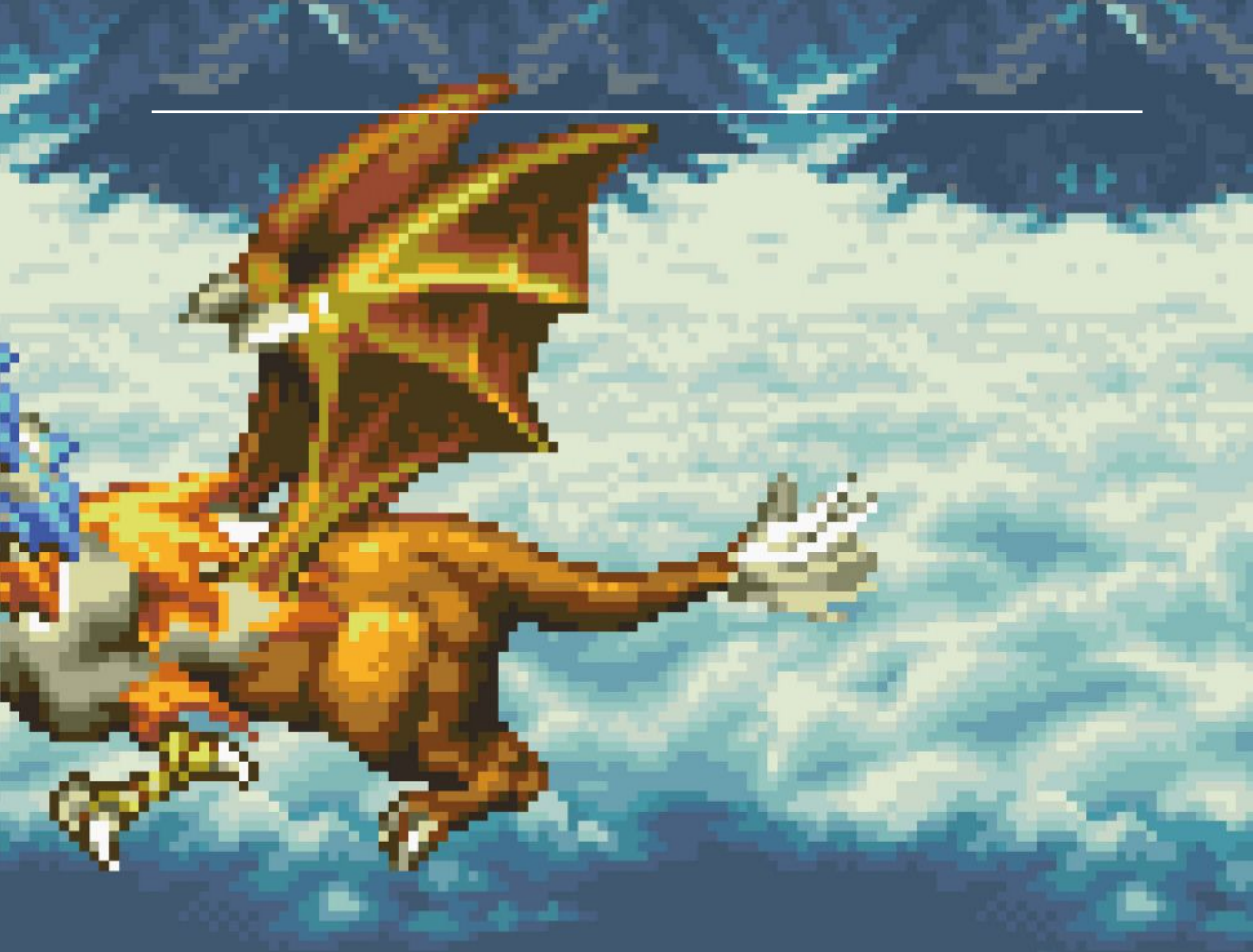
Brian Fehdrau, programmer

First released
1995
—
Genre
RPG
—
**Developer
and publisher**
Square

Seiken Densetsu 3

Released in 1995, this is the third entry in the Seiken Densetsu (Legend of the Holy Sword) series, which kicked off with *Seiken Densetsu: Final Fantasy Gaiden* on the Game Boy in 1991. The Super Famicom sequel is better known in the West as *Secret of Mana*, one of the most highly regarded action-RPGs of the 16-bit era. But despite its predecessor's success, *Seiken Densetsu 3* remained a Japan-only title until a fan-translated version surfaced in 1999.

Graphically, the title is one of the very best on the Super Famicom, full of beautiful incidental details, sumptuous backdrops, huge boss creatures and clever special effects, including a day/night cycle. The audio too is worthy of note, delivering a stirring soundtrack that ebbs and flows with the action. But it's the scale of the game that astonishes, with three different openings and endings, depending which of the six party members you select at the start of the game. Repeated playthroughs provide a different view of characters' motives, while your party can also change classes and follow either light or dark paths, which alters the challenges they face.

Seiken Densetsu 3 does suffer from a few niggles: combat is a button-heavy affair, with occasionally unresponsive attacks and an unwieldy menu system, making battles a bit of a grind. So while it's not quite the *Secret of Mana 2* gamers were hoping for, it's still worth experiencing if only for the gorgeous visuals.

First released *1995* / **Genre** *RPG* / **Developer and publisher** *Square*

Seiken Densetsu 3

"Many hours were devoted to re-writing and polishing each song until I was finally satisfied with the end result. Outside of those occasions when I had a synthesiser programmer for support, for those albums I did almost all the work myself, including working on the sound selection, editing, effect design and final data encoding. During the two-year production period, I spent almost 24 hours a day in the office, alternating between composing and editing. The fact that I could spend such a luxurious amount of time on the project led directly to the high music quality of *Secret of Mana* and [its sequel] *Seiken Densetsu 3*.

"To go into further detail, in order to create the sense of a fully immersive sound, I would use two tracks of the same instrument, and give only one side vibrato to create the sense of three-dimensional sound. I chose the placement of each instrument, and its melody, after a long process of trial and error. The best of what I discovered is in there. I believe the end product is something that people can enjoy listening to, hopefully for a long time to come."

Hiroki Kikuta, composer

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

"We added the ability to transform into Super Baby Mario when you pick up a star. In fact, our first idea was that the baby would transform into fully-grown, moustachioed Mario when you got the star, but another staff member pointed out how that would be weird with the story, so we kept him as Super Baby Mario. Personally, I still think the idea of adult Mario running around is better.

"For Yoshi's Island, the basic concept for the game system – the idea of the Yoshis carrying Baby Mario relay-race style – was decided fairly early. We added the story on top of that afterwards. At Nintendo, all our developments focus around the gameplay system first; the story comes later.

"The staff members working on it the longest started around the time Super Mario World was released, so about five years. The first two years were mainly spent experimenting with different ideas. We had one idea where Yoshi would move around freely, and he'd support Baby Mario and lead him through the stage. Almost all of those early ideas came to naught, but the one that really stuck and bore fruit for us was the idea of a game where even though you hit enemies, you don't die."

Shigeru Miyamoto, producer

First released
1995

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer and publisher
Nintendo

Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together

"Of all the Super Famicom titles that didn't reach the West, *Tactics Ogre* is the one whose influence casts the longest shadow. Although nominally a sequel to 1993's popular real-time strategy, *Ogre Battle*, it established the 'tactical RPG' subgenre as we know it today, ushering in a plethora of clones (with many companies releasing 'Tactics' versions of their own franchises) and being the landmark from which *Disgaea* and the like originated. Due to the success abroad of its *Final Fantasy Tactics* offspring, the game was finally localised for the Sony PlayStation.

"Yasumi Matsuno's chef-d'oeuvre was also groundbreaking for the dark tones of its plot, ripe with deep political intrigue. Nowadays we're sadly all too familiar with the expression 'false flag', yet few things could explain its meaning better, in this medium or elsewhere, than playing through the game's first chapter, up to the 'Baramus Incident'. Moral choices famously got their breakthrough in video games a decade before, with Garriott's *Ultima IV*, but it's *Tactics Ogre*'s storyline, branching in lawful, neutral and chaotic paths, that truly builds upon that legacy. A towering achievement on so many levels, *Tactics Ogre* stands tall in the great Japanese tradition of political fiction, alongside movies such as Oshima's *Night and Fog* and Oshii's *Patlabor 2*."

Carlo Savorelli, guest reviewer

First released
1995

—

Genre
RPG

Developer and publisher
Quest

Welcome to the coder's bedroom...

Homebrew games

With its complex architecture, in-built security measures, and the sheer scale of the development task, the homebrew scene for the SNES hasn't been as active as with other consoles of that era – although that hasn't stopped some determined programmers from making a handful of new games. However a larger part of the scene is ROM hacking, in which the ROM image of an existing game is altered to tweak the gameplay, add cheats, improve the graphics and even create localised text for Japanese-only releases. This section highlights the hard work of these dedicated home-brewers and ROM-hackers.

Coder's Bedroom by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

Mario Kart R

First released *2004* / **Genre** *Racing* /
Developer *d4s*

The Legend of Zelda: Parallel Worlds

First released *2006* / **Genre** *Action adventure* /
Developers *Euclid and SePH*

Metroid Redesign

First released *2006* / **Genre** *Action adventure* /
Developer *Drewseph*

Chrono Trigger: Prophet's Guile

First released *2007* / **Genre** *RPG* /
Developer *Kajar Laboratories*

SMW2+2

First released *2008* / **Genre** *Action platformer* /
Developer *Golden Yoshi*

F-Zero: The Lost Tracks

First released *2009* / **Genre** *Racing* /
Developer *devinator015*

Oh No! More Zombies Ate My Neighbors

First released *2010* / **Genre** *Action* /
Developers *Stanley_Decker and Sloat*

Bob-omb Mafia

First released *2012* / **Genre** *RPG* /
Developers *Giangurgolo and Omega*

The Kremling's Revenge

First released *2012* / **Genre** *Action platformer* /
Developer *Preposterify*

Mega Man X - Generation

Released *2016* / **Genre** *Action platformer* /
Developer *SOPHIA*

Grump's Dream Course

First released *2016* / **Genre** *Sports* /
Developer *MowseChao*

Final Fantasy IV - The Darkness Within

First released *2017* / **Genre** *RPG* /
Developer *Rynzer*

The Amazing Spider-Man: Lethal Foes

Curiously limited to a Japanese-only release, this platform beat 'em up stars the eponymous web-slinger on a mission to defeat a roster of comic-book villains, including the Green Goblin, Venom, Doctor Octopus, Carnage and Alistair Smythe as the Ultimate Spider-Slayer. Each level is a timed race through the environment, defeating or, more often, simply avoiding the various henchmen en route to the boss battle.

The star of the show is a beautifully animated Spidey, who swings on webs using the shoulder buttons (pretty much the coolest part of the game), and automatically clings to walls and ceilings. He can jump, punch, crouch/low kick, shoot web pellets and perform a flying kick, but it's hard to string these moves together into pleasing fluid combat. Spidey's inability to fire pellets diagonally, or jump and punch makes dealing with airborne foes annoyingly tricky.

There's certainly the foundation of a decent game here, but the clumsy combat, short, uninteresting levels and wildly variable difficulty conspire to make it a largely unsatisfying affair. Defeat by a boss also sends you right back to the start of the level – a deeply annoying design decision.

Released by Epoch, the game was one of the handful of titles to work with the Barcode Battler II, where scanning various product barcodes unlocked new content.

First released
1995

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

Developer and publisher
Epoch Co.

Ys V: Ushinawareta Suna no Miyako Kefin

"At the time a draft plot had already been prepared, entitled 'Lost Kefin, Kingdom of Sand'. Our official instructions were to use this draft plot as the basis for a new Ys. Since *Popful Mail* was our first time developing for the Super Famicom we learned a lot from our initial mistakes. For this reason, personally I was grateful for the chance to develop for the Super Famicom again. At the time Ys was known for its battle system of defeating enemies mainly by bumping into them, but implementing that system on the Super Famicom felt a little bland, and so we experimented with various ideas by trial and error.

"Meanwhile, a separate development team was working on *The Legend of Heroes 3*, and I did some playtesting for it. *The Legend of Heroes 3* retained an overhead view, but also introduced a concept of height. I thought this was highly original, and tried to incorporate this system into the new Ys to deepen the action. This was how *Ys V* came about. Around this time, home computer games were also flourishing, and so I did my best to present something that could only be done on a console. During this same period, Square released *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, and techniques such as their graphical effects were highly enlightening. Few staff members who had developed the previous titles in the Ys series were still at Falcom, so we enjoyed a fairly high degree of freedom in making the new game. I was also still quite young, and we had an excellent development environment, so I worked deep into the night almost every day."

Jun Nagashima, programmer

First released
1995

—

Genre
RPG

—

Developer and publisher
Nihon Falcom

Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!

"*Donkey Kong Country* was an incredibly successful game that benefited from having the amazing 'wow' factor provided by the stunning new graphics technique. And, coincidentally, it was the first game I was fortunate enough to work on. Sequels are hard – especially after a successful first game – but in some ways, they can also be easier as you get to build on all the knowledge from the first game and refine your concepts and techniques, often building a better and more polished game. 'Three-quels' on the other hand are even harder; you've had your initial 'wow' factor, you've built on and refined that for the sequel, so where do you go with the third part?

"For the team, it was essential to find the balance between retaining the familiar – the stuff that fans would expect and want – and then finding ways to add new ideas to keep things fresh. The team also changed a lot for this third instalment; a lot of key members from the original two games moved on to form the team that worked on what was then known as *Project Dream*. Those of us that remained to work on *Donkey Kong Country 3* found ourselves in new lead roles and with an influx of newer staff as the company continued to expand on the back of recent successes.

"The key things we tried to introduce to the formula were mostly to add to the wrapper around the levels, which themselves still strived to retain the classic *Donkey Kong Country* platforming feel, but for the overworld we tried to add in a little more depth to the gameplay, introducing RPG-lite elements with some degree of freedom on the main overworld map. It's still very much a linear game, but I think it had a lot more overlapping and intertwining elements than the previous games that just gave it a feel of its own."

Mark Stevenson, graphic artist

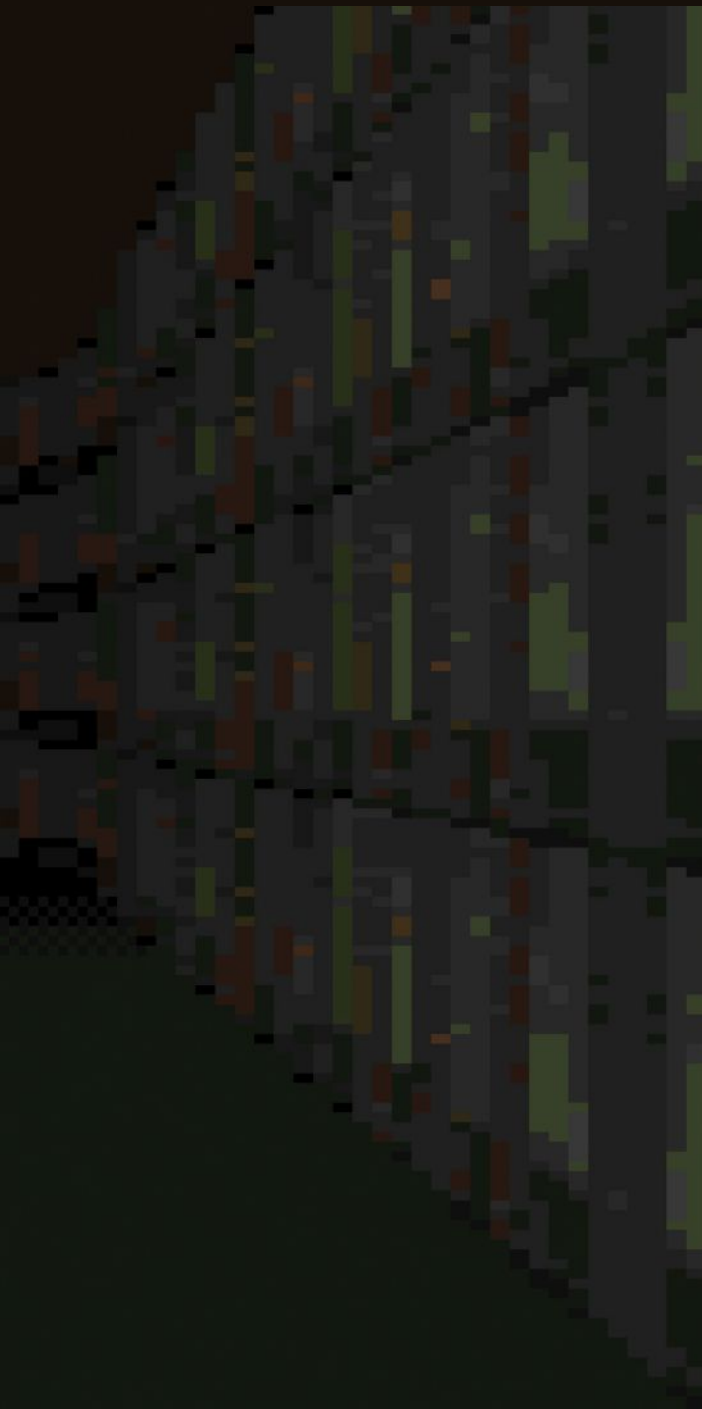**First released** *1996 /* **Genre** *Action platformer /* **Developer** *Rare /* **Publisher** *Nintendo*
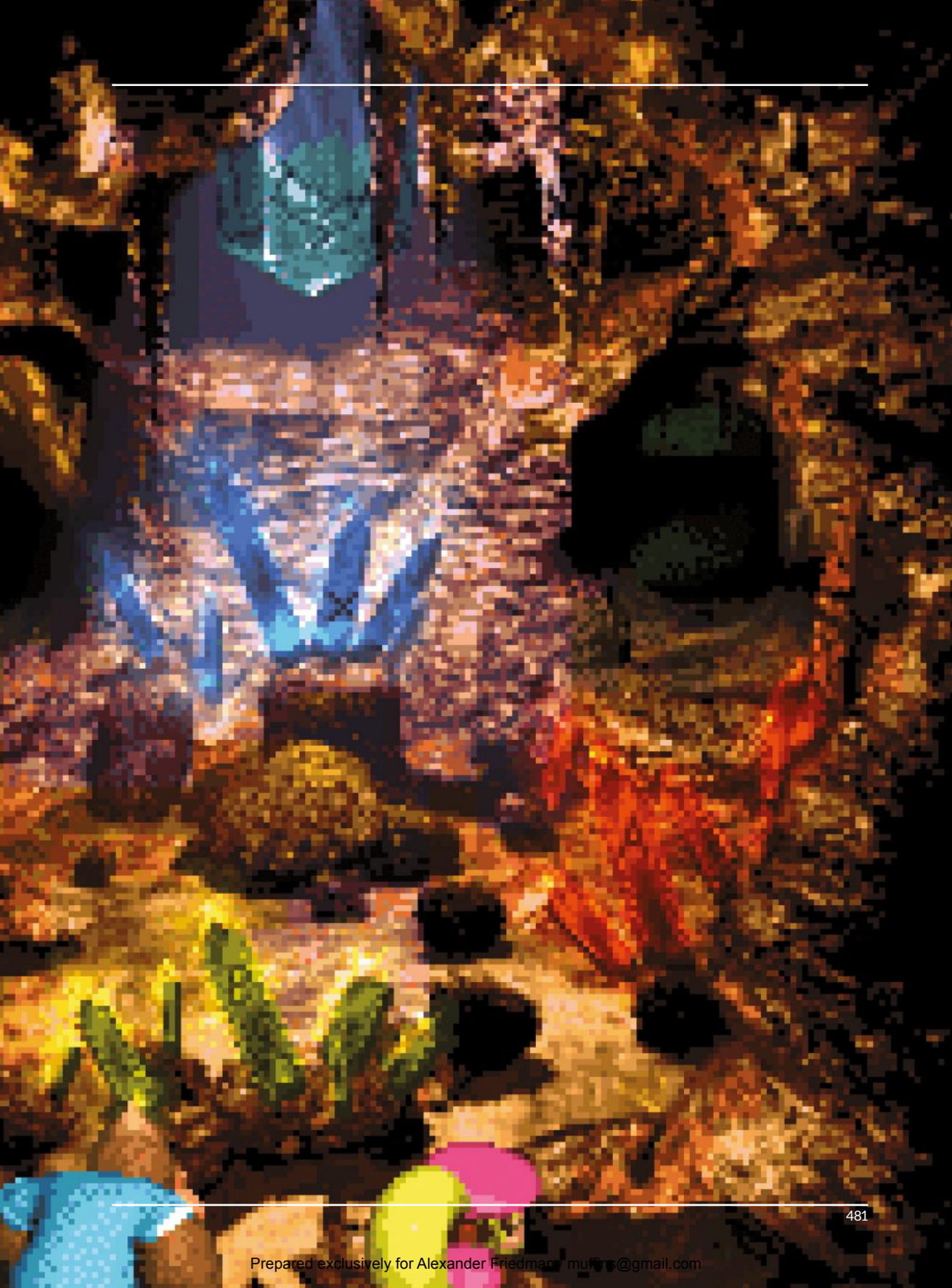
DOOM

"One of the biggest video game surprises of 1995 was the release of *DOOM* on the Super Nintendo. Many felt that the 16-bit console – which was rapidly reaching the end of its lifecycle at that point – simply wasn't capable of running the top-selling PC first-person shooter. However, programmer Randy Linden of Sculptured Software proved them wrong, creating a bespoke custom rendering engine that, with the help of a Super FX 2 chip, ran id Software's highly popular game at a perfectly acceptable rate. It was even capable of hosting multiplayer games via the XBAND modem network.

"Despite the obvious challenges of compacting the game down to fit on a cartridge, Super Nintendo *DOOM* features 22 levels from the PC version, and all the weapons you know and love. It's only when you really examine the game closely that you begin to see some of the clever shortcuts the developer took to make the game work on Nintendo's system. The ceiling and floors aren't texture-mapped, the sound is very much simplified, enemies always face the player, and the screen has a black border to reduce its size and cut down the amount of rendering needed.

"Still, even with those shortcomings, Super Nintendo *DOOM* is entertaining to play, and offers a considerable challenge to those willing to take the plunge."

Julian Rignall, games journalist

First released
1996
—
Genre
First person shooter
—
Developer
id Software
—
Publisher
Williams Entertainment

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

"*DoReMi Fantasy* may not be familiar to too many readers of this book, as it spent its first 12 years of existence as a Japan-only title. But in 2008, the game made its way to the Wii Virtual Console in both North America and Europe, albeit still in Japanese.

"This follow-up to *Milon's Secret Castle* on the NES is a straightforward platformer that's undoubtedly more approachable than its more exploration-focused predecessor. It's also saccharine-sweet in its delivery, kicking off with a simple world, almost to a fault. But the game starts gaining character as the stages increase in diversity. The candy-themed world, for example, has Milon hopping on giant forks, which double as platforms, while dodging swinging knives. A few autoscrolling levels provide an appreciated challenge, and one memorable stage has Milon traversing a ramp-lined mountain as boulders tumble down.

"The negatives are clear in any language, however: not all levels hit creative highs, as *DoReMi* checks off the obligatory ice- and lava-based stages, and some bosses are tuned too hard, such as the doozy of a showdown with the Sun/Moon tag team. The game controls well, though, which is key for any platformer. Provided the whimsical trimmings don't turn you off, *DoReMi Fantasy* is a charming artifact of the hop-and-bop heyday."
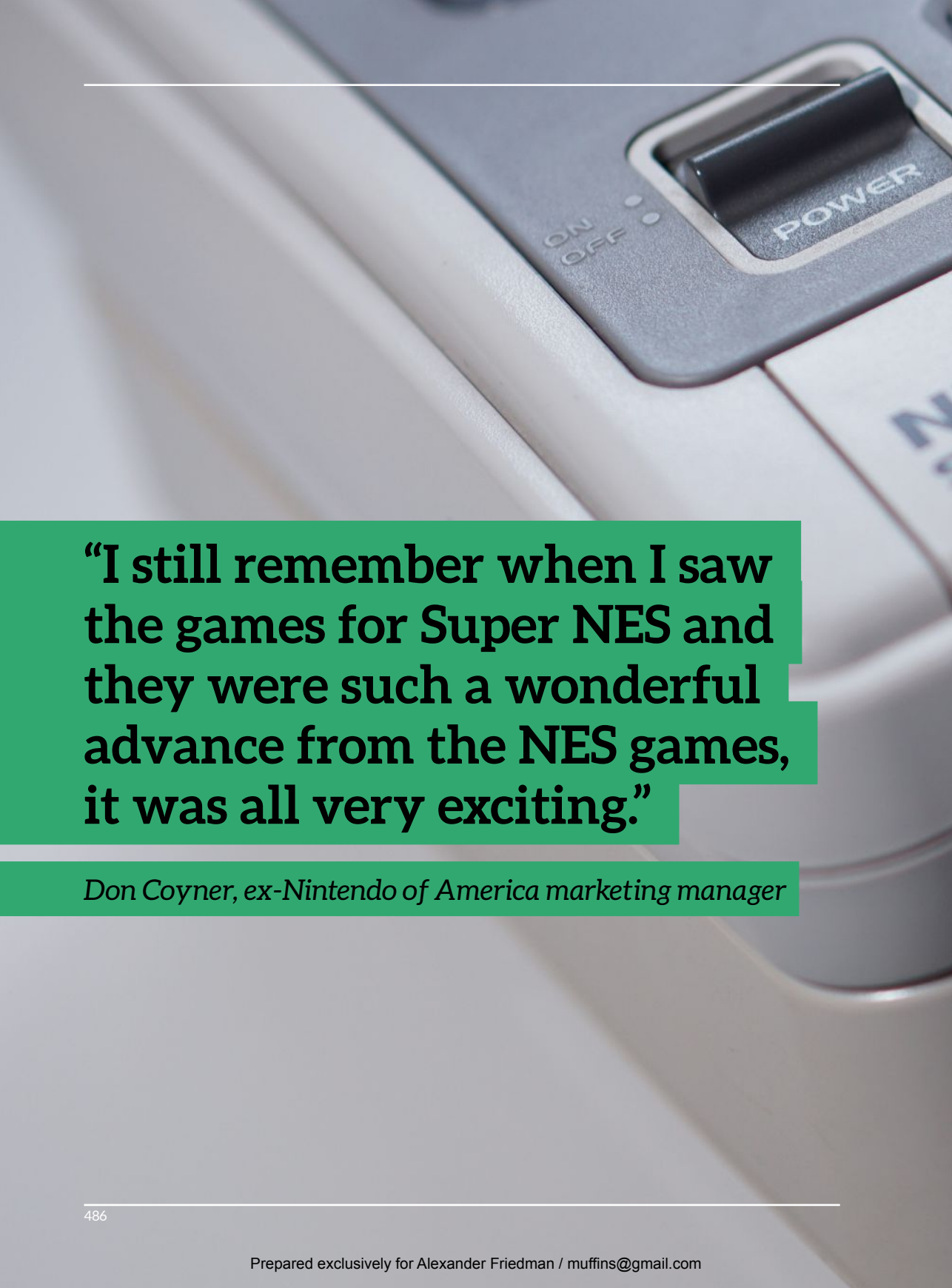
Greg Ford, games journalist

> **"I still remember when I saw the games for Super NES and they were such a wonderful advance from the NES games, it was all very exciting."**
>
> *Don Coyner, ex-Nintendo of America marketing manager*
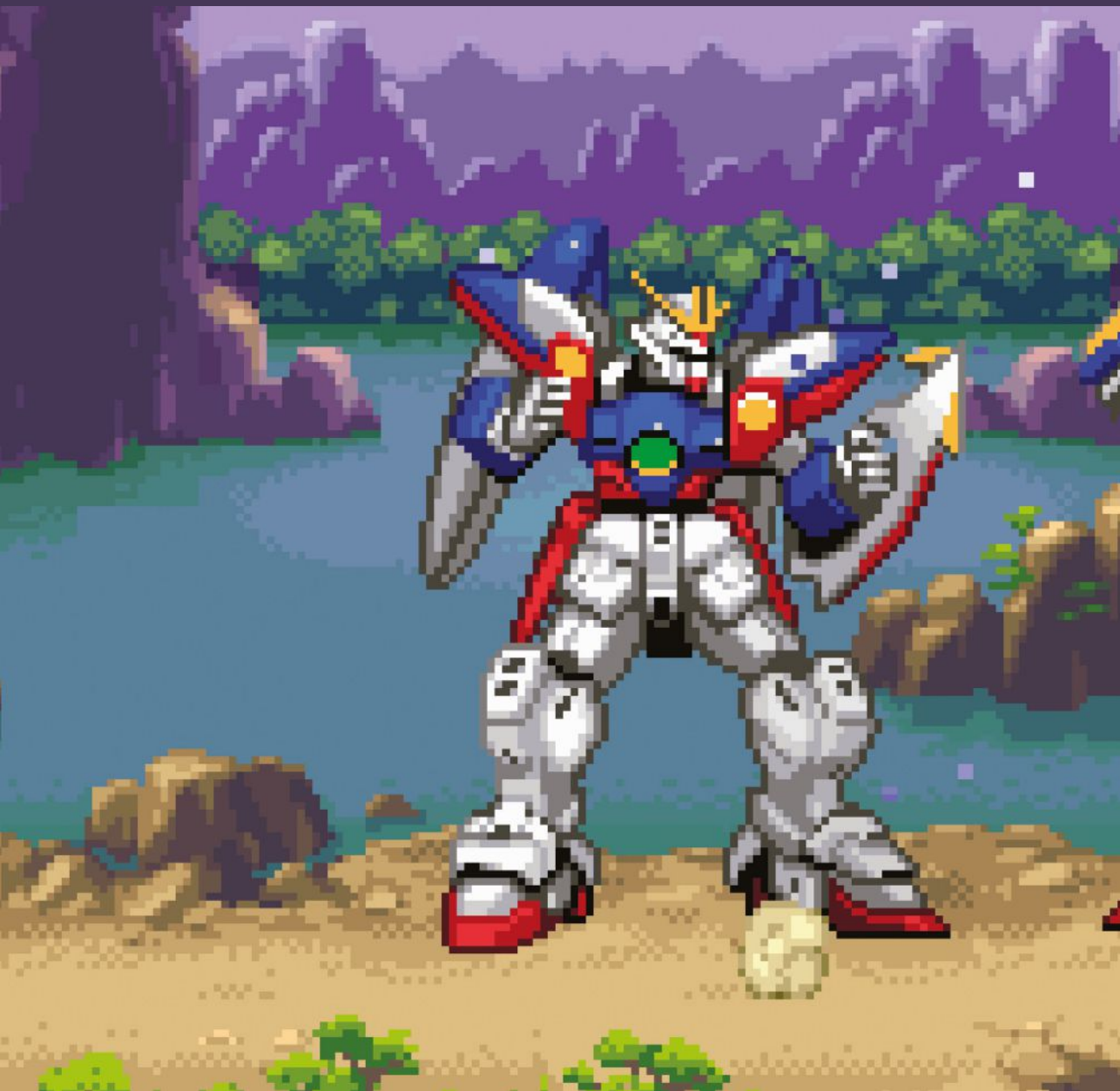
Mobile Suit Gundam Wing: Endless Duel

This Japan-only release takes the characters from the *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing* anime series and transplants them into a *Street Fighter Alpha*-style beat 'em up. There's no real need for any prior familiarity with the TV series, though: this is just a bunch of hulking mechs kicking the crap out of one another.

You can play solo against computer opponents in Story or Trial modes, or engage in one-on-one battles with a friend. There's a roster of nine playable mobile suits and their pilots (plus one unlockable boss character for use in Versus mode), from either the Space Colony Gundams or the Earth's Romefeller Foundation Army. Gameplay follows the usual beat 'em up conventions with punch and kick moves, but adds both mêlée and long-range weapons into the mix along with dash and vertical jumps, making for gameplay that's both tactically deep and explosively brutal.

Developed late in the Super Famicom's lifecycle, *Endless Duel* is technically impressive, with huge Gundam characters and fast and responsive combat. It's also a really attractive title with gorgeous intro screens and backdrops plus lots of clever effects and incidental details. It might not quite top *Street Fighter II*, but this Japan-only release makes a fine addition to any fighting fan's collection.

489

First released
1996

Genre
Action

Developer
HAL Laboratory

Publisher
Nintendo

Kirby Super Star / Hoshi no Kirby Super Deluxe

"Whether he's playing pinball, breaking blocks, popping Puyos, or tilting 'n' tumbling, it seems like Nintendo likes to trot Kirby out whenever it has some random experimental game it wants to try. You'd almost think the little pink puffball wouldn't have time for traditional platformers, the genre in which he started, but he still manages to appear in a few. However he tends to deviate from the norm in that field as well, be it platformers made of clay, stitched out of yarn, or – in *Kirby Super Star*'s case – a game made up of a bunch of little platformers.

"Advertised as '8 Games in One!' on its North American and European boxes, *Super Star* features multiple takes on Kirby's standard gameplay of varying depths and difficulties. Among them are Spring Breeze, a trimmed-down version of *Kirby's Dream Land*, the first title in the series; Dyna Blade, an original platformer that pits Kirby against a giant bird that's terrorising the land; and The Great Cave Offensive, which drops Kirby into a large, maze-like world on a quest for hidden treasures.

"A few smaller sub-games are there to flesh out the package, and although extremely simplistic, these timing-based tests of skill are surprisingly addictive. There's a lot here to enjoy, and an enhanced port, entitled *Kirby Super Star Ultra*, was even released on the Nintendo DS in 2008."

Phil Theobald, games journalist

Lennus II: Fuuin no Shito

"Lennus is actually a satellite of the planet Raiga, and was the setting of the first game. *Lennus II* tells the story of Lennus' opposing satellite, Eltz. The Raigans, as a people, are running out of time – their telomeres, a part of DNA in genes that limits how many times a chromosome can reproduce, are deteriorating. The Raigan people only have about 15 generations left. And then, even if they reproduce, their children will just die. When the people of Raiga learn that the end is near for them, one of the things they do is build these satellites, Lennus and Eltz, to experiment with new races. That explains why there are so many different races on these worlds, and why they're at odds with each other.

"The problem was that *Lennus II*, which was supposed to have a two-year development cycle, ended up taking four years to finish. It was like the entire project was cursed! We knew how hard RPGs were to make, so we turned in a scenario that was actually shorter than the first game, but the new programmer they hired to make it wasn't very good, and the producer wasn't really up to the challenge, so the game fell way behind schedule. But despite all the challenges, they worked hard and managed to get it out the door. Unfortunately, by then the Super Famicom era was at its end, and the game didn't sell at all. So *Lennus III* only ever existed in my head, where I had a strong sense of what the concept would be, and that's where it'll be locked away forever."

Hidenori Shibao, game designer

First released
1996
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer
Copya System
—

Publisher
Asmik Corporation

493

Super Mario RPG
Legend of the Seven Stars

"I remember the day my brother brought home *Super Mario RPG*. He borrowed it from a friend for the weekend and the minute I saw the cartridge my eyes were instantly locked on the label. It was well detailed, colourful and frankly beautiful. As a ten-year-old I was giddy as a school boy. I had no idea that it was going to be filled with so much adventure, humour, memorable characters, amazing music and a combat system that was simple and fun.

"We popped that cartridge in, plopped ourselves down and never looked back. We laughed as Bowser cried falling with his chandelier, we were horrified by Belome eating Mallow, got lost following Geno through the forest maze, beat Boshi in the Mushroom Derby, scaled Booster Tower, defeated a giant cake and saved Peach. In the end we got owned by pirate shark Jonathan Jones and never beat the game, but holy cow did we have fun playing it.

"The term 'RPG' was unknown to me at this time but this planted a seed which grew into a love for RPGs. *Super Mario RPG* was my first love in the RPG world and one that won't ever be forgotten."

Matthew Riddle, guest reviewer

First released
1996
—
Genre
RPG
—
Developer
Square
—
Publisher
Nintendo

Street Fighter Alpha 2 / Street Fighter Zero 2

"The SNES/Super Famicom had its fair share of Street Fighter titles, starting with the masterful *Street Fighter II*. By 1996, however, it was a technical marvel that Nintendo's ageing hardware could run Capcom's latest fighter as well as it did.

"The Alpha series acted as a prequel within the Street Fighter timeline, starring younger versions of mainstays such as Ryu, Ken and Chun-Li, as well as characters originally from *Final Fight* (Guy, Sodom) and the original *Street Fighter* (Adon, Birdie). *Street Fighter Alpha 2* bolstered the roster with *Street Fighter II* favourites Zangief and Dhalsim along with elderly assassin Gen, high-flying commando Rolento, and Shoto schoolgirl Sakura.

"Along with *Star Ocean*, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* was the only other SNES/Super Famicom title to use the S-DD1 chip for graphic decompression with sprite data. Despite this powerful addition, there were visible loading times before a match to load in the audio. This was an admittedly foreign concept for fans of the franchise who grew up with the previous titles.

"Despite technical limitations, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* remained a largely faithful port. It can be seen as a fond send-off to the platform that did right by Capcom's popular franchise."

David Giltinan, games journalist

Mortal Kombat 3

"While working on the arcade version of *Mortal Kombat 3*, we saw the technology shift from 2D to 3D graphics taking place. However, we were hesitant to dive in because of the crude, blocky characters that would've resulted. We made a conscious choice to stick with our 2D digitised look, at least until the technology caught up enough for us to represent the characters as something more than flat, shaded geometric shapes, which we felt were a visual mismatch. However, we did use rendered 3D assets for certain portions of the game; many of our background elements were modelled and rendered. I think the choice to remain 2D also ensured another quality port for the SNES, even with next-generation platforms on the horizon.

"*Mortal Kombat* was born in the arcade, but changes in technology and coin-op industry challenges made it clear, even back then, that the long-term success of the franchise would mean a focus change from coin-op to home console development."

John Tobias, series co-creator

First released
1996
—
Genre
Fighting
—
Developer
Midway
—
Publisher
Williams

498

Harvest Moon /
Bokujō Monogatari

"I grew up in the countryside [in Kyushu, Japan], and as a child I wanted to go outside – to go downtown! I found as I grew up I wanted to leave the countryside behind and go to Tokyo, go to the big city with all its excitement. But when I did go to the city, it wasn't as great as I had originally thought. Sort of a 'the grass is always greener' situation. When I was in the city, I started reminiscing about what was good about where I came from, what made the countryside so special. That's where some of the key concepts for *Harvest Moon* came from.

"Back in 1996, pre-*Farmville* and all that other stuff, to make a farming game was such a stretch. As we tried to bring it over from Japan to the US, a lot of people didn't think it was going to work, especially back in the SNES days with all the platformers and more violent games available. This game was exactly the opposite – it was an orange among apples. But lo and behold, it did find its place, and that's thanks to the fans."

Yasuhiro Wada, producer

First released *1997* / **Genre** *Simulation* / **Developer** *Amccus* / **Publisher** *Natsume*
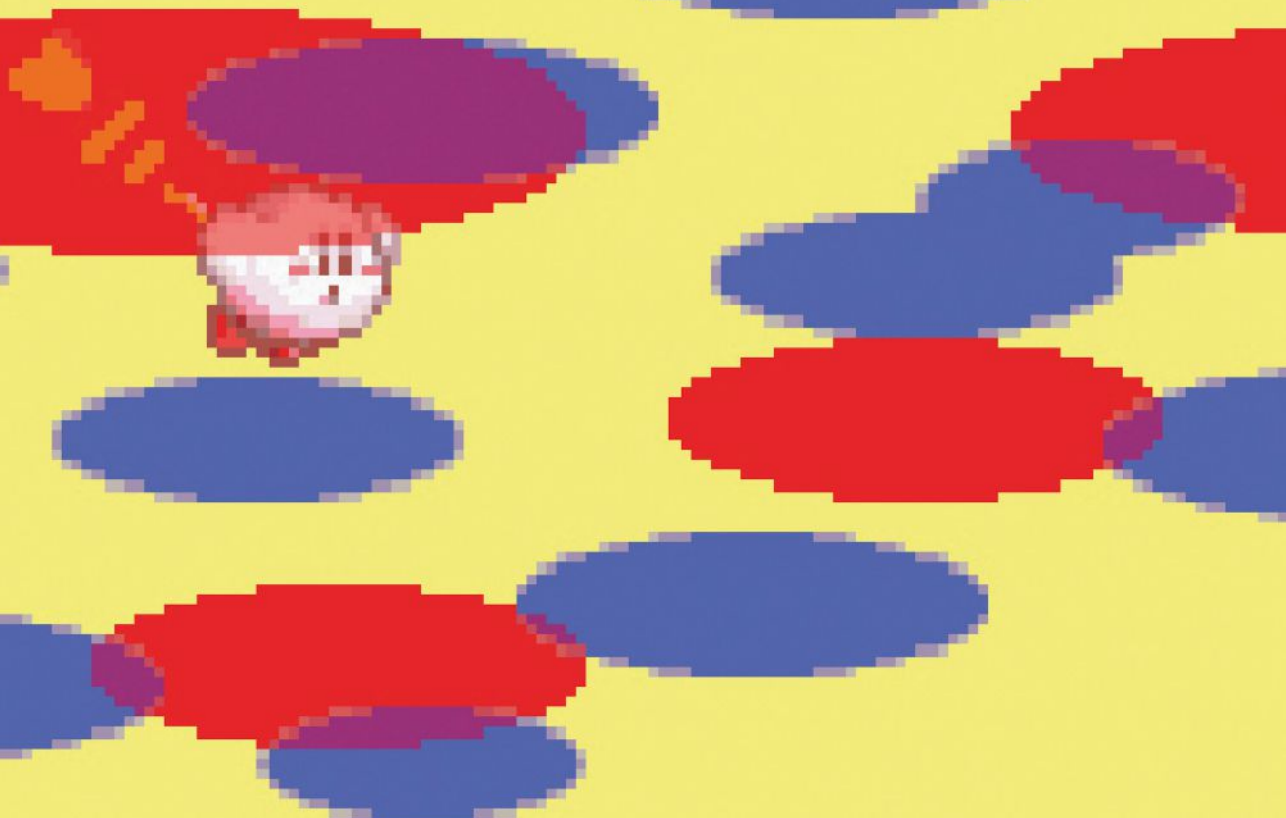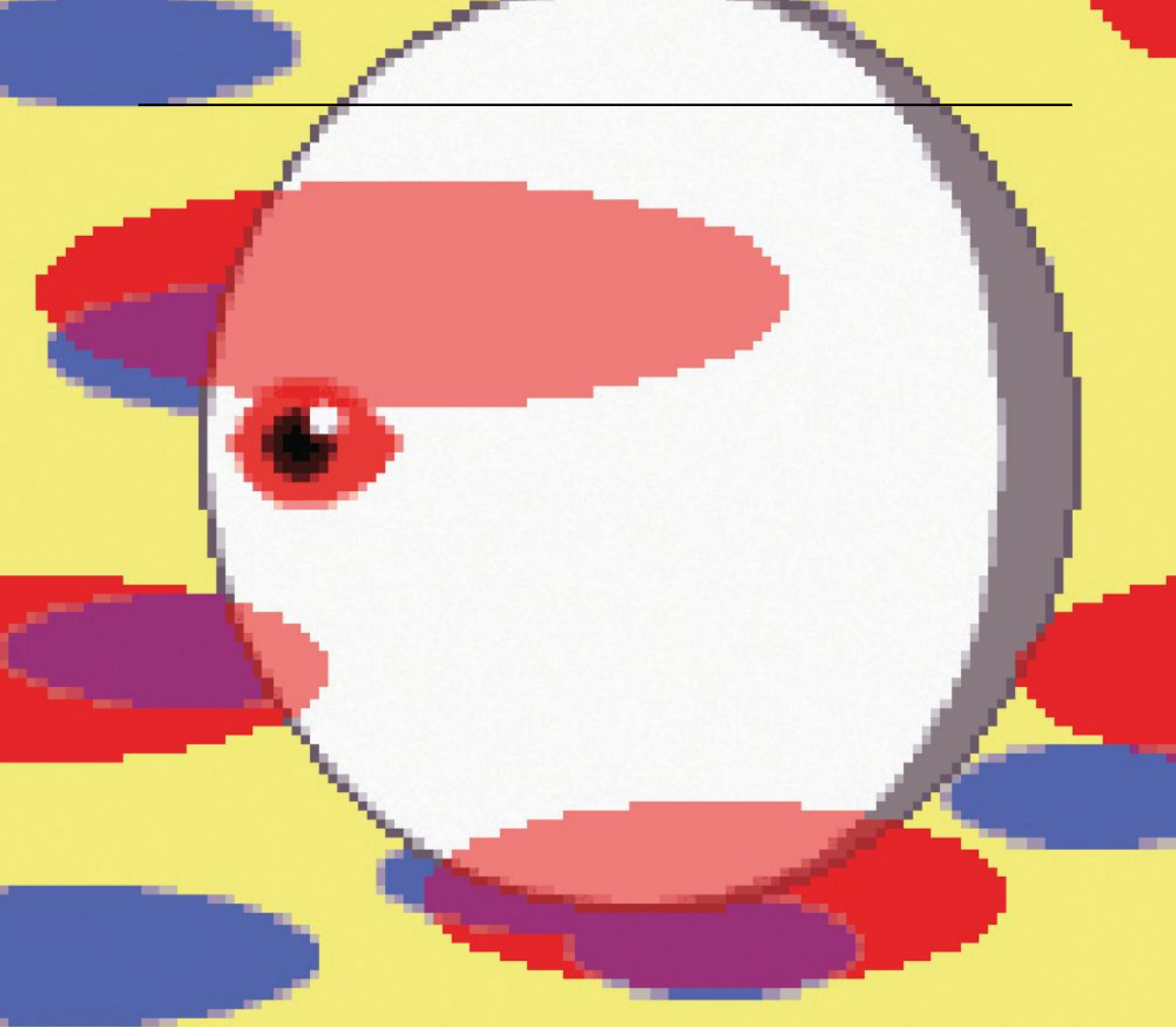
Kirby's Dream Land 3 / Hoshi no Kirby 3

"In this adorable old-school adventure, Kirby sets off alongside a team of equally adorable companions on a quest to protect Dream Land, once again, by locating the Heart Stars that are vital to bringing peace back to the realm. This time, though, Kirby not only has to deal with a possessed King Dedede, but also an ominous dark cloud that has mysteriously enshrouded the Kingdom.

"Veterans of the Kirby franchise will know what to expect, with the cute pink puffball able to run, swim and fly his way across five charming and adorable worlds, all portrayed through a crayon-like aesthetic not dissimilar to *Yoshi's Island.* On top of this, players can also take advantage of Kirby's

trademark versatile ability to suck up enemies and clone their skills. This is further complemented by Kirby's ability to utilise the skills of his companions, and even receive constant support from Gooey the Blob, who is controllable by a second player.

"Sadly, given the fact that it was both the final first-party title for the Super Nintendo in America, and criminally unreleased in PAL regions, many may have missed out on *Kirby's Dream Land 3* the first time around. However, this charming adventure is definitely one title you should go back and revisit, whether you missed it first time around or not."

Sophia Aubrey Drake, games journalist

Rockman & Forte

Released exclusively in Japan in 1998, this spin-off of the Rockman series – more popularly known as Mega Man in the West – was the last in the series to appear on the Super Famicom (its predecessor, *Rockman 8*, went straight to PlayStation and SEGA Saturn). No SNES version was released, but the game was ported to the Game Boy Advance in 2002, where it was known as *Mega Man & Bass*.

Anyone familiar with the series will know what to expect: it's a traditional 2D platformer in which the lead character traverses a succession of rooms and passages, shooting enemies while collecting power-ups and health tokens. The main difference here is that you can choose to play either as Rockman, with his usual 'Buster Shot' charge weapon, or Forte, whose multi-directional rapid fire and double jump make him the go-to character for most of the game.

Rockman & Forte doesn't really move the platform-combat genre forwards in any meaningful way. It's very nicely animated and the backdrops are detailed and colourful, if a little garish at times, but it's very much more of the same: fiendish enemy placement, infuriating boss fights and repeat plays until you know the layout of every hazard on every level. Only hardcore fans of the series need apply.

First released
1998

—

Genre
Action platformer

—

**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom

Fire Emblem: Thracia 776

Fire Emblem is a series of tactical role-playing games that date back to 1990, with *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light* on the original Nintendo Famicom. *Thracia 776* is the fifth game in the franchise and the last to appear on the Super Famicom – indeed, it was one of the very last games released for the system, appearing in 1999, three years after the launch of the N64!

As with previous Fire Emblem entries, you control a band of warriors – knights, archers, swordsmen, axemen and so on. Each stage presents a turn-based battle in which you deploy your forces strategically, pitting strong units against weaker enemies, and ensuring troops don't become isolated or outnumbered. When a character dies in battle, it remains dead for the rest of the game, and the loss of a powerful and much-loved unit is often cause for a restart. Once the winning conditions have been met for that stage, the story progresses to the next battle.

Although similar in structure to previous games, *Thracia 776* raised the stakes with a much higher difficulty level and stages that require a very specific approach to ensure victory. So while it's not a bad entry in the franchise, it's less accessible and more frustrating than its predecessors. You'd probably be better off playing the earlier Fire Emblems before tackling this episode.

First released
1999
—

Genre
RPG
—

Developer
Intelligent Systems
—

Publisher
Nintendo
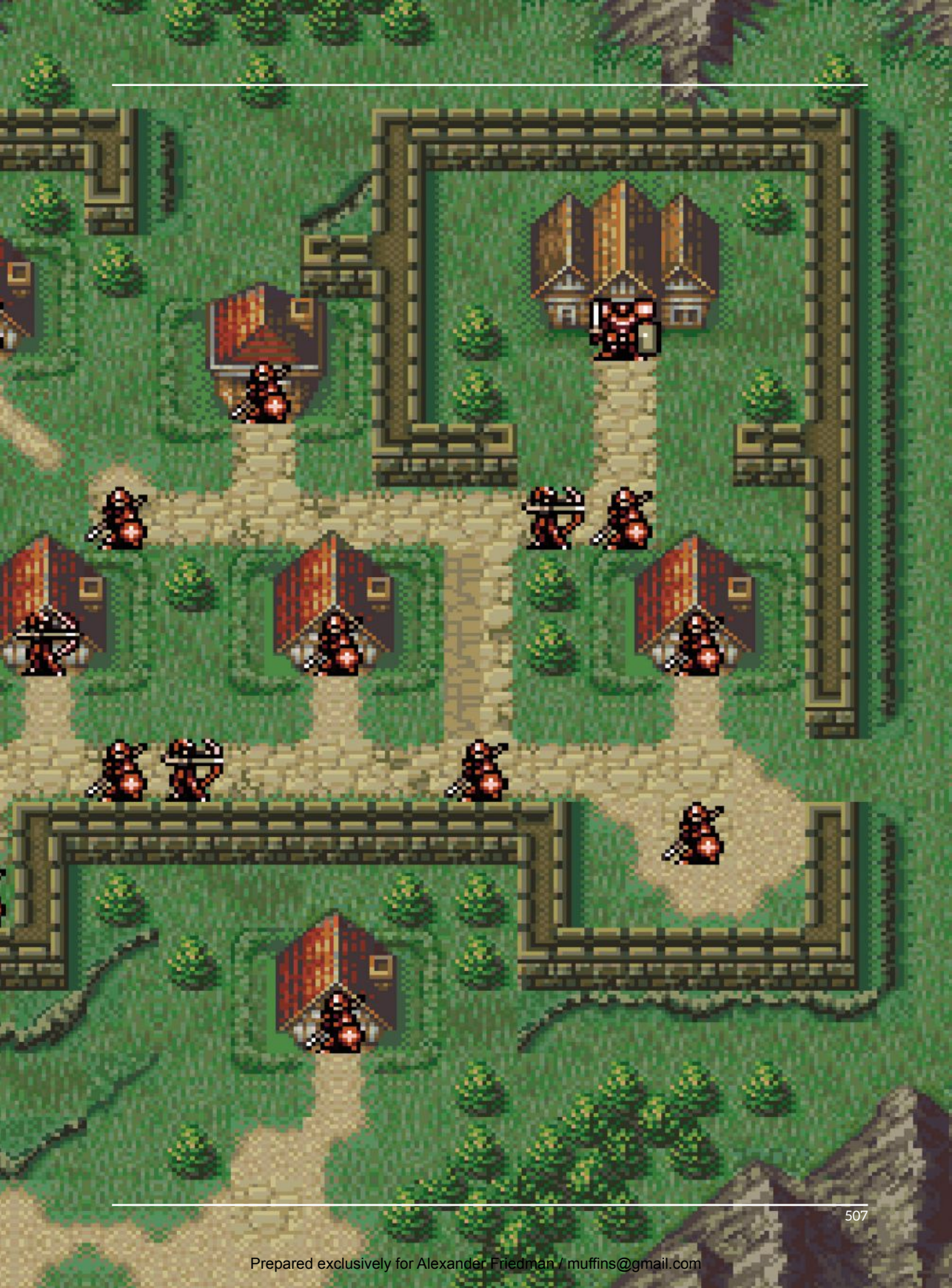
Welcome to the graveyard of unreleased games...

Unreleased games

Game development is a complex task, fraught with pitfalls: initial ideas are over-ambitious, key developers leave the project, budgets are broken, deadlines are missed and, as with games like Star Fox 2, *newly released on the Super NES Classic Edition, the advent of a new generation of hardware makes the title prematurely obsolete. Games are left unfinished and the code gets shelved, either lost over time or, occasionally, to resurface as a scratchy YouTube video or playable ROM. The SNES' vast library is littered with dozens of announced but unreleased titles – here are some potential classics that never made it to store shelves.*

Graveyard of Unreleased Games by Craig Stevenson – *2017*

Star Fox 2

Set to follow in the footsteps of the critically acclaimed *Star Fox*, this sequel was being developed by Nintendo and members of UK studio Argonaut Software. It was more than 95% complete when Nintendo finally decided to pull the plug on the much-anticipated title, over fears that it would be unfavourably compared to the 3D graphics seen on the PlayStation and SEGA Saturn.

In *Star Fox 2*, Andross has returned to the Lylat System in order to launch a revenge-fuelled all-out attack on Corneria. As such, Fox McCloud and the rest of Team Star Fox must once again come together, alongside new recruits Miyu the Lynx and Fay the Dog, in order to stop the impending threat. Miyu and Fay aren't the only new additions though, as *Star Fox 2* extensively expanded on the original by including randomised gameplay elements, unique character abilities, and even a semi-real-time map system.

Back in 1996, Nintendo may have chosen to shift its focus onto the in-house developed *Star Fox 64*, but the story does have a happy ending. Nintendo shocked the gaming world by announcing that *Star Fox 2* would be included in the roster of games on the Super NES Classic Edition console, finally receiving the release it always deserved.

That's not all though, as Nintendo isn't simply releasing the already-established version that's available online; instead it has continued where Argonaut Software left off by completing the last pieces of production. This means players can expect to see an updated intro, new graphics and art, and even brand new text and storyline elements to flesh out Andross' attack on Corneria. There are also gameplay alterations, the most notable of which being an increased difficulty level thanks to ruthless enemy AI, and the lack of a missile lock-on.

Project Dream

"*Project Dream* was intended for SNES for a year, until we realised there was no way we were going to manage it. What we did have running was this little demo which, uncompressed, took up as much data as the whole of the first *Donkey Kong Country*. It featured this kid called Edson with his dog, Dinger, who followed him everywhere. The demo had some very basic combat, and saw Edson wading through a jungle-like swamp and trying to avoid being squished by a huge dinosaur foot.

"For the first few months [graphics director] Kev Bayliss worked on some initial concepts and with the motion capture technology we'd used to create Killer Instinct; he created a great looking demo of a 3D adventurer brandishing a sword. This was really exciting because no one else was really using

motion capture in games at the time. I can't stress enough how much better *Project Dream* on SNES looked than *Donkey Kong Country*; it was a genuine graphical leap.

"While we worked on the SNES version, Tim had a couple of guys looking into running *Dream* on the N64. When we saw what they had achieved, it was clear to everyone that was the way forwards. So sadly *Dream* for the SNES was cancelled. As expected, we eventually moved onto the N64 for a year, and even on that console we always had the sneaking fear that the game was just too ambitious for the hardware; that it just couldn't do what we wanted it to do to make *Project Dream* truly amazing. That's when it gradually evolved into *Banjo-Kazooie*."

Steve Mayles, character designer

Genre *Action platformer* / **Developer** *Rare*

Killer Instinct 2

Rare's *Killer Instinct* is something of a 16-bit cult classic. Adapted from the arcade release, not only did it have a memorable cast of characters and high-end graphics, it also introduced a number of unique elements to the then hugely popular fighting genre. As such, it came as no great surprise when *Killer Instinct 2* debuted in arcades in 1996.

What was a surprise however, was the absence of a Super Nintendo version, despite many within Rare confirming its existence. Much like the arcade release, the game was set to follow on from the aftermath of Black Orchid's victory and Eyedol's subsequent death, an event which accidentally

sets off a time warp that not only transports many of the fighters back in time, but also releases Eyedol's arch-enemy, the Demon Lord Gargos.

Despite the cancellation, *Killer Instinct 2* would still make it to consoles: many will recognise the above plot from *Killer Instinct Gold*, an upgraded version of *Killer Instinct 2* for the Nintendo 64. In fact, it seems this may actually be the reason for the cancellation, with *Killer Instinct* lead designer Chris Tilston confirming that, despite promising development on the Super Nintendo port, the existence of the N64 meant that development moved over to the upgraded *Gold* version.

Genre *Fighting* / **Developer** *Rare*

Socks the Cat Rocks the Hill

"*Socks Rocks the Hill* was a great creative triumph that never saw the light of day. It was a companion to SEGA Genesis' *Socks Rocks the House*: theirs was set inside the White House; ours was set around Washington DC. We were encouraged to be irreverent – and boy, were we. Even while it was being developed, I was asking, 'We can't do that, can we? Wait, we can do that? I can't believe we can do that!' Richard Nixon calling in bombs;

Ted Kennedy in a car on a bridge … it was fair use as it was political satire in game format. The side-scrolling gameplay itself was pretty straightforward. Though we completed the game, it never saw the light of day as the publisher withdrew its US operation before it was launched. I wish I'd kept a copy!"

David Warhol, game designer

Genre *Action platformer* / **Developer** *Realtime Associates*

Rayman

Rayman's limbless escapades may be best known as PlayStation classics. However *Rayman* could just as easily have stood alongside the likes of *Donkey Kong Country* and *Super Mario World*, as another classic platformer for the Super Nintendo. In fact, the title was originally planned for the Super Nintendo CD attachment, which also never saw the light of day.

This revelation came from none other than *Rayman* creator himself Michel Ancel, who discovered a long-lost build of the Super Nintendo version of *Rayman*. The build itself, which is now playable, may not contain much beyond a solitary level devoid of enemies or items, but it does, alongside screenshots and information from Ancel, reveal a somewhat different Rayman to the one we know today. These differences include not only Rayman's appearance and an alternate head-up display, but also a possible two-player co-op mode.

That's not all though, as Ancel even revealed that at the time the Super Nintendo release was being developed, the original plot was also very different. The game was to take place inside a computer, with Rayman being one of the employees and the final boss set to be a computer virus.

Genre *Action platformer* / **Developer** *Michel Ancel*

Mick & Mack Global Gladiators

Originally developed by Virgin Games for the Mega Drive/Genesis, *Mick & Mack Global Gladiators* is an odd sort of game. On the one hand it has a strong environmental message, in which players gain lives and continues for recycling within the game's bonus stages. On the other, it's a McDonalds-themed platform shooter in which the player is assisted by Ronald McDonald in their quest to collect the Golden Arches.

That's not to say that this is a throwaway title. In fact, there's quite a level of pedigree to the development, with the game built on the same engine as that seen in other Virgin titles, such as *Cool Spot* and the Mega Drive/Genesis build of *Aladdin*. This is primarily owing to the fact that the game's development was handled by David Perry's team at Virgin.

Interestingly, despite being the spiritual successor to the earlier McDonald's-themed NES game *M.C. Kids*, *Global Gladiators* was never originally planned for the Super Nintendo. In fact, a Super Nintendo build was never actually seen by the public until nearly a year after the original release at the 1993 CES show. Sadly this would also be the last time the game was seen, despite *Global Gladiators*' appearance on multiple other SEGA platforms as well as the Commodore Amiga.

Genre *Action platformer* / **Developer** *Virgin Games*

Super Shadow of the Beast

Re-releasing video games isn't just a modern concept; there were a fair number even back in the days of the Super Nintendo. These included the likes of *Super Mario All Stars*, *Castlevania: Dracula X*, and very nearly Psygnosis' classic Amiga platformer, *Shadow of the Beast*.

Development of *Super Shadow of the Beast* was undertaken by a company known as IGS, rather than the original developer and creator of *Wipeout*, Psygnosis. Nevertheless, it was once again set to tell the story of Aarbron's corruption by the evil beast Lord Maletoth, followed by his arduous and battle-heavy quest for revenge. Sadly though, while the game would go on to appear on a variety of

other platforms, including the Mega Drive, Atari Lynx and even recently the PlayStation 4, the Super Nintendo version never saw the light of day.

This doesn't mean its development was a secret though, as the title was featured at both trade shows and in magazines, with Nintendo Power commenting on the title's superiority over other versions upon its appearance at the 1992 CES convention. More surprisingly, it seems that *Super Shadow of the Beast* was actually in a near-complete state upon its cancellation. So much so, that playable versions of the title can be found widely available online today.

Genre *Action* / **Developer** *IGS*