ULTIMATE Nintendo®

GUIDE TO THE SNES LIBRARY 1991 - 1998



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Thanks and Acknowledgements

Thanks to following:

The contributors, writers, and Jirard Khalil for the foreword.

Asheton Phinney for editing assistance.

Oliver Lee Arce and Dominique Arce for cover artwork.

Yoshi Vu for cart images, hardware images, and additional cover artwork.

Some console and accessory photos courtesy of Evan Amos.

Websites like MobyGames (mobygames.com), Giant Bomb (giantbomb.com), and NintendoAge (nintendoage.com) for data.

Univision Communications for permission to reproduce Chris Kohler's article.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those fans of retro video games, be it Atari, Nintendo, PC, Sega, or any others. Through your interest, discussion, and playing of these games, you are helping to keep these classics alive for future generations of video game players to learn about and enjoy.

I also want to dedicate this book to all those who helped support me through the arduous process of writing, editing, and compiling this tome.

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ISBN: 978-0-9973283-2-5
Printed in PRC

Version 1.0 (First Printing)



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Daniel Greenberg (@winterion) is a professor of Computer Game Design at George Mason University researching game appreciation and giving academic lectures at various game conventions across the US. He is also a hockey player, root beer aficionado, and founder of Winterion Game Studios, which produces the web series IONGAMING: youtube.com/winteriongamestudios

Peter Skerritt began playing video games back in 1976 at the age of 4 and hasn't stopped since. Playing *Hardball!* and *4th & Inches* on his Commodore 64 in the late 1980s sparked an interest in sports video games which continues today. He also enjoys pinball and arcade games.

Mike Vito's goal in life is to play every video game known to man. His wife and daughter constantly try to convince him that it's not possible, but he loves games too much to give up so easily. When he's not playing games, he's writing about them. You can find more of his work at HeyPoorPlayer.com.

Daniel Anderson spends his time working a grindy day job, tending to a pair of ridiculous cats, and fighting his Amazon.com addiction. He hopes to one day be a novelist but finds reviewing terrible SNES games an even greater calling. (Not really.) He also hosts a modest podcast - *The Daily Daze* at podomatic.com.

Dagan Moriarty really wanted to pilot an X-Wing and/or Voltron when he grew up. But alas, he had to settle for his backup career as an animator working in television. He loves his amazing family and awesome friends, and he's not above using flattering adjectives in return for gifts. He is co-host of the retro-fueled *KnockBack Podcast*.

Karen Niemla is of the "Oregon Trail Generation" and enjoys retro consoles and computers, PC gaming, web design, drawing, and writing. For 12 years she's been a librarian and is currently a Reference and Research Librarian at Mercyhurst University. She collects any retro games that interest her, particularly Atari 8-bit.

Jim Evans still plays terrible games so others don't have to. He is compiling 8 and 16-bit retro video game music into podcast episodes on YouTube called *The Retro Sound Test*. He can also be found talking gaming nonsense on Instagram @super_jimtendo.

Alli Flanagan grew up in the leafy suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. After spending the first few years of her life mastering the ability to use her thumbs, she grabbed a controller and the rest is history. Alli can be found fighting monsters, leaping through time, and exploring the galaxy almost every day of the week.

Foreword

by Jirard Khalil

After the major success of the Nintendo Entertainment System, when rumors of a console sequel began to swirl, everyone was waiting with bated breath. How do you even begin to design a follow-up to the machine that spearheaded the resurgence and rebirth of the video game industry in North America? And yet, when the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Super Famicom in Japan) was finally released worldwide, the love and support for that little gray box was evident from the very first moments. It didn't matter what came before, or if the system launched with a limited library alongside *Super Mario World*, or if there was a console war with Sega and its formidable Genesis looming on the horizon. The SNES, with its iconic controller design and unique audiovisual aesthetic that has persisted to this day, laid the groundwork for every console to come after.

Perhaps even more important to the SNES legacy is that the games themselves still regularly top "best of all time" lists. The birth of the Mega Man X franchise, the ambitious refresh of *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, overwhelmingly robust and story-rich JRPGs such as *Final Fantasy III* (*VI*) and *Chrono Trigger*, the mind-blowing 3D graphics of the Donkey Kong Country franchise – the SNES had it all. With the added legitimacy of the now well-established video game market and better creative tools this new console made available, it felt like true masterpieces were appearing on the platform at a higher rate. It probably even jump-started the idea of becoming a game designer as a realistic possibility for many in the West. That's why when you listen to interviews or podcasts from game developers of today, be they the smallest indie or the biggest AAA, they often go on and on about their childhood SNES. It started something.

You hold in your hands the perfect snapshot of an entire era of gaming. Considering the SNES library as a whole, you can see just by looking at the titles how the '90s advertising machine brought gaming to the forefront of mainstream culture: *Contra III: The Alien Wars*. *Street Fighter II*. *Super Castlevania IV*. Remember when you knew kids who had to be *either* a Sega kid *or* a Nintendo kid? And how many of you dreamed of being on the game show *Nick Arcade* just to show everyone the right way to play *ActRaiser*? I know I did. The SNES could make niche, nerdy things into household names. For the first time for many, video games were totally inseparable from what it meant to be a kid, and now, sitting here almost 30 years later, I find them inseparable from what it means to be an adult, too.

Like vinyl records on a vintage turntable, when it comes to the SNES, there's nothing like the real thing. The pure magic this console created is undeniable and universal. Its legacy is enormous, and with it comes millions of memories created by people everywhere and bound together by a little grey box and wired controllers. So today, as you open up this guide book and reflect upon all the games you've played or wished to have played over the years, I hope that there is something in here to remind you why the SNES is essential.

Jirard Khalil is known for his YouTube show The Completionist, where he completes one game a week and has been doing so for almost a decade. You can find his work on his YouTube channel That One Video Gamer.



This is the original North American Super NES cartridge design, which was produced from 1991 until Spring 1993.



The Super NES games released in PAL territories like Europe and Australia used the same cartridge shape as the Super Famicom games in Japan.



North American Games released in late Spring/early Summer 1993 and forward utilized this updated cartridge shape.



Key to this Guide



Each entry in the main SNES game guide section consists of those game carts commercially released in North America and Europe between 1991-1999. Promotional or special carts, such as *Miracle Piano* or *Donkey Kong Country Competition Cartridge*, can be found in separate sections.

Each individual game listing contains the following information:

Game Title – The name of the game.

Genre – The classification or type of game, for example a platformer, racing, or a sports title. Many games span multiple genres or are a combination of two.

Release Date – The approximate date the game first became commercially available in North America or in Europe.

Region – The region the game was released in: NA (North America) and/or PAL (European PAL territories).

Developer – The company responsible for the creation and programming of a game.

Ported by – In the case of a game originally created for the arcade, computer, or another game console, this is the company responsible for programming/translating it to the SNES, if different from the original developer.

Publisher – The company responsible for financing the development, advertising/marketing, and release of a game. A publisher may develop a game internally with their own team, but often a publisher will hire another company to handle development.

Players – The number of players the game is designed for. By default it will denote a multiplayer game with alternating turns; however "(simultaneous)" denotes a game that can be played or controlled by more than one player at the same time.

Special Features – Game attributes out of the ordinary, such as being able to save game progress via battery backup, being able to save and continue via password, optional edit mode, and/or peripheral support for the SNES Mouse, Super Scope, Justifier, etc.

Availability – The prevalence and relative popularity of a game during the lifespan of the SNES, ranging from very common to extremely rare. Note: This does not necessarily relate to the availability of the game in modern times.

Star Rating – The reviewer's overall appraisal of the game, pertaining to its quality relative to other similar games in the genre, related games in the SNES library, and other factors.

☆ – **Poor**: No bright spots at all, no fun to be had, barely playable.
☆ – **Very Bad** (little merit): A very troubled game that's still playable with almost no fun factor.
☆☆ – **Bad** (some merit): A game with problems, but is still playable and might have bright spots.
☆☆ – **Below Average**: More problems than the average game.
☆☆☆ – **Average**: Run of the mill, could be fun, but issues hold this back from being a stand-out.
☆☆☆ – **Above Average**: An enjoyable game with more positive attributes than negative.
☆☆☆☆ – **Good**: An enjoyable game with some slightly negative attributes.
☆☆☆☆ – **Very Good**: An very fun and enjoyable game with a few flaws/setbacks.
☆☆☆☆☆ – **Excellent**: An outstanding game with very few minor flaws.
☆☆☆☆☆ – **Classic**: Closest to perfection you'll find in a game in both concept and execution.

3 Ninjas Kick Back

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★




In this action-platformer based upon the sequel to the (hit?) film, three young ninja brothers set out to retrieve a magical dagger from the evil Koga. Each selectable character must take down ninjas, thug Grungers, bats, fire-breathing stone heads, and more by using a katana (Colt), a staff (Rocky), or sais (Tum Tum). The brothers all function similarly, aside from differences in their heights and life-draining special attacks. Their movements and accompanying animations are very smooth as they swing and hand-walk on ropes, hang on and jump off ledges, crawl, etc. Their ability to attack from any position, even while on ladders, is particularly nice, and jump kicks, an upwards weapon spin attack, and a dubious block/parry move are also at their disposal. Pickups are numerous and include a limited projectile attack, screen-clearing magic, tokens, health replenishment, and two kinds of collectible bombs. Three types of stages keep matters engaging, and the level design is somewhat diverse, with traversing horizontally or vertically in interesting ways a common occurrence. However, an abundance of hazards, such as spikes, boulders, and flames, can get annoying. There's a bit of humor sprinkled in, conveyed through some background characters, a nice ledge-balancing animation, and funny-looking bosses, such as a gigantic nurse. Decent cutscenes move the story along, and solid stages, such as a rainy dojo or a hospital with destructible beds, set the mood, but the music is touch and go, with an obnoxious rock stage intro. What hurts here is that a much-needed password save is only available on the Easy setting, and the two-player mode is mostly useless. The experience also suffers from not being able to continue if all lives are lost on the final boss/stage, forcing a restart from the beginning.




Reflections: I'm guessing that this game's story is somewhat faithful to its source material, but being that the *3 Ninjas Kick Back* movie has a reputation barely above dirt, it's doubtful I'll ever watch it to be sure. If I wasn't interested in child ninjas when I was a child, I'm definitely not going to catch this on HBO any time soon. In the game, there's a somewhat disturbing voice sample of a boy (Tum Tum?) saying "Let's murderlize 'em!" when you select your character, but when they die, their grunt sounds like a man's. Hardened ninja combat will grow a kid up real quickly, I tell ya. – PC

The 7th Saga

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Produce!
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★




King Lemele feels an evil growing upon the planet Ticondera, so he trains seven apprentices to seek the seven runes that will save the world in this RPG. You control your choice of one of these characters, such as an elven sorceress, a demon, or a robot fighter. While exploring dozens of towns in a top-down perspective, you encounter the other six adventurers under various circumstances, often to team up or battle one-on-one. If they defeat you, they take your hard-earned runes that each offer special spells to their wielder. To hunt them down and retrieve what's yours, use the crystal ball in the screen's upper left. It indicates where points of interest (monsters, towns, runes, etc.) are in relation to you. For combat, the camera goes behind your character, and you select commands one at a time. Rather than making your choices before each turn, individual actions are carried out directly, so there's no more hoping that a health potion goes through before another attack! Ticondera is filled with locations to explore and information to discover about the mystical runes. There are numerous quests as well as many optional adventures within the story. What missions are available and how you approach them can depend on who your character is. This makes each playthrough a new experience, although in all circumstances, you need to grind levels often for better stats. If this doesn't scare you, you'll find pleasant music over an interesting story with an array of fantastical characters.





Reflections: This game is tough, and there is so much grinding. I'm talking *Dragon Warrior* amounts of battles. When you fight an apprentice, they are automatically set to your level, so gaining experience won't even help. You're only required to fight another character twice, so this affects just a small portion of the boss battles. While I enjoyed the music as a whole, I felt split on the graphics. The towns are well designed and give a sense of being more expansive than what you can actually explore, but the world map is drab, with a limited color palette and tileset (although I did enjoy the first time Mode 7 kicked in for an overworld encounter). *The 7th Saga* isn't a good introduction to RPGs, but if you can make it through and want more after playing as each character, there's always the next game in that universe, *Brain Lord*! – KY

90 Minutes European Prime Goal

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Players compete for glory as one of 14 international teams in this angled, horizontal soccer sim. League Championship, Cup Championship, and Tournament modes are on offer along with All-Star, which takes players from different teams to compete against each other in a league. The "You're a Hero" option allows the player to randomize a new athlete, train him, and insert him into an existing team. There is an arcade feel in the whole presentation, as the sprites are colorful and chunky, and the sounds are punchy. When the ball meets the net, the commentator screams "GOAL," which flashes across the screen in huge letters while the crowd erupts like a Brazilian carnival. A cutaway to the team celebrations allows the player to press different buttons to make the team do a variety of animations, adding a little extra fun. The controls are quick and responsive, and pulling off the various tricks and dives is easy to do. Scoring a goal feels exciting, as does clearing the ball from the defensive lines. The heads-up display (HUD), which shows the score and player names, does become intrusive because it takes up a third of the screen, but the top part can be switched off. An absolute hidden gem and a must for soccer fans.





Reflections: This game is a massive nod to *International Superstar Soccer*, as everything from the player colors to some of the controls to even the little X that appears on the screen to show where the ball will land is the same. This is no bad thing, though, as the game has its own identity that's a joy to play. You can immediately tell that this is a Japanese game from its little details, such as the character animations during the "You're a Hero" training section. The only thing the experience is missing is a minimap to show where teammates are on the pitch. Because the camera is quite zoomed in, it can be irksome to find players upfield, and the HUD is basically useless anyway, so it would have been a welcome addition. A distinct lack of real player names may also put some off, but out of the plethora of soccer games on the system, this is by far one of the more enjoyable ones. – JE

A.S.P. Air Strike Patrol

Desert Fighter (EU)

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Opus
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







In this isometric shooter, the player pilots the gun-toting F-15 Strike Eagle or the A-10 Thunderbolt II Tank Buster bomber in an attempt to halt the threat of the Zarak forces in the Middle East. During sorties, the player must remove designated targets, such as radars, scud missiles, and oil factories, all while dodging and engaging enemies that include fighter jets, anti-aircraft missiles, and tanks. The unique gameplay twist is that the player only has a set amount of in-game hours to complete each mission; leaving the sortie area to return to base uses up time but refuels and rearms the jets, so planning and strategy are key to success. Additionally, the two jets have different armaments, so experimenting with using a limited supply of lock-on missiles for precision targets or carpet-bombing multiple foes with reckless abandon can make a difference in achieving the needed quota of mission targets – destroying a high percentage of them results in a better grade and mission debriefing. A selectable map screen assists in choosing one of eight available areas and in finding targets, but some involve the player exploring each site to find the objectives while having dogfights and tensely weaving through enemy fire. Once its daunting first impression wears off, this is an entertaining title with presentation that matches the gameplay in spades.





Reflections: If you feel the need, the need for speed, then this game truly offers it. I found that playing as the green bomber jet made the target objectives easier to take out, and it was also the most maneuverable plane to use while dodging swaths of enemy fire. In missions where the target isn't on the map, you can explore with the fast-paced F-15 to cover more ground, then return to the hangar to pick the bomber up and finish the job. The in-game time frame never really gets in the way, and each time you return to base you can check the mission progress to plan accordingly for the next venture out. People generally laud the Desert Strike series as some of the best vehicular combat games of this type, but if you excuse the rubbish name (the PAL one is much better), then there is an excellent title here that is an absolute must for action fans who just want to blow stuff up. – JE

AAAHH!!! Real Monsters (Nickelodeon)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★




It's a scare-tacular time for Ickis, Krumm, and Oblina in this action-platformer as you help them complete the midterm exam at their monster school. Each of the sections involves finding a particular piece of junk (and sometimes scaring a specific person) as presented by the headmaster, the Gromble. Assignments start in the depths of the city dump and move to a human location, including a post office. Your goal is to navigate platforms, hazards, and stage elements (such as switches) to meet the requirements and reach the exit. You control all three monsters simultaneously, with the lead character indicated at the top, and you're able to switch who leads with L/R. The creatures have their own attributes as well as a special skill; for instance, Krumm has a shorter jump and the ability to scout ahead visually. Within the stages, you collect more than the assigned item because there are pickups, such as insects that add a point of health to the heart at the top. The stages are long and maze-like, but thankfully, there are checkpoints in the form of spinning yellow arrows that point toward the goal after activation. The game is mostly straightforward in how you need to play, but the various hazards (such as spikes) and enemies (such as rats) often appear without warning, sometimes too quickly to even throw junk at them. Additionally, there are stages where you must blindly fall into the unknown, frequently causing you damage. The controls are frustrating since you can't swap characters unless they are standing still, and you can't use a special ability unless the monsters are all together. This title comes close to being interesting but is frustrating enough to lose most of its fun factor.





Reflections: Growing up watching Nickelodeon, I was excited to see what developers were able to do with this property. The manual keeps up the humor of the cartoon, but levity is lacking from the game itself. This is all the more unforgivable given that the gameplay is also deficient. It's the required conditions for special abilities and the enemies appearing out of the ground and walls that detract from the experience. Aren't *you* the one who's supposed to be jumping out and catching others off guard? Despite my disappointment with this title, I encourage Nickelodeon to create games from other '90s cartoons. Who else wants to see a visual novel version of *Doug*? – KY

ABC Monday Night Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Data East, Kuusoukagaku
Publisher: Data East
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★



This American football game storms out of the gate with a strong presentation based on *Monday Night Football*, a long-running popular weekly broadcast that's been on the air since 1970. The iconic helmet-crashing intro sequence is here, as well as voice clips from announcers Frank Gifford and Keith Jackson. While the presentation is great, the underlying football game is a different story. Play calling on offense and defense is limited to just four different plays, which can only be changed either before the game or at halftime. A fifth play, called Power, is less an actual football formation than a cutscene during which the player works to press the B button faster than the opponent to score a quick touchdown. Otherwise, the offense feels too slow, with minimal sense of speed on the field as the action takes place in a traditional vertical perspective. Hammering on the B button to gain momentum makes little difference. The hit detection is poor, with would-be tacklers stopping running backs cold without even touching them. Wide receivers inexplicably drop passes far too frequently, even when there aren't any defenders in sight. When receivers do catch the ball, however, big gains are often assured. Defensively, the game fares a bit better. It's easy to cycle between controlled players using the A button, but this doesn't always cycle to the player closest to the ball, and hit detection for tackles is inconsistent at best. The ability to create and customize teams is nice, and data is saved via battery backup. This, along with season play and stat tracking, does offer some replay value, but it's doubtful that anyone would want to play more than a game or two.





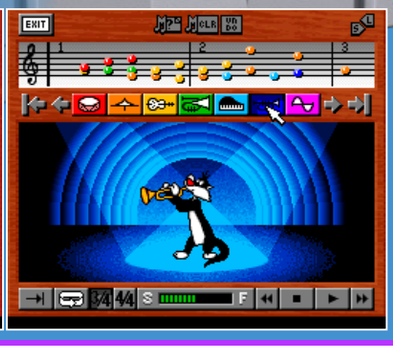
Reflections: During my gameplay sessions for this review, I was surprised to see on the statistics screen that Ken and Guile were the quarterbacks for Green Bay and Washington, respectively. While I'm sure that the previous owner of the cartridge I was playing made these funny roster changes, it did get me to thinking about Ken and Guile tossing footballs around to the other World Warriors in between Street Fighter matches. This doesn't have much to do with the game, of course, but that's for the best. When it comes to *ABC Monday Night Football*, take the advice of Frank Gifford, who utters this line at least five times per game: "Forget it!" – PS

ACME Animation Factory

Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







ACME, purveyor of fine do-it-yourself kits trusted by hapless coyotes since 1949, lends its name to an art, animation, and song composition program that *won't* see you crushed under a boulder – it might just squash your creative spirit a little. The bludgeoning begins with obnoxious background music and sound effects. Mercifully, you can mute these, and although you'll no longer hear the main menu's classic cartoon character sound bites, it's really for the best. Speaking of iconic Tunes, Bugs Bunny's Music Hall features a selection of seven Looneys playing instruments. You can arrange Sylvester's trumpet toots, Taz's bongo beats, and other noises to create harmonies, but the scale is so minuscule (to accommodate useless looping animations) that correctly placing notes and chords is a chore. Fortunately, erasing is easy – the function is mapped to a dedicated mouse/controller button. Unfortunately, there's only one eraser size for the Drawing Board – *big* – so it's better to use pencils to fix mistakes, and both these and spray cans come in a generous array of eight widths and 15 hues. You can even sacrifice shades in the lineup to formulate custom colors, though doing so may alter some of the 16 editable patterns. Solid and outlined geometric shape makers help with original drawings and animations, but a bevy of prefabricated backdrops and characters cry out for coloring in. Though it's fun to paint Daffy's dandified duds or Marvin's Martian regalia the first time, each of their animatable frames must be tinted individually, which becomes tiresome. Still, this tedium is preferable to the Game Arcade's practically unwinnable memory mini-challenge. Overall, this title has good aspects, including the ability to save songs, art, and animation separately, but flaws in the music, control, and presentation might toon you out.





Reflections: It doesn't bode well when the first voice sample played is Porky Pig's signature sign-off: "That's all, folks!" It seems to suggest that either the game is over before it has begun or that the options on the menu it accompanies are paltry. Neither implication is true, and there are innovations to admire here – the octet of line weights, eraser button, and Color Selector Machine are great ideas. Sadly, so much else about this game feels heavy-handed (including the overeager application of the Looney Tunes license) to the point that it stifles its essential purpose – fostering an effective environment for self-expression. – AP

ActRaiser

Genre: Action-Platformer, Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Quintet
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







A world lies in chaos as monsters under the command of the demon Tanzra have taken control. After a long slumber, the Master awakens in his Sky Palace to help rebuild civilization and drive off Tanzra and his six Guardians. This godly quest uniquely combines action-platforming with simulation play to create a delightful experience. From the palace overlooking the world, players communicate with the Master's assistant, Angel. Here, the game can be saved and various entries viewed, such as the status of the Master and towns or items and magic obtained. The player can also travel around and visit six initially uninhabited lands. Each of these areas begins with Act I, an action-platforming section where the player controls a statue animated by the spirit of the Master. The Master is thus equipped with a sword he can swing while standing, crouching, and jumping to vanquish all manner of monsters, including trolls, ogres, skeleton warriors, and flying creatures. The Master must survive while traversing stages with pits, spikes, moving platforms, and other obstacles. These gameplay mechanics are standard, but the controls are smooth and the challenge is demanding yet not overwhelming. After facing and defeating that stage's Guardian (often based on a character/creature from world religions or ancient mythology), the top-down simulation mode for that location begins.





Players control the cherubic Angel and communicate with town leaders, who relate what is needed to develop the town and warn of issues that may arise. The land is made habitable via the use of miracles (acts of nature), such as lightning to clear rocks/trees, rain to restore dried fields, and sunlight to melt ice. Players can direct which way the people build, and after timed turns, more citizens expand the town by erecting homes and planting crops. In the meantime, Angel uses a bow and arrow to eliminate flying bats, dragons, and demons that try to destroy buildings and carry people away. After being guided to build over and seal monsters' lairs, the people usually offer the Master a gift, such as new technology, a new magic spell, or magic points for the action mode. When the town's population has increased enough, the founders alert the Master of lurking evils that must still be dealt with. Players can then select one of four acquired magic attacks and begin Act II for that locale, a second action-platforming stage with a more difficult Guardian to defeat. After that area is cleared of monsters, it's on to the next.

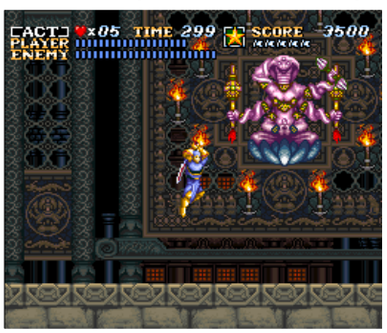
This title appears to be a simple action-platformer with a simulation twist, but it's the communication with the townsfolk and the short stories told in each land that add complexity. Deeper themes are revealed through the inhabitants and their connection to the Master, such as destiny, sacrifice, faith, and love. The relationship with the people permeates the experience, resulting in moments that could be described as emotional, such as fulfilling the last request to bestow rain upon a dying, gracious man. The different towns also look to assist each other, as technology gained from one can be shared with the others, such as medicine from the jungle island of Marahna or music from the desert town of Kasandora. These gifts help the towns flourish, which in turn leads to increasing the overall populations and strengthening the Master with more hit points for the action mode.

The presentation is classy and refined, with the game conveying the feeling that the world is an encompassing one. Mode 7 is used to great effect when traveling over the lands in the Sky Palace and in an exciting fashion when transitioning from the palace down to the ground to engage in the action sequences. The graphics are very good, with nicely detailed backgrounds and large sprites for the Guardian bosses, but the standout feature on the technical side is undoubtedly the magnificent soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro. From grand organ swells in the Sky Palace to melodic flute tunes in the towns to riveting battle hymns, the music not only complements what's on the screen but also enhances it to a degree that's not often seen in video games. This often beautiful, sometimes bittersweet, but always entertaining title is a unique and enthralling treasure that most will want to bask in the godly glow of.





Reflections: An early SNES release in North America, *ActRaiser* was a hit and set a great example by offering new play modes and experiences that were not available on Nintendo's previous console. Due to Nintendo's strict censorship policies at the time, the protagonist's and antagonist's names were altered from the Japanese version's "God" and "Satan," and religious imagery was changed. In spite of this, the heavy religious themes and symbolism naturally still shine through. The positive yet somber epilogue is one of the most meaningful and daring that I've seen in a console game, and hats off to Quintet/Enix for going in that direction. While religious themes mostly carried over into the sequel, the follow-up disappointingly dropped the simulation mode, and with it vanished the close-knit and symbiotic bond between god and people that elevates the original. Enough praise cannot be bestowed upon Yuzo Koshiro's soundtrack, which is of such high quality that it was not only released as a standard soundtrack in Japan but was also rearranged and recorded by an orchestra for a symphonic release. – PC





ActRaiser 2

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Quintet
Publisher: Enix (PAL: UbiSoft)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







The Master returns to save civilization and vanquish the wicked forces of Tanzra in this side-scrolling action-platformer. Beginning in the Sky Palace, the player maneuvers over a map of populations that have been afflicted by avarice, starvation, and other ills. Seven areas' evils are battled on the ground in two separate multistage acts apiece. The winged Master is equipped with a sword to attack and a shield to block projectiles. The sword is underpowered; even common enemies take more than one hit to defeat, and several often have to be dealt with at once. Thankfully, the Master can deftly swing his blade in an upward strike, crouching chop, jumping slash, and downward jumping stab. Sub-boss and boss battles are very engaging, with large villains that can give the player a lot of trouble. There are seven different magical attacks that can be unleashed depending upon the Master's standing or jumping position, such as Thunder Bolt and Fire Breath. These may be used once per obtainable scroll. However, they take several seconds to charge up, and it can be difficult to trigger a specific one in the heat of battle. Platforming is cumbersome due to the Master's ability to double-jump and glide. It can be tough to stop him where desired since he can divebomb automatically, resulting in a shaky landing that might put him over an edge. The game's magnificent stage design and accompanying baddies in the icy palace, fiery fort, factory, ant colony, and more all pop with gorgeous graphics, but the overcomplicated platforming and onslaught of enemies make this a title for only the most hardened gamer. Nonetheless, it's a great technical achievement, with fantastic visuals and a marvelous soundtrack to bolster it.





Reflections: The unique world-building elements from the original *ActRaiser* were removed from this sequel, and with that, much of the charm left as well. While the action stages obviously had a ton of effort and care put into their development (the work from artist Ayano Koshiro is incredible), ignoring the unique simulation elements most likely turned off fans of the original, resulting in another title that mostly gets lost in the shuffle. The biblical-type messaging that permeates the game still can be effective as storytelling, but not interacting with and helping the people directly takes much of the starch out of the experience of being a protective god. – PC

The Addams Family

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★

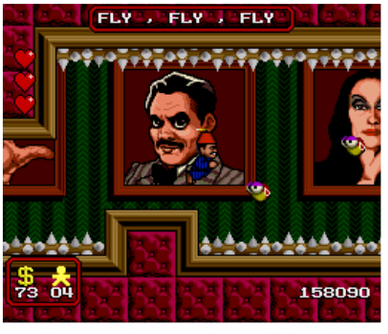






Members of the Addams family have been captured, and it's up to Gomez to rescue them in this platformer that's loosely based on the 1991 film. Every stage (except the last) is open from the start, giving players the option to play through them in any order. They are set in different parts of the mansion, but since this is the Addams residence, spooky graveyards and dungeons are par for the course. Due to the nonlinearity, players are free to roam wherever they like, but the sprawling nature of the stages sometimes makes them feel too long. On the plus side, this provides numerous hidden areas with extra lives and additional heart containers (health) to discover. Other than lives and health, power-ups are also hidden throughout the house. A propeller hat allows Gomez to fly, shoes boost speed, golf balls and swords can be used against enemies, and shields grant brief invincibility. Horror-themed baddies, including werewolves and ghosts, are lurking around every corner, but enemies such as cute rabbits and monkeys feel oddly out of place. Foes can be dispatched by bouncing off their heads (which can also propel Gomez to hard-to-reach areas), but a select few are armed with spikes and must be avoided. Each stage ends with a boss fight where Gomez must simply dodge projectiles while looking for an opening to jump on the enemy's head. Although the game is difficult in places due to slippery controls and poor hit detection, unlimited continues, a password system, and extra lives (earned by collecting dollar signs) make things a bit easier. Being able to play the stages in any order is also nice, but there's not much else that sets this title apart from other platformers.





Reflections: I was more of a *Munsters* fan growing up, but I did enjoy an episode of *The Addams Family* here and there. For my creative writing class in middle school, I wrote a screenplay that was a mash-up of sorts and had the two families becoming neighbors. Most of my classmates knew of T*he Addams Family* due to the film, but I had to explain to them who *The Munsters* were. My teacher at the time, Mrs. Hughes, was really nice. She let me bring in a VHS tape full of *The Munsters* episodes to show the class. – MV

The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★




To torture her big brother, Pugsley, Wednesday Addams has hidden six things throughout their spooky family mansion for him to find. The player must guide Pugsley's running, ducking, crawling, and jumping as he goes from room to room searching for each item. Since this is the Addams's home, the rooms are filled with dangerous traps and thousands of deadly spikes. There are so many spikes that it makes the game unfun and nearly unplayable. When not dealing with those nightmares, players will be killing scuba-diving cats, rubber duckies, and a host of other nonsensical enemies by jumping on their heads. Some foes can be avoided, which is recommended since every kill is accompanied by the annoying sound of digitized flatulence. Pugsley can also replenish his health and earn extra lives by collecting money. It doesn't make any sense, but neither does much else in this game. In order to advance through most rooms, Pugsley must locate and touch switches to unblock doorways. During the latter portions of the game, these switches need to be touched in a specific order, and of course, they are usually surrounded by spikes. Once a doorway is unblocked, the player can advance to the next area in the room. Unfortunately, most rooms' areas look exactly the same, and since Pugsley can re-enter completed ones, players can inadvertently travel backwards. The visuals are the single enjoyable thing about this game. Even though Pugsley's controls are slippery, he animates well, as do the enemies. The hand-drawn backgrounds of the bathroom and laboratory are simply gorgeous. However, pretty graphics alone don't make a good game.




Reflections: I often wonder what the developers were thinking when making a game like this. They have to realize that mostly children will be playing a game with the Addams Family name, right? Why make it so difficult? What's the goal here? If it's to make kids feel distraught, then they've succeeded. *I'm* distraught after playing this, and I'm a 38-year-old adult! Maybe they wanted the gamer to feel as though they were being tortured since that seems to be what the Addams Family is into. If you like spikes, then you might get some form of enjoyment out of this. I, for one, am glad that I'll never have to play this game again. – MV

Addams Family Values

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★




Homicidal Debbie Jellinsky is holding Baby Pubert ransom in this tenuous movie tie-in, so make Uncle Fester rescue him by searching a massive top-down world. Its deathly landscapes, shrouded by unsettling music, include grotesque gardens, bubbling swamps, and bone-laden deserts. Finding keys, retrieving peculiar items, and solving puzzles involving portals and switches aid your progress, as does talking to monsters and Fester's freaky family. Their madcap dialogue, highlighted with portraits of the titular film's actors, launches missions, such as helping Wednesday and Pugsley light a cave with a pumpkin, and initiates rewards, such as increasing Fester's "Ill-Health" (skull icon life meter) when Morticia receives Pubert's toys. Importantly, Granny provides gross cookies that heal, grant invincibility, etc. This delightfully dark setup begs for exploration but soon punishes you in several ways. First, Fester's primary weapon, a lightning bolt, is difficult to line up with enemies, and its power and range (unremarkable to begin with) shrink to nearly nothing as he takes damage from skeletons, fishmen, bosses, and more. Next, navigation can be nightmarish thanks to dead ends and an unhelpful map. Finally, saving is a hassle of backtracking to find Cousin Itt, and continuing after death frequently makes you start far back from where you were. While the experience is successfully creepy, kooky, mysterious, and spooky, these drawbacks might leave you in the lurch.




Reflections: Something in this game disturbed me. It wasn't the eerie laughter echoing in the Wetlands, the demonic faces in the Dungeons, or even the unrelenting difficulty, troubling as all those were – it was an unkind obsession with people's weight. Fester is mocked as "Fat Boy" and "Lardball" by a sentient Venus flytrap, and while Granny is affectionate toward "that pasty, flabby look," she's also the type to like baking corpse beetle cookies and suggesting explosives for removing a poor fellow stuck in a tree – in other words, she adores "bad" things. When Fester finally removes that trapped man with a shrinking potion, the guy doesn't shout "I'm free!" but "I'm slim!" because apparently being thin is more important than being saved. Additionally, an Uncle Fritz is mentioned as being "voted the most gross person ever," but all he's depicted as is heavy. I expected the game to be grim, but this is a darkness I had not foreseen: fat shaming. – AP

The Adventures of Batman and Robin

Genre: Action-Platformer, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Gotham City's Batman takes on his rogues' gallery of archvillains across eight stages, each loosely based upon an episode of the animated series. Most of the game takes place on a standard 2D scrolling plane, with Batman using punches, low kicks, jump kicks, rolling dodges, blocks, and throws to fight a few different types of suited gangsters. Besides melee attacks, Batman has his Batarang to stun enemies, a grappling gun to ascend and swing around, and a limited number of throwing stars, spray gun uses, explosives, and smoke bombs. A flashlight, x-ray goggles, and gas mask can also be equipped, but each is only useful on one stage. The game captures the authentic look and feel of the cartoon, with well-drawn sprites and outstanding animation whenever Batman moves, attacks, climbs ledges, or wall-jumps. The stages' Art Deco look likewise accurately reflects the sights of Gotham. Although repeatedly encountering the same mobsters can be tedious, each stage has a unique location and objective, such as a rooftop chase after Catwoman, an overhead Batmobile-driving level to take down Two-Face, and a rescue mission through the Riddler's elaborate, inventive labyrinth. The challenges range from suitable and fun (such as facing Joker on a roller coaster) to some frustrating sections where using the cumbersome grappling gun can lead to quick, cheap deaths. Scant shortcomings aside, the experience is mostly a great time, incorporating many cartoon elements and characters, fresh stage types, quality music, excellent graphics, and wonderful presentation.





Reflections: With its deep characterizations, outstanding voice acting, and mature themes, the cartoon (originally *Batman: The Animated Series*) is arguably the finest and most faithful Batman adaptation ever produced, even to this day. This SNES title is a fantastic translation of that experience, even if it tries to do too much. For example, while getting the option to equip what you want for each stage is nice, it's unnecessary since you can equip everything, with the only inconvenience being having to scroll through more items to select them for use. Wall jumping is a welcome return from the NES game, but you can only use it at a few points. It seems that by including as many cartoon elements as Konami could fit and adapt (such as the clunky Batmobile stage), the overall game quality may have been diluted a bit and realized to be less than perfect in areas. – PC

The Adventures of Dr. Franken

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Motivetime
Publisher: DTMC
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





After losing his girlfriend in the mail, Franky the Frankenstein's monster must turn his vacation into an international search to get Bitsy back, piece by piece. Starting on a world map, he eventually opens paths from Transylvania to Australia, India, Mexico, and more, for a total of 20 side-scrolling levels to visit. 16 of these harbor body parts and other necessities for rebuilding Bitsy, including hands, feet, bolts, and a Tesla coil. Each component is quartered and strewn about its locale, and reaching them might require the use of secret passages, springboards, levers, button-operated cranes, and/or precision platforming. Most destinations feature wonderful settings, such as Japanese pagodas and Egyptian ruins, and memorable enemies, such as boombox-wielding punks and pistol-brandishing policemen. Travelers often neglect bringing something important, however, and Franky's no different: He forgot to pack a wallop. Despite the energy-replenishing batteries in each level, he sustains damage too easily. His main attack system, composed of left, right, and backflip kicks respectively mapped to the Y, A, and X buttons, is awkward, and his secondary bomb and stun attacks are limited in quantity. These flaws and the need to explore should encourage a slow, careful approach, but time limits force a headlong rush into danger. Even the four enemy-free bonus destinations have as many hazards as helpful items, and devastatingly, there are no continues. Although Franky's journey has an interesting premise and look, the experience is less than the sum of its parts.



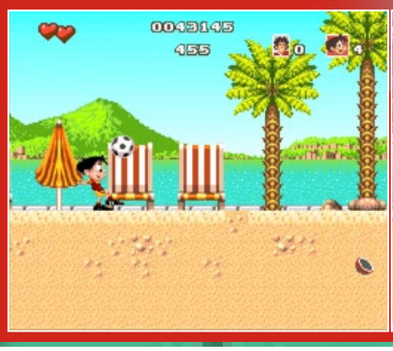


Reflections: The music during most of this game is forgettable compared to the visuals, with the exception of the title track: a funky remix of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. This tune, also featured in the Game Boy and unreleased NES Dr. Franken games, is classically cool, and I wish there were more like it during the stages. I also wish I knew why Franky couldn't just get his girlfriend a passport so she could travel with him. Did he package her up because he sees her as baggage? That cad-aver! He could've at least shipped his mail-order Bride of Frankenstein to NYC in one piece. Her name's Bitsy; how big could she be? Besides, when he reassembles her at the game's end, he puts her together all wrong – like he doesn't even know her. Now I understand the reason for the vacation and the multiple parts: Bitsy wanted to *break up* with him. – AP

The Adventures Of Kid Kleets
Soccer Kid (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Krisalis Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★

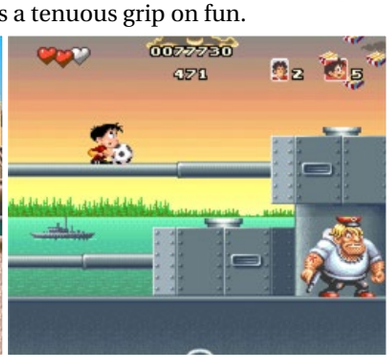






The World Cup trophy has been stolen by aliens and scattered across the planet, so it is up to Kid Kleets to scour London, Russia, Italy, Japan, and the USA for the pieces in this action-platformer. Kid uses his soccer ball to dispatch dogs, builders, sledging Russians, bosses, and even robots by performing various tricks, including flicks and overhead kicks. The ball can also be used as a springboard to reach higher areas. This is helpful because the trophy parts cannot be obtained without first collecting a total of 11 trading cards spread across each location's three parts. From jumping on London taxi cabs to darting across the Japanese bullet train, the stages are unique and mixed, but the gameplay is let down by the jarring camera and slippery controls. If Kid takes a few hits, it is back to the start unless a checkpoint is reached, and though hidden hearts can be found to increase his life bar, health replenishment items are essential to staying alive. Accumulating points by collecting foodstuffs eventually awards extra lives, but there are also hard-to-reach 1-ups to find. The ball is a neat mechanic but also a curse – too many times it bounces over an enemy completely, getting lost in the process. A hold of a button returns the ball, but not in time for the hero to avoid damage. It's unfortunate, but Kid Kleets has a tenuous grip on fun.





Reflections: What should have been an enjoyable title with a clever gimmick becomes, at times, a very generic platformer. Enemies are rinsed and repeated throughout, bar a couple of locational stereotypes, which is a shame as the stages feel fresh and different from each other. The key to success here is discovery, but with the subpar controls and the aforementioned camera issues, the game is a chore to explore. You can't reach the final boss and the true ending without getting all the collectibles, but frustration sets in quickly, leading to speeding through and making mistakes. It looks great but plays poorly, though at least something new was tried with an oversaturated genre. Also, who came up with the localization name of *Kid Kleets*? It sounds like an awful Stan Lee comic book alliteration attempt and should have been kept as *Soccer Kid* as it was named in the UK. – JE

The Adventures of Mighty Max

Genre: Action-Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: WJS Design
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







When pieces of a weapon are hidden, it's up to Mighty Max (and friends Bea and Felix) to gather them for use against the evil Skullmaster. Max chooses between two different areas to start, and as each is completed, it's replaced by another until all five are done. The environments of this puzzle-platformer consist of a handful of stages that end when Max gets all the weapon pieces (counted down in the upper left) into a teleporter and then enters it himself. Standing in his way are enemies that he stuns with his tennis ball cannon. Once they're immobilized, Max picks them up and throws them to get rid of them. Alternatively, a collectible horn calls his bodyguard, Norman, to toss the monsters for him. To aid his weapon search, Max can manipulate parts within the stage, such as levers for launching or balloons for carrying. Other helpful objects, such as magnets and moving platforms, are activated by shooting a switch. Max also collects various objects in each stage, the most common being items such as the shells in the ocean, earning himself an extra life. However, he zooms around and jumps to unnatural heights, making it difficult to control him precisely. In addition, the stages are huge, and with platforms and passageways in every direction, it truly is a puzzle getting Max where he needs to be, even when using the arrow at the top that points to the nearest weapon or teleporter or when scouting his immediate surroundings with A + D-pad. This game has an interesting fusion of platforming and puzzling while still integrating action. Despite issues with the controls and a sudden, anticlimactic ending, this is something anyone can enjoy, even without knowledge of the protagonist's cartoon or toy line.





Reflections: A game that has a rare combo pack with a VHS of one of the *Mighty Max* episodes? (Kids, ask your parents about VHS.) Color me intrigued. Unfortunately, the title screen treats you to rock music instead of the cartoon theme song, so it's unsurprising that the game also lacks the show's educational aspect despite ample opportunities. Then again, how did some of the enemies at the Incan pyramid know how to walk like an Egyptian anyway? (Kids, ask your parents about The Bangles.) Looking strictly at the gameplay, I enjoyed this title for what it is and would recommend it for people who aren't looking for a chance to take down one of the many foes from the series. – KY

The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★





When Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale steal three priceless artifacts from the Rocky & Bullwinkle Museum, classic cartoons Rocky the squirrel and Bullwinkle the moose launch into action to recover the missing display and save their museum's debut. Your quest to regain each relic will see you scaling the treacherous Grimalaya Mountains, diving into the belly of a metal leviathan, and dodging rogue daggers as you explore the seedy underbelly of downtown Pottsylvania. Armed with a lively headbutt and a stockpile of surprisingly deadly mooseberries, you begin your journey as the kind but dim-witted Bullwinkle. Although you spend the majority of your adventure in his slightly clumsy hooves, you'll find yourself commanding a stylish tailspin – as well as a cache of lethal acorns – when you take control of Rocky during the story's thrilling final arc. Despite having two formidable attacks per character, successfully defeating enemies can be an incredibly tedious affair. While it should be reasonable to assume that each of your adversaries will be affected by both melee and ranged assaults, this frustratingly isn't the case; certain opponents can only be injured with an energetic melee strike, whereas others practically demand to be hit with a well-aimed berry or acorn. To make matters worse, your supply of deadly airborne projectiles is limited to what you pick up as you explore. If you find yourself with a dwindling reserve at an inopportune moment, you'll be left at the mercy of your foes. It's possible to replenish your health by collecting sunflowers, but their often precarious locations – combined with some infuriatingly floaty controls – make it difficult to justify the risk. If you manage to survive until the end of a stage, you're given three chances to gain an extra life by completing one of two different minigames. Successfully outrunning a train as Dudley Do-Right or defeating a dragon as Mr. Peabody and Sherman will reward you with that much-needed prize, but this altogether exhausting adventure just isn't worth your time.





Reflections: When you're developing a game, it's important to agree upon some semblance of consistency when it comes to combat. If you decide to include multiple attack types but then limit their effectiveness to specific enemies, there needs to be some sort of indication to let the player know which strike to use. When you introduce attacks that have no discernible pattern of effectiveness – as Imagineering decided to do – you'll only succeed in creating an incredibly frustrating experience. – AF

The Adventures of Tintin: Prisoners of the Sun

Genre: Action-Platformer, Action
Release Date: Feb. 1997
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★





Based on comics by Hergé, this game sees the adventurous Tintin helping Professor Calculus, who's been kidnapped amid a mysterious sickness after a dig in Peru. To rescue his friend, Tintin needs to work through side-scrolling stages, a back-view driving level, a front-view run down a mountain to escape an avalanche, and more. Many levels have a puzzle element that requires Tintin to find a key item or push an object into the right position. Hindering his progress are "enemies," such as museum guards or sliding luggage, as well as environmental hazards, such as falling books and prickly branches. When Tintin suffers damage, his parchment portrait in the upper left rolls up in sections, with the final blow taking a life and restarting the level. If he loses all lives, the only way to continue is by using one of the passwords given before certain stages. Fortunately, there are health pickups in the form of idols in addition to extra lives and time, which is displayed in the upper right. The wonderful graphics accurately represent Hergé's style, both in the characters and in the stage settings, which include a waterfall, a South American village, and an ancient temple. On the other side of things, this game is quite challenging. Avoiding damage is crucial, and everything hurts. Many of the stages require quick reflexes and ducking into the background/foreground. This creates a high-tension experience magnified by tough time limits. The visual style makes this a pleasure that belies the hefty hurdle of difficulty that is not for everyone.





Reflections: Being Infogrames' second Tintin title, *Prisoners of the Sun* shows some improvement over *Tintin in Tibet*. There are added elements, such as climbing onto ledges, flipping a light switch in the museum, and swapping characters in the wooded area. I enjoy the changing play and the foreground/background fields that simulate 3D environments, but this game is a toughie! Health is not refilled between stages, so taking the time to find pickups or extra lives (which also fill health) is necessary. I love the graphical style of Hergé, and the developers have done it justice. Unfortunately, the text during the cutscenes is nearly illegible and takes away from the comics feel. If a bit of frustration doesn't scare you away, this title is sure to entertain. – KY

Adventures of Yogi Bear

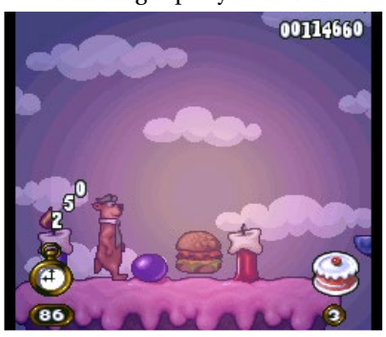
Yogi Bear's Cartoon Capers (EU)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blue Turtle
Publisher: Cybersoft
(PAL: Empire Software)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





As classic cartoon Yogi, bear with 20 side-scrolling stages to spread the word about unauthorized industrial construction in Jellystone Park. You move, duck, jump, swim, bounce, and ride in five regions that include a snowscape, batty mines, redwood forests, a deep lake, and the building site. Not only does every sprawling stage within a zone have the same backdrop, but also many of the same creatures, such as palette-swapped sparrows, pairs of pastel bunnies, and annoying gopher quartets, appear throughout your journey. Should these or other hazards graze you, you'll shed a slice of your health meter cake, but a bop on top dispatches most opponents. Nonetheless, it's no picnic to proceed through the repetitive level layouts, despite the arrays of baskets that behave as temporary platforms for overcoming pits or reaching spare cake pieces. These hampers might also take you to a batch of pocket watches or to a stage's hidden bed. Landing on the latter initiates "Dream Time," where collected watches become seconds on a timer as you try to reach a clock fragment – getting all four in one region grants a continue. However, this is a self-perpetuating and ultimately pointless goal – you won't likely need continues unless you expose yourself to more danger by searching for watches and beds. If you still want to explore, helpful blossoms, lanterns, oysters, etc. mark areas you've already visited, but aside from such visual touches, good controls, and jaunty music, this title's tedium might put you into hibernation.





Reflections: The game almost entirely omits Yogi's bowtied best buddy – that's a major Boo-Boo – yet what's really bizarre is the bigger bear's inconsistent relationship with food. On the one paw, he clearly adores it – every one of his dreams is on a sugar-frosted landscape populated with pizza, burgers, and fries. Conversely, Yogi's *raison d'être*, the perennial picnic basket, is reduced to a mere stepping stone for him. Instead of providing empty calories, it's filled with even emptier points. Would the lure of a high score really make Yogi Bear cave? Let's also consider his cake health meter. Food is literally life for Yogi, but according to the manual, he doesn't take damage; he "share[s] a piece of cake with [his friends]." That's all well and good, but that means he also feeds ghosts, barrels, jackhammers, and other things that don't eat. Smarter than the average bear, huh? – AP

Aero Fighters

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Video System
Publisher: McO'River
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Rare
★★★★





In this arcade port of the vertical shooter of the same name, players choose one of four military pilots and battle an onslaught of enemy fighters and screen-filling bosses. Each selectable character is from a different country (USA, Japan, Sweden, and the UK) and has their own story that unfolds throughout the game. Some stories are basic, such as that of the Japanese character Hien, a stern soldier who just wants to please his superiors. Others, such as Kohful the Viking's desire to be the best pilot in the world, are more humorous. Each pilot flies a different type of plane with vastly different ammo and shooting patterns. Collecting stackable power-ups from certain fallen foes increases the plane's range of fire, but one-hit-kill rules apply, and losing a plane also results in losing those power-ups. Each plane is also fitted with a powerful special weapon, although this is extremely limited. The stages are mostly dark and bland-looking, consisting of military bases, cities, and rural countrysides. Having a second player join the fun adds an additional four pilots to the roster. Although these characters don't have as much of a backstory as the original four, they do bring with them additional dialogue during cutscenes. The music and sound effects fit the gameplay well, but they seem muted or muffled. Similar to most shooters, this one is full of challenge, but since the stages are somewhat short, it's more than fair. A good controller with turbo fire will help immensely.





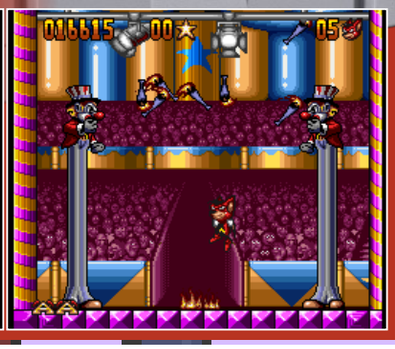
Reflections: Oh, man. This game brings me back to my arcade days. The only reason why I've ever played *Aero Fighters* is that it was located in close proximity to my local arcade's *Mortal Kombat* cabinet. Actually, I think that's how I discovered the majority of my favorite arcade games growing up. I can thank *Mortal Kombat* for my love of *Windjammers*, *NBA Jam*, *Sunset Riders*... the list goes on and on. Walk into an arcade nowadays (if you can even consider Dave & Buster's an arcade) and you'll be greeted with arcade versions of *Flappy Bird* and *Fruit Ninja*. They stuff the classics in the back corner near the mop bucket. That's fine by me, though. Smelling dirty mop water while playing *Ms. Pac-Man* brings me back to my arcade days all over again. – MV

Aero the Acro-Bat

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Why so serious? Indeed, maverick clown Edgar Ektor has just sabotaged the World of Amusement Circus in the vilest of fashions, forcing its biggest star, Aero the Acro-Bat, to swoop in and save the day… all while performing his act. Yep, Aero begins this platformer before scores of onlookers, executing stunts and feats while fighting for his life against deranged circus meanies. Diving through flaming hoops, darting across fading platforms, flipping light switches, and seeking hidden keys – the show must go on, it seems, with each stage enforcing its own harrowing rule for completion. It only gets harder from there; once the circus is liberated, more trials await at a treacherous theme park, a perilous wood, and finally, Edgar's own Museum of Horrors. Aero ain't no Batman, either; his signature move is an awkward double jump that sends him "drilling" into foes at 45-degree angles. The winged wonder can also hurl amassed Magical Stars at baddies and hover in place to avoid – maybe – the game's countless spike and buzzsaw deathbeds. Occasional power-ups provide useful but fleeting abilities – Aero Wings grant the bat limited flight, the Parachute slows his descent for critical seconds, the Lightning box bestows a triple jump, and Invincibility Stars provide a spurt of invulnerability. The most precious of these, however, are the most mundane; players hoping to reach the finale will quickly learn to hoard every extra life and hit point pickup they stumble across, the latter expanding the rodent's lifeline to five. Deviously, the game's childish veneer belies its heinous difficulty – dicey controls, limited continues, and a restrictive viewing distance are enough to discourage the most optimistic of performers. And yet, those willing to persevere will find a title surprisingly rife with variety, including roller coaster rides, bungee jumping, preposterous bosses, and even a skydiving bonus stage… provided they don't go batty in the meantime.



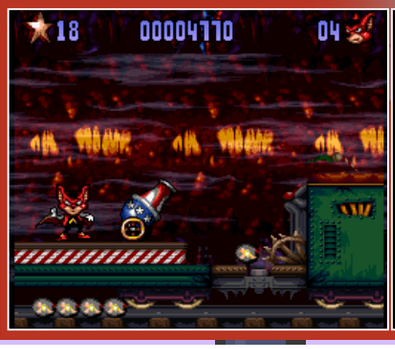


Reflections: The cynical might dismiss *Aero the Acro-Bat* as just another mascot platformer – or worse, another *Sonic the Hedgehog* clone – but its weird, decidedly uncool trapeze theme makes the comparison somewhat unfair. Indeed, the game's difficulty suggests the developer should have paid MORE attention to what made Sonic so popular (accessible design). Nevertheless, Aero's first outing gave us two things: Edgar's sidekick Zero, who would later star in his own decent platformer, and perhaps the best musical renditions of "Thunder and Blazes" and "Sabre Dance" ever heard in video game form. – DA

Aero the Acro-Bat 2

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Set in the aftermath of his previous adventure, the mascot bat is back for more platforming antics. Having just watched the evil Edgar Ektor fall to his apparent death, the noble hero spots a "Magician's box" within the mad clown's compound. Stepping inside, Aero is transported to "another world" where he becomes entangled in a nonsensical story involving a saucy bat girl, a freaky clone, a madcap scientist, and a sinister scheme to conquer every circus in the world. Sadly, this bat crazy plot is probably the most memorable element of Aero's second outing – despite romping through seven visually exotic locales, from dungeons and castles to a disco-styled fever dream, the action remains decidedly pedestrian, lacking the variety and whimsy that made the original at least marginally interesting. The soundtrack fares no better, offering a rote musical score without the catchy resonance of its forebear. Indeed, the game's key elements are just holdovers from before; Aero still has his double-jump drill attack, still collects and flings "Magic Stars" at clowns and other meanies, still hoards energy refills for a max lifeline of five, and still performs feats of swinging, bouncing, and launching to gain greater height and traction. Power-ups are likewise recycled, granting added flight or jumping prowess if found. To be fair, Aero himself gets a few new tricks; the winged one can now slide through narrow openings and funnel himself downward with his "Drop Drill" maneuver, although his hovering ability has been lost. A superfluous "choose-the-right-cup" bonus round has also been introduced. In sum, there's nothing here that truly astounds save for that absurdist storyline and some necessary refinements; thanks to tighter controls, a smarter camera, a password feature, and fewer soul-crushing deathtraps, the title is expressly easier than its precursor. Hence the strange dichotomy that defines the series – the first punishes, the second panders, the former innovates, the latter's a boilerplate of batty clichés.





Reflections: Gaming has a significant advantage over its modern contemporaries – while film and literature often flounder when forcing a sequel to a popular or critically acclaimed work, video game follow-ups tend to turn out much better. But not in Aero's case. Both games, plus the *Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel* spinoff, all succeed and fail in varying, inconsistent manners, robbing the series of a true, go-to title. My favorite? I hate to say it, but probably the 'tude infused *Zero*. – DA

Aerobiz

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







This business strategy simulation allows the player to become the CEO of an airline, name their company, and establish a headquarters in a major city. After that, the requirements for success are to manage a profitable operation, have a set number of passengers (based on the selected difficulty), and link all 22 world cities within the 32-year game period; the game is over if the player's airline ends just a single year in debt. Three other companies compete in an attempt to carve up the airspace, so it is up to the player to open air routes, purchase and maintain Boeing 747s, Airbus A300s, and other real-world planes, and keep routes profitable by building hotels for customers and using advertising to promote them. More planes become available as time passes, which is the major difference between the two scenarios on offer, as each starts in a different year (1963 or 1983). World events such as countries at war, accidents, and even earthquakes can hinder air routes at random, while tourist booms and other occurrences excite passenger demand. The player has access to tools such as the boardroom (which advises on what to do), budget controls, and buying stocks and shares. At the end of each turn, the AI reveals its hand, and a performance review shows which company is making the most money. An unintuitive, confusing interface hinders what is a devilishly fun time killer.



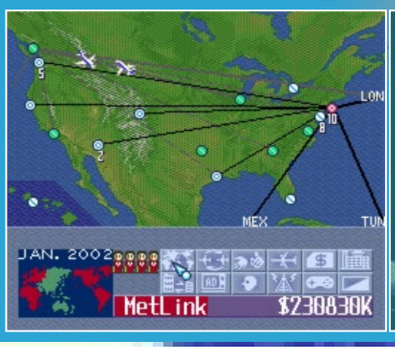


Reflections: The infamous wall of difficulty that is rampant throughout Koei games even today is immediately present here, with baffling stats and figures available from the start and confusing icons when small text boxes would have sufficed. I've found that the best approach to their brand of lunacy is just going all out on the initial playthrough (without questioning the consequences) to see what happens so you can adjust for the next attempt – amidst the dull ache of seemingly endless spreadsheet figures lies a game with enough charm and character to make you want to play it again. My first try involved buying more planes than I needed and not having any air routes open to use them, so on my next playthrough, I went easier on the Airbuses. As well as things can go, that Koei curve ball will happen when one of your cities decides to go to war or, happily, one of your cities hosts the Olympics, giving a spike in traffic and capping off a truly silly game – but an addictive one at that. – JE

Aerobiz Supersonic

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







This business strategy sequel about operating an airline company offers five difficulty levels and four scenarios that collectively span from the 1950s to 2020. Each two-decade period has planes appropriate to that era, such as the Boeing 707, the Concorde, or cutting-edge supersonic craft. The idea is to send out negotiators to open air routes which can then be used to expand the player's aeronautical empire, the endgame being to have the most passengers, to be in profit, and to have offices in all seven global regions, from South America to Southeast Asia. The game is lost if the time runs out or if the player is in the red at the end of the fiscal year. Once the player ends a turn, the AI or human opponents have their say in divvying up the airspace, potentially preventing the player from achieving success. The main screen has icons to take care of business, including buying planes from real-world manufacturers (some now defunct), setting budgets, and placing advertisements, all in the name of making money. World events such as war or tourist booms appear at random and can aid or hinder when trying to negotiate a new region. Though essentially the same experience as the previous installment, this game is just as fun and just as engrossing.





Reflections: I'm not entirely sure that we need two airline simulator games on the SNES, but this is the better one of them from a presentation standpoint. The game is still menu-crazy like its elder brother, but the stakes have been upped graphically, and more cities can be negotiated with due to the world being split into separate regions to conquer. It is weirdly addicting, this long-winded connect-the-dots-on-the-map game, and hours can be wasted tinkering with the price of fares or advertisement costs or listening to the boardroom directors complain when you aren't doing things properly. It is a breath of fresh air from the usual strategy experience of building armies and wiping out feudal principalities that Koei is renowned for, and if you enjoy simulation builder games à la *Theme Park* then you seriously can't go wrong here. – JE

Air Cavalry

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Synergistic Software
Publisher: Cybersoft
(PAL: GameTek)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







War is hell in this quasi-helicopter simulator that merges arcade-style action and tactical realism to produce an uneven hybrid. Three campaigns – set in the Middle East, Central America, and Indonesia, respectively – await the wary pilot, tasking him with various missions that all play essentially the same. Seek-and-destroy is the most common assignment, wherein one must eliminate a specific number of supply trucks, fuel tanks, surface-to-air launchers, and similar targets. Others are search-and-rescue concerns, requiring suicidal souls to sweep over landscapes of wild gunfire, landing and grabbing wayward troops along the way. A different "helicopter gunship" is reserved for these various undertakings, each suited for the objective at hand. The heavy UH-60A Blackhawk, for instance, is a transport vessel perfect for extracting stranded troops, the spry OH-6D Defender is a lighter, flimsier craft appropriate for reconnaissance, and the high-tech AH-94A Valkyrie is an overloaded war machine. Each auto-targeting copter comes equipped with a radar, a high-caliber chain gun, and at least one rocket type – the iconic Hellfire anti-tank missile is even available for the more bullish machines. Yet, despite these pretensions of realism, there's little actual story or context connecting each engagement; the missions are described in only the most general of fashions, undermining any sense of real-world agency or drama. Enemies, which consist mainly of tanks and anti-aircraft guns, neither move nor even animate during the course of battle but are nevertheless brutally accurate with their attacks. The damage taken from these strikes bears realistic, if random, repercussions, often leading to the loss of ammunition, fuel, and flight maneuverability. Indeed, the controls, even at their best, feel belabored, requiring players to press a combination of X and Y to gain or lose altitude. Graphically, the game is also rough, using Mode 7 effects to create a merely passable, faux 3D environment peppered with tiny, pixelated enemies often indistinguishable from the terrain. Likewise, the audio fares no better. However, its split-screen co-op and versus modes were surprisingly forward-thinking for the era and still engage today.





Reflections: I sometimes rely on the "cheater's" tactic of save states to more efficiently experience – and complete – the 16-bit era's more grueling, time-consuming games. And yes, due to its lack of continues and/or passwords, *Air Cavalry* is one of those blacklisted titles that proves frustrating to the uninitiated. Indeed, a mere design tweak – unlimited continues – could have made this bird a more worthy ride. – DA

Al Unser Jr.'s Road to the Top

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







With famous driver Al Unser Jr. as your guide, get ready to speed on go-karts, snowmobiles, and International Race of Champions (IROC) stock cars before reaching this game's titular summit – Indy car racing. For each vehicle type, you drive in three races against five opponents and must place higher than fourth to proceed, except in the third Indy competition. There, only first place unlocks the final challenge in which Al Jr. himself participates. Prior to each race, you see an overhead map of the upcoming track before selecting a vehicle with impressive handling and acceleration, superior speed, or balanced stats. A digitized portrait of Al Jr. appears alongside colorful commentary, and then you're off in a behind-the-vehicle perspective – your speed, position, and more are displayed at the screen's bottom. With each lap, you're shown how many are left to run and how great your lead or lag is. Although every track provides interesting backgrounds ranging from rock formations to nighttime snowscapes, racing itself is straightforward steering, accelerating, and braking, with manual shifting only available in hard mode. Your competitors become very aggressive over time, but their buffeting can sometimes improve your position, and it's satisfying when they succumb to the same oil slicks that you do. If you fall too far behind, quit the race to avoid running laps in vain, or try practice mode beforehand to improve your skills. Played alone or with a friend on a horizontally split screen, this title provides a simple, competent racing experience.





Reflections: The game's manual teases a chance to try "a special Unser family tradition," but I had no idea what that might be. Could I depend upon the pleasant, pixelated face of Al Jr. to steer me right? It turns out that after completing the last go-kart, snowmobile, and IROC tracks, I would take detours from my Road to the Top to drive on a Path to the Peak – Pikes Peak, to be precise. To gain passwords and continue my journey, I would have to navigate this perilous route solo in progressively shorter times without plunging off the mountainside to a grisly... do-over. This is the second most troubling aspect of the game. The first is the painful choice between the incomplete audio experiences of *either* music *or* sound effects. I want to know why I can't have both simultaneously, but I fear my question will never be Unsered. – AP

Aladdin (Disney's)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







Join the lovable scoundrel Aladdin and his mischievous companion Abu in this adaptation of the wildly successful Disney film. Remaining faithful to the movie, this game emphasizes skillful platforming rather than typical enemy encounters. While the first stage sees you facing a hefty number of palace guards, the combat never strays from being playful. Enemies can be stunned with the simple throw of an apple or defeated with a casual jump to the head. Beyond this initial sequence, opponents become few and far between, and much of the challenge begins to lie in environmental obstacles instead. Swinging platforms, large jumps, and bottomless pits are commonplace, but these can thankfully be overcome with the help of a cloth parachute that allows you to glide. Every stage feels unique, with memorable set pieces that help bring the game to life. Merchants line the streets of the bustling Agrabah marketplace, while the mysterious Cave of Wonders overflows with mesmerizing forbidden treasure – "touch nothing but the lamp." A little creative license was taken with the adaptation of the source material, too. You'll find yourself being invited into Genie's lamp and even rescuing Abu from the perils of an ancient pyramid. These stages are a welcome addition that makes the experience feel like an extended cut of the film rather than just a simple translation. With all the magic and charm of a Disney film, you'll find this adventure to be a true "diamond in the rough."



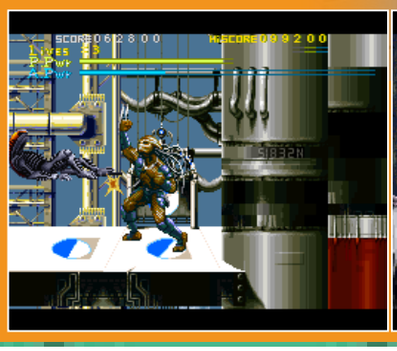


Reflections: I love the traversal in *Aladdin*. There's something incredibly satisfying about running through the streets of Agrabah and outwitting palace guards with an artfully executed jump. Every movement flows effortlessly into another, making each stage an absolute joy to explore. Capcom actively encourages you to take advantage of this fluidity by placing enticing gem collectibles along paths that require acrobatic maneuvers. This is Aladdin at his most stylish. You can also expect to be humming along to some of *Aladdin*'s most well-known tunes – I've always found it hard to get through Genie's stages without breaking into "Friend Like Me." While admittedly some of the tracks have been slightly altered from their film counterparts, the spirit of each song remains intact. The music is such an integral part of the entire experience, and I couldn't imagine playing *Aladdin* without it! – AF

Alien vs. Predator

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jorudan
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







The Predator is on the hunt for a swarm of aliens that have taken over a human colony on the planet Vega 4. This beat 'em up sees him stalking his prey through 10 stages set in locales such as a forest, sewer, spaceport, and spaceship, most of which simply proceed left to right. Using a punching combo, jump kick, and grab attacks, he must dispatch aliens including tall warriors, acid spitters, and chestbursters two at a time before moving on. A sliding attack using the L/R triggers is an essential tool to get out of sticky situations and survive the somewhat iffy collision detection. Not too many health potions appear, and the invisibility cloak is mostly useless, but throwing spear and disc blade pickups can be used to inflict more damage. However, the Predator sometimes must lean on using his shoulder cannon, a chargeable weapon that floors enemies and, at the cost of a little health, rains down a powerful lightning attack when fully powered. Standard enemies tend to have way too much stamina, which can make brawling with the limited variety of foes monotonous. Boss battles are a drag, as the huge aliens look gorgeous but move too quickly and inflict too much damage. Overall, the graphics are mostly fine, but the animation is poor, with creatures seemingly sliding rather than moving at times. The sound effects are nothing special, but the music isn't bad, and the cutscenes at least do a decent job in storytelling. Strip out the properties involved, though, and what's left is a bit hollow.



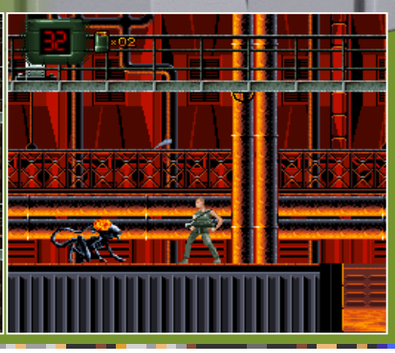


Reflections: This is a disappointing experience, especially given the crossover potential of the two extraterrestrial franchises, successfully established first in the Dark Horse Comics series. The concept would soon be done justice in console form with the first-person shooter *Alien vs Predator* (Oct. 1994), one of the Atari Jaguar's finer offerings. However, the full potential of an AvP game would be seen in Capcom's arcade beat 'em up *Alien vs. Predator* (May 1994). Brilliant in every facet, this game for one to three players features four playable characters: two different predators, a female cyborg, and one based on Dutch, Arnold Schwarzenegger's character from the film *Predator*. It was intended to be a movie tie-in, yet not only was it never released in console form, but also the movie itself would be stuck in developmental hell until an entirely different and inferior film would debut in 2004. – PC

Alien³

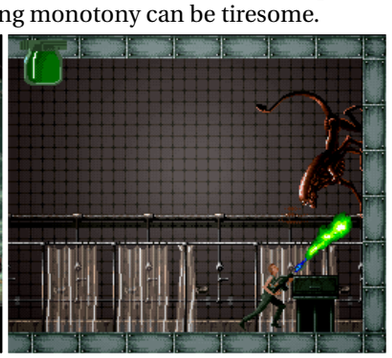
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment, Spearsoft
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





In this game based on the sci-fi horror film, Ellen Ripley must carry out missions in a work prison while surviving an alien onslaught. Each of the six separate stages comprises several missions selected via terminals located in the stage's central hub. Ripley moves freely to different areas (furnace, mine, weapons room, medic bay, alien corridor, etc.) connected by hallways, doors, and air ducts. The areas' designs are fun, and each is distinctly defined graphically. An army of aliens in various developmental stages stands in the way: crawling facehuggers and chestbursters, spitting and jumping aliens, fully developed aliens that climb walls and ceilings, and in rare cases, an alien queen. Ripley has an automatic pulse rifle, grenade launcher, and flamethrower to deal with the threat, but ammo is limited, requiring management and pickups. A motion tracker activated with the Select button is nice but not always useful. The controls are smooth and spot-on, with Ripley being able to shoot in eight directions while running, crouch-walking, climbing ladders, jumping, or even hand-walking on monkey bars. Ripley's animations are excellent to accommodate her movement. The missions, however, aren't too varied, usually consisting of sealing doors or ventilation pipes, destroying alien eggs, fixing generators, or rescuing trapped prisoners. Returning to terminals for ensuing duties and backtracking to different areas are a huge hassle since aliens constantly respawn, making everything a slog. Losing a life eliminates any mission progress for that stage, so finding health pickups is essential. The music is tense and moody, and the sound effects are authentic, especially when using the motion tracker. Unfortunately, the mission types repeat and maps are only accessible at terminals, which, while realistic, isn't helpful. It's technically fine, but the grinding monotony can be tiresome.





Reflections: SPOILERS: The intro and end of the game are just as depressing as in the titular film. I was looking forward to reviewing *Alien*³ the least for this guide book. I have such a love/hate relationship with it – the game does a great job of translating the creepy look and sound of the Alien movie franchise, but it wears me down quickly due to the heavy travel and endless army of facehuggers (you do a *lot* of crouch walking). Less is sometimes more; if the number of missions were cut in half from around 40, I feel the game would be better off. Still, it's miles ahead of the abysmal NES version. – PC

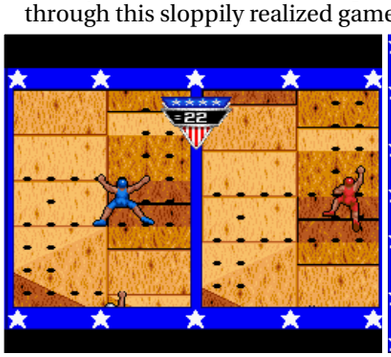
American Gladiators

Genre: Action, Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Imagitec Design
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-16 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★





Tease out that feathered hair and squeeze into your best patriotic singlet – it's time to push yourself to the limit as you strive for the title of Champion! In this sports game based on the popular TV series, you compete in seven grueling minigames against Nitro, Thunder, Turbo, and the rest of the elite Gladiators, who have been training to crush the dreams of hopefuls like you – they'll stop at nothing to curb your progress and send you home crying all over your neon bodysuit! Soak in the pulse-pounding intro music and don't let the digitized group photo of the awe-inspiring Gladiators intimidate you. Instead, start by selecting either One To One for a single-player experience or Tournament for a bracketed competition, choose to compete as a male or female, and enter your name. Events with totally awesome names await you: Assault, Human Cannonball, Atlasphere, Joust, Powerball, The Wall and the Eliminator obstacle course must be conquered if you desire the respect of mere mortals everywhere. Each event requires a different approach, so plan to take some time to learn the awkward controls by trial and error. After each challenge, you get the current score along with the name of the upcoming event and which Gladiator waits to take you on. Tournament mode can be played by up to 16 people, and if you pit your skills against a friend, the experience shifts between simultaneous and alternating play, depending on the event. Some challenges, such as Assault, are relatively interactive and fun, while others, such as Human Cannonball, feel random and cheap. There is little fanfare for a victory after all events are completed, but if you can tolerate getting through this sloppily realized game, you're a winner!





Reflections: The graphics in *American Gladiators* are below average, with a strangely limited color palette and minimal animation. The music is extremely repetitive, practically begging you to hit the mute button and blast your own hair metal cassettes. Gameplay often feels slow and unresponsive, and most of the events have controls that are completely devoid of nuance and fluidity. Overall, the game is a choppy affair that feels unrewarding to spend all but a few minutes with. On the bright side, there is some variety among the seven playable events; this can keep the game at least briefly interesting as you try to devise strategies for victory. And of course, those patriotic onesies are a radical fashion statement! – DM

An American Tail: Fievel Goes West

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft, Shimada Kikaku
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Put on your cowboy hat and take to the Old West as the courageous Fievel Mousekewitz in this action-platformer that's based on the film of the same name. Fievel must find his family by navigating through five stages, beginning his journey in busy New York City and ending in the sweltering hot desert of Green River, Utah. Most stages offer multiple routes, rewarding those who wish to explore. You must avoid or defend against cute-looking wildlife such as cats, vultures, and snakes, all leading up to a final fight against the movie's villain, Cat R. Waul. Fievel is armed with his trusty cork-shooting popgun that can be upgraded to fire up to three corks at once or changed over to shoot blasts of water that extinguish fiery platforms. Numerous coins are scattered throughout every stage, and collecting 100 grants an extra life. Other power-ups, such as 1-ups, health, and invincibility, can be found in "$" blocks that you shoot open. The music from the film didn't carry over to the game, but the score is still very enjoyable. From the damp sewers to the sunbathed desert, the visuals are nicely detailed, replicating the feel of the movie exceptionally well, and the day/night cycle in the desert stage adds a nice touch. Fievel controls well enough; however, his jumps can be a bit floaty, making smaller leaps difficult to time. The final stages can also be punishing, but there are so many coins to collect that additional lives are easy to come by. Although it's a short game, the alternate paths add a hefty amount of replayability, and fans of the film will get a lot of enjoyment out of it.




Reflections: I saw the original *An American Tail* in theaters when it was released in 1986. Seven-year-old me couldn't help but get misty-eyed when Fievel got lost and couldn't find his parents. Years went by and movies such as *The Terminator* and *Mad Max* "hardened" me. I thought I was too mature to watch the sequel, but my curiosity got the best of me when I saw this game at our local rental shop. My parents questioned why I wasn't renting *Contra III: The Alien Wars* again. I simply told them that I was renting this for my younger brother. I recall getting scolded that night for not letting him play. – MV

Andre Agassi Tennis

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: TecMagik Entertainment
Publisher: Radiance Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★




This tennis simulation has both a three-quarter, top-down view and the endorsement of renowned tennis superstar Andre Agassi, who also appears in the game as one of eight playable athletes. In addition to Practice, Exhibition and Tournament modes await players, offering singles or doubles formats. The focus is less on bells and whistles and more about the game on the court, and it's a challenging one to play. Each controller face button executes a different kind of shot, including lobs, volleys, smashes, and punch shots. Players must learn when to use each of these, based on the ball's position, and where on the court to aim it. The problem is that players move around the court quickly, and it's easy to overshoot the desired position to hit the ball; learning how to adjust to this speed and accurately move into place takes considerable practice. An Amateur gameplay mode simplifies the shot controls but doesn't affect the overly sensitive movement of players, leading to a lot of one-sided matches until adjustments are made. The struggles with gameplay difficulty lie underneath a fairly impressive aesthetic package. On-court visuals are nice, with several court surface options and tennis players who are well animated, if a bit short in stature. It's tough to see the difference between the eight athletes since the camera is so high up, though it's not a major issue. The sound is also notable, with very clear voice samples to call scores or shots that are out of bounds. The effect of the racket hitting the ball is also suitably crisp. The learning curve here is high, but it can be rewarding for tennis fans and players willing to put in the time to adjust to the controls.




Reflections: It's apparent that the hook for this game was the inclusion of Agassi as a playable character. He was coming off of his first Grand Slam win at Wimbledon in the summer of 1992, and his popularity in the tennis world was increasing every year. His endorsements with Nike and Canon are represented in this game, too. Interestingly enough, in 1993 (when this game was in development), injuries dogged him through significant portions of that year, and it was the only one between 1990 and 1995 in which he did not make a Grand Slam final. That doesn't mean that there's a "Super Nintendo curse," does it? Nah. Curses only apply to Madden games. – PS

Animaniacs

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





Come join the Warner brothers, Yakko and Wakko, and the Warner sister, Dot, as they rush to right a madly masterminded plot! At the film company CEO's request, the cartoon trio must recover 24 movie script scenes stolen by Pinky and The Brain to achieve this side-scroller's "good" ending. Aside from the Studio HQ tutorial and the Editing Room's final confrontations, you may enter or leave most levels freely, choosing them from a top-down map. Be wary of security guard Ralph outside and within the sprawling Adventure, Aquatic, Fantasy, and Sci-Fi Studios; he can capture your lead party member, forcing you to get them loose and then vamoose from the water tower. Although the swappable siblings function identically by jumping, dashing, and occasionally tossing items, keeping the trio intact on screen lets you stack them to reach otherwise unobtainable script pieces. Getting every one of these is tricky because many are hidden, and although combat is nearly nonexistent outside of boss battles with animatronic ape hands, a fiery robot, and others, there are hazards to the max – no baloney! There's no slack. Like Ralph, crushing ceilings, stomping dino feet, blazing broom rides, and more can send Warners to the water tower until none remain. Happily, collecting coins earns continues and slot machine spins, potentially freeing trapped characters, granting invincibility, or yielding even more tries. Nonetheless, the challenge may drive you insane-y – it's kind of a pain-y but still fun to play-ny the Animaniacs! Those are the facts!





Reflections: Familiarity is the name of the game here (actually, the name of the game is *Animaniacs*, but I digress). The zany show's fans and the show's zany fans alike should be delighted with the cartoon's theme song, Pinky and The Brain's tune, and the moment when the cranium-rich component of that rodent duo utters his signature saying: "Pinky, you are a threat to tolerance." That's the one everybody knows, right? If not, aficionados are sure to recognize other character cameos, including the Goodfeathers and a certain sultry Nurse (Hellooooooo!). However, my favorite part is spotting the many movie references throughout the Warner Bros. studio lot. There are ones from *Star Wars*, *The Terminator*, *E.T.*, and more, but the best might be from *Aliens*: a Xenomorph, but with an eggplant head! They should have gone with a gourd to really fit the film, though: "Get away from her, you squash!" …Mwah! Good night, everybody! – AP

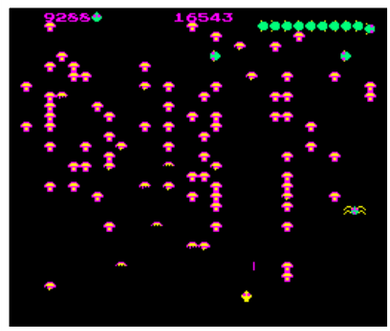
Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Atari Collection 1

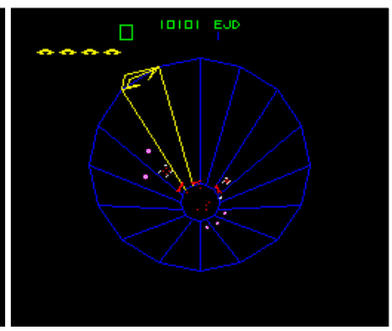
Genre: Compilation
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari
Ported by: Digital Eclipse Software
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Indulge in some Atari arcade action with this collection of six classic titles ported to the SNES. *Asteroids* is a single-screen shooter with vector graphics in which you command a ship that can rotate, thrust, and blast hurtling asteroids and enemy spaceships. *Battlezone* is a 3D vector graphics first-person shooter inside a tank where you must annihilate opponent tanks and ships before they get you. *Centipede* is a colorful single-screen shooter where you avoid spiders and bugs while destroying a segmented centipede as it winds down towards you in a mushroom-filled playfield. *Missile Command* has you defending cities being attacked by ballistic missiles; the objective is to destroy the incoming missiles by aiming with a cursor. *Super Breakout* is a brick-smashing ball-and-paddle affair where you have to deflect a ball to eliminate all the bricks on the screen. Finally, *Tempest* is a quick, vector graphics 3D shooter where you control a ship that spins around the periphery of a geometric tunnel while firing at baddies that come towards you. All the titles are accurate and competent ports of their arcade predecessors, with options available for each to tweak game elements such as number of lives and bonus thresholds. However, the unique control schemes aren't necessarily translated perfectly to the SNES controller. While *Asteroids* and *Battlezone* seem to have made the transition alright, the lack of analog spinner and trackball controls hampers performance somewhat in *Centipede* and *Tempest* and more heavily in *Missile Command* and *Super Breakout*, where subtle but quick movements are essential for precision. While you can adjust the speed of cursors, ships, and paddles in these four titles, it doesn't quite live up to the arcade experience. Still, this is a fine way to enjoy the fun of the golden age of arcade games.





Reflections: Besides some slowdown when traveling down the tube between *Tempest* stages, there isn't much in the ports that isn't accurately translated from their arcade counterparts. The sights and sounds are authentic, and there are even details such as the distant, spitting volcano on the battlefield in *Battlezone* (you still can't reach it no matter how hard you try!). An analog controller like the Vaus controller on the NES definitely would've been welcome for *Super Breakout*, and it's a shame that SNES Mouse compatibility wasn't built in for *Missile Command* and *Centipede*, as they would have benefited greatly from that peripheral more closely emulating the functionality of a trackball. – PC

Arcana

Genre: RPG
Release Date: May 1992
Region: NA
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: HAL America
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Young hero Rooks must harness his arcane skills as a Card Master to stop the corrupt magician Galneon's sinister schemes before the world falls to ruin. As the youthful spellcaster, you and up to three allies journey across the kingdoms of Elemen in search of treasures and elemental spirits needed to save your homeland. As you explore maze-like, first-person dungeons with a compass and maps to guide the way, enemies lurk everywhere, sometimes appearing in huge numbers and without warning. Preparing for each expedition by outfitting your team with weapons, shields, and armor, however, helps to level the field when faced with these randomly generated, turn-based battles for survival. Similarly effective are purchasable, single-use spells that launch unforgiving elemental attacks against entire enemy formations. These items, as well as restorative herbs, medicines, elixirs, and camping supplies, help to keep your team in fighting shape as you face ostensibly insurmountable odds. Before launching an all-out assault, it's important to take note of your adversary's elemental attribute. Enemies and allies are surrounded by a colorful border that represents a specific elemental aura. When casting spells, these attributes can have a dramatic impact on your attack's potency. Water spells, for example, are incredibly effective against enemies with a Wind or Fire attribute but barely leave a scratch on those comprised of Earth. As a Card Master, you also have the ability to recruit powerful elemental spirits to fight by your side. In addition to offering impressive support, these invaluable allies are able to alter your team's attribute in the middle of a battle to mitigate incoming attacks. Between its memorable characters, compelling story, and satisfyingly strategic combat, this superb adventure draws a winning hand.



Reflections: Preparation is key as a Card Master in *Arcana*. Having the right weapons equipped, the right spells in hand, and a healthy stockpile of escape and restorative items is the only way to survive the dungeons of Elemen. Expeditions occasionally suffer from unusually high monster encounter rates, which can see your unsuspecting party thrown into a new fight every few steps. In fact, learning to pick your battles becomes an absolute necessity if you hope to make your way through the game. I guess what I'm trying to say is that you've got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away, and know when to run. – AF

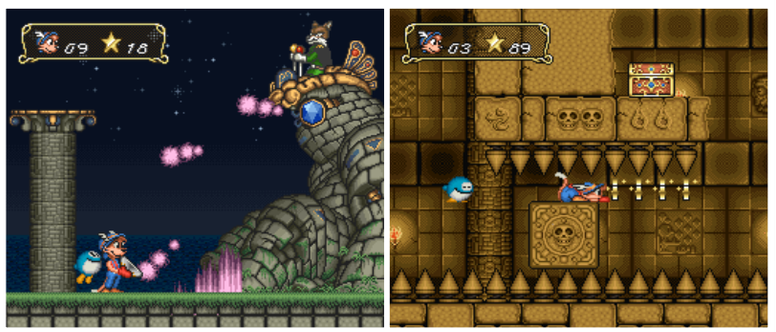
Ardy Lightfoot

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: ASCII
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★





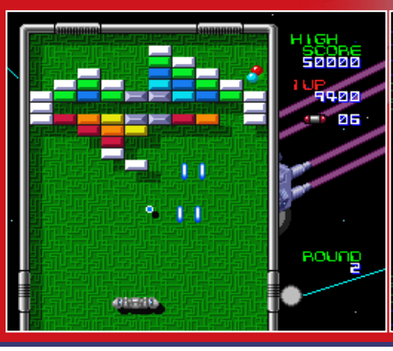
Can Ardy Lightfoot and his pal Pec prevent vile reptile Visconti from exploiting the wish-granting power of the rainbow's seven jewels? Find out in 18 levels of clever and calamitously difficult platforming through mines, forests, a giant worm's innards, a pyramid, a pirate ship, a multistage castle, and more. As impressively diverse as these locations are, they're no match for the variety of challenges therein. Bucket Ferris wheels over spike pits, a Hall of Mirrors with electrified tridents that can hit Ardy's reflection and kill him, stage boss Catry's button-deployed boxing gloves, and other dangers ensure that there's no shortage of fascinatingly frustrating features. Furthermore, Ardy is not a sturdy adventurer – one hit deprives him of his combination friend-and-throwing-weapon, Pec, and a second ends Ardy, too. Fortunately, most levels have checkpoints, and Ardy can both find extra lives and earn them by collecting 100 stars. He has a potent pogo stick tail for attacking and high jumping, a mirror-like cloak he slowly unfurls to avoid damage, and the ability to move blocks, bombs, and other items to overcome various obstacles. Treasure chests abound as well, and they often hold a replacement Pec or a temporary power-up for him, such as air tanks for limited flight. This game, from its cutscenes with Ardy's friends Don Jacoby and Nina to its peculiar platforming password system, is bursting with details to hold your interest – but it will not hold your hand.



Reflections: Ardy might be the main character, but he hardly seems the best mammal for the job. What if dashing Don Jacoby had been the hero? He certainly looks the part in his boots, leather jacket, and fedora, while Ardy just slums it in plumber's attire. Not only that, but Don is Ardy's only means of advancing multiple times throughout his quest. Don opens paths for him, slices him out of a foul worm belly, and single-handedly holds up the pyramid's collapsing ceiling so Ardy can escape. Afterwards, Ardy silently mourns his friend's apparent death, but Don's not down! He returns to help attack Visconti before being smashed into a wall, and he *still* survives. He's crushable, but he comes right back like a fine Stetson. Meanwhile, Ardy dies at the drop of a hat. In fact, he should drop the one he's wearing – he doesn't deserve a feather in his cap, let alone wings. – AP

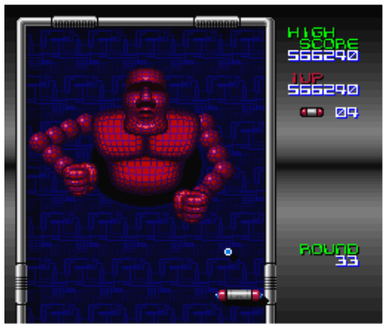
Arkanoid: Doh It Again

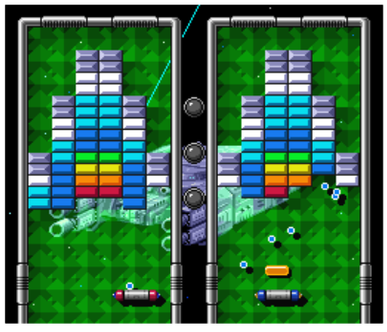
Genre: Ball-and-Paddle
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Edit Mode, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★





The objective of this fast-paced ball-and-paddle game is to direct your Vaus ship left and right on the bottom of a static playfield, deflecting a ball and smashing blocks to move on to the next level. Inventive and colorful block layouts make proceedings interesting, especially since silver blocks have to be hit multiple times to be destroyed, and indestructible gold blocks have to be navigated around to get at the blocks they're protecting. Besides these obstacles, pesky critters can affect play, such as electric beings that deflect the ball and jellyfish-like creatures that gobble and deposit it elsewhere on the field (this can also be advantageous). Helpful capsules you can collect often drop from destroyed blocks. Their effects include elongating the Vaus paddle, splitting the single ball into eight, equipping lasers, allowing the ball to destroy multiple blocks without deflecting, holding the ball on the Vaus until you choose to release it, opening a warp gate to the next stage, creating a forcefield at the playfield's base, granting an extra life, and resetting the Vaus to its default state. These keep the experience fresh, as do boss fights every 11th stage, even if they are a little awkward to play. You can alter the paddle speed, use the SNES mouse, and design your own single stage to try out. Two players can either compete against each other or work cooperatively on the same screen. The action can drag at times, and some stages take luck to defeat, but you can't ask for much more from this sterling example of the genre.





Reflections: The Arkanoid series is the pinnacle of the *Breakout* clone genre, which, while admittedly not deep, is tough to make too interesting. Taito decided to create a backstory involving a civilization seeking out a new planet to inhabit while the evil Doh places blocks that must be destroyed in the path of their scout ship. And by the way, Doh looks exactly like a giant carved moai head from Easter Island. It's weird and a little crazy, but I'm not sure how else you can fabricate a story for a game like this (is one needed?). The 99 stages do seem to be a bit much once you get into the game, but it's not as if you'll ever play many brick-breaking games in your life. Taito likely understood this and thankfully went all out with the content and options. – PC

Art of Fighting

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Monolith
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★





This one-on-one fighting game features the standard two-out-of-three rounds of action in three modes of play. The Story mode allows the player to select Ryo or Robert; either character must rescue Ryo's kidnapped sister by defeating eight other fighters, one by one. The 1P VS COM and 1P VS 2P modes let the player(s) choose any of the 10 fighters to face in individual matches. Graphically, the game is impressive, with well-defined characters, decent backgrounds for the fisticuffs, and a nice zoom-in/out effect that adjusts based upon the distance between combatants. Beneath the glossy surface, however, is a heavily troubled fighting system. There doesn't seem to be a good balance between character strengths/weaknesses and damage dealt by attacks, especially in certain overpowered special moves that sap a huge chunk of energy with a single hit. There also isn't a large variety of attacks per character, with only a single button apiece for punches and kicks and a third button for stronger strikes and grabs. Intuitive combos seem to be missing, and dashing has limited use. A taunting button is available to drain the opponent's spirit gauge, affecting the performance and power of special attacks. Since this meter is also rechargeable by holding down an attack button, fights can devolve into strange "tug of war" button-pressing battles between opponents. Furthermore, the sound effects are poor, with attacks and blocks seeming nearly the same. There are some nice ideas in this title, such as a trio of ability-building bonus stages in the Story mode, but the product itself is half baked.





Reflections: The Art of Fighting series served as a prequel of sorts to the more popular (and better) Fatal Fury series by SNK. The scaling in the arcade game made a decent transition to the SNES, but what didn't make it was the visible damage incurred to the fighters' faces during the rounds. Characters from these two series, along with those from other SNK game franchises, would eventually combine to form the rosters for the long-running and extremely popular King of Fighters series. *Art of Fighting* definitely has a generic cast (the female King aside), with several characters being derivatives of ones from better-known franchises. John, for instance, is almost a straight clone of Guile from *Street Fighter II*, and Ryo is a little *too* close to Street Fighter's Ryu, not just in name, but also in his similar special moves. – PC

Asterix

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: May 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Obelix has been kidnapped by the nefarious Romans, and it is up to Asterix to save him in this traditional platformer. The titular hero can punch, run, and jump as he travels through five multipart acts, visiting Egypt, Greece, Rome, and more in search of his friend. Item blocks are strewn across each stage and contain coins for eventual 1-ups and food for extra hearts; these are much needed as Asterix must restart a stage if he dies. Special items can be collected to call upon Asterix's helpers, such as little Dogmatix, who attacks the nearest Roman soldier, and Cacofonix, whose awful harp playing freezes enemies stiff. Scattered throughout Asterix's journey are cauldrons of magic potion which can make the mustachioed one invincible or even airborne for a limited amount of time; some stages require this to reach level exits. From wildlife, Vikings, and gladiators to pitfalls and traps, everything is out to get Asterix, which can become overbearing. His punch attack has zero range, so getting hit happens often, and on occasion, the controls give way by failing to register a jump, leading to cheap deaths. Adding in a few forced scrolling stages across mountaintops and rollercoasters to spike difficulty just puts the exclamation point on a game which is well presented but soon ebbs away into a very average platformer.





Reflections: This is not quite straight out of the pages of a Goscinny and Uderzo strip like its sequel, but *Asterix* is a decent foundation to build upon. I know I am supposed to suspend disbelief in a fantasy world, but Obelix is the strongest of all the characters, so there is no way he would be kept prisoner because he would just bash and wallop everything in his path. But in the true sense of the comic, it is supposed to be a bit farcical, as he is kidnapped during his slumber and then found still asleep, dreaming of wild boar at the end of the game. Asterix's punch has perhaps the weakest attack range I have ever seen in a game to date because the player has to be pixel perfect not to take damage, and even then it can mysteriously fail. It is just a shame that the game runs out of steam during its midpoint and becomes a case of trial and error instead of fun. – JE

Asterix & Obelix

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames, Bit Managers
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







In this platform adventure, the titular duo take a jaunty journey across Europe, gathering souvenirs to present to Caesar himself. From standard jump-and-collect fare to participating in an English rugby match and even to competing in the Olympic Games themselves, there is plenty of content that leaps straight from the pages of the René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo comic. The player can choose a character – they don't have any significant differences – and a friend can join in with the other for co-op play. Enemies consist mainly of the Roman army, and punching them out of their boots and into the sky is always fun, but there are also generic birds and other animals. The game is a joy to play but is let down by its insane difficulty, even on the easiest setting. Upon completing an act, the duo are not given their health back, so stocking up on lives by hitting blocks laden with coins is essential and finding important health items mandatory. An unnecessary stage timer just adds panic and forces the player to make mistakes. This hampers the fun, especially when on stages that have instant-death pitfalls or a tricky set of enemies to get by. If you are a fan of the 50's comic, then this is a fitting tribute. Just be prepared for a huge wall of difficulty – bigger than the one keeping the Gauls in!





Reflections: I'm a massive fan of the Asterix universe, so this game brings out the child in me. Everything is bright, bold, and cartoony, just like the books. The story itself (to annoy Caesar by proving they can freely leave the village that the Romans fiercely guard) easily fits in with its own canon, and getting to play some of the actual comics is fantastic! It is a shame that the experience suffers from inhumane difficulty, as progressing through to see the next beautifully realized stage is a treat. The game gets in too many cheap shots in the form of off-screen enemies, and many of them are completely unavoidable. Grab a buddy, though, and there is much fun to be had. I just wish you could change characters on the fly. – JE

Axelay

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







The Illis solar system has succumbed to an alien invasion, its fleet defeated save for one stubborn survivor – the righteous pilot of the powerful Axelay stratafighter. He must now go where no man has, penetrating the heart of the Armada of Annihilation to eliminate its mysterious leader. Hostile cityscapes, an aquatic underworld, even a lava planet alive with airborne worms – the game's six worlds are as diverse as they are lethal. More noteworthy, however, is the dynamic perspective, which alternates between vertical and horizontal action to produce an unusually eclectic feel. The overhead levels are particularly immersive, tilting the view to simulate a perpetual horizon from which objects gracefully "fall" into being. The side-scrolling missions are less mesmerizing, benefitting instead from stronger level design and more straightforward confrontations. Indeed, the vertical stages' dipped viewpoint leads to some cramped navigation and nebulous hit detection rarely felt in their left-to-right counterparts. The game's selectable weapon system is similarly unique, allowing the ship's pod, side, and bay compartments to be affixed with crucial add-ons. Initially, these armaments are rather bland – the Straight Laser produces a fireball-like volley, the Round Vulcan spreads bullets in a two-way spray, and the Macro Missile launches dual torpedoes at incoming foes. However, newer weapons become available over time, and some, such as the all-penetrating Wind Laser, prove almost cathartic in their destructive fun. And yet, this idea of withholding arms seems a strange misstep, as it renders certain weapons unavailable, and thus wasted, for large swaths of the experience. Fortunately, the game is more gracious in terms of challenge; sustaining damage from projectiles merely causes the loss of the currently selected weapon. This equates to having a four-hit life bar, provided players switch to the next gun before being struck again. Instant respawns, extra lives, multiple difficulties, and a few continues also keep the proceedings fair. Well-crafted graphics and a bold soundtrack elevate the action even further, but there's no shaking the grounded truth – while half the game soars for the stars, the other languishes in stratospheric limbo.





Reflections: *Axelay* is often deemed one of the SNES's finest shooters, and with its massive bosses, slick use of Mode 7 effects, and surprising lack of slowdown, perhaps it deserves that distinction. And yet, when counterbalanced with its uneven level design, underwhelming animation, and nominal replayability, a newcomer might just second-guess that glowing praise. But no matter; *Axelay* remains a safe, reliable choice for any shooter fan stuck with only a Super Nintendo. – DA

B.O.B.

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







To meet his blind date, B.O.B. the android lad must battle through 50 side-scrolling levels across three perilous planets. Each one offers unique landscapes, such as Goth's carapace caverns, Anciena's evil temples, and Ultraworld's gelatinous blobs, and all are riddled with enemies, including robots, flying jellyfish, and excreting insects. These quickly drain B.O.B.'s life meter, so finding health-replenishing wrenches is key to survival. To fight back, B.O.B. obtains ammunition for his gun arm, which holds up to 99 rounds each of six varieties: single-shot, triple-shot, flamethrower, rocket, bolt, and wave. If all ammo is depleted, B.O.B. can still punch, but death makes him restart a level with just 50 single-shot rounds and three trampoline remotes. These, as well as the helicopter hat, shield, umbrella, floating bomb, and flash, are collectible gizmos that make getting through the maze-like stages easier – or simply possible. He can't scale heights without the trampoline or helicopter hat, for example. He's often provided with a needed remote as a hint of upcoming danger (e.g., an umbrella before a steep fall), but that's one of this title's few kindnesses. The strict time limits, cruel death traps, laser beams, acid pits, and lack of checkpoints can make exploration vexing, and the occasional boss battle or ricocheting spaceship ride do little to break up the ultimately monotonous gameplay. It's a shame the cute, quipping protagonist's jaunt isn't a tad more accessible, but in this case, B.O.B.'s not your uncle.





Reflections: Boisterous Ormolu Bot? Boring One-time Boyfriend? Bring Own Beer? I scoured the manual and Back Of Box, but I can't help Being Overly Baffled about what B.O.B. stands for. Despite appearances, he certainly doesn't stand for sticking to his commitments. Although he powers his way through far too many levels, climbing ladders, dangling from pipes, and blasting oozy centipedes, he ditches his understandably irked robot date for a more attractive model, with whom he manages to get stranded thanks to his persistent misfortune with space cars. Maybe he should have saved himself the trouble and never left the first level's healing recharger pod. He normally dies after the timer runs out, but standing in that unit effectively grants him immortality. Sure, it comes at the cost of liberty, but his mind could remain unfettered, free to self-reflect, to conquer life's greatest questions and… of course! B.O.B. could mean Boxers Or Briefs! – AP

Ballz 3D

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: PF Magic
Ported by: Cave Logic
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★



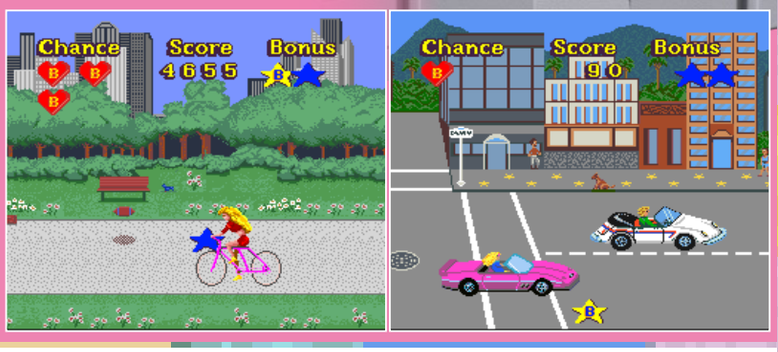
Welcome to The Jester's fighting arena! Taking control of one of eight combatants – Kronk, Boomer, Bruiser, Turbo, Tsunami, Yoko, Divine, or Crusher – you've been challenged to defeat the mischievous Jester in one-on-one combat. You'll need to fight your way through a gauntlet of enemy brawls before facing your ultimate rival, but if you manage to defeat him, he's promised to grant you a single wish. You're tasked with knocking out each opponent in the best of three 99-second rounds. If time runs out and both combatants are still standing, the one with the most remaining health wins. Defeating each adversary can be done with combinations of kicks, punches, grabs, or special attacks; surprisingly, you're also given the ability to restore your health by "groveling" in the middle of a bout. While this is an interesting feature, its practical applications are extremely limited – you're only able to restore life points once your fighter's close to defeat, and the process leaves you open to attack. It's clear that an impressive amount of thought was put into the game's mechanics, but the character controls are so poor that each fight ends up feeling unquestionably broken. Characters move at a snail's pace, attacks that should connect simply refuse to land, and repeatedly using a single strike ends up being more effective than performing a complicated combo. Similarly, the presentation suffers from its own set of problems. There was an ambitious attempt to create the illusion of a 3D arena by utilizing Mode 7 and constructing characters solely from pre-rendered spheres. However, every combatant transforms into a flailing, indistinguishable mess as soon as any action begins. Glimmers of what could've been a promising fighter can occasionally still be seen, but they're doing a fantastic job of hiding within an incredibly dull and unsatisfying game.



Reflections: Much of the fun of a fighting game comes from learning moves and executing them at precisely the right moment. This takes skill and ultimately leaves you with a sense of accomplishment and a drive to keep coming back for more. What PF Magic failed to do is create a fighting system even remotely close to this ideal. Character movement feels clumsy, navigating the arena is frustrating at best, and unresponsive controls make for an inescapably tedious experience. I'd love to have something positive to say about *Ballz 3D*… well, at least it doesn't have a sequel. – AF

Barbie: Super Model

Genre: Action
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil)
Developer: Tahoe Software Productions
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★



You're Barbie on a quest to become a supermodel. At the start, there are two faux difficulty options: "Junior Model" only features short stints at the dressing room, vanity, and catwalk, while "Super Model" is the full game. Each level begins with Barbie sitting in a cafe, ski resort, beach, or elsewhere having the most interesting reverie her vacuous soul can conceive: walking, driving, or biking down a street in the same locale (activities so fantastical and precarious that she couldn't *actually* do them); this transitions to auto-scrolling gameplay, where you must avoid hazards such as people, snowballs, frisbees, and ice while grabbing stars for points and hearts for health. Stopping is impossible, but holding Y accelerates and B decelerates. Touching cameras or shopping bags on the road opens bonus games for points where you're briefly shown a *Barbie* magazine cover and then tasked to match her clothes, makeup, accessories, and hair to it by memory. At the end of the street, you go to an aerobics room to practice catwalk moves; it's always four button presses while moving in square. Then you do the same road sequence over again backwards, culminating with a fashion show where you perform the poses you learned earlier. After four levels of this monotony, you beat the game, and Barbie becomes a supermodel if you scored 5000 points, which is extremely easy. At least it's possible to get a game over if you run out of health on the streets, but the game over screen is just Barbie smiling on a couch in her penthouse. This title isn't merely bad; it's insulting. The people who made this must've truly believed that girls are imbeciles who deserve this garbage.



Reflections: Years ago, out of morbid curiosity, I played through the Genesis version of this game (which is identical). I'm the opposite of Barbie: I'm overweight, I hate pink, hate makeup, wear glasses, and I'm a gamer. Yet during childhood I *did* own and play with Barbies (though I liked my TMNT and Ghostbusters figures more). I grew out of it. Barbie irks me for the same reasons Lisa hated Malibu Stacy on *The Simpsons*. Just look at this! They needed a girls' game, so it's about modelling, and Barbie literally can't even *dream* of anything daring or complex. Problems with female representation in gaming remain today, but at least things have improved since 1993. – KN

Barkley Shut Up and Jam!

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Accolade
(PAL: Sony Electronic Publishing)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This side-scrolling street basketball game pits teams of two against each other for fast end-to-end action, monster dunks, and none of those silly foul calls to worry about. The play controls are fairly simple, with buttons for shooting, passing, and "power," which boosts speed, shot, and super dunk abilities. There are a few modes of play on offer here. The Tournament mode, which sends teams through a ladder of others, is joined by Series mode. This is essentially a playoff series between two set opponents in a Best of Five or Best of Seven arrangement. Single play is also available for those who want a quick game, and it has options for victory that include reaching a predetermined number of points first or a timed option where the team with the highest score at the end wins. Visually, the game does a nice job with the various court settings and player dunk animations. The music is rather repetitive and forgettable, but the sound effects and lines from Sir Charles himself are very clear. While this all sounds great on paper, the execution is quite flawed. It's hard to know who you are on the court and where your player is, which makes defense more difficult than it should be. Even on offense, when players bunch up, it's too easy to run into an opposing player and have the ball stripped because of not being able to identify who is who. Another problem is that the camera sometimes can't keep up with the action streaking from one end of the court to the other, so players left behind get lost off-screen. All told, the flaws keep this one from being recommended.





Reflections: This game bears more than a passing resemblance to *NBA Jam* with its two-on-two structure, straightforward controls, and turbo-esque "power" ability. Giving players more of that kind of experience in the second half of 1994 was a good idea, and Accolade even had some solid pieces in place: Charles Barkley was coming off of an NBA Finals appearance, and having him represent the game – along with taking it to street courts – added a certain amount of attitude. Unfortunately for Sir Charles, all of that 'tude falls by the wayside if the underlying game isn't good... and with *NBA Jam Tournament Edition* starting to make its way into arcades, it was pretty easy to forget about *Shut Up and Jam!* (until this review). – PS

Bass Masters Classic

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Malibu
Publisher: Malibu
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





This game pits you against a difficult, natural challenge: catching bass. Play as your choice of six anglers in five tournaments. While the waters are populated by three kinds of fish, you may only catch bass. Before you hit the open water, you must visit a bait shop to purchase lures or upgrades to your equipment. Once you're ready to fish, you enter a top-down view of your craft on the water. Move yourself to the desired spot, then use X to access your tackle box and select your equipment. Cast your line with Y to enter an underwater side view of your hook. Here, you (hopefully) see nearby fish who may be attracted by your chosen lure and begin the delicate process of enticing a bite. After netting a catch that meets tournament parameters, it is put in the livewell, which is limited to five fish, and you head back for another cast. When you're done fishing or the time is nearing 3:00 p.m., go to the dock for the weigh-in to see how your collection stacks. The total weight is tallied, and at the end of the third day of the tournament, the totals are summed to determine the rankings of each angler. You only move on if you reach the placement requirements for the competition, and then it's off to the next lake! The game offers realistic graphics, although the colors look unappealing. Reeling is a slow, frustrating process that requires a lot of trial and error from the start. This would be a difficult title for someone to pick up casually and enjoy, but fishing game fans may get hooked.





Reflections: The graphics were the hardest thing for me to get into in this game. It's not just the look of the sprites and backgrounds, but it's also the transition from overhead casting to side-view reeling. There is little visual connection to the action, and it took me away from the realism the graphics try to portray. I did enjoy the look of the underwater scenes, with the Mode 7 lake beds and throngs of fish who like to open up for your lure but *not actually bite*! Okay, maybe this game got me agitated with its lack of direction. It's enough to make me want to kill a fish… I mean, to humanely catch and release. I'm not a monster, after all. – KY

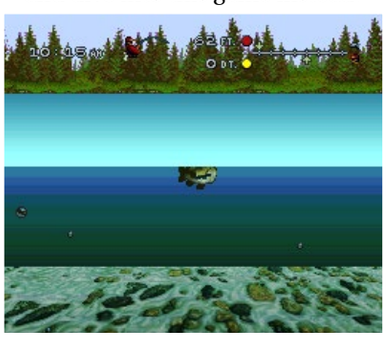
Bass Masters Classic: Pro Edition

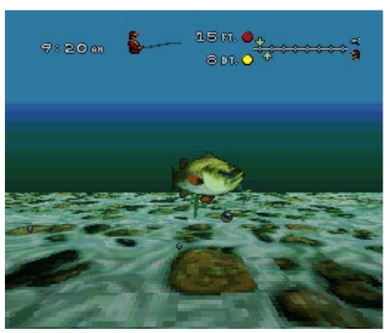
Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Black Pearl Software
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





This game pits you against a difficult, natural challenge: catching bass… again. An updated version of *Bass Masters Classic*, it's the same experience with a new look! You play as one of 12 different anglers through a series of five fishing tournaments. Your goal is to reel in the heaviest five bass you can find. At the start of each day, you can visit a bait shop with lures and equipment upgrades, including new boats. There are good tips about what situations are best for each lure, such as weather and water conditions. When you're ready to hit the lake, you control your boat in a top-down view. Use your fish finder and an occasional jumping fish to find those scaly biters. Then, press Y to cast and enter an underwater side view of your lure. You can scout the length of the water with X before you start reeling. Besides the fish, you also see fauna and various smaller swimmers that have no interest in your lure. Once you've caught and reeled in a bass, you repeat the process or move your boat elsewhere. When satisfied with your catch or 3:00 p.m. comes around, head back to the dock to do the weigh-in. Throughout the three days of each tourney, your weight totals are added continuously, and if you finish the final day at the required placement threshold, then you move on to the next lake and competition! This game is an improvement over the previous version, with better graphics and information to more easily net a big catch. If you're a budding virtual fisherman, forget the predecessor and dive into this game instead!



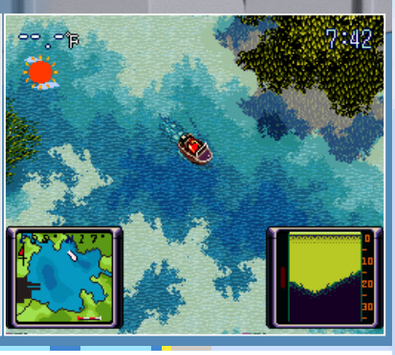


Reflections: I was prepared to complain about how the game was re-released with nothing but a facelift, but *Pro Edition* is more than that! While I appreciate the change from the muddy darkness of before, I adore the smaller "quality of life" additions. The first time I reeled in a fish, I was taken aback by the addition of music, which creates excitement to this central part of the gameplay. Also, you see fish jumping out of the water while driving your boat, as well as while you're reeling them in, forcing you to be attentive or risk dislodging the hook! All the changes they made create an improved experience that despite its faults, allows you to forget the existence of its predecessor! – KY

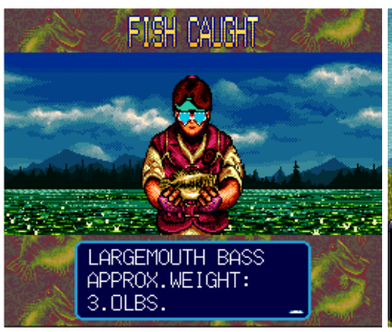
Bassin's Black Bass with Hank Parker

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Starfish
Publisher: Hot-B
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





The professional fishing scene is a tough battle if you want the chance to compete with Bass Fishing Hall of Fame inductee Hank Parker. This game is composed of four fishing tournaments in different bodies of water. You begin in your motorboat, which you steer around the map with the D-pad. Once you choose a place with the help of your pinging fish finder, press X to open the action menu and start casting! You then see a close-up of the area around your boat and can choose your lure and cast your line. Depending on which lure you're using (e.g., the swisher, crankbait, plastic worm, etc.), you have to dance your bait around to attract some underwater attention. If you get a bite, pull on the pole with the D-pad and begin reeling in your catch. If the fish makes it to your boat, it is evaluated for type and weight. You can only bring five bass to the weigh-in for judgement, so thankfully, the game automatically keeps your best catches. When you are done, or at the end of the time limit, head back to the docks to see how your fish stack up on the scales. Rank is determined by the total weight of your caught fish. Place high enough, and you're onto the next, more difficult championship. It's a game that pretty well emulates the illogical combination of zen and frustration that is fishing. With great sound and graphics, it's also a much less fragrant alternative.





Reflections: The sound and music impressed me in this game. On the docks before and after the tournaments, you get to hear fantastic music that I thought belonged in a well-composed RPG. While out on the water, you are treated to a blend of natural sounds. Add the pitter-patter of the rainy weather effect, and you've got a soundtrack to fall asleep to. Unfortunately, this is where my calm ended because once I started taking my bass fishing seriously, flashes of annoyance began to poke their noses above the water. *Oh, I'm sorry, was my minnow lure not wriggling in enough of a lifelike manner for you, Mr. Bass?* Maybe I am just no match for Hank Parker. I appreciate all the detail this game has, but if I've learned anything from video games, it's that competitive fishing can be difficult! – KY

Batman Forever

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★





Based on the 1995 movie, this beat 'em up has you assume the mantle of Batman or Robin (or both with two players) to fight through dark, dangerous locations ranging from the Second Bank of Gotham City to the Batcave. The eight levels consist of rooms of bland enemies, with the nearest foe's health appearing at the top below yours. If your bar runs out, you immediately reappear minus one life, but losing all lives means a game over without any continues. To stave off death, you have a long list of moves that include exclusive weapon attacks for both Batman and Robin, some only available after collecting their blueprints. Not all moves are damage oriented, as the duo can also perform actions such as launching themselves to a higher level (SELECT + UP) and dropping to a lower one (R + DOWN). When transitioning to a new room, a black screen with "HOLD ON" appears, forcing you to wait before continuing. This is especially annoying when an enemy knocks you back through a doorway or off a platform, causing a repeat of this screen to return to the foe. At the end of each stage is a boss fight against amped-up generic thugs or an actual villain from the Batman universe: Two-Face or The Riddler. There is a good amount of pick-ups, from health and extra lives to Riddler clues and blueprints. The game has a nice difficulty curve and even offers a Training Mode, but it's not satisfying to perform combos or defeat enemies. The digitized graphics are unimpressive and add little beyond their novelty. Sure, this game is Dark, but you won't feel very Knight-ly while playing.





Reflections: I'm not a fan of realistic graphics, HOLD ON regardless of what generation of console is involved. HOLD ON Cartoons and pixels are what I prefer in my peepers. HOLD ON Yet while I'm not a fan of *Batman Forever*'s looks, HOLD ON I can appreciate what they were trying to present. HOLD ON This isn't a terrible game, HOLD ON but I do wish the moves were more intuitive and the environments more interesting. HOLD ON Okay, that's enough! HOLD ON Quit that! HOLD ON Maybe if I create a long run-on sentence it won't interrupt me uh basically fans of the dynamic duo may enjoy tackling enemies together even punching each other in competitive mode it may not have much appeal beyond that please excuse me for not ending this review with punctuation – KY

Batman Returns

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





This single-player brawler is based on the 1992 blockbuster movie sequel. Players assume the role of Batman as he fights his way across Gotham City and the one-two punch of the Penguin and Catwoman. Most of the stages in the game are side-scrolling levels that pit Batman against scores of the Red Triangle Circus Gang's clowns. Some attack with their hands and feet, while others come armed with juggling clubs, knives, swords, and even bombs. The Caped Crusader responds with punches and kicks of his own, along with a few nifty grab-and-throw moves; he can even pick up clowns and toss them into windows and fences, just to see and hear the shattering of glass or the cracking of wood upon impact. These moves are quite satisfying to pull off. Batman also has a few gadgets at his disposal, including screen-clearing test tube bombs, Batarangs, and a grappling hook. The latter of these comes into play sparingly during light platforming stages that break up the pugilistic monotony. There's also a Batmobile level, where Batman must shoot down clown bikers and survive to the end of the stage. The bosses here are challenging, even on the easiest difficulty settings; pattern recognition only goes so far, with Batman still suffering cheap hits and losing quite a few lives. The controls are generally simple, though activating the test tube bombs is a bit complicated for something that is needed in a pinch. The graphics and sound are excellent, with great character designs and level backgrounds that scroll smoothly while a fantastic rendition of Danny Elfman's film score plays in the background. This game offers a decent challenge and is a lot of fun to revisit every so often, even without multiplayer.





Reflections: One of the perks of running the sound from my SNES through my stereo was that I could tape record music from my favorite games to enjoy whenever I wanted. *Batman Returns* was one of the soundtracks that I played often. While other people were listening to Snow, Silk, and Janet Jackson in their cars, I was listening to this – along with tracks from *F-Zero*, *Final Fantasy II*, *Super Castlevania IV*, and *Wing Commander*. I like to think that I was ahead of my time, given how popular video game music has become. – PS

Battle Blaze

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Aicom, Electronics Application
Publisher: American Sammy
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Two paths lie ahead in this fantasy fighting title: The Hero and The Battle. The former is a single-player story in which you, as swordsman Kerrell, must defeat four possessed competitors before facing Netherworld demon Autarch, manipulator of the tournament that decides the Kingdom of Virg's succession. Using a map, choose your first foe from dagger-wielding woman Tesya, electrified werebeast Shnouzer, Dark Blade-brandishing Adrick, or morning-star-swinging half-orc Gustoff. You meet your adversaries in side-view arenas and must beat them twice within three or fewer battles; if you fail, use one of three continues. All assailants have life meters that change from green to yellow as damage is dealt; when a bar turns entirely red, its owner loses that round. To avoid or inflict injury, combatants can block, duck, leap, and attack while standing, jumping, or crouching. A few character-specific moves, such as Tesya's Kiss of Doom (chest stab) or Adrick's Arc Blast (projectile), complete each fighter's arsenal, and yours are achieved with uncomplicated button combinations. Besting all four enemies grants you Life, partially refilling your health during the confrontation with Autarch. If you tire of Kerrell, try The Battle, where you can also be Lang (Kerrell's palette-swapped brother), Gustoff, Adrick, Shnouzer, or Tesya. Receive royal accolades by defeating the computer or a friend five consecutive times. While short on options, intricate combat, and quality sound effects, this game is mildly enjoyable – just don't expect it to set the world ablaze.





Reflections: I'd like to knock these characters' blocks off, and I'm not talking about some sort of Mortal Kombat-esque decapitation – I mean the defensive move. The computer opponents frequently go on guard, quashing all damage and testing patience. However, this tendency is superior to how they sometimes just walk your fighter into a corner, doing nothing else unless you act. You can get up, grab a snack, and come back to find them still sauntering nigh eternally. There's no major need to worry about the timer running out – it only affects the score. In fact, it's invisible during fights, and in what should roughly be its place is a silly skull that silently chatters when a battle ends. Why? My only guess is that it's sending secret messages to another chattering skull in this game – the one on Gustoff's loincloth. I don't want to know what they talk about. – AP

Battle Cars

Genre: Racing, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-8, (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







In this futuristic racing game, players must battle their way through a post-apocalyptic world by driving cars that are fitted with deadly weaponry. They can pick from several modes. The VS (two to eight players) and Tournament (four or eight players) options allow friends to compete one-on-one. The campaign modes let one or two players pick one of three cars and compete in a series of races. Each vehicle is armed with missiles, grenades, and bomb-like disks, while also having the ability to jump on opponents to cause damage. Prior to the main showdown, players compete in a cross-country race where the goal is to pass the finish line in a set amount of time while destroying as many opponents as possible to earn cash for vehicle upgrades. Credits for weapon upgrades are awarded if racers finish before the time limit. Also before the main race, the player is introduced to the track's boss character through some humorous trash talk. Unlike most games from this genre, main races aren't won by placing first ahead of a set amount of racers; the goal is simply to beat Metalhead Mike, Doctor Diana, and other bosses. This makes for a fun one-on-one versus competition in which the player and the boss trade fire while dodging the other cars on the track. Killing everything won't guarantee a win, though. Players must keep their turbo up by avoiding collisions and enemy fire. Ramming into walls causes the car to lose control and bounce around, and if it takes too much damage, it blows up, ultimately ending the race. The music isn't very memorable, but the tracks are full of interesting environments, such as exploding refineries and destroyed cities. Racing fans looking for something different should look no further.



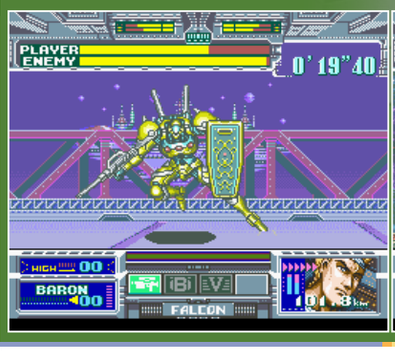


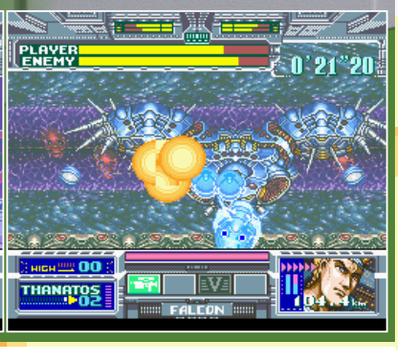
Reflections: Games such as *Battle Cars* steered the vehicular combat genre towards a more appropriate, "darker" experience. Many gamers in the early '90s were spending hours in *Super Mario Kart*'s Battle Mode, controlling colorful go-karts commandeered by kid-friendly plumbers and princesses. A more mature gamer may have been looking for explosions, destruction, and bloodshed. Thankfully, some much-needed carnage would come in 1995. That's the year Sony Computer Entertainment unleashed *Twisted Metal* onto the Sony PlayStation. Instead of controlling cutesy gorilla-driven go-karts, gamers could get behind the wheel of a deadly, rocket-firing ice cream truck driven by a maniacal killer clown! – MV

Battle Clash

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features:
Super Scope (required)
Availability: Common
★★★







In a dystopian future, Mike Anderson pilots the Standing Tank (ST) FALCON, seeking to avenge his father's defeat by Anubis in the Battle Game – but he can't do it alone. As his gunner, the player focuses on shooting down enemy STs in first-person, one-on-one combat using a combination of rapid-fire and charged shots from their laser cannon, as well as single-use special weapons, including bombs, homing lasers, and the powerful but energy-draining V-System. Produced by Gunpei Yokoi, the game takes full advantage of the Super Scope's myriad inputs; pressing CURSOR cycles through special weapons for use, for example. Strategy emerges from identifying boss weaknesses, using defensive fire, and pinpointing charged shots at key locations on enemy STs to deplete their health meter before the opponent can do the same. The two-player mode having players alternate rather than allowing a partner to steer the ST FALCON is a miss, as is the name of the second player's mech, the ST MOSQUITO. Time Trial mode has potential but requires they be played in batches rather than selected individually, which can become tiresome. Still, the game shines in single-player Battle Mode, where the varied vistas, eclectic mechs, and personable personalities carry the experience. There's a learning curve to be climbed and no save feature, but generous retries and a few hours should see any aspiring gunner through to the end.





Reflections: The Super Scope may not have been a huge success overall, but *Battle Clash* is a fun title that leverages the accessory effectively. Imagining the plastic bazooka as a 27-foot-tall mech's weapon is easy, and the variety the game offers makes what could have otherwise been a turret simulator into an engaging game worth playing through. The plot hook of the ST FALCON having a distinct gunner (the player) and pilot (Mike) adds to the immersion and plays on the game's recurring motif of prevailing through teamwork. I'm also fond of Yuka Tsujiyoko's composition here, and the boss themes really keep me in the zone while I am squinting through the Super Scope sight tube, particularly late in the game. As with all Super Scope offerings, there's extra effort in getting set up to play, but it's games like this that make it worth the trouble. – DG

Battle Grand Prix

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: KID
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★

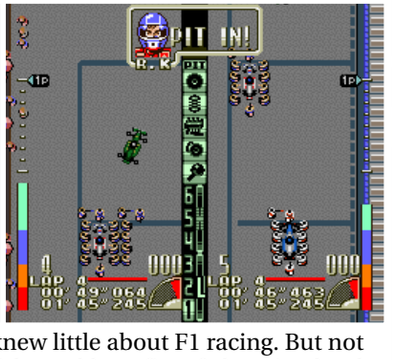






Formula One racing gets miniaturized in this semi-simulation of the popular sport. Set from an overhead perspective, players can choose from four modes of play – "Survival" has racers vying to avoid elimination by placing within a minimum standing; "Champion" is more traditional, determining its victor by granting points to those who rank highest over a series of races; "VS" is exactly that, a head-to-head competition between the player and a singular opponent; and finally, "Slot" takes advantage of the top-down design to loosely emulate toy-box racing wherein the player only brakes or accelerates an AI-guided car. The races themselves are held across an impressive number of venues – Lima, Shanghai, Toronto, and the Vatican to name a few – although most won't notice due to the game's forced vertical split-screen perspective. Indeed, even the single-player game is fixed within this myopic viewpoint, offering little to see beyond the track itself. Visibility is further narrowed by a crowded screen of stats, from the seesawing speedometer to the flashing warnings, that make navigating the more taxing tracks especially precarious. And yet, those blessed with the patience to learn and essentially memorize each course's winding intricacies will find an enriching experience beneath the game's figurative hood. Adjustments can be made to a number of attributes, including the vehicle's downforce (top speed and cornering), brakes (of which foot, engine, and CPU-types can be further tuned), and transmission (four standards are available), while the actual driving requires its own risk/reward planning depending on changing weather conditions (rain might mean a pitstop for different tires) and the damage incurred by other cars. And true to life, the racing proves formidable across all three of its difficulties; one misguided turn can cost a race or, even worse, cause disgrace through a totaled car. No continues or other crutches exist to relieve these inevitable defeats, either; this is a racer intended strictly for the genre's most ardent aficionados.





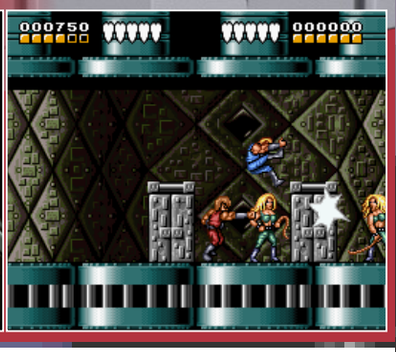
Reflections: Before this review, I knew little about F1 racing. But not anymore. I now understand the risks and benefits of choosing hard tires over soft (hard lasts longer, but soft skids less). I understand the conditions in which tweaking an engine for greater torque might prove advantageous over adjusting for sheer top speed. I even understand the difference between the four engine spec classes. So yes, the best thing I can say about *Battle Grand Prix* is that I actually learned something, and that deserves a nod of respect. – DA

Battletoads & Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team

Genre: Beat 'em Up, Action
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★

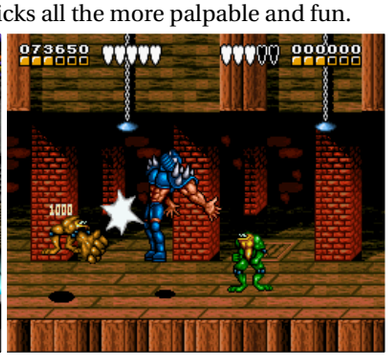






Two of the planet's most fearsome fighting teams have joined forces, and they're serving up justice one headbutt at a time! The Battletoads and Double Dragons must track down the Dark Queen and the Shadow Boss, who are hatching a diabolical plan to seize control of the Earth from aboard the Queen's massive spaceship. Start by choosing your favorite heroic brawler. Generally, street fighting amphibians Pimple, Rash, and Zitz are slow but strong, while everybody's favorite urban vigilantes, Billy and Jimmy Lee, trade power for quickness and agility. There are seven levels to conquer, so dispense punishment liberally using all manner of cartoon violence. For this outer space battle, the Lee brothers unleash their Dragon Force Techniques, including the Thunderin' Knee Drop and Twistin' Typhoon Kick! Not to be outdone, the Battletoads bring their own brand of special techniques, referred to as Smash Hits, that include moves such as the Big Bad Boot and Nuclear Knuckles! Waves of dishonorable baddies are never too proud to attack while your back is turned and consistently rush you as you're attempting to engage with their fellow cretins. Seemingly out for revenge, some familiar bad guys from both the Battletoads and Double Dragon franchises make appearances throughout the game – Linda Lash, Abobo, Walker, and Big Blag have never been known for fighting fair, and they're not about to start now! Luckily, you'll pick up bludgeoning weapons and sticks of dynamite along the way, as well as plenty of Bonus Pods containing 1-Ups, energy boosts, and other essential goodies. Levels are varied and fairly inventive, and the game's music is appealing with some rockin' guitar tracks that will fuel your fighting spirit! Sound effects are crunchy and satisfying, making the constant flurries of punches and kicks all the more palpable and fun.





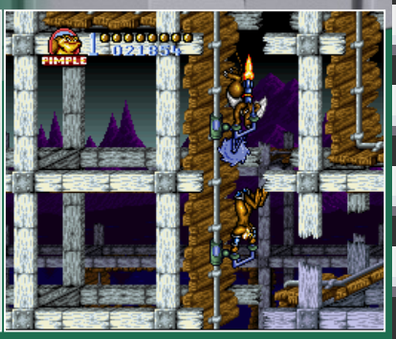
Reflections: This game evokes a playful tone, with humorous cutscenes between levels helping to tell the story. Numerous silly elements lend themselves to this title's light-hearted style, from the over-the-top cartoon wild takes before each boss battle to the whimsical fighting moves, such as literally hammering enemies into the ground like so many roofing nails! A nice variety of gameplay elements also add to the fun. You'll find yourself fighting baddies, racing HoverBikes, repelling down deep shafts, and even piloting a space fighter reminiscent of the arcade classic *Asteroids*. So grab your sleeveless denim jacket and harness your inner vigilante because there's plenty of justice (and smiles) to dish out! – DM

Battletoads in Battlemaniacs

Genre: Beat 'em Up, Action
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Pimple and Rash leap into action to rescue their brother, Zitz, from the evil Silas Volkmire. (Unsurprisingly, it seems like the Dark Queen is behind this sinister plot.) The amphibious duo must enter the Gamescape, Volkmire's dangerous virtual reality world, to find their chum and end the tyrant's plans. Choose either Rash or Pimple (by using the second or first controller, respectively) to punch, kick, headbutt, and jump your way to victory! For added variety, the toad twosome can execute Smash Hits, such as Pimple's BT Big Hammer move or Rash's Big Boot Block attack. Cartoony action springs the muscle-bound heroes through surreal levels including boobytrapped caves, treacherous jungles, and demented roller coasters. Baddies such as Psyko Pigs, Wasplings, and Scuzz the Rat try to curtail your quest, so be ready! Although the sprites are large, the blaring rock tunes are fun, and the sound effects lend a satisfying crunchiness to the combat, this is an excessively difficult title, demanding repetition and memorization. Gameplay shifts wildly from stage to stage, keeping even the most avid gamers on their webbed toes! Levels involve side-scrolling beat em' up action, tricky platforming on the backs of slithering snakes, vertically scrolling through bottomless pits packed with spikes, clinging onto a killer roller coaster, and Speeder Bike racing at breakneck speeds through tunnels designed to murder meddling toads! All in all, the intense challenge is conducive to repeated croaking. A couple of Bonus Levels do allow you to obtain extra lives, and the first stage's *Golden Axe* parody might boost your spirits. Two-player mode even offers the option to pummel your friend while you pummel your foes. You'll likely find the feature therapeutic during this brutal experience.





Reflections: Remember the myth that says touching a toad can give you warts? Well, you'd rather be covered in warts from head to toe than feel the itch-inducing frustration caused by playing this unreasonably difficult game! If I had a bat right now, I'd take a page out of Beavis and Butthead's book and play some Frog Baseball with this title! Or better yet, let's see if the cartridge is amphibious and throw it in the lake! Maybe I'll drive it out to a busy highway and make it hop across multiple lanes of careening traffic! Honestly, if I had a choice between eating flies and playing this absurdly tough game… I'd play the game. But the fact that it was a hard decision should tell you something! – DM

Bazooka Blitzkrieg

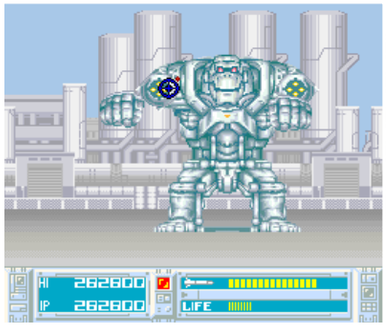
Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-4
Special Features:
Super Scope (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







A failure in the Sylon Inc. mainframe has caused the release of robotic soldiers upon a helpless populace, and unless someone can fight their way to the mainframe and destroy it, the city is doomed! The player must eradicate these mechanized soldiers and vehicles as they arrive on-screen in this auto-scrolling first-person Super Scope shooter. Taking too long to eliminate most enemies results in damage from gunfire. Deadlier missiles, fired by stronger foes, can be intercepted with the player's shots. Thankfully, the player also has missiles at their disposal, which can be used to quickly dispatch more dangerous adversaries. Power-ups scattered through the levels and hidden in containers include life recovery, missile ammo, a temporary shield, and a cruel anti-power-up that damages the player. The game has two modes: Blitzkrieg and Boot Camp. Blitzkrieg is a five-stage single-player campaign where the player must survive Sylon's waves of foes, traveling along streets, bridges, factories, and a service elevator, in order to reach and destroy the malfunctioning mainframe. Bosses, such as walkers and airships, await at the end of each level in this mode, with specific weak points and attack mechanics. Boot Camp functions as a hot-seat score attack, with up to four players trying to get the best total on one of three levels. Three difficulty options (Novice, Pro, and Expert) are available for both game modes, though the true ending can only be obtained by completing Blitzkrieg on Expert. While not a noteworthy title, the limited library for the Super Scope might make it worth exploring for owners.





Reflections: It is not a good game, but some quality use of parallax scrolling helps give *Bazooka Blitzkrieg* a sense of depth that its mechanics cannot, particularly when bridge beams are passing by swiftly as helicopters pepper missile fire from a distance or when enemies show up at multiple ranges with varying levels of detail to the sprite work. Because so much of the damage dealt by foes is automated, it becomes a pattern memorization exercise (read: chore) to know which enemies will actually stop and attack rather than simply run off-screen and which need to be eliminated with missiles rather than direct fire. Thankfully, with infinite continues, memorization is strictly a matter of tenacity, and defeated levels are permanently in the rear-view mirror. Perhaps most importantly, the first-person perspective spares the player from having to acknowledge the absurdity of seeing the protagonist: a ninja with a bazooka. – DG

Beauty and the Beast (Disney's)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: July 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Become the Beast and win Belle's love to turn human again in this adaptation of the animated classic. Your quest progresses through 16 side-scrolling levels in the castle's forbidden west wing, the wolf-infested woods, the luxurious library, and more. These areas are rife with foes ranging from spiders, frogs, and rats to living paintings, candlesticks, and books. Although the Beast can attack with his massive paws, growl to stun enemies and create platforms, climb walls and curtains, jump, and more, his movements are awkward and hard to manage. This ungainliness renders it excessively difficult to overcome rising spikes, moving platforms, electrified lightning rods, falling chandeliers, and other challenges on the way to battling bosses such as gargoyles and Gaston. Speaking of that vindictive villain, this game does do an admirable job of incorporating elements from the film by featuring familiar music, the magic mirror, and cameos from Lumière, Cogsworth, Mrs. Potts, and Chip. There's even a level inspired by the movie's sweet snow fight, and your timer is the petal-dropping enchanted rose. Finding replacement petals provides additional seconds, and in a nod to Belle's bibliophilia, grabbing hardcovers grants temporary invincibility, a health boost, etc. Nevertheless, you must remain on the lookout for the hearts that bestow extra lives because, despite the Beast's ability to sustain eight hits before death, he's truly ill-suited to facing the hazards before him. Combine his clumsiness with limited continues, and you have a tale as old as time: a great license transmuted into a mediocre game.





Reflections: The aforementioned snow fight stage starts out promisingly, with birds alighting on the Beast much like they do in the film, but it soon devolves into a tedious test of patience in which you must catch first seven, then 10, then 13 snowballs tossed at you by Belle, with each successful batch awarding you a 1-up. Miss one wintery projectile, and Belle chuckles at your cute incompetence. Miss three, however, and you lose a life. I came up with a myriad of ways to justify this tiresome bit of gameplay – maybe it represents how the Beast has a snowball's chance of breaking the curse or how he's losing his heart to love. Perhaps Belle throwing snowballs is a metaphor for pitching woo, but when you come right down to it, this is simply not how love *or* snowball fights work in actuality. Care to argue otherwise? Be our guest. – AP

Beavis and Butt-Head (MTV's)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Crude cartoons Beavis and Butt-Head see a commercial for a GWAR concert and decide that taking pictures of themselves doing cool things will get them free tickets. You control the duo (switching between them with SELECT, although there's no difference in gameplay) on their platforming trip through four areas of Highland: the high school, streets, hospital, and mall. You can choose the order of the areas, each of which is around six parts including a boss fight. Once they're completed, you get access to the final stage at the GWAR concert. Each level has a distinct environment with its own hazards and enemies. For example, the Streets of Highland stage has rakes you have to jump over, clotheslines to bounce on, and angry bulldogs that bust through fences. Scattered throughout the levels are a few weapons, mainly sticks with boxing gloves. Half of the time, you are left without and must simply avoid damage. There are health pickups in the levels in the form of food items that are on the ground (obtained by pressing DOWN) or falling through the air (snagged by hitting UP). Also, after each area, there is a single-screen Couch Fishing minigame where you use a fishing pole to collect food for health while avoiding enemies that will snap the line. While the game does a great job of mimicking the visual style of the *Beavis and Butt-Head* cartoon, taking damage is all too easy due to enemies darting in from offscreen and tight jumps coupled with loose controls. There is nothing spectacular about the experience outside of its connection to the show, so play at your own risk.





Reflections: *This sucks!* Well, not entirely. The developers did a fantastic job of putting you into the environment of the delinquent teenage characters. It seems natural for Beavis and Butt-Head to be bashing their neighbors on the sidewalk, riding a gurney through the hospital, or chicken fighting at the gymnasium. Also fitting is the presence of familiar characters, such as Mr. Anderson and Daria, and the use of sound bites featuring the duo's trademark grunts and exclamations. On the other hand, as an action game, it lacks solid controls, sometimes causing frustration. Fortunately, the password system helps, and there's a two-player option, so if you're a fan of the show, it may be worth your time to play. Otherwise, *change it!* – KY

Bébé's Kids

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Motown Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★







In this terrible side-scrolling beat 'em up based on the 1992 animated film of the same name, a single player takes control of LaShawn or Kahlil to wreak havoc in the Fun World theme park. Both kids can jump, duck/dodge, pick up and throw items, and use punches and kicks. Special attacks, such as uppercuts and spinning kicks, can be performed by holding the L or R button while pressing an attack button. The only major difference between the two characters is in their super move ground attacks, with Kahlil's being a tumble and LaShawn's being a cartwheel. However, none of that really matters because the hit detection is atrocious. Starting with three lives, the player must fight guard dogs, security personnel, and angry mascots while trudging their way around different areas of the park. If the player runs out of health or time, they are forced to restart at the beginning of the stage. Health usually isn't a problem since there are plenty of healing items in the form of food, but the timer becomes an irritating issue because both characters walk at a ridiculously slow pace. Stages are mostly drawn from the film and are themed. The pirate attraction is brimming with dive-bombing parrots and, predictably, pirates. The haunted house is a confusing, poorly designed maze where players must fight mummies while plodding around in circles and eyeing the timer. The only mildly interesting part is the House of Glass, which has the youngest sibling, Pee Wee, throwing items that the player must break before grown-up Robin catches them. The funky music grates on the ears, and the goofy visuals are just plain ugly. Overall, this is a horrid game based on a bland movie.





Reflections: An animated movie rated PG-13?! This was a big deal back in 1992! I remember asking my parents if I could see it, but they said no because my brother was only eight years old at the time. Years later, it finally aired on cable, and around that same time, this terrible game showed up at my local rental shop. My gamer instincts told me not to touch it, and I ended up renting something else. A buddy of mine did decide to pick it up and informed me of how awful it was. This piqued my interest, so I headed over to his house to see for myself. Well, he wasn't lying; this game's infamous status is well deserved. – MV

Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper!
Beethoven's 2nd (alt.)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Riedel Software Productions
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★




Beethoven, compose yourself! Your puppies have gone astray, and as both a St. Bernard and their father, it's your duty to find and retrieve Chubby, Mo, Tchaikovsky, and Dolly in four timed side-scrolling levels: suburbia, the park, the kennel, and the wilderness. Each of these worlds has two parts, with one precocious pup waiting and whimpering at the tail end of the first. In the second, your child can either trot ahead, or you can carry them past obstacles and back to their mother, Missy, by picking them up by the scruff. Grabbing steaks for extra lives and life-replenishing bones and drumsticks helps overcome hazards such as falling apples and rocks, burning barbecue pits and campfires, and spiky lanterns and logs. Enemies include whirlwind alleycats, squirrels, Dobermans, mountain lions, and dart-firing dogcatchers. If you find a sprinkler, fountain, faucet, or waterfall, you can clear a screen of baddies by shaking your wet coat. If not, your bark is worse than your bite, and each snarl sends a sound wave to stun and subdue foes; you can increase its range by holding the Y button, but this freezes forward movement other than jumping. On that note, your leaps are momentum based, but your walk is both lumbering and slippery, leading to an awkward, clunky feel as you face fences, falling/moving platforms, slides, conveyor belts, and pitfalls. The controls and occasional poor enemy placement dog an otherwise straightforward, uninspired experience that, despite the main objective, is hardly fetching at all.




Reflections: The music tracks during the levels are derived from The Fifth Symphony by Beethoven (the man, not the dog), and though the iconic "dun-dun-dun-daaah" seems kind of somber as a sting for finding sweet little puppies, it's still fitting because it was that specific composition that inspired the name of Beethoven (the dog, not the man). That scene happens in the first Beethoven movie, but this game is tied to the second film – *Beethoven's 2nd* even appears on the title screen, despite the *Canine Caper* moniker on the cart's label and box art. For the sake of diligence, I watched the movie, and it's a heavy-handed heartstring-puller as expected, but aside from the presence of Missy and the pups, its plot has nothing to do with the SNES game. I also discovered a computer version of this title, which just goes to show that it's a dog-eat-DOS world out there. – AP

Best of the Best: Championship Karate

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Futura
Ported by: Loriciel
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★½




This technical kickboxing game presents a bevy of options in your quest to becoming champion. You can edit your kickboxer's name, choose one of four appearances, and customize your fighter with 13 punches, spin kicks, jump kicks, etc. from a wide selection of 55 strikes. The animation is rotoscoped, resulting in realistic-looking movements on both offense and defense. Gameplay takes place on a single 2D plane in the ring. Attacks land successfully based upon distance and placement as well as the defensive stats and parrying of the opponent. Moves may be smartly linked together, but instead of button mashing, choosing the proper attack and parrying via DOWN are the keys to success. Bouts end if a fighter is knocked out cold (all their energy lights are off) or by decision when all rounds are completed. Fighters may level up their Strength (attack efficiency), Resistance (ability to withstand attacks), and Reflex (parrying effectiveness) via three training minigames and by winning matches. After stringing together wins, you will have the opportunity to enter "The Kumate" for difficult bare-knuckle fights in a round-free underground setting. There aren't many bells and whistles in terms of presentation, but working your way up the fighter ranks is rewarding. A learning curve is inherent to gauging when to use different attacks, when to defend/rest, and how to figure out your opponent. However, this more realistic level of strategy should keep fans of competitive fighting and martial arts games fully engaged.




Reflections: This was first released on computer platforms in Europe as *Panza Kick Boxing* and the TurboGrafx-16 as *André Panza Kick Boxing*, named after the French kickboxer (in Japan it was simply *The Kick Boxing*). The name change on the SNES was most likely due to the 1989 martial arts film *Best of the Best*. However, the game more closely resembles the plot and look of two Jean-Claude Van Damme films. The underground fighting is like the "Kumite" of *Bloodsport* (1988), while the game's Kumate setting looks to be inspired by the Tong Po final fight scene in *Kickboxer* (1989). As a teenage martial arts fan, I recall renting this title and being overjoyed by its attention to detail, as it was unlike any other game that I had seen, especially on a console. The variety of realistic-looking kickboxing and Taekwondo techniques on display was like candy to a martial arts geek like myself. – PC

Big Sky Trooper

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: LucasArts
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Take back the galaxy from the Sultan of Slime as a Big Sky Trooper in this quirky action game that mixes in shooter and puzzle elements. The experience involves using the E.S.S. Dire Wolf, a ship served by FIDO (Flexible Interactive Digital Omnicomputer), to clear out planets' atmospheres via single-screen space shooter segments before dropping to the top-down surfaces to eliminate hostiles. Once a planet has been freed, a beacon that allows travel between linked planets can be deployed. The robotic suit used on the ground is armed with a charge bolt, and as the game progresses, it obtains upgrades, such as snorkels and jet packs, to reach previously unavailable areas. Collecting batteries and fruits keeps the life bar full and the suit free to use upgrades. Some stages are vast puzzle labyrinths with switches and one-way doors; these can become frustrating when having to backpedal, and more often than not, the bolt gun misses targets completely when you're sidled up against walls, leaving you open to attack. Missions range from rescuing secret agents to pointless, silly fetch quests involving spoons, and the game is expertly written with tongue-in-cheek humor throughout. However, it is a shame that the puzzling sections let down a fun package.





Reflections: This title is definitely one from left field – it looks quite cutesy with its big, animated sprites, but at the same time, it lets you open fast food franchises on planets to keep aliens out. I read that back after writing it, and it still doesn't make sense, but that is *Big Sky Trooper* in a nutshell. Shooting alien spaceships and then going down to the surface to mop up is fun, and travelling to different planets is a cool idea, but it eventually becomes repetitive as the game is huge. Upgrades for your robot suit are spaced out to keep interest piqued, but the latter stages of the game just have you going through the motions. Still, the writing is silly enough to make you want to see what happens next, and this doesn't disappoint. Straight from the get-go you are promoted to a 21-star general, and as the game progresses, the number gets higher and even more arbitrary just for laughs. If you want something fresh to play, you could do worse than look here. – JE

Biker Mice from Mars

Genre: Racing. Action
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Get ready to throw down on the track with mice, mutants, and motorcycles! You control one character from an array of six: three biker mice and three of their adversaries. Each vehicle they drive has different stats in speed, acceleration, and grip (how it handles turns). There are three modes of play: Main Race, Battle Race (which has different courses and permanent deaths), and either Practice (for one player) or Vs Race (for two). Main Race runs at least three rounds (increasing with each difficulty). A round is five races, and you must place in the top three overall to qualify for the next set. Press B to accelerate, X to brake, Y to shoot, and A to use a special item. Each character's weapon has a different effect, such as Throttle's Tornado Shot that sends players into the air or Karbunkle's Mutation Beam that briefly transforms others into slow, vulnerable mutants. After every lap, you receive a weapon refill and a random special item, such as a stopwatch that temporarily freezes opponents. You must avoid not only these attacks but also hazards in the environment, including fans that push you off the course or rough terrain that slows vehicles (except for Limburger's hovercraft). After each race, depending on your performance, you receive cash that you can spend to upgrade your vehicle's tires (better grip), engine (higher speed), armor (increased damage tolerance), and weapons (more shots). While the controls of the game aren't perfect, the races are entertaining and enjoyable, with a unique experience for each character. It's too good not to grab a friend for some head-to-head Martian rodent action!





Reflections: You don't have to be familiar with the *Biker Mice from Mars* cartoon to enjoy this game. It isn't focused on story, so knowing the characters' relationships is unnecessary. The game uses an isometric view, which is good for easily spotting hazards (one of my biggest gripes with another racing game, *Super Mario Kart*), but it can cause confusion since LEFT and RIGHT turn the vehicle in those directions from the character's perspective, not yours. This is a minor issue, though, in a well-made game, and from the mouth of the leader of the biker mice, Throttle, "In this wild and woolly universe of ours, there's only three things you can count on: your brain, your bros, and your bike"... and this game being fun. Darn, now that's four things. – KY

Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★







Set in the not-so-distant future of 2030, former NBA star Bill Laimbeer has brought his own version of hoops to life. Pushing competitors around and violently wresting the ball from their possession is standard operating procedure, while mines and sawblades can take opponents – or the player – out of a play. Players can get either a quick single game in to satisfy curiosity, or they can engage in League play, which consists of taking a team through three divisions and reaching the Super League to battle for supremacy. Each game is split into two halves of equal time, much like college basketball, and they're set in a few different court environments, complete with their own power-ups to obtain. The action takes place via a somewhat zoomed-in overhead view. It's hard to differentiate between the players, but they look fine despite moving a tad slowly. Sound effects are a bit muted, but the music is pretty good. Play controls consist only of the D-pad for moving players and the B button for doing the rest. That includes passing, shooting, shoving players for steals, and jumping or diving for loose balls. This control scheme is as problematic as it sounds; shooting can only happen while standing still, so pressing the D-pad at all while trying to shoot results in a pass, which often winds up being errant. Passes are essentially worthless, as computer-controlled players frequently cut them off, so aggressive defense and decent shooting are the keys to victory here. It's also not possible to manually change which player to control, so running after loose balls or trying to cut off a driving opponent with a defender is on the computer to set up. Despite the interesting premise, the unintuitive controls keep this one from being a contender.





Reflections: This first SNES basketball game *could* have been pretty decent. League play provides depth and replay value, the ever-changing power-ups can make things interesting, the futuristic setting is neat, and the lack of rules make it easy to get into. The play controls just kill it. Perhaps Hudson was trying to keep it simple with the one button, as the game clearly has arcade leanings, but the SNES controller has plenty of buttons to spare. Even just using two buttons – one for shooting and jumping and the other for passing and steals – might have fixed the problem, but we'll never know. – PS

Bill Walsh College Football

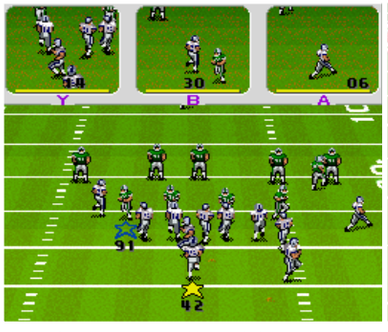
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: High Score Productions, Visual Concepts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★

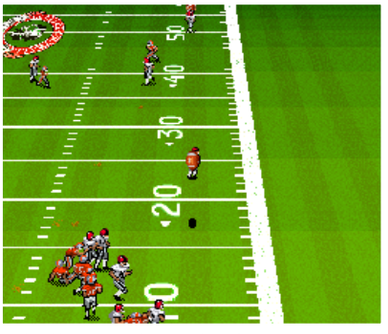






This college football simulation bears more than a passing resemblance to a popular series of NFL football games. The 11-on-11 action is displayed in an isometric perspective. Plays for offense, defense, and special teams are viewed in a set of eight windows. Pressing the B button during pass plays on offense pulls up three windows which display the wide receivers and show their proximity to defenders. What sets this title apart is the use of teams based on colleges across the country, along with select offensive plays that distinguish the college game from the NFL. Most of these unique plays are based on the option, which revolves around the quarterback making late decisions after the ball is snapped; delayed handoffs can gash opposing defenses expecting a pass, while faking a handoff to a running back and having the quarterback keep the ball can fool run defenses into pursuing the wrong player. Exhibition play, season play, and a special playoff mode with all-time great collegiate squads from the past allow for significant replayability. Unfortunately, there isn't an NCAA license here, so "official" bowl games and ranking polls aren't in this game. Nevertheless, it looks and sounds very good, and it plays a great game of college football. It's still a fun way to spend a Saturday afternoon in the fall.





Reflections: *Bill Walsh College Football* was released a few months after *Madden NFL '94*, the game that it's essentially based on. John Madden is replaced by Bill Walsh, and EA Sports anchor Ron Barr joins him in the booth before and after each game. There is one major thing that High Score Productions and Visual Concepts forgot to address when moving from pro to college, though. The game clock doesn't stop on first downs, like it does in actual college football games. This is a pretty big deal when managing the clock towards the end of a half or the end of a game. It can force players to take timeouts that they shouldn't have to take in order to conserve precious seconds, which can certainly be an issue once those timeouts are gone. This factors in more after big plays down the field, when players need extra time to huddle up or hurry to the line of scrimmage once the play is over. It's not a game-breaking oversight, but college football fans will definitely notice it. – PS

BioMetal

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Athena
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







The galaxy is under attack! Quick, pop in some '90s dance music and jump inside the cockpit of your state-of-the-art MF-92GX Halbard fighter! The BioMetals, a hostile race of mechanized extraterrestrials, have fixed their sights on the Milky Way. Take control of Kid Ray and Anita as the heroic duo lead the WASP fleet against the enemy threat in this fast-paced side-scrolling shooter. Select from three different levels of difficulty and prepare to launch! A variety of cannons and missiles are at your disposal, with the ability to evolve your weapon systems by collecting power-ups in each stage. Your plasma rifle can be upgraded into a three-way shot, five-way shot, powerful laser, or devastating wave shot. Missiles can be launched straight ahead or at strategic angles, and the deadly homing rockets track down enemy targets and annihilate them. Your futuristic fighter is also equipped with a trusty rotating shield composed of four spinning orbs designed to protect the Halbard when activated. Blast your way through six levels of intense action as the ferocious BioMetals attack in seemingly endless waves. The scrolling background graphics are immersive and atmospheric, with sporadic lightning flashes in the distance, translucent clouds blowing by, ghastly gossamer flora, and more evocative elements. Enemies are large and menacing, attacking incessantly and unmercifully. The game's music, created by pop group 2 Unlimited, is an odd fit, but soaking in those upbeat tunes does help ease the pressure that comes with having to save humanity. You only get four continues to become the hero of the Milky Way, so make every shot count! This dangerous mission will challenge your reflexes, exhaust your trigger finger… and get your feet tappin' to some sweet, sweet dance tunes!





Reflections: The Halbard's rotating force field, known as the "GAM," adds some special dimension to the game. Not only are the spinning orbs able to protect your scrappy fighter, but also the circular shield can be made to spread outward in order to attack enemies preemptively. The force field can also be fired in any single direction for a more concentrated and powerful blast. Your invaluable orbs slowly deplete when in use and need to be recharged once the energy bar runs down completely. It takes some thoughtful strategy to know when to use the GAM and when to allow it time to be replenished, adding extra depth and fun to this space battle. – DM

Blackthorne
Blackhawk (EU)

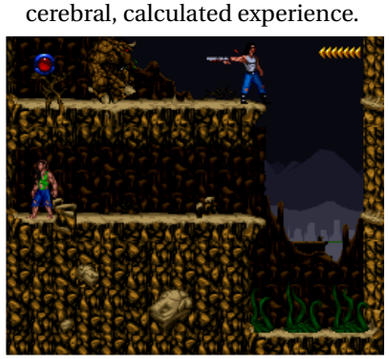
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Blackthorne sets out to save the Tuul Kingdom from the warlord Sarlac in this deliberately paced action-adventure title. A wooded swamp, mines, a desert, and a castle are the environments that form the backdrop to this dark world. Each area consists of connected levels that have Blackthorne traveling around single screens stitched together while searching for elevators and other means of advancing. A copious amount of platforming is involved, with broad jumping, running, and climbing up and down pedestals and cliffs necessary to explore the open levels. Blackthorne can collect items from enemies and human allies; the several bomb types, levitators, bridge keys, and keys to unlock force fields aid in solving puzzles and moving on, but backtracking is often required once items are obtained. Combat consists of using a shotgun (firing in front and behind) to deal with gun-toting goblins and traitorous humans, whip-wielding orcs, spider mines, rock beasts, and carnivorous plants. However, timing shots and avoiding injury by ducking back to "hide" via UP feel awkward and tacked on at times. Blackthorne is slow when the shotgun is equipped, with running, jumping, and climbing only available when it's packed away via A. The difficulty is punishing, not only due to the various dangers, but also because items such as bombs are limited, so Blackthorne may become stuck at points. Dying or giving up (if stuck) unfortunately puts him back at the start of the level without items. The proceedings look gorgeous, with smooth, rotoscope-style animation and moody backgrounds bringing Tuul to life. The music does a great job of adding to the mature atmosphere, as do the cinematic cutscenes. Recommended for those wanting a more cerebral, calculated experience.





Reflections: Developed by Blizzard of *Warcraft* and *Diablo* fame, *Blackthorne* is definitely a unique change of pace. I once played a demo of it back on the PC in the '90s and thought it was pretty good, but that was before it got to moments of extreme difficulty. It's not for everyone, understandably. However, in the mid '90s, there were not many PC games of its sort being released to us computer players. In Blizzard tradition, the game has a rich backstory, and there is an insane amount (nearly 20 pages) of lore explaining the history of Tuul and Blackthorne's mysterious past. While that's more of a standard for a PC game release, it's surprising to see that amount in an SNES manual. – PC

BlaZeon: The Bio-Cyborg Challenge

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: A.I
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Bio-Cyborgs have a stranglehold on humanity, and it's up to you to take them down with Garland, a spaceship that can take the form of enemy vessels. Initially, this seems like a basic horizontal space shooter. Y shoots single shots, X is rapid fire, and A/B is for special abilities. You die in one hit, and if you lose all your lives, you can continue from the beginning of the stage. While this doesn't sound too bad, the stages are fairly long and often feature minibosses. When you finally make it to the stage boss, a bonus point counter appears, quickly decreasing and thus encouraging you to take out the enemy machine quickly! Garland is a trusty spacecraft, but it's only equipped with a peashooter and special Tranquilander rounds. Certain enemies leave behind their shells if struck with the latter weapon, and if you steer Garland over those bright blue shapes, it takes on the enemy's form and method of fire, such as a spread gun or multi-layered lasers. Along with stronger abilities, the transformation affords an extra hit, although damage diminishes its fire power. Get hit a second time, and the form reverts back to peashooting Garland. The metamorphoses add a fun element to an otherwise average shooter, and despite the fact that you can adjust the difficulty, this is an unforgiving game with tight corridors to navigate and crazy fire patterns to dodge. If you're a fan of shooters and aren't scared of a bit of difficulty, give this one a try.





Reflections: At first, I thought this would simply be another space shooter, but when I underwent a ship transformation, I turned that thought around! Gaining new abilities over the course of a stage is normal shooter fare, but coming in the form of enemies added excitement to this element. *BlaZeon* was originally released in the arcade; the SNES version lacks its predecessor's two-player capability and some other content. While the game's box boasts "non-stop action," each stage has some part where there are no enemies, and you're idly staring at your ship. These sections become infuriating when you fly through them the second (or third (or fourth (okay, maybe fifth))) time because you got tagged by a heat-seeking missile. No worries; it's only 10 minutes of your life you have to relive. Who said video games were a waste of time? – KY

The Blues Brothers

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







In a surreal pseudo-sequel to the 1980 film, musicians Jake and Elwood Blues are no longer saving orphanages from foreclosure but rather platforming for their lives inside an, uh, evil jukebox. To escape, the brothers must survive 34 treacherous stages (24 in two-player co-op mode) of snapping bear traps, angry lawnmowers, grinning flies, and countless bottomless pits. Fortunately, the duo's musical pedigree is woven oh-so-elegantly into the gameplay – records found throughout each level can be hurled, shuriken-style, at advancing threats, while mini-jukeboxes grant scratchy chords of temporary invincibility. But wait, the brothers also apparently love cake! Gobbling the white-iced pastries transforms them into, well, bulked-up beefcakes capable of superhuman leaps and throws. Yet, whether sprinting across precarious cliffs, crawling through spike-lined sewers, or bounding through electrode-laden, OSHA-defying factories, death is still everywhere for the less surefooted. Indeed, controls are slippery no matter the terrain, but it's the many blind jumps, drops, and springboard challenges that will reduce most players to crooning the blues themselves. The game's soundtrack is also abysmal, pumping the same puny number of tired tracks until even its best – the timeless *Peter Gunn* theme – is soundly ruined. But, for all its faults, the game's cooperative mode is surprisingly smart, allowing players to lift and carry each other over any obnoxious obstacle. Unexpected serpent-riding bonus rounds and some shrewd late-game puzzles also lend soul to the otherwise flat proceedings. Don't be fooled; monotonous or not, the game is tough, with a relentless timer, scant extra lives, and three meager continues to see one through. And for those few who do reach the end? A generic, one-note finale is their grand ovation.





Reflections: Why Titus wanted the rights to *The Blues Brothers* is itself a head-scratcher, but stranger still is how little the SNES game resembles its cinematic counterpart. Flying serpents? Performance-enhancing desserts? Wrecking balls swinging perpetually through murky sewers? As the Angry Video Game Nerd might say, "What were they thinking?" It's all about money, I'm sure – I wouldn't be surprised if the game turned out to be a hasty reskin of an otherwise unmarketable title, hence all that incongruous nonsense. I wonder what poor abandoned mascot might still be languishing in an early build. – DA

Bonkers (Disney's)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Disney's madcap cop cat is on the beat! A toon artifact trio (the Magic Lamp, Sorcerer's Hat, and Mermaid's Voice) has been taken, and since hapless partner Lucky is in traction, Bonkers D. Bobcat is the one in action in this side-scroller's six stages. His romp to retrieve the thieved goods proceeds through Hollywood and Toontown – from a posh estate and luxury liner to mean streets, sludgy sewers, and Wacky Studios, there are tons of colorful backdrops on which to direct the animated former actor. Unsurprisingly, all areas abound in hazards; Bonkers must overcome dancing flames, electrifying wiring, moving platforms, and more while managing the criminal element. Chimp pitchers, sentient scooters, and insidious insects are just a few of the usual suspects seeking to outline the pen-and-ink police cat in chalk, so how does the fuzzy flatfoot fight back? Bombs are a way! He lobs or rolls them to blow up adversaries and obstructions alike, and by securing 10 badges, he increases his carrying capacity. Naturally, Bonkers can also bop many enemy noggins, and his metered dash lets him roll through narrow spaces or bash baddies, blockages, and bombable power-up balloons. Those helium holders house anything from super-dash-driving Hyper Juice to health-replenishing donuts, but to lengthen his life permanently, Bonkers must find hearts. These help him best bosses to reveal laudatory headlines between levels, although the police chief's incisive commentary indicates the actual quality of Bonkers' performance. As for how this title rates, it's short and silly, much like its star.





Reflections: Fans of the Disney Afternoon series might appreciate this game's many references to it. Aside from laid-up Lucky, Toots horns in, Fall-Apart's helpful gifts are a blast, and The Collector is again cast as a conniving villain. The nods to Disney don't end there: The three relics come from *Aladdin*, *Fantasia*, and *The Little Mermaid*, respectively, while the big cheese himself – Mickey Mouse – appears on some gas pumps (I guess he's playing the fuel). Should you lose all lives on the lookout for Donald, Goofy, and other familiar faces, don't worry: The continue screen is not just a standout; it's a stand-up. For the show to go on, you must guffaw at comedic stinkers, such as "Why don't vampires kiss? 'Cause they have bat breath!" If that kills you with laughter, you live! If not, it's game over – and that's *Bonkers*! – AP

Boogerman: A Pick and Flick Adventure

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







It's time to channel your inner eight-year-old and immerse yourself in a world of fart jokes, burps, and boogers. Meet Snotty Ragsdale, the eccentric millionaire who secretly moonlights as the disgustingly heroic Boogerman! Things are more than a little fishy at the local laboratory, so the intrepid superhero has sworn to investigate. BM grabs his mask, tights, and outlandish arsenal of gross-out weapons, including a limited amount of booger projectiles and intestinal gas that can be emitted as noxious fart clouds or burps. Pouncing upon enemies is an additional means of attack, and Boogerman can dig in trash piles to unearth some items – he must find clumps of green mucus and cans of beans to regularly replenish his inventory of boogers and bodily gas. There are scores of mutated baddies trying to thwart the leotarded protagonist across five multipart stages, from the Flatulent Swamps all the way to the Pus Palace. Flushing himself down toilets can warp Boogerman to otherwise inaccessible areas, while outhouses along the way serve as checkpoints. Collecting enough plungers and pimples in each of the levels earns the boorish champion some 1-ups. Despite the crude theme, gameplay is extremely fluid and nuanced; jumping, crouching, and climbing all feel smooth and responsive. The animation is beautifully done on the playable protagonist, with his gorgeous movements imbuing a high level of polish. The bosses waiting to do battle at the end of each stage are uninspired, however – all of them are animated poorly in contrast. Big baddies such as Hickboy, Revolta, and Booger Meister come across like afterthoughts, and these showdowns are a shoddy reward for making it through each world. The music is average, but the sound effects generally lend some extra punch to the gross-out vibe. This is a playful and colorful effort with some nice graphics and animation, but more thoughtful and varied design would have elevated the total package.





Reflections: This title boasts competent presentation and fairly solid gameplay overall, so it's a shame that it suffers from simply being too long. Each of the five stages contains four very similar levels, making the experience feel extremely redundant. Even reducing the amount of levels to three per stage would have been a marked improvement. The drawn-out pace of the game saps some of the fun, and it's easy to find yourself just wanting the levels to end due to the visual monotony and lack of challenge. – DM

Boxing Legends of the Ring

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







In this boxing simulation, players lace up their gloves and square off against eight real-life legends including Sugar Ray Leonard and Rocky Graziano. Three modes are available to choose from: Exhibition, Career, and Battle of the Legends. Exhibition lets up to two players face off against one another for practice. In Career mode, players create their own boxer and fight their way up the ranks to become the champ or "Legend of the Ring." Boxers start out weak, but wins and losses award points to enhance their abilities between matches. The Battle of the Legends mode places all eight boxers (which can be controlled by eight separate people) in a playoff bracket system, with the last one standing being deemed the champion. Created boxers can be entered in the Battle of the Legends but only after completing Career mode. The fights themselves are realistic and intense. Unless the "Far" or "Switch" setting is selected in the options, the player's boxer is always located in the foreground, giving them an over-the-shoulder view of their opponent. Boxer sprites are detailed and take up most of the screen, but because of this, movement can only be done laterally, so maneuvering around the ring is very limited. Uppercuts, jabs, and hooks to the head and body are all part of the fighter's arsenal, with blocks playing the important defensive role. The boxer's health is indicated by their portrait at the top of the screen. Facial cuts and bruises determine their status, with the image becoming surprisingly grotesque when a boxer is about to be KO'd. Due to the game's realism, players who button mash and forgo defense are almost guaranteed to lose. Fight fans who are looking for an intelligent boxing game should look no further.





Reflections: I went into this game the same way I do with most boxing games – punching as fast as humanly possible. I actually won a few matches doing this, but that was only because I was using Sugar Ray Robinson, who is the best boxer in the game. I tried this "strategy" in my first Career fight and was knocked out faster than I could say "Rocky Balboa." After having that embarrassing loss handed to me, I started my next fight actually thinking about when to punch. It took me a few matches, but it was really rewarding to get my first win.
– MV

Brain Lord

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Produce!
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

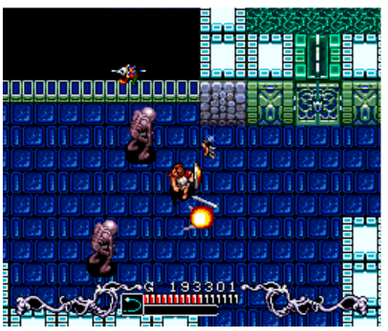






Are the dragons that shield the world from evil extinct? As Remeer, descendent of storied warriors that served mankind astride those flying reptiles, it's your duty to find and face the answer in a top-down quest through the Tower of Light, the Ice Castle, Droog Mountain, and more. Packed with skeletons, goblins, scorpions, and other respawning foes that must be fought with swords, axes, bows, and other weapons, these places offer intricate layouts and locked doors requiring specific keys. They're further filled with additional obstacles, including spikes, lava, moving/disappearing platforms, and the most salient (and satisfying) of all – puzzles. From stone-shoving sequences to nifty riddles, these brain teasers open new paths, hopefully leading to chests with life-extending hearts, expendable shields, and other goods. If you exceed your inventory's capacity, try saving at a statue and using a Warp Gate to return to town to sell your spoils, speak to informative folks, and shop for spells, health items, armor, and more. Jade is a particular gem of an acquisition – each of the nine types contains a different upgradable Fairy, and you can deploy two at a time to attack, heal, light dark rooms, etc. These aren't your only friends, however – fellow adventurers Kashian, Ferris, Rein, and Barness appear periodically with helpful items and dialogue, and wall plaques provide hints. Though sometimes slow and saddled by a slightly cumbersome menu system, this experience of fighting and figuring things out is fun – solve the puzzles and crown your cranium king!





Reflections: Outfitting options abound in this game, and it's neat that you needn't obtain every single weapon, Magic Medallion (spell), or Fairy to slash and jump through your journey successfully. Do you prefer swift, swath-cutting swords, obstruction-crushing axes, or blazing boomerangs for battling baddies and bosses? Should your Jadeites work to extend your life, end your foes, both, or neither? Is the quick-charging Magic Shot good enough, or will you wait to unleash the Ghost spell? In general, it's up to you. Certain instances do require (or at least lend themselves to) the use of specific equipment, but it's fun finding your favorites in the meantime. This game is also kind in additional ways: Copious hints, map-revealing X-Ray Glasses, and the Warp Gates' hastening of travel are quite convenient. They're almost nice enough to make up for those foulmouthed pig enemies – I swear that *they* swear. – AP

The Brainies

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★







The chaotic Brainies must be contained, so it's up to you to direct all of them to their sleeping pads! With a pseudo-3D view, this puzzle game challenges you to take control of the colorful Brainies and move them to their matching pads, which are gray disks filled with a color (red, blue, yellow, or green). To move one of the creatures, select them with the purple cursor and choose the direction with the D-pad. Brainies move as directed until they hit a block or wall, at which point you can move them again. Some of the obstacles, such as arrows that force them in a direction or teleporters that transport Brainies of a matching color to the other identical teleporter, can also affect their travel. In addition, there are pickups, such as a heart that doubles your timer in the upper left. If you're unsure what an object is, pressing R gives information about whatever's under the cursor. Running out of time or pressing L + R, which restarts the level, loses you a life. You can then use a continue or jot down the password that appears as a sequence of six Brainies. Passwords (or "PassBrains," as they're called) are set for every five levels, so using one may lose you progress. This game is entertaining and sure to stretch your mind, but there's nothing innovative about the puzzling stages, and the graphics are mediocre and bland. It's a challenging game that will keep you busy for several hours but likely be forgotten several weeks later.





Reflections: I love a game that puts you in control of an enemy or someone evil, but there doesn't seem to be a point to the way it's done in *The Brainies*. The little creatures could just as easily have been your pets that need to be directed back home, and the game would have been the same. It's nice that all the stages are a single screen so you see everything without wasting too much of your sometimes aggressive time limit planning moves, but the forced, angled perspective makes the tiles seem squished and the symbols not always easy to interpret. I did like the jammin' music in the game and the effect of its increased tempo when running out of time, but it's probably not going to make this something you're going to excitedly run home from school to play. – KY

Bram Stoker's Dracula

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Psygnosis Limited, Travellers Tales
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★☆







Players control Jonathan Harker as he attempts to destroy Dracula and end his reign of terror in this action-platformer that's loosely based on the Francis Ford Coppola film. Visually, there isn't much to get excited about. Players explore forests, churches, cemeteries, and crypts, but due to the game's mediocre graphics, nothing stands out or gives off a creepy vibe. The music, on the other hand, is very atmospheric and brooding, but unfortunately, the irritating sounds of the enemies overshadow the score. From the outset, adversaries consist of town drunks and vicious dogs, but soon enough, standard horror-themed baddies such as ghosts and skeletons make appearances. Jonathan's main weapon is a fairly weak short sword that can be upgraded to a longsword early on in the game. Additionally, Jonathan can discover different sub-weapons throughout each stage's many hidden passageways. The level layouts are confusing to say the least. A small arrow guides the player to where the level's hidden exit is located, but they can't progress until they either locate Van Helsing or activate a switch. Jonathan moves as if he has grease on the bottom of his shoes, making spikes and other traps difficult to avoid. Boss characters, such as Dracula's carriage driver and Dracula himself, are bigger versions of their film counterparts. Although intimidating due to their size, most bosses can easily be destroyed by spamming the sword, while others require some maneuvering throughout the environment. If ending Dracula's reign is too challenging, players can always bump down the difficulty, but it should be noted that playing on easy mode means the game cannot be fully completed. Although a very bland experience, fans of the movie might get a few bite-sized morsels of fun out of it.





Reflections: I absolutely loved Coppola's vision of Bram Stoker's novel, so I was really excited to play this. Upon reaching the first boss (Dracula's carriage driver), I was confused to say the least. He was inexplicably gigantic! I know big boss battles are cool, but come on! The majority of the boss fights had me questioning if Dracula and his minions had gotten ahold of Mario's super mushrooms. Jonathan's allies have gone through some alterations as well. Van Helsing's in-game sprite looks like a guy you should avoid if walking down a dark alley. I wasn't sure if I should take his advice or "Just Say No." – MV

Brandish

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Nihon Falcom
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

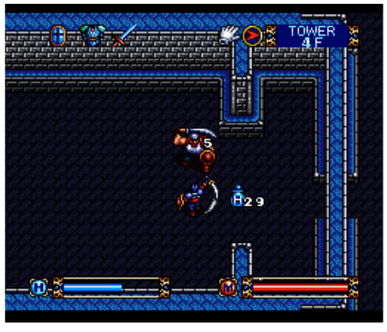






Swordsman Varik is being chased by sorceress Alexis, and in the pursuit, they find themselves in a mysterious, trap-laden land dominated by a dragon. In this action-RPG, Varik seeks to escape both this strange realm and Alexis's vengeance. When moving in the top-down environments, pressing LEFT/RIGHT doesn't rotate Varik's sprite but instead spins the whole room a quarter turn in that direction. This changes the perspective for Varik, allowing him to view whatever may be on the newly upward-facing walls. Unfortunately, when accessing the menu with START, the map does not rotate in kind, which can be confusing. Enemies, such as skeletons and gargoyles, move and attack in real time, and the game doesn't pause while in the inventory, so Varik needs to be quick swapping items in the middle of battle. Aside from the usual swords, armors, and shields of this fantasy land, there are other useful objects, including potions, spell scrolls, and steel balls that can reveal pits. As Varik makes his way through the five areas, from the Ruins to the Fortress (where the dragon awaits), he needs to search every nook and cranny because there are often objects or keys in one level that are needed in later ones. Occasionally, Varik must solve puzzles and challenges to access an area by pulling switches, stepping on triggers, jumping over holes, etc. He finds clues about his journey on plaques that he examines by pressing L/R + Y, and he can replenish health by resting with L + R. Varik's quest to free this land of the evil creature while also keeping Alexis at bay is an intriguing adventure that, while marred by issues with navigation, is worth the difficult task ahead of him.





Reflections: This game seems perplexing the first time you press LEFT/RIGHT. There is an alternate control option, but you still have to understand the rotational movement in relation to the map that itself needs to be referenced often to ensure you fully explore a level. Once I got oriented on the movement, it became a smoother experience. This game is a good idea at its base, with action, puzzles, and RPG elements, but it's wrapped in bland visuals and sounds. If a lack of glitz and glam doesn't bother you, however, *Brandish* is an entertaining game that is worth the time to figure out. – KY

Brawl Brothers

Brawl Brothers: Rival Turf 2! (EU)

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This side-scrolling beat 'em up features *Rival Turf!* brawlers Jack Flak and Oozie Nelson (now named Hack and Slash) teaming up with three of the world's best fighters to defeat the evil Dieter and his army of clones. To begin the game, the player must choose any two fighters out of the five, making the remaining three Dieter's prisoners. Each prisoner will be added to the roster of playable characters after the player defeats their clone. Fighters come with advantages depending on size. For example, Hack and Wendy are small and fast, Slash and Lord J. are powerful behemoths, and Kazan is an average-sized, all-around brawler. In addition to basic combat, fighters have individual wrestling maneuvers (such as powerbombs and DDTs) that can be performed after grapples, or they can use various weapons ranging from rocks to guns. Powerful special moves are also an option but come at the cost of health. Thankfully, health pickups are plentiful and can be carried until needed. For players having trouble, Angry Mode can be turned on in the options menu, granting brief invincibility when taking lots of damage. The campaign starts off on a high note, featuring pulse-pounding music as the player fights off enemies while dodging a hail of bullets from a helicopter. Unfortunately, the excitement tapers off with maze-like sewer and elevator stages that contain multiple pathways that look exactly the same. Beating up cyborgs and thugs in makeshift mech-suits is fun for the most part, even though poor hit detection will have players second-guessing their positioning. Add in a one-on-one fighting mode, and there is enough here to separate this beat 'em up from others in the genre, but the confusing maze stages drain a lot of fun out of this title.





Reflections: I was dreading playing this considering its predecessor, *Rival Turf!*, was ultimately a borefest. My outlook quickly changed during the first stage. Dodging bullets raining down from a chopper while punching dudes in their faces was exhilarating! Unfortunately, my excitement turned to dread after getting lost in the sewers. Oddly enough, the Japanese version of this game removes the extra pathways in the sewer stage. Guess what! That version can be unlocked by repeatedly pressing B, A, X, Y at the Jaleco screen. Don't freak out when the screen gets all glitchy. Simply press START, then DOWN three times and START again. Now the game is actually fun! – MV

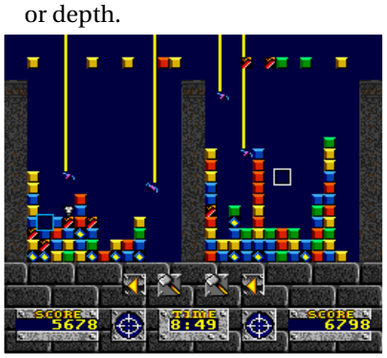
BreakThru!

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: ZOO Corporation
Ported by: Artech Digital Entertainments
Publisher: Spectrum Holobyte
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Bust up rainbow bricks in a variety of international settings! The player moves a blinking positional cursor across a two-dimensional field of blocks. Selecting a block with any adjacent blocks of the same color causes them vanish from the playfield. The field must be cleared in the allotted time to advance. The controls are surprisingly complex for the presentation; the player can slide the playfield from side to side, control the floating queue of bricks above the wall, show vertical trace lines, select orthogonally congruent bricks of matching colors to remove, or even trigger unique blocks such as directional-clearing arrows, single-color wipes, and dynamite to destroy immediately surrounding blocks. This raw variety of input actually favors the controller for more responsive play, despite the game's support for the SNES Mouse. The gameplay remains mostly consistent from setting to setting, even as the backdrops change from the Berlin Wall to Big Ben, the Golden Gate Bridge, Red Square, and other iconic locales. Each new venue adds slightly more challenge. Difficulty options for time and complexity help tweak the experience for all skill levels, and the mere existence of a cooperative mode is a rare treat in a puzzle game. Competitive mode also takes a creative turn, with two players competing for points on the same wall, whereas Dual Wall mode exhibits the more traditional two players, two puzzles pattern. For all its efforts to instill variety, however, constantly clicking conjoined color clusters does not reveal much in the way of emergent strategy or depth.





Reflections: There's something curious about having *Tetris* creator Alexey Pajitnov's smiling face all over a game he'd only endorsed, not worked on. You'd be forgiven as a player if you picked this game up, assuming this was just one of his lesser-known efforts. The SNES port certainly improves on the distinctly Windows 3.1 visual stylings of actual creator Steve Fry's version, but for all the cascading chromatic cube conundrums it can throw at you, the most puzzling thing about this game remains how it is slyly emblazoned with the endorsement of the creator of *Tetris*, as if to imply his involvement. An anecdotally fun game, if only for the clever mix of multiplayer modes and the morally questionable marketing. – DG

Breath of Fire

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





The Dark Dragons destroyed your Light Dragon village and seek to rule the world. Can you and your allies stop them? This is a high-quality JRPG with an expository intro cutscene, surprising revelations, umpteen NPCs along the way, effective music, and detailed backgrounds. It's in an overhead angle, with towns, homes, dungeons, etc., and a world map connects locations, including mountains, snow, and deserts. Occasionally, wild animals appear on the overworld, and you can hunt them for items. There are many playable characters with distinctive sprites, including anthropomorphic mole, wolf, and fish people. SELECT opens the menu, filled with symbols for categories: a sack for items, a helmet for equipping, a staff for magic, "OP" for options, etc. Items names are so abbreviated that they're sometimes indecipherable, and organizing is clunky. Fortunately, a "?" icon within shops and the command screen explicates items. Your carrying capacity is limited, but there's item and money storage in towns. In battle, four party members face enemies, and a menu shows your vital statistics and symbols for actions: a sword for battle commands, "AB" for auto battle, an unsheathed sword for fighting, a shield for defending, and so on. The protagonist can become a dragon and learns new dragon forms during the game, and other characters have special abilities in and out of battle. For instance, some can use magic, Karn can fuse with other party members to create powerful forms, and Ox can break certain walls. The enemies are varied, ranging from slimes and soldiers to ghosts and giant squids, although they're predictably palette-swapped in other locales. Only bosses receive non-battle sprites. You walk slowly, level grinding is required, and the difficulty is initially high, but you can save at dragon statues throughout the world. Don't miss this if you love JRPGs.





Reflections: I remember gaming magazine ads for *BoF*, but I wasn't that attracted to it. Like many Japanese titles back then, its Western marketing and box art hid its Japanese-ness, unintentionally making it less interesting. Capcom didn't know how to sell JRPGs here and enlisted Square Soft to do it since they'd been successful at it. About 10 years ago I finally played this, although I couldn't recall much until replaying it for this review refreshed my memory. It's not an unforgettable experience, but it doesn't need to be. It's a great start to a great franchise, and it garnered a GBA remake. – KN

Breath of Fire II

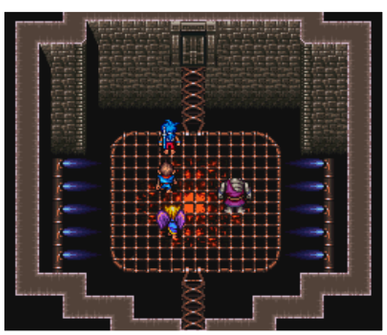
Genre: RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
(PAL: Laguna Video Games)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Mysteriously separated from your family, you must discover your destiny as a Dragon clansman and assemble allies to stop a burgeoning evil. The plot reveals itself along your quest and has subplots for playable characters. The world has myriad anthropomorphic animal races: dogs, winged humanoids, frogs, apes, and more. Your party can have four characters; those staying behind don't gain experience. During battle, the party faces off against the enemy and takes turns using items, attacking, or casting spells. Additionally, each hero has an individual ability: The principal character heals damage, Katt taunts, Nina can regenerate magic AP (Ability Points), etc. The principal character can become a dragon as well, which pools your AP into a single attack. HP is displayed in numbers and a bar, and defeating monsters more than once reveals their HP bars. Most monsters are unique, including slimes, soldiers, insects, goblins, and more. The encounter rate is high, grinding is required, and you can stumble into deadly areas. Pressing X opens the command screen, where you view stats, use items, and change battle formation. In towns, shops carry equipment and items, churches and shrines save your game, and banks store your possessions. Eventually, you build a new town and your decisions influence its development, granting various advantages. Here, your characters can fuse with elemental shamans you meet around the world to create powerful new forms. Besides the main quest, there are secrets. Random grass tufts on the world map open a hunting minigame where you can obtain curative meat and eggs. More items can be procured at fishing spots on the map in a fishing minigame. Despite translation errors, this JRPG is among the SNES's best, having depth in story and gameplay as well as excellent music and visuals.





Reflections: Before putting it aside to review games for this book, I was in the middle of *Breath of Fire IV* on PS1. By then I'd already played *I* and *III*, but not *II*, and now I can't believe I skipped it! It's excellent and truly established the characteristics of the series, more so than the first. Despite lazy overuse of sexual harassment plots (normally I wouldn't notice, but it just happens so often), the story is rich, especially in its character arcs and the surprisingly taboo conclusion it builds towards. Turns out *Final Fantasy X* isn't as bold as I'd thought. – KN

Brett Hull Hockey

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







This three-quarter view, five-on-five hockey simulation relies on starpower to try to stand out from other similar SNES games. It's led by cover athlete Brett Hull, who offers analysis after each game. Play-by-play commentary from Al Michaels is the other big feature; Michaels has a long history in the broadcast booth, including calling the "Miracle on Ice" hockey game in the 1980 Winter Olympics, in which the United States team pulled off its historic upset of the USSR. The presence of Michaels is most prominent, as his commentary follows game action as well as it can – there's obvious stitching of his calls with appropriate player numbers, but it gets the job done. The game also has several different modes of play, including exhibition, season and playoff modes of variable length, plus a shootout mode. One unique option is the ability to "coach" teams by selecting which skill areas for the teams to improve; it's not very deep, but it's a nice touch nonetheless. Extras and starpower only go so far, though, as the action on the ice is chaotic and difficult to follow. There isn't any kind of flow to games, shooting accuracy seems more random than player-driven, and attempts to check other players by pressing the A button too often lead to defenders blowing right past their targets. Even passing, a basic skill, doesn't feel as controlled as it should in a game like this. In short, it's a mess on ice. While the sound is decent, bolstered by solid effects and above-average music, the graphics don't impress. The scrolling is smooth, but player animations are stilted and rough, and it's too difficult to keep track of where the puck is at all times. Sorry, Brett; this shot went wide of the target.





Reflections: If I were judging this based on presentation alone, the score would be much higher. Despite the rough nature of the commentary, Al Michaels delivers his lines well – including a nice "commercial break" sign-off when the game is paused. The pregame matchup with Michaels and the postgame analysis with Brett Hull are pretty well done, too. Ultimately, though, presentation can only get you so far when the underlying game is so flawed. Prioritizing presentation over gameplay is a recurring issue with Accolade's sports games during the 16-bit and 32-bit eras, and that's a shame. – PS

Brett Hull Hockey '95

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





This three-quarter view, five-on-five hockey simulation marks the second and final season for Brett Hull video games. It once again sports a license to use real NHL players and stats, and Al Michaels returns to deliver the play-by-play calls. Several gameplay modes, including season and playoff setups, a shootout mode, and exhibition play, are here to deliver hours of scoring and checking action. Play controls feel more intuitive for things such as changing active players and battling for faceoffs. Shooting has been split into two different buttons – one for a powerful slap shot and another for a more accurate wrister. This may temporarily confuse players who are used to one-button shooting. All play controls, both offensive and defensive, are responsive and generally easy to learn after a few periods of adjustment. Scoring has been increased in this game, with distant slapshots finding their mark; this happens maybe a bit too often and makes goaltenders look bad. Passing accuracy is improved, especially compared to the first game, which also makes offenses more formidable. On the defensive side, physicality is both dished out and received liberally. Turning penalties on reflects this, with more calls being made and more power play opportunities resulting. Players who like to engage in a lot of body checking may do well to turn penalties off. Al Michaels does another decent job with play-by-play, even if his lines repeat before too long. He also makes more individual player calls, as opposed to generic numbers. Visuals see a notable bump, with a crowd added and a pretty busy Jumbotron that shows neat animations for hits, penalties, and scores. Action on the ice is less cluttered but still looks fairly bland. Maybe give this one a look if you like pucks.





Reflections: From the *"Did you know?"* file... This might be the last Brett Hull hockey game – unless you count the unreleased Atari Jaguar ones – but it didn't end hockey game development for Radical Entertainment. In fact, the Brett Hull titles were just the beginning. The team developed a pair of NHL Powerplay games for Virgin Entertainment and an NHL game for FOX Interactive called *NHL Championship 2000*. It set the standard for presentation in hockey video games to that point, featuring authentic *NHL on FOX* broadcast graphics, multiple auto-replay angles, and two-man commentary from Kenny Albert and John Davidson. – PS

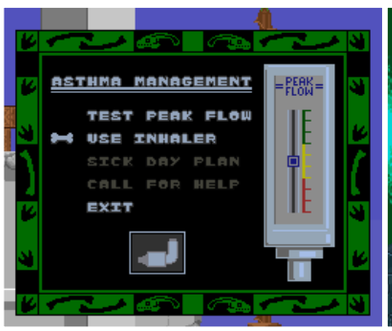
Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus

Genre: Action-Platformer, Educational
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: WaveQuest
Publisher: Raya Systems
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Rare
★★





This side-scrolling educational title is about asthma. In it, the planet's air-filtering wind machine has been stolen and dinosaur kids Bronkie and Trakie must find its parts. You can be either character (they control identically), but if a friend joins for simultaneous play, you must both be palette swaps of the same dino type. They all can do a short-range strike and a breath attack that's replenished by lung pickups. Jumping is stiff, and frequently you must shimmy across ropes by jumping and holding UP, but it's volatile. Furthermore, sprites sometimes jitter distractingly when the screen scrolls. Eggs represent lives and health together; one disintegrates by pixels when you're damaged, but it's hard to see. Fortunately, you can find health, medicine, and eggs for extra lives. There are six levels (each comprising three parts and a boss battle) set in uninspired locales, such as jungles, caves, and cities. You need to find friendly dinosaurs and answer their asthma quizzes to progress or get a machine piece. Most enemies are dinosaurs or animals such as frogs and birds. Some spit, some chase you, pterodactyls fly into you, and others bum-rush you. Bosses are usually large dinosaurs and other creatures that aren't that difficult. You must also avoid asthma triggers including smoke, feathers, pollen, dust, and more. Touching triggers lowers your peak flow (your breath's strength) and causes the screen to darken. To recover, you can open the asthma management menu and test your peak flow, use your inhaler, take medication, or call for help. You're scored on your health, questions, and trigger avoidance rather than time or enemies defeated. Between levels, animations show how to use an inhaler with text health advice. The art is cartoony, with stylized backgrounds and exaggerated characters, while the music and sound are bearably mediocre. Alas, novelty is the game's greatest asset.





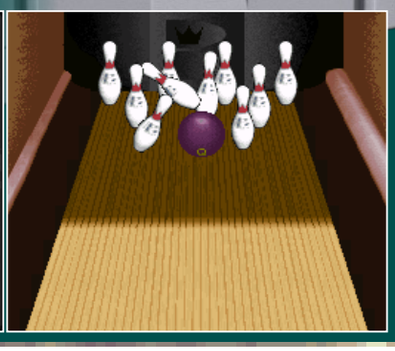
Reflections: I vaguely remember reading about this title in a gaming magazine years ago. This might not look like a game that would have any complexity in its storytelling, but it's interesting in how it links what it's trying to convey with its set goals and rewards. It values self-care and stresses overtly that it's OK to ask for help, a departure from the usual wish-fulfillment power fantasies of gaming. Bronkie and Trakie aren't the only asthmatic video game heroes, though: The protagonist of *Mother* (or *EarthBound Beginnings*) has asthma and occasionally suffers status effects from it. – KN

Brunswick World: Tournament of Champions



Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: Tiertex Design Studios
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Polish up your bowling ball and spray some disinfectant in those shoes because it's time to climb the ranks of the professional bowling circuit. Before hitting the lanes, you can either choose one of 11 professional bowlers or create your own character and outfit them in numerous combinations of bowling garb. There are also several different ball types and weights to choose from, but these are not just for looks. Each one possesses different attributes that affect how the ball reacts after it is thrown. You can hone your skills and test each ball in the game's practice mode, where you can also see how various lane oil patterns alter the ball's path. After practice is out of the way, enter your bowler in one of five tournaments to face off against 64 (32 in short format) real-life and fictional bowlers. Winning any of these competitions awards you an invite to the sixth one, the Brunswick World Tournament of Champions. For bowlers looking for a multiplayer experience, League play is an option that allows up to four friends to play in either a singles or teams league consisting of four, six, or eight bowlers/teams. The actual bowling is easy to pick up but hard to master. A simple interface allows you to position your bowler and their aim before starting and stopping two moving meters that control throwing power and ball spin. The graphics aren't stunning, but they don't really need to be. The lanes look nice and subtly change depending on the tournament. Thankfully, the music can be turned off because it never changes and doesn't fit the bowling alley atmosphere. Although there are several modes of play, the lack of a bowler progression system is sorely felt. Nethertheless, this is a solid title.





Reflections: I'm pretty good at video game bowling, but there is something about this title that got me totally hooked. I sunk more hours into it than I'd like to admit and won each of the tournaments. I also spent an embarrassingly large chunk of time dressing my bowler up in different clothing. I may have an addiction to bowling games. When *Wii Sports* was released, I called out of work for a week to play the bowling portion. When I tried to return, I was advised that I was going to need a doctor's note. Luckily, I have a really understanding family doctor. – MV

Brutal: Paws of Fury
Paws of Fury (GER)



Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Eurocom
Publisher: Cybersoft (PAL: GameTek)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The 1990s' "animals-with-attitude" trend continues in this one-on-one fighting game featuring a cast of eight anthropomorphic mammals. These fighters have been called to compete in an elite martial arts tournament held by the Dali Llama, a powerful warrior who offers a tantalizing prize – the legendary "Belt of Heaven." Each entrant embodies a unique fighting style: Kung Fu Bunny, for example, specializes in vicious kicks, while the Soviet-trained Ivan Bear takes more of a brawler's approach. But it's not all serious, high-minded fighting. Prince Leon the Lion might practice "Tan Ku," but he's not above whipping out a concert-grade amplifier and blasting opponents with his ultrasonic guitar. Indeed, this misplaced whimsy leads to some unbalanced gameplay that's most glaring in two-player bouts, with certain characters packing clear advantages over others. It's not just the flamboyant special movies; each animal can perform an assortment of regular light, medium, and hard attacks, but some, like Ivan Bear's overpowered hard punch, can prove more devastating than the deadliest special. This is the game's most brutal problem: the fighting mechanics simply lack the refinement one would expect from a "martial arts" title. Forget discerning a viable combo or countering strategy; even the act of consistently blocking attacks is an inscrutable struggle. Yet, stumble as it does, the game is undeniably attractive, combining beautifully drawn backgrounds and ambient music to evoke a distinct, Eastern sensibility. The fighters are similarly unique, possessing an interesting range of motivations and movesets, although their respective sprites are not always as endearing – for every fine Foxy Roxy, there's a less fetching Rhei Rat. The presentation is likewise commendable, showing the player's rising rank, from white belt to Grand Master, with each battle won, along with a win/loss history tracked via a cumbersome password. Moreover, special moves are actually taught in-game during the single-player experience, providing an organic way to improve the player's skill. Unique character endings and the option to switch between "turbo" and "normal" modes round out this flawed but not insubstantial creation.





Reflections: The early 1990s experienced a glut of *Street Fighter II* copycats, and unsurprisingly, I originally deemed *Brutal: Paws of Fury* as just another cynical cash-in. But I was wrong. While its combat system is certainly weak, the game compensates through its overriding charm, resulting in a decent palate cleanser for those needing a break from more serious fighters. – DA

Bubsy II

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Accolade
(PAL: Telstar Fun and Games)
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





This pun-packed, side-scrolling sequel sees Bubsy braving the Amazatorium attraction to stop millionaire Oinker P. Hamm from hogging history itself, pouncing on foes and gliding along the way. Incidentally, the bumptious bobcat is also pursuing his young twin kin – unless you've opted for one of the two-player modes. In that case, bobkittens Terri and Terry tag along with their uncle, tossing bananas to assist or annoy. These aren't the only choices to make, however. You must pick a path to the pork conniver, whether it's a five-stage First, Second, or Third Floor Tour or all tiers combined into a 15-stage Grand Tour. Next, decide which exhibit wing is best – East or West – to access five selectable worlds: Aerial, Egypt, Medieval, Music, and Space. With variations offered on every building level, these sprawling environments each hide a huge, red marble, and recovering all such spheres is required for unlocking the floor's boss room (scattered small marbles provide points). This task is a trough of trouble thanks to bleating sheep, winged eyeballs, electrifying guitars, and other aggressive enemies, not to mention hazards including flames, spikes, and pits. Bubsy must even pilot biplanes and rockets to outmaneuver porcine meteors and boar blimps within some stages, so be careful – he could die when pigs fly. Fortunately, both vehicles pack a Nerf® Ballzooka™, and he can brandish the toy weapon on foot if he finds it. Additional items range from bandaids for restoring Bubsy's healthy smirk to portable holes for escaping stages; the bobcat can also try several minigames. Though the numerous floors provide replay value, everything in the overlong Grand Tour becomes draining: cats and hogs – the whole kit and caboodle!





Reflections: The twins, enemies Bozwell (buzzard) and Sid (shrew), and Bubsy's armadillo associate, Arnold, are all characters from the sole episode of the Bubsy cartoon, which features the flippant feline frequently asking "What could possibly go wrong?" Well, let's see: Despite using the true talents of Tress MacNeille, Rob Paulsen, Jim Cummings, and other voice-acting luminaries, the animated series never came to be, and after the introduction of the mediocre *Bubsy 3D* (1996), another game starring the bobcat wouldn't debut for around two decades. Does that answer your question, Bubsy? – AP

Bubsy in: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1–2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Here's an unusual yarn – the tale of a cat named Bubsy seeking not to chew but to rescue said thread from thieving Woolie aliens in 16 side-scrolling "chapters." Wordplay precedes the gameplay; the manual and stage titles alike are laced with fun parodies and puns. Though it's tempting to roll your eyes, keep them on the screen to enjoy fighting foes by jumping and gliding as you explore creative environments that feature trees gnawed into number two pencils, vegetable bodybuilders by carnival high strikers, hive-sweet-hives, and rides on rafts, roller coasters, rocket ships, and more. Bubsy's own looks are also memorable, but that's largely due to his many death animations. Whether the Woolies wear conductor's caps or clown wigs, a touch from them, deputized prairie dogs, shooting starfish, or other enemies ends with one of the bobcat's nine initial lives in pieces or a puddle and with you in a huff. Indeed, the level designs consistently place unsuspected danger on the periphery, and panning/tilting the view ruins the momentum while failing to reveal every cat-killer. It's infuriating, especially when spiky cattle skulls, crackable tack crates, water hazards, and more also claim chances, forcing you to reread the level's name (which is fine) and rehear Bubsy's obnoxious quotes (which is not). Happily, minutes, checkpoints, and extra lives are plentiful, special shirts accord invisibility or invincibility, and there's generally more than one way to skin a chapter (for example, by entering warp caves to skip sections or snag bonus yarn balls). Though weaving through worlds in search of knitting necessities sounds absurd, the raveling of dopey humor and hefty difficulty might leave in you stitches.





Reflections: Despite adoring cats and having a best friend nicknamed Bubsy, I have a hard time tolerating this title's self-important protagonist. What I do like from the game (plus its manual and sequel) are some of the cheesy puns. I camembert to pass up on wordplay; it colby an addiction, but what's the parm? It makes things cheddar when I'm bleu, and it shows my gouda humor. I chuckled brie-ly at a level logged in as "Beavery Careful," but Bubsy knocks this name, sneering "Hey, I didn't write this stuff!" How dairy you, bobcat! If you don't at least occasionally enjoy puns, you're probably a muenster! – AP

Bugs Bunny Rabbit Rampage

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Viacom New Media
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







As in the cartoon *Rabbit Rampage* (1955), an animator is harassing Bugs Bunny by putting him in dangerous situations. In this action-platformer, Bugs must make his way through 10 unique stages to thwart this adversary. To take down enemies that range from gingerbread people in the fairytale stage to Martians in space, Bugs can kick, spin-attack (at his health's expense), and throw pies or, more importantly, ACME objects. These items, which he finds throughout the stages, include dynamite, anvils, and exploding bones. One of the objects is an arrow that creates a respawn checkpoint should Bugs's carrot-shaped life meter at the top be depleted. Damage can be difficult to avoid, so thankfully, collecting carrots refills his health, and grabbing 1-ups increases the life counter in the upper left. If his lives run out, Bugs gets three continues before it's game over. Some stages end in a boss fight with a familiar Looney Tunes character while others are made up entirely of a boss battle or feature no boss at all. At the end of every level, Bugs receives a performance-based style rating that can earn him more health (carried over stage-to-stage) or even an extra life. The graphics and music are well done and present an experience that is faithful to the source materials. The variation in the levels, not only in the gameplay but also in the different backgrounds and enemies, keeps the game interesting. It's fairly difficult because foes attack both from the sides and from above (the stages are often taller than a single screen), and Bugs has no defensive moves. While on the short side, it's a fun time with some rascally cartoon faces.





Reflections: I like the *Rabbit Rampage* cartoon, and part of me quite enjoys seeing the constantly snarky Bugs get a taste of his own "wise guy" antics. You do get to see the antagonist from the cartoon, Elmer Fudd, as the first level's boss, but he's swapped out with (SPOILER) Daffy Duck for the final boss. Frankly, I would have liked to have seen Daffy play a bigger role throughout the game and in his different alter egos, given his intense rivalry with Bugs. Even without knowing the references, this game has colorful graphics and good music, and while it's somewhat difficult and short, it's a fun, varied game that will have you shouting for neither Duck Season nor Rabbit Season but SNES Season! – KY

Bulls vs Blazers and the NBA Playoffs

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★







This five-on-five, horizontally scrolling basketball simulation is the first NBA game for the SNES from Electronic Arts. It only features the 16 squads that made the playoffs in the 1991-92 NBA season, along with the All-Star teams from both conferences. Game modes include single-game exhibitions and a full Playoff ladder. The former has three different difficulty settings and is the best way to practice before taking a shot at the Playoffs. It's vital to practice on the higher difficulty settings because in the Playoffs, the difficulty is automatically locked in at its highest setting. The CPU becomes a very formidable opponent, constantly shadowing offensive players so tightly that it becomes very difficult to get room to shoot. Fouls are called much more frequently, bringing the free throw T-Meter into play. The T-Meter requires two well-timed button presses to sink (or miss) free throws. Regardless of which mode of play is selected, the flow of the game is quite slow, as players lurch up and down the court without much urgency. There isn't a Turbo button here, so a player's speed is based purely on his real-life attributes and can be affected by increasing fatigue as the game wears on. Proper positioning for rebounds is too tough to ascertain, leading to frustration on the glass. Visually, there's little detail in player models, and the frame rate is poor. Some players do have marquee shots, and there are some dunks to be seen, but it all happens in such a choppy fashion that it's uninteresting. The sound is pretty minimal, too. Aside from the basketball bouncing and the occasional sneaker squeak on the court, there's not much to hear. Overall, it's probably better to leave this game on the bench.





Reflections: *Bulls vs Blazers* is a rough experience. There's not a lot to like, unless you're a fan of the rosters included here. Playing as Michael Jordan is neat, but even His Airness is bogged down by sloth-like movement. Playing as Jordan and the 1991-92 Bulls is still a serious challenge in the game's hardest difficulty, as gaining separation and space in order to take shots is a rare feat. Even Gary Payton couldn't cover opponents like the CPU does here. This combination of factors just drains the fun out of this title before long. I'd rather play golf with Charles Barkley. – PS

Bust-A-Move

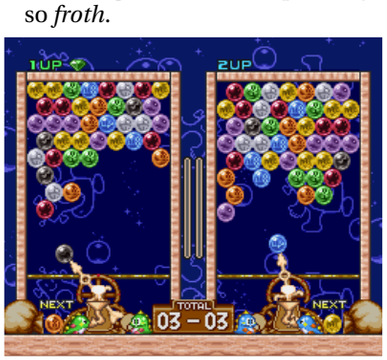
Puzzle Bobble: Bust-A-Move (EU)

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Bubble Bobble's Bub and Bob will battle bubble trouble in this puzzler. Actually, slacker Bob only seems to share in clearing spheres should a friend snap to it; otherwise, you control a brace of Bubs at the base of a rectangle. Manning an elaborate Launcher, one Bub sets the slant while the other loads and blows the ammo, a randomized rainbow of orbs. Shot globes glom onto the bubble array above, and if you create or contribute to a color-coordinated cluster of three or more, then *B-A-M*! They pop and drop harmless foes and spheres untethered to the top or others. A hue preview helps plan how to sweep the screen of polychrome foam, but don't delay – Bub gets huffy and puffy, spontaneously blowing bubbles into play if his "Hurry Up!!" countdown dwindles, and you're washed up if excess suds dip beneath the bottom bar. These basic principles propel three modes. Challenge Record's endurance test endlessly adds orbs until you crack, while VS Play splits the screen instead. There, you and your buddy's doubled Bobs can enable handicaps and work yourselves into lathers with assailing spheres. No pal? No prob! 10 *Bubble Bobble* baddies confront you as computer competitors. However, the biggest challenge arises from 1P Play's 100 stages, each with a unique layout to eradicate before the ceiling settles (save for the sole boss fight). Diverse shape and color compositions urge skillful shooting, but nudging the Launcher's aiming needle, ricocheting your rounds, and using elemental bubbles to douse, torch, or spark certain designs help clear spheres. Though the backgrounds vary a lot, the music and overall play do not, so passwords provide a bubble break. You'll keep returning to this arcade port anyway; it's simple, fun, addictive, and so *froth*.

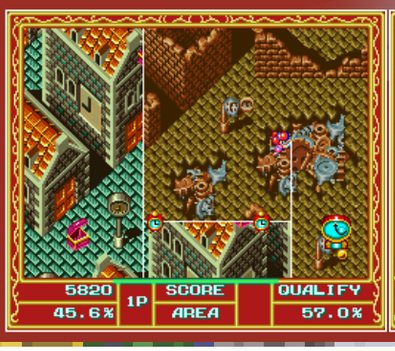




Reflections: I appreciate the visuals in 1P Play, from the stained glass, sylvan, and sundry other backdrops to the orb arrangements themselves. Though largely abstract, they occasionally form concrete images, including a heart, a fish, and even (according to my notes) a "sundae/parfait!" Indeed, I tried jotting descriptors for every array, but looking back, not all my efforts were especially elucidating. Runic doodles and question marks querying my own perception abound in my impressions, as do phrases such as "narrow grape drape." I also somehow spotted Alfred Hitchcock and a "Metroid bonnet" amidst the stages… maybe I should lay off this 16-bit bubbly. – AP

Cacoma Knight in Bizyland

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Affect
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





It's time to get Bizyland! This gorgeous domain, stolen by Queen Wagamama and her devious mirror, has been replaced by her dreary country of Lasyland – the jingle bell forest lies silent, gingerbread houses have been razed, and the cheery robotics center is now a skeletal husk. To regain his kingdom and his kidnapped daughter, Ophelia, King Cacoma must rely on you, as Jack, Jean, or robot RB93, to outline areas with magic chalk, reverting them to their former glory. You face seven three-stage levels, with each single-screen round lushly depicting the metamorphosis from wonderland to wasteland before play begins. Your hero scurries along the borders of the image and can move across it while sketching straight lines with chalk. When you complete a shape, that bit is reclaimed and might also reveal an item-containing chest. Surrounding enough areas to meet a specified percentage of the screen causes the entire level to become beautiful Bizyland again, but enemies such as ocarinas, clocks, magnets, and umbrellas complicate this quest. Some attack by touching your character, but others hurt you by hitting the line you're sketching – not realizing this might make the source of damage difficult to decipher. Speedy Jean can easily dodge most opponents, Jack's slightly slower pace requires a tad more strategy, and RB93's rusty gait becomes difficult to manage. While these quibbles, the limited continues, and the game's short length erase a little enjoyment, there's still a well-illustrated, whimsical world to draw you in.





Reflections: With a name like Wagamama, she has to be bad – after all, the wicked queen's appellation appears to come from the Japanese word for "selfish." On the other side, King Cacoma's name might be derived from *kakomu*, meaning "enclose" or "surround" in Japanese, which makes sense since that's the doodling ruler's way of recapturing his kingdom. He certainly didn't decide on that method by copying the 1981 arcade classic *Qix*, no siree! Hmm… what's the Japanese for "big fat liar"? Honestly, it doesn't matter if the gameplay's unoriginal because the look and feel of this title is delightfully wacky and weird. In keeping with that theme, this cart features tests for both your monitor and your controllers. While not entirely unheard of (*Kirby's Avalanche* also includes an input test), it just seems strange that the game wants to help you check buttons you'll never use while playing it. – AP

Cal Ripken Jr. Baseball

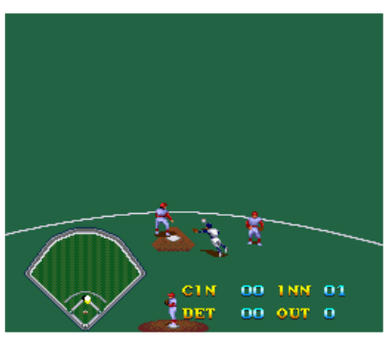
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This baseball simulation is quite basic. It doesn't have licenses from Major League Baseball or from the Players' Association, so the 16 regular teams – and two "All-Star" teams – are populated by "pun"ishingly-named fictional characters, aside from the titular Cal Ripken Jr. Macon A. Buck? Check. Spade Froggs, instead of Wade Boggs? He's here. The players have similar statistics to their real-life counterparts from the 1992 season, so their on-field performances at least somewhat mimic the big leagues. Game modes are pretty sparse, with the only options being the usual Exhibition mode and a password-driven Season mode. On the field, the action takes place from the familiar top-down perspective. Batting and pitching are executed with simple button presses, and the trajectory of the latter can be altered by using the D-pad to make the pitch curve left or right. Fielding is crisp, and the CPU is usually pretty good about assigning the best fielder to handle any ball hit into play. It's worth noting that all fielders in this game have cannon arms; this can be frustrating for offenses, as ground balls are almost automatic outs for the comparatively slow runners. The pace of each game is also fairly slow, which tends to make things tedious. Graphically, the game gets the job done; pitcher and hitter animations are decently smooth, and each of the four stadiums have nice detail. The sound is a mixed bag; voiced umpire calls are very clear and easy to understand, while the music is an incessant loop of 22 bars that will likely have players reaching for the mute button before long. All told, while this title is playable and delivers an acceptable form of video game baseball, there's not enough here to keep fans playing for long. This one's a benchwarmer.





Reflections: The puns that were used for baseball players in unlicensed games back in the 16-bit era got me to thinking about what some of these names might look like for today's athletes. Maybe Baron Drudge plays for New York instead of Aaron Judge? How about Spike Clout in Anaheim instead of Mike Trout? Was there a Brookie Metts sighting in Boston for Mookie Betts? Yeah, yeah. I know. I won't give up my day job. In the meantime, a piece of advice from this amateur punster: Don't bother with this unremarkable game. The SNES has plenty of better baseball titles. – PS

California Games II

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Epyx
Ported by: Silicon Sorcery
Publisher: DTMC
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Hit the Californian sand, surf, and snow as you compete to impress Zak, who's challenged you to set high scores in five extreme sports. The first, Hang Gliding, sees you soaring with blue and purple water balloons in tow. Once you've caught a favorable headwind to launch yourself from a cliffside perch, you're asked to drop the balloons into small ocean targets. Although this might sound relatively simple, keeping any sort of consistent altitude is virtually impossible, and you'll often find yourself dropping helplessly towards the water below. Next, Jet Surfing puts you in the fast lane as you race around a track in the open ocean. After leaping from the starting line, you can increase your score by staying within the boundaries of the course, collecting scattered bonus items, or jumping over obstacles. The Snowboarding event challenges you to ride down a mountainside while avoiding hazards. Expect a frustratingly narrow field of view as you hop over logs, trees, cliffs, and mountain climbers on your journey towards the sun-drenched shores below. Performing a handful of stylish tricks in a mid-course half-pipe helps you secure a better score. Afterwards, Bodyboarding has you performing spins, cuts, and barrel rolls as you surf your way towards the shoreline. Pulling off tricks closer to the crest of the wave awards more points but also increases the chance that you'll end your run by surfing straight over the top. Once your ride begins to dissipate, you'll fight with incredibly sluggish controls as you dodge between mermaids, swimmers, and rocks before coming to a stop at the beach. Lastly, Skateboarding sees you riding through a winding course of tunnels and half-pipes in the San Francisco aqueducts. Successfully performing flips, grabs, grinds, and handstands as you race towards the finish adds points to your score, and you'll be rewarded with an impressive bonus after crossing the line. While all of these events are reasonably unique, they lack the depth and finesse needed for any kind of long-term replayability.





Reflections: It feels as though *California Games II* was simply rushed out to capitalize on the success of the original. None of the events control particularly well, and a lack of in-game instruction makes them frustratingly difficult to compete in. I can appreciate that Epyx was attempting to include more complex events to keep their formula feeling fresh, but what we're left with is an unpolished and unsatisfactory experience. – AF

Cannon Fodder

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Sensible Software
Ported by: PanelComp, Silicon Sketches
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★



"War has never been so much fun." A throwaway tagline for a modern shooter, but for the team at Sensible Software, this is just the start of their darkly humorous take on warfare. Jools, Jops, and the endless waves of volunteers that follow must undertake 24 dangerous military missions across jungles, deserts, tundra, and urban terrain to thwart El Presidente. Players use an arrow cursor to direct their soldier group's movements and attacks, firing their guns along with deadlier munitions discovered in the field or provided in advance. Missions are split into phases, each with a goal ranging from hostage rescue and civilian protection to enemy elimination and asset destruction. Friendly vehicles allow players to transport troops and eliminate hardened assets or buildings, while enemy vehicles add challenge. Occasional power-ups give troops missiles or invulnerability. The top-down strategic gameplay is faithful to the player's inputs, particularly when using the SNES Mouse. Soldiers scramble to selected spots quickly, albeit with some imperfect pathfinding. As the friendly casualties mount, the names of new recruits vary wildly, from Sensible staff to pop culture references, and for the last few stragglers, flat-out insults. Those that live receive meaningless promotions that help reinforce the preservation motive without conferring any in-game benefit beyond fancier icons. Sadly, the mirthfully morose main theme is a casualty of the port, replaced with a synthesized equivalent that falls short of the original tune. The gore of the original is also eschewed in favor of cartoonish representations that feel right at home on the SNES.



Reflections: Jon "Jovial Jops" Hare wrote "Narcissus" a full decade before it became the song played during recruitment phases and mission results. It was penned in the spirit of the first girl he loved and lost, but migrated into this context, it conveys its sorrow onto not only the mission results but also the recruitment, where the gravestones pile on Boot Hill and the soldiers line up to serve. That's the beauty of this game – buried in a veneer of point-and-click combat is a clever, cynical critique of war, whose weighty message can haunt the player without hampering the gameplay. I'm still somewhat surprised Nintendo was willing to tackle such a powerful and controversial title, and I'm not surprised at all that it wasn't released for the SNES in North America. This is one of those games I revisit every few years. If an Amiga is out of reach, warm up your SNES Mouse and queue up. – DG

Cannondale Cup

Genre: Racing, Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★



Grab your helmet, check your tires, and put up that kickstand! Endorsed by the Cannondale Bicycle Corporation, this third-person racer is actually a slightly modified version of a game called *Mountain Bike Rally*, which was designed to work with the Exertainment System Lifecycle 3500 stationary bike peripheral for the SNES. After soaking in the hard rockin' intro music, you can choose from eight different racers. These characters each have their own unique comic book aesthetic and attitude, but most of them are actually named after real-life mountain bike pros – famous racers such as Franck Roman, Alison Sydor, and Tinker Juarez are all on the roster. Pick a track, and then choose your faithful mount. Stats and specs are displayed for each selectable bike, including turning rating, speed rating, and tire type. The Cyclocross, Super V, and East Beast are just a few of the many models to choose from. The Options screen allows you to set your skill level, steering style, and preferences for punching and wipeouts. Pedal that bike like your life depends on it while steering and taking swipes at your opponents, and watch out for the bicycle-hating curmudgeon who tries to assault you endlessly! Ride over jump ramps for some serious air, and access speed boosts to help you gain precious inches on your competition. The on-screen menu displays your lap number, your speed, and your current position in the race. You'll need to finish a set amount of laps or achieve specific scoring milestones in order to unlock additional tracks and circuits. The races take a very long time to complete, and the game quickly becomes monotonous. The music is also painfully repetitive and will make you want to pedal your bike right off a cliff. Unfortunately, there are no cliffs in this game.



Reflections: The art in *Cannondale Cup* is blocky and primitive, featuring choppy animation and an abysmal frame rate. Backgrounds appear plain and flat, with almost no rendering of depth or atmosphere. Opponents suffer from the same jerky animation as your playable character. The lack of smooth gameplay makes control during races difficult, and it's easy to over or understeer as a result. It's almost as if Cannondale Bicycle Corporation wanted this game's development to turn out poorly so that people would go out and buy more actual bicycles instead of playing video games. Pretty sneaky… – DM

Capcom's MVP Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Equilibrium
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★





This 11-on-11 football simulation is exceptionally rough. At first glance, it seems fine; there are familiar play-calling screens with multiple plays available in various formations, and the three-quarter view gives a decent perspective on the action. The Tournament mode is a bracketed playoff mode where it's "win or go home," and Custom mode offers an exhibition game with limited options to adjust before choosing teams and taking the field. One of these options is, interestingly, the ability to just call plays as the coach, allowing the CPU to execute each selection. Finally, MVP mode generates a series of scenarios that the player must win in order to move on to the next. The rough part of this game takes place on the field, as the play controls just aren't very good. The biggest gripe is that the R trigger snaps the football and also must be pressed to throw a pass after designating the desired receiver with a face button. This runs contrary to just about every other SNES football game, and players will either find this out the hard way or happen to stumble upon an instruction manual. It's not intuitive and winds up creating a frustrating experience. Passing is inaccurate, the running game is very mixed (with some out-of-bounds calls being missed), and the kicking game is a mess. Visually, the game looks fine, with decent player animations – though the players all look exactly the same and have no numbers to differentiate one from another. There's not a lot of music here, and the sound effects – while adequate – aren't terribly inspired. Aside from the NFL license, there's really nothing else positive to take away from this game. Play at your own risk.



Reflections: I *think* I see what Equilibrium and Capcom were going for here. They wanted to make a football game that, while inspired somewhat by Madden, was its own unique and distinct animal. Unfortunately, the end result deviated from Madden in all of the wrong places – notably the play controls – and wound up being one of the worst football video games that I have ever played. Much like Konami's *NFL Football*, *Capcom's MVP Football* is proof positive that even the best publishers wind up releasing a few awful games here and there. To quote Tim Kitzrow from *NFL Blitz*, "What a disasterbacle!" – PS

Capcom's Soccer Shootout

Soccer Shootout (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: A-Max
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





This fast-paced soccer game leans a bit more on the arcade side of the pitch, making it a great choice for casual fans. There's a nice array of options on offer, including exhibition matches, variable-length season play, an all-star game, a training mode, a shootout/penalty kick mode, and an option to play indoor soccer. Getting the hang of the controls may take some time, however, and the training mode isn't much help as it's more of a skills test than a gameplay teacher. After a few games, players learn to pass, tackle, and shoot more intuitively. Goaltenders are pretty solid, but they give up a considerable amount of rebounds that lead to easy scoring chances. Since the game moves fast, players need to mark opposing ball handlers quickly and try to take the ball away forcefully or intercept passes as best as they can. Care must be taken when tackling, though, as in-game referees do card vicious tacklers, and free kicks can shift the balance of the game. The indoor soccer mode, while only an exhibition, is as arcade-style as it gets. Walls around the pitch keep the ball in play at all times, and the shorter field often leads to higher scoring. The other game modes take place in more traditional stadiums, so throw-ins, corner kicks, and goal kicks are common. With a longer field, players need to perfect their passing to set up key scoring chances. Visually, the camera perspective is from fairly high up, so players aren't that detailed, but the action scrolls smoothly from side to side, and the camera tracks the ball well. The presentation has some nice touches, including replays and close-up goal celebrations, and the sound is adequate, with good music and a few voice samples. Why not take a chance on this shootout?



Reflections: Soccer games usually aren't my go-to sports gaming experience, but I had fun playing this one – even though my results were more losses than wins. There's definitely a faster pace here than in most soccer games I've played, and it was exhilarating to hit key passes and find scoring chances. Indoor soccer is, to me, the star of the show here. I found it a bit easier to break away and score on the shorter field, and increased scoring opportunities add a fair amount of excitement. Sadly, despite the Capcom name, Mega Man doesn't appear in this soccer game (but he's got his own elsewhere on the SNES). – PS

Captain America and The Avengers

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Data East
Ported by: Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







The heroic Avengers set out to stop Red Skull and his network of villains in this shoddy port of the comic book beat 'em up arcade game. Captain America, Vision, Iron Man, and Hawkeye are the selectable champions tasked to beat down and destroy robot troopers and androids on the way to facing bosses such as Mandarin, Crossbones, and Klaw. Punches, jumping attacks, throws, and dash moves are available, along with a ranged attack for each character, such as Cap's shield throw or Vision's beam. Staying away from foes and using these projectiles is key to survival because enemies swarm and gang up. Standard melee moves convey no feedback and are ineffective against more than one baddie, and on top of that liability, struck foes inexplicably get limited invulnerability, making every encounter much harder than it should be. Some background items can be picked up and thrown, but they don't pop up too often. There is a maximum of five continues with a single life each, and being that health is scarce, players may find themselves getting crushed and defeated unless they painstakingly plan their attacks and take their time. Surprisingly, boss battles are overall easier to get through since their patterns are predictable and there is less on-screen clutter with one or two bosses versus several regular enemies to contend with. A few horizontal shooter sections interrupt the normal side-scrolling beat 'em up stages, and though they're executed well enough, they feel a little tacked on and overlong. The graphics, sound effects, and voice sampling are average, but the soundtrack is competent, and the cutscenes may evoke a smile. Some mileage may even be had from the two-player experience. However, this superhero outing doesn't quite save the day.





Reflections: This SNES port is such a disappointment compared to the solid four-player arcade original. The melee attacks don't feel right without feedback for executing combos, and there are far fewer stage items to toss at enemies – it just doesn't seem like a proper beat 'em up. Perhaps the biggest sin with this underwhelming port is the lack of audio for the campy dialogue when the Avengers square off for a boss fight: "You cannot escape!" "You will be the one escaping!" These shortcomings aren't for want of processing power but are rather due to Mindscape, who coded the port. The superior Sega Genesis version, ported by Opera House, keeps the arcade feel intact, corny dialogue and all. – PC

Captain Commando

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







It's the oddest fighting foursome ever to battle for justice! In this port of the 1991 arcade beat 'em up, Captain Commando (former NES Capcom character mascot) and his heroic friends hit the streets of Metro City in the year 2026 to take on the sinister Scumocide and his gang of super-powered thugs. Choose your playable protagonist and prepare to punch, kick, slash, and blast your way through nine stages packed with genetically modified enemies who are nearly as strange as these good guys: Mack the Knife, an alien mummy who wields deadly knives; Ginzu the Ninja, a stealthy warrior armed with a trusty sword; Baby Head, a genius infant who has apparently designed a giant robot suit that he skillfully pilots; and of course, Captain Commando himself, a champion equipped with an awesome lightning-and-fire-emitting energy glove. Each selectable brawler offers a totally unique set of fighting actions, including self-damaging special moves such as Mack's spinning attack and Ginzu's smoke bombs. Part the seemingly endless sea of foes by picking up extra weapons ranging from grenade launchers and machine guns to huge assault mallets. The game's music is mediocre, but the levels provide a collection of colorful backdrops for the cartoony violence. Pummel your way through a museum, circus, aquarium, ninja dojo, and enemy spaceship – sounds like any kid's fantasy weekend! Brave the mission in one-player mode or team up with a friend for double the wacky combat. The year 2026 isn't too far off – will it really be this weird?!





Reflections: You can play this game as a baby piloting a mech suit… You're still here reading this?! Well, for those few hard sells that aren't already scouring eBay for a copy of *Captain Commando*, what more do you need to know?!... Fine. This is a competent port of an excellent arcade game created by a legendary video game company that is well known for making some of the best side-scrolling beat 'em ups known to man. This title is futuristic, fluid, and a lot of fun. But most importantly – you can play this game as a baby piloting a mech suit. – DM

Captain Novolin

Genre: Action, Educational
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Raya Systems
Players: 1
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Rare
★★

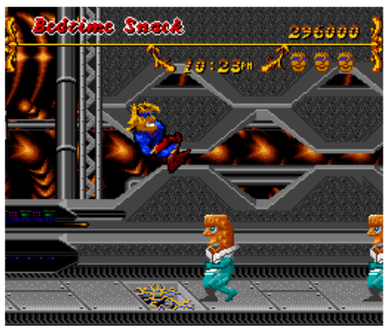






Captain Novolin is a diabetic superhero who must save Mayor Gooden from the aliens that are invading his town in the form of dangerous, sugary treats. Each stage starts with Novolin's doctor and dietician giving him advice about handling his diabetes and what he should eat for a meal and snack. Novolin must then get past a legion of giant sweets as he collects the food necessary to maintaining his blood glucose levels, such as bananas and turkey sandwiches. To stave off the bouncing donuts, floating licorice, and spitting ice cream cones, Novolin can stomp by pressing DOWN after jumping with A. He can only take four hits in each of his three lives, all of which are indicated in the upper right. When his lives are lost, it's game over, although being a fairly short game, this isn't much of a problem. Novolin's adventure spans two days, with each one sectioned off into mealtimes. Besides the standard side-scrolling stages on foot, there are also a couple that have the Captain pilot a motorboat. At both the start and halfway point of each day, Novolin color-matches a glucose test strip and fills an insulin needle for injection. Within the levels, there are stars for diabetes information, blue squares that allow Novolin to test his blood sugar, and question marks with a relevant quiz for extra points. Ending a stage with glucose levels in the safe zone also awards points. Once Novolin gets the hang of taking down enemies, his rescue mission becomes a simple challenge of striking or avoiding foes before they run into his large hitbox. Unfortunately, there isn't much going for the game beyond the simplistic action, so unless there's a desire to learn about diabetes management, this title may be a pass for most people.





Reflections: "An SNES game about diabetes?! No way!" I said to myself before playing this. It certainly has a specific target audience – children with diabetes or others who may want to learn about it. There is even a feature where you can input a code from your doctor to personalize the frequency and volume of injections. I see how this game could help a child talk to others about why they take insulin or care about the food they eat, but without the diabetes aspect, there isn't enough game here to be interesting. Although... I guess the '90s were rife with diabetes references. Who can forget the hit song "Blood Sugar Glucose Levels" by the Red Hot Insulin Injections? – KY

Carrier Aces

Genre: Action, Simulation
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Synergistic Software
Publisher: Cybersoft
(PAL: GameTek)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







In this third-person combat flight simulator set in the Pacific during World War II, five types of gameplay await: Dogfight battles between two planes, Torpedo Strike runs in which the defending deck guns fire at attacking fighters, Strafing Attack runs that mirror the Torpedo Strike with different munitions, Dive Bomb runs that are particularly difficult to defend, and Carrier Landing with on-deck guidance. The multi-perspective split-screen battles played vary from scenario to scenario, as players fight over a series of islands. The ability to adjust difficulty is welcome for single-player mode, where the AI proves a worthy adversary, especially when dive-bombing ships. There's some generous depth to the dogfighting, as the player must account for fuel, battle damage can impact what controls or information are accessible, and different dynamics emerge from how different aircraft battle each other. Planes handle well and controls are intuitive, but learning to adjust altitude and velocity to outwit opponents takes time. The other modes are far quicker to play and often pop up as the last phase of a conflict once one side's carrier air group (CAG) has been shot down. The audio presentation, mostly horns and drum rolls, is forgettable. The visuals are much stronger, particularly the use of Mode 7 scaling and rotation; cutscenes that occur at key moments (such as sinking vessels) are well designed. The horizontal split screen looks sharp and works well in tandem with the third-person camera, but the result functions better for ship combat than direct dogfights. It's fun with a friend, but for such a late release, one would expect a little more from the experience.





Reflections: The United States and the Empire of Japan engaged in many battles in the Pacific Ocean theater during the Second World War. None of these real-life battles are directly addressed in this game, as the names of the missions seem to be sleight of hand; Defense of New Savoy Island, for example, is likely a reference to the Battle for Savo Island, while the Invasion of Turlunga Island may parallel the Invasion of Java. The ship names, however, are spot on, even using the Allied reporting names of "Val" and "Kate" for the Japanese bombers. Two interesting sidebars – you can voluntarily retreat after clearing an enemy air wing if you don't have enough firepower to deal with the naval contingent, and you can instantly lose missions by forgetting to put any planes in your CAG beforehand! – DG

Casper

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★







A friendly ghost with unfortunate relations, Casper has to face the spooks of his haunted abode to help his friend Kat save her father from the villainous Carrigan. The pair begin in the attic and work their way through the large mansion, screen by screen. To help keep Kat safe, there are objects in the house that Casper can morph into after collecting. He uses these forms to overcome various hazards. For example, he can become a butterfly net to defeat flying housewares or a rope to cross holes in the floor. Throughout the mansion, Casper encounters his three ghost-uncles, who require special items to battle, such as a wine jug for popping corks at Uncle Fatso. Casper has to keep an eye on how long he stays in his morphed form, as it depletes his ectoplasmic power. His image at the bottom represents the power level and sinks behind his name with use. In turn, the letters of Casper's name represent a tick of health. He consumes an extra life if all his health disappears; otherwise, he uses a continue. If Kat takes any damage, Carrigan swoops in and Casper loses a life. There are other items Casper collects, including baseball caps that replenish health and sprites that replenish power. The most important pickups are the seven OOZ capsules scattered around that are needed to save Kat's dad. While the game has an interesting concept, there isn't enough diversity to keep it engaging. Since there's a limited number of objects and situations for morphing, the experience becomes more about traversing the house's maze for the capsules than it is about the puzzles. Hardcore fans of the eponymous 1995 movie may enjoy seeing Casper and Kat walking around together, but few others will find such pleasure.





Reflections: The graphics of *Casper* attempt to emulate the visuals of the movie, and while I think the ghosts look good, Kat's sprite is unappealing, working against any sort of empathy that I would normally feel toward a character. The act of morphing into everyday objects is a clever mechanic, but it gets stale quickly when you use the same item for only one or two situations without substitute. There's certainly inspiration from *A Boy and His Blob*, but this game lacks the charm and puzzle variety. I can appreciate what they tried to do here, but it sadly falls short. – KY

Castlevania: Dracula X

Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★







As Richter Belmont, you are bound by blood to brave Dracula's domain, seeking both the vampire's demise and the safety of your beloved Annet and her sister, Maria. You're initially armed only with the straight-striking whip of your forebears, but lashing candles along your path might grant you one of several additional weapons: the arcing Axe, fast-flying Dagger, ground-burning Holy Water, returning Boomerang, or motion-hindering Watch. Using these eats up hearts, also found within candles, but amassing ammo enables you to unleash an Item Crash, a particularly potent manifestation of your current sub-weapon (or whip, if you have none). For example, a Boomerang Item Crash rains down cruciform fury for a few seconds. With such equipment, you face seven visually vibrant side-scrolling levels before battling Dracula, including a town-turned-inferno and a diabolical Clock Tower. At two points, you may discover paths to different stages. These, as well as a single key, are critical to rescuing Annet and Maria, but pitfalls, spikes, and monsters also challenge you. If you can survive skeletons, zombies, pesky Medusa heads, etc., bosses such as a werewolf and Death himself attack. While occasionally finding lives and health-replenishing meat helps, Richter's stiff controls don't, especially in a game that calls for precise timing. Even with his ability to backflip and leap on staircases, he takes effort to master. Still, the practice might be worth it if only to hear classic series music, so play as if the reputation of the vampire-hunting Belmonts is at stake.





Reflections: If you haven't been living under a rock or inside an unwhipped candle, you might know that this game is kinda-sorta-almost-maybe a port of the fantastic *Akumajō Dracula X: Chi no Rondo*, except that it's wildly different and lacking many of the things that make the PC Engine Super CD-ROM² title great, such as an extra character to play, extra people to save, extra levels to discover, and extra spoken German. *Rondo* is an exquisite experience that rewards exploration and celebrates a strong female lead with Maria. In comparison, *Dracula X* is almost as bare bones as the average reanimated skeleton, but I still enjoyed it. I loved grooving to awesome tunes like "Bloody Tears," and I was moved by how my triumph was infused with the tragedy of losing Annet. There's enough here to take a whip crack at, and I could never say that this game of fighting Dracula sucks. – AP

Champions World Class Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



Command one of 32 national soccer teams as they try to prove whose feet are the fanciest. You can start out with a one or two-player exhibition match, or when you're ready for a longer experience, you can jump into a tournament. In game, you have a top-down, horizontal view of the field. The person you control is identified by the star below them. If they are not on the screen, a symbol appears along the edge in their direction. To switch to a player closer to the ball, press the R trigger. There is a minimap in the upper right indicating where each of players is on the field; your athletes are green, your opponents are red, and the referee is indicated in purple. The upper left shows the score as well as a stopwatch displaying how much in-game time has passed. At the beginning of each half, you have the opportunity to choose the formation of your team (the number of forwards, mids, and defenders) before watching a short news report about the matchup. After the game, the reporter appears again to recap the action with a clip of the best play. You then receive a password to save your progress before continuing on to the next group match. If you win enough of the games, you will move out of groups into a bracket toward the finals, hopefully becoming the best soccer team in the world!



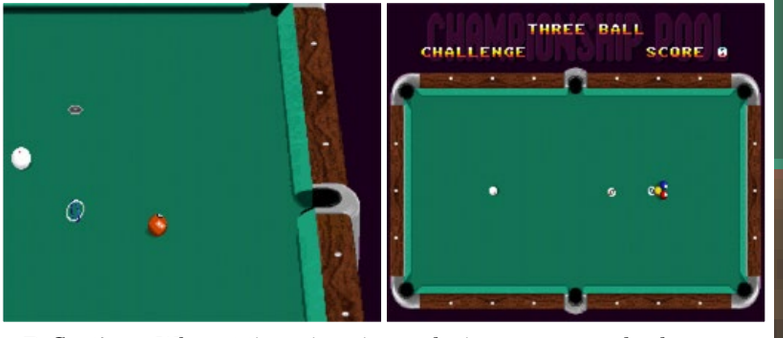
Reflections: I love the news reporter in this title. He adds a special touch to an otherwise ordinary sports game formula. The graphics are appealing, and the players have a lot of character, responding emotionally to goals or fouls. The goalie is the most dramatic, throwing a tantrum if a ball gets past him and into the net. Unfortunately, controlling the athletes feels sluggish and delayed. Some animations, such as turning around and kicking the ball, are long and make reactions slow. One of the best aspects of the game is that each team has their own levels of offense, defense, and speed, offering you a way to essentially change the difficulty rather than having your team choice be arbitrary. While this is a fairly average soccer game for the SNES, it does have some unique aspects that make it enjoyable and worth your time. – KY

Championship Pool

Genre: Billiards
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bitmasters
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★



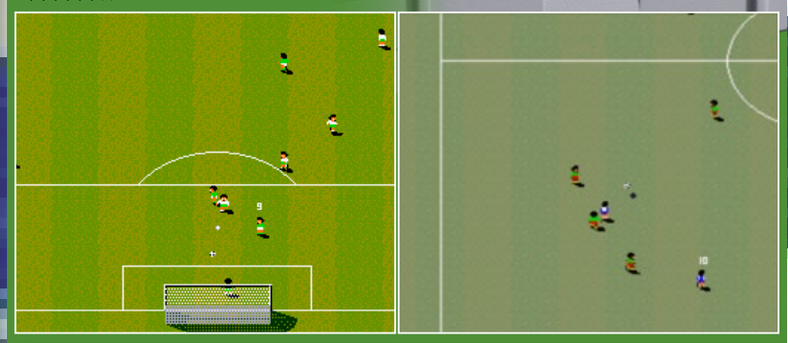
Sink a few games of pool with up to eight players, or take on the computer in a knockout tournament in this top-down simulation. Several modes are available, including Freestyle, where players can hone their abilities or try trick shots on an array of rack layouts, such as eight or nine ball. There are also multiplayer Party options and a selection of Challenge modes, offering various skills and "beat the clock" tasks to partake in. The main meat of the game is the Tournament mode where the player competes against AI opponents, all of which are difficult to defeat. Moving a cursor across the table shows a ghost of the cue ball and the direction it will hit balls around, and a tap of the shoulder buttons changes the speed at which the cue will strike. Pausing the game allows back or topspin to be applied to the ball, but this detracts from the immersion of playing the table, and it can be difficult to line up shots because the slightest knock of the D-pad can veer the ghost line away from the intended target. Computer turns are simulated so that the matches happen quickly, which provides plenty of extra practice shots between losing and starting again. A fun little title with quirky presentation that may turn some away due to its wall of difficulty.



Reflections: What at times is quite a relaxing game can also become relatively infuriating due to the AI that casually wins with ease. You can set up a shot that the computer should never be able to hit without drawing a foul, and the screen will tell you that it has won the frame! The feel of the game is still well done, from picking a jaunty jukebox tune to seeing your opponent wince at losing a match. The controls, however, do take a little bit of getting used to as they don't feel refined or precise enough to deal with lining up that perfect shot to put your foe away. It isn't a bad game by any stretch, and if you enjoy pool, it does have charm. It's just lacking something that I can't quite put my finger on. – JE

Championship Soccer '94
Sensible Soccer: International Edition (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sensible Software
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1–2 (Simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★



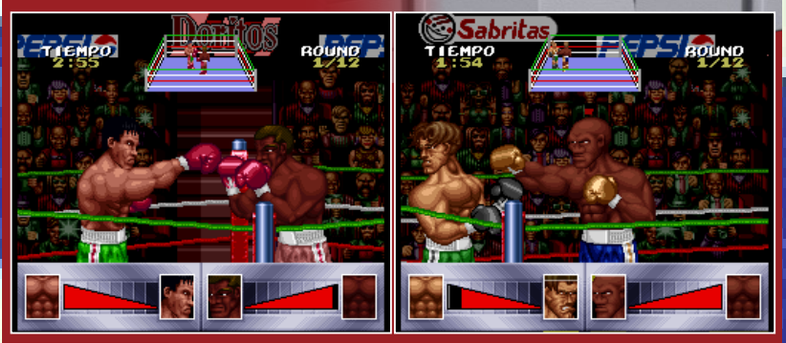
Whether you want to create a custom neighborhood league or lead a national team to the World Championship, this arcade-style soccer game has you covered. Each of the three levels of play has a range of lengths up to a large championship (in a round robin or knockout style) involving dozens of teams. After making your choice, you will then pick which teams to control. You are not limited in how many teams are player-controlled, but choosing more than one team means you'll need a friend nearby to play for the second team when they're facing off. Otherwise, the player-controlled team defaults to the first controller. During the match, you'll find yourself in control of tiny sprites on a seemingly huge, empty field. The small players are rather cute, and they have different hair and skin colors, giving them character. The crowd reacts to the plays, gasping at a near miss or cheering for a penalty, which adds to the atmosphere. The AI is well designed and competently handles the players on both sides of the pitch. You have many options in approaching the ball both offensively and defensively. You can even try a header or go for a sliding tackle. Be careful, though, because if you trip an opponent during a slide, your player will receive a yellow card and be one step away from getting kicked out! Having a range of difficulties, this game allows players of any skill to enjoy a solid soccer experience.



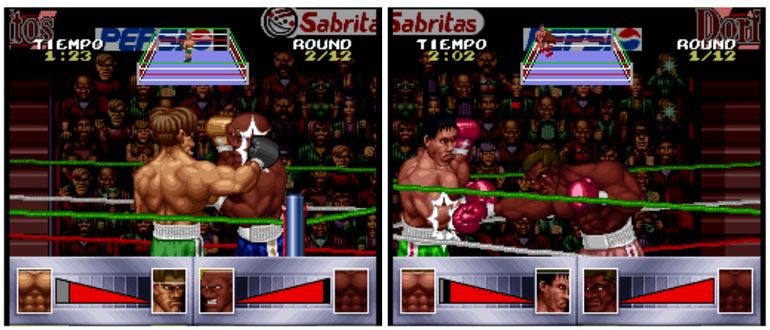
Reflections: Initially, I was turned off by the size ratio of the players to the field. It is difficult to tell whether you are kicking to another player or just an empty spot upfield. When you or your opponent do finally get the ball into the net, you'll be treated to a celebratory screen and a replay of the moves that got it there. This makes the goal more exciting when it's yours and more disappointing when it's not. I find it fun to do silly tactics, so I was delighted to be able to spam the tackle and see my players fly thirty feet across the grass with surprised expressions. It makes for an entertaining match, and I shall take it on my journey to the World Cup… I mean, "World Championship," because this game is not connected with or endorsed by any entity that might cause a copyright issue. *Please don't sue me!* – KY

Chavez

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Rare
★★★★



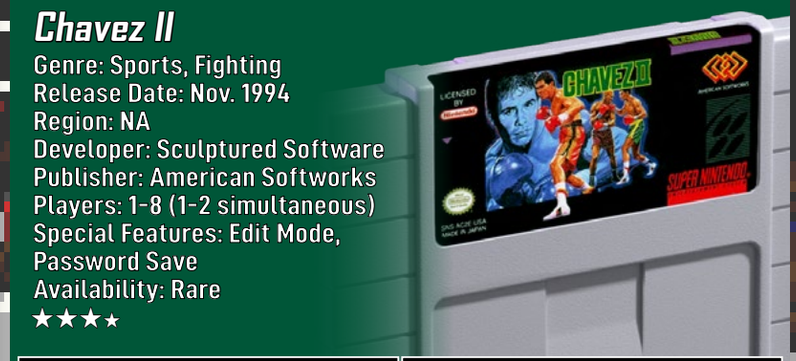
This boxing game is the Spanish-language release version of *Riddick Bowe Boxing*. It allows players to create their own fighter (or choose from a stable of premade ones) and rise through the ranks to eventually go toe-to-toe with world champion Julio César Chávez. There are two types of play – single-player Career Mode or exhibition matches for one or two participants. Before beginning their career, players can customize their boxer by changing their face, hair, and the color of their gloves and trunks. This creation process also lets them determine their boxer's power, speed, and stamina with a set amount of distribution points. While boxing, the view of the action is from the side. Boxers can throw high or low jabs and hooks and uppercuts as well as block high or low. Each boxer's health bar and head/body condition are featured at the bottom of the screen, while the current round and the round's remaining time are at the top right and left corners, respectively. Above the contenders is a bird's-eye view of the ring, which shows players their fighter's location and helps when trying to avoid the corners. The boxing is very sim-like, and the majority of fights will go the full 12 rounds. As the player climbs the ranks, they'll be able to increase their boxer's stats by training (jumping rope, lifting weights, etc.) in between fights. Unfortunately, the player has no part in the training process and simply chooses what they want their boxer to work on. Although the boxing is somewhat realistic, the visuals are colorful and cartoony. Other than Chávez, all of the fighters are fictional, and several look alike. However, the crowd makes each match feel lifelike because they react accordingly, especially when a boxer lands a flurry of punches. Although it lacks big thrills, this is a solid boxing title.



Reflections: This title was rebranded from Riddick Bowe to boxing legend Julio César Chávez and released in parts of the Southwest United States and Mexico. Boxing games are real hit or miss with me. Some are just too hard and force the player to grind their butt off to have any chance at winning. *Chavez* does require some of that, but the matches are actually fun, so I don't mind. I love that I can create my own boxer, and I really think that's why I enjoy it so much. This sounds so corny, but making my own character helps me form a bond with them. This is especially true for sports games, and it's a great feeling when a created character wins a championship. – MV

Chavez II

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★⋆





This boxing simulation is a Spanish-language altered version of *Boxing Legends of the Ring*, featuring Mexican boxing hero Julio César Chávez. Two modes are available to choose from: Exhibition and Career. Exhibition lets up to two players face off against one another for practice. In Career mode, players create their own boxer and fight their way up the ranks to become the champ. Boxers start out weak, but wins and losses award points to enhance their abilities between matches. The fights themselves are realistic and intense. Unless the "Far" or "Switch" setting is selected in the options, the player's boxer is always located in the foreground, giving them an over-the-shoulder view of their opponent. Boxer sprites are detailed and take up most of the screen, but because of this, movement can only be done laterally, so maneuvering around the ring is very limited. Uppercuts, jabs, and hooks to the head and body are all part of the fighter's arsenal, with blocks playing the important defensive role. The boxer's health is indicated by an energy level in their portrait at the top of the screen as well as facial cuts and bruises accrued on the boxer in the ring, with their face becoming surprisingly grotesque when a boxer is about to be KO'd. Due to the game's realism, players who button mash and forgo defense are almost guaranteed to lose. Fight fans who are looking for an intelligent boxing game should look no further.



Reflections: Like the original *Chavez*, *Chavez II* was slightly altered from a previously released boxing title, rebranded to feature Julio César Chávez and, released in Mexico and parts of the American Southwest. I went into this game the same way I do with most boxing games – punching as fast as humanly possible. I tried this "strategy" in my first Career fight and was knocked out faster than I could say "Rocky Balboa." After having that embarrassing loss handed to me, I started my next fight actually thinking about when to punch. It took me a few matches, but it was really rewarding to get my first win.
– MV

The Chessmaster

Genre: Board Game, Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★





Chess, the centuries-old battle of wits and foresight, carefully maneuvers its way onto the Super Nintendo in a simple yet thoughtful entry for the system. In this board game adaptation, two identical armies, each manned by a player or the Chessmaster, take turns maneuvering specialized pieces in the hopes of checkmating the enemy King. Pressing SELECT brings up the Actions and Settings menus for generous options to configure the experience. Sixteen levels of play are available for the Chessmaster; furthermore, Deep Thinking allows the Chessmaster to consider its next move during the player's turn, while Opening Book gives it access to a reference library of over 150,000 cached positions for early-game scenarios. Toggling Teaching Mode gives the board visible silhouettes to show where selected pieces can legally move. Additional features include swapping sides, automating play, forcing the Chessmaster to move, getting advice from the Chessmaster on a move, switching between traditional Staunton or fantasy pieces, displaying board coordinates, rotating the board, viewing the board in 2D, 3D, or a War Room view that includes rank and file coordinate notation of the last four moves, and more. Setting up the board, also found in the Actions menu, allows the player to build any custom scenario they want to play out, so long as the pieces are in legal positions and counts. While it could have offered a more appealing audiovisual effort than one music track, one board, and two piece types, it does present a terrific chess experience for those dedicated to learning or improving.



Reflections: From its Gupta Empire origins in the sixth century as chaturanga to the modern day, chess has undergone numerous transformations, from the unit types to its status in society – far more changes, it seems, than the cover of the Chessmaster series. The iconic Chessmaster, Will Hare, graces the cover art of most of the series' releases from its humble 1986 computer origins on. Don't be fooled by his coy smile and illuminated army, however; where the Chessmaster succeeds is not so much in humbling players with its difficulty, but rather in providing an informative and helpful entry-to-mid-level chess experience, flush with tools for aiding amateurs while still entertaining experts. This entry is no exception, and those without a proper tutor could do a lot worse than the SNES version of the late Mr. Hare's iconic persona, whose sage-like styling is a symbol, not of intimidation, but of education. – DG

Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: System Vision
Publisher: Kaneko
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Chester Cheetah, known for his wild abandon for fun and flavor, has been imprisoned by Mean Eugene at the Four Corners Zoo. Eugene has even broken Chester's motorbike into pieces and hidden them. Each of the five platforming stages in this game has Chester scouring a different exhibit in search of these parts. Only after collecting a bike bit is he allowed to use the exit. Along the way, Chester encounters various animals who don't want to see him go, from the roller-skating turtles of the park to the punching kangaroos in the monkey pits. Chester can hop on enemies, but if he takes damage, Chester can grab Cheetos Paws to refill his health meter, while collecting 100 paw tokens earns him an extra life. Should Chester lose all his health, he has to restart the level and recapture any items. This becomes an issue with the later stages where there are long auto-scrolling sequences at the end. Chester can obtain other items to aid in his search, including shoes that allow him to dash and a guitar that makes him invulnerable (and uncontrollable) for a time. Having different environments, each stage does well in presenting a variety of obstacles. For example, the monkey pits have vines that Chester has to climb and swing on, while the hidden caves end in a minecart sequence with spikes to avoid. The game starts out fairly easy and straightforward but quickly ramps up the difficulty, so Chester had better be prepared for a challenging, cartoony ride.





Reflections: If *Too Cool to Fool* was intended as an advergame, they forgot the "adver" part of it because the only major inclusion of Frito-Lay snacks is the health pickups. I'm not complaining since you can then simply enjoy the game and let the subliminal advertising do its job. Basic movement works fine, but once you encounter the unique interactions, the controls become less clear. For instance, the underground tubes of the first stage are difficult to maneuver in vertically, and swinging on the vines in the second stage can send you in a direction opposite of what you intended. Despite this, the graphics are spot on for the theme and fit what I would expect from a game about a cheesy-snack-peddling cat. What other title gives you a chance to bodysurf atop a hippo? Well, maybe the sequel, but you'll have to read the next review to find out! – KY

Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild West

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Kaneko
Publisher: Kaneko
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆







Chester escaped the Four Corners Zoo, but Mean Eugene returns to rip up his map to Hip City. Now the cheetah must travel to 10 parodied US cities where the map shreds landed so he can reach his destination. He begins with a choice of three starting locations: Euphreaka, Omahog, or Lostin. Within each side-scrolling stage, Chester has to find the map piece before heading to the exit. Hindering his progress are themed enemies (such as alligators in the Un-Clearwater swamp stage) that kill Chester in one hit. In return, he can bounce on their heads and, after enough times, defeat them. Aiding Chester's adventure are his ability to continually jump by flapping his arms and several available pickups, such as a bag of cheese puffs that saves him from death and accessories that award extra lives for the level. After Chester collects the map piece and reaches the stage's Goal, he enters a boss fight, which often involves Mean Eugene in a deadly contraption. Once he defeats his foe (and after a bonus stage of collecting cheese paws if he had previously acquired enough of the cheddary treats), Chester is sent back to the US map to select the next stage. He also returns to the selection map if he loses all his lives and uses one of his two continues. After completing nine cities, Chester races Eugene in a final battle for the last map piece. This game has good music and sound effects as well as bright and colorful graphics appropriate for the character. The one-hit deaths are harsh, although the stages are short to compensate. The controls are fairly responsive, but the game has some spots with exceptional lag and eaten inputs, which doesn't mix well with the instant deaths. These issues bring the whole experience down to little more than a playable game.





Reflections: Personally, I didn't like the first Chester Cheetah game all that well, but I would probably take it over this one. I'm not a fan of one-hit deaths and find them much too punishing in most situations. *Hey, I think I'm getting the hang of this boss fight... Nevermind.* In addition, the lag issues contribute to the frustration and make me want to say this game isn't worth playing. Thankfully, the music and graphics are something that can be appreciated and give hope to this advergame. Maybe this is the All-American game that we deserve for this All-American snack. Or maybe not. – KY

Choplifter III

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software Pty
Publisher: Extreme Entertainment Group (PAL: Ocean Software)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★⋆







Rescue a set number of hostages from enemy clutches in each stage of this side-scrolling action game. The player pilots an attack chopper, choosing the direction it faces by tapping the L and R buttons. Changing control while under heavy gunfire from troops, fighter jets, anti-aircraft guns, and more is tight and fluid, and returning fire is possible with a whole array of weapons. From homing missiles and chaff grenades to screen-wiping blasts, power-ups are collected via parachute drops, which also include much-needed extra lives. Hostages are rescued by landing next to them and returning them to the allied landing zone, but only 10 POWs can be carried at once, so some strategy is required on stages where 20 or more have to be saved. The chopper can take a few hits, as shown by a health bar that can be replenished once per level by landing at a recharge helipad. Missions take place in the jungle, at sea, and even underground to add variety and a challenge which never lets up. The only downsides to this frantic-paced game are the hulking boss tanks and structures that are unfairly difficult, reducing the confrontations to attrition rather than skill.





Reflections: Everything about this game feels tight and responsive as bullets are easy to dodge, but if you take your eye off the ball, it will punish you. Enemies don't respawn until hostages have been saved, so using repair points and drop-offs in tandem with one another increases the success rate. It starts off relatively difficult and stays that way throughout, which may prove to be inaccessible to some, but it harks back to a few of the unforgiving arcade games of its time, such as *Dropzone*. I also love games that manage to pack personality into simple designs. Here, the tiny sprites are just mere pixels, but they all burst with character and charm in how they salute you when saved or when an enemy's parachute is shot out from above him. There isn't a deep story to get engaged with, nor is there a slew of gameplay modes, but if you want a no-nonsense shooter with a challenge, then you'd do well starting here. – JE

Chrono Trigger

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







The pleasing pealing of Queen Leene's Bell foretells compelling lives, they say. Its antique chimes even cheer on the carnival encounter that'll lead to challenging the Apocalypse, but young Crono and Marle are not the only ones for whom it tolls – it tolls for thee as well. Listen: Guiding that spirited swordsman, that perky princess, and their anachronistic companions throughout this epoch-hopping opus is an enthralling experience sure to enrich your existence with its intricate narrative, exciting battles, and glorious music. Though most role-playing games take time, this one *transforms* it into a magnificent medium for meaningful adventures.

The overarching thrust of the quest involves averting "The Day of Lavos," on which an immemorial evil emerges and incinerates the world. Yet no single stitch in time can save 1999, especially since the story starts nearly a thousand years earlier, during the Kingdom of Guardia's Millennial Fair. Unaware of the distant doom or her pendant's properties, Marle tests an experimental Telepod invented by Crono's brilliant pal, Lucca. This act unlocks the first of many Time Gates – doorways to different eras. Eventually learning of both the frightful future and their ability to change it, Crono, Marle, and Lucca crisscross the centuries, from lizard-laden Prehistory and the magical Dark Ages to the warring Middle Ages and the starving someday of 2300 AD. Although each engaging destination offers a Map Screen for taking characters between labeled locales, names such as Zenan Bridge, Tyrano Lair, and Proto Dome are hardly all the reading to relish.





The most moving words often come from those closest to quiet Crono – his allies who leave their own eras to erase Lavos. In addition to Lucca and Marle, Robo, a once derelict robot; Ayla, a vivacious, voracious cavewoman; Frog, a tragically noble knight set against the enigmatic Magus; and perhaps one more pledge to aid the cause. Richly realized with expressive speech patterns and animations, these jewel-like personalities keep watch for encroaching evil while keeping you company with their memorable mannerisms. Though traveling parties can only admit a trio, it's usually easy to summon different comrades from the End of Time before confronting corrupt creatures, machines, knights, and bosses. Generally initiated by touching a visible (and frequently avoidable) enemy within top-down Field Screens, menu-based fights involve the filling of each combatant's Battle Gauge until, for example, Crono can swing his katana or Lucca can fire her gun at a chosen opponent. Successfully trading blows with foes lowers Hit Points until someone is subdued – hopefully, it's a baddie, not a buddy. Should you decide to use Magic Points instead of items or characters' individualized weapons, you can select "Tech" to unleash an ever-growing array of impressive special attacks, dazzling elemental blasts, or critical healing and support spells. Accrued apart from stat-boosting levels, these invaluable abilities can be combined ("Comb"), with two or three champions contributing to scintillating shows of strength.

Furthermore, as the heroes explore, acquire items/equipment, and interact with the environment in castles, caves, domiciles, and other overhead areas, they meet myriad people whose captivating dialogue colors their respective worlds as much as the gorgeous graphics do. The desperation of survivors, the haughtiness of elites, and the determination of good men and women breathe life into this immense fantasy while providing knowledge or initiating missions and side quests with intriguing intertemporal consequences. Such supreme proceedings are enhanced by the superb soundtrack's exquisite airs, orchestral compositions, driving beats, and intentional silences that join to evoke reverence, horror, energy, and resolve.





From its beginning to its multiple conclusions, this triumphant title is intensely well constructed and packed with a profusion of thrilling scenes and touching moments. Whether soaring through skies on the Wings of Time, racing a Jet Bike, or seeking the might of the mythical Masamune, each marvelous hour offers minute details that are second to none. Shhh... Queen Leene's Bell is ringing – do you hear its call?

Reflections: I didn't grow up with this amazing game, but I did manage to grow up *in* it – no, really! Medina Village is a location in *Chrono Trigger*, and Medina, a village in western New York, is where I spent my youth. Granted, the game's Medina is named for the famous Saudi Arabian city and pronounced differently than my old town's moniker, but I can't help smiling at the thought of a Time Gate appearing in my childhood home. That small connection aside, it's no wonder this sublime tale of time travails inspires reveries for me and many – it was fashioned with the help of a veritable "Dream Team." Comprising *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi, *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu, *Dragon Quest* creator Yūji Horii, *Dragon Ball* creator Akira Toriyama, and *Chrono Trigger* producer Kazuhiko Aoki, this quintet of consummate craftsmen plus others made a masterpiece that makes me laugh, cry, and consider my own potential for change. It's as if the iconic tick-tock of the title screen's pendulum keeps time in my heart. – AP





Chuck Rock

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Core Design
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Gary Gritter has kidnapped caveman Chuck's wife, Ophelia, so it is up to him to belly bounce, jump kick, and lob boulders at a whole raft of prehistoric nasties that include giant mosquitos and boxer-short-clad *T. rex* in this side-scrolling action-platforming game. Not only can Chuck throw rocks at enemies, but also he can use them to climb to higher platforms or as a shield against falling stones or projectiles. He has six beats of a health heart and loses a life when it becomes empty; if all three lives are lost, it is game over, so not rushing across the boards is key to survival. Luckily, plenty of health pickups are strewn across five worlds that range from jungles and ice caves to the final area in the boneyards, but there is a distinct lack of secret areas, so exploration is not necessary, even with no level timer. A water stage breaks up the gameplay, adding something different to the proceedings, but very bright visuals and attractive stages cannot save the experience from the frustrating difficulty. Enemies bolt out of nowhere, making it very easy to become overwhelmed, and losing a life results in starting the whole stage again. A pretty game, but the novelty wears off past the first world.





Reflections: People usually have fond memories of this game, and I was no different. But when you actually sit down and play it properly, you realize how cheap and annoying it can get, as the gameplay never lives up to the excellent visuals that trick you into wanting to see what happens next. Chuck is apparently in a band as the title screen would suggest, so where is all the cool music? There are a couple of generic level tracks, but they aren't exactly rock-band-worthy. The whole game is simply built on the title pun in that you are called Chuck Rock and you chuck rocks. – JE

Civilization (Sid Meier's)

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: MicroProse
Ported by: Asmic Software
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







From antiquity to Alpha Centauri, this first entry in Sid Meier's legendary series chronicles the progress of human civilization from the perspective of one nation. The player must work over the centuries to one of two possible triumphs: successfully launching a space mission for a science victory or eliminating all other civilizations to win by domination. Inspired by early god games and grand strategy board games, this title captures familiar names and places and wraps them in a comfortable top-down, turn-based world. As a pioneer work in the explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate ("4X") sphere, it has numerous vectors to consider; players must manage such variables as city happiness, technological research, luxury goods, armed forces, building structures, population growth, and world opinion. Cities and units are represented by color-coded squares; units are moved strategically along the grid layout of the world map to explore, improve/pillage terrain, or attack enemy units and cities. Land mass, temperature, climate, and planet age can be set for a randomly generated world, or an approximation of Earth can be played. Five difficulty levels that impact scoring and AI extend the game's reach and replayability. Three to seven opposing civilizations from the 14 nations represented will battle not only the player, but also each other, adding an element of diplomacy. Barbarians and villages serve as elements of risk and randomization. As time marches on, the UI and music change to reflect the era. The controls are somewhat improved with the use of the SNES Mouse, which the interface favors; that said, players shouldn't let owning only a controller stop them from trying this masterwork. As an entry point for future grand strategists, it works Wonders.





Reflections: One more turn… just… one more turn! Having played the PC version prior to the SNES one, I really noticed the quality jump in the visuals and music, while for my non-indoctrinated friends, the game served as a disarming title to draw them into the world of grand strategy titles. The introduction's Goddess is even kind enough to walk you through the basics of tile improvement only moments before the minute-long wait for your world map to generate. I didn't find myself missing the omitted Civilopedia or castle-building mechanics, as they didn't impact the game itself. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Gandhi's famous nuclear ambitions, driven by a design fluke in which an unsigned byte representing his aggression underflowed after shifting government types. It's a favorite in classroom lectures! – DG

ClayFighter

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







A meteor made of clay lands over the old Playland funfair, creating eight distinct fighters who want to become the new King of the Circus via a knockout tournament with two-out-of-three-round battles. A whole assortment of zany claymation characters, including evil snowman Bad Mr. Frosty, clown Bonker, blob monster Blob, and Elvis impersonator Blue Suede Goo, all fill the screen with quick, medium, and brutal attacks. Each combatant also has their own special moves, many of which are standard quarter-circle-plus-attack-button fare; they range from shooting musical notes and operatic screams to spinning lariats and shapeshifting into weapons. Hitting a foe reduces their health meter and flashes printed comedic exclamations, such as "BIFF!" or "BOOM!" Some of the brutal attacks can momentarily cut an opponent in half, and landing several blows in succession results in "KO" appearing above the battered fighter who, if struck again, will receive massive damage. However, this can be difficult to do as the game feels clumsy and slow. Pulling off moves is sometimes a complete crapshoot, and the hit detection is often very poor. Because the characters are from digitized clay sculptures, their frames of animation hurt the flow of a fight – they have to finish the animation they were doing to move on to the next. This is a well-presented game with some genuinely unique fighters, but the novelty soon wears thin.





Reflections: When your best character is, rather than a fully sculpted monster, a simple blob that can turn into different items depending on the situation, you know there is an issue. Still, the sheer amount of these games that kept appearing meant that they must have been popular. This one is very much a "style over substance" experience as it is pretty threadbare once you begin playing, and I have an absolute bugbear with any end boss that just copies the selectable roster's attacks – it screams lazy development. This may be a first for me (that I can remember), but the tournament mode repeats characters to fight on more than one occasion as filler – fighting them all once and then facing the boss should have been enough. A poor game that never got over the good idea pitch. – JE

ClayFighter 2: Judgement Clay

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Entertainment
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







The city of Mudville is being overtaken by clay, creating the next generation of gooey contenders in this nonsensical one-on-one fighter. Ostensibly, the circus-driven whimsy of the original is tossed for a decidedly edgier tone, wherein its garish characters have little else in common. There's Hoppy, a muscle-bound bunny sculpted in the Schwarzenegger tradition; Octo, an octopus best likened to a gigantic severed hand; Nana Man, a maniacal, bipedal banana; Goo Goo, a bulbous, oafish baby; and Kangoo, a boxing-obsessed kangaroo. Returning stars Bad Mr. Frosty, The Blob, and Tiny complete this trippy lineup, the first two undergoing their own questionable redesigns. Naturally, the game's most striking element is its graphical style, which incorporates full clay models and sets to produce an undeniably surreal experience. But anyone expecting the smooth, fluid animation of the best Claymation cartoons will surely be disappointed here – characters move in a limited, almost janky fashion, with nigh-static backgrounds that barely twitch, let alone crawl with life. Even the storyline is strangely silent, forcing players to the manual for any sense of context. Fortunately, the gameplay is better realized, using a three-tier (weak, medium, and strong) fighting system to bring the hurt on opposing foes. Indeed, many moves are dynamic, shifting from, say, a lunging punch to a flippant uppercut depending on character proximity. A primitive combo system is also in place, along with character-specific special attacks. None of these moves, from Octo's charging Cartwheel to Hoppy's Spinning Carrot projectile, are particularly satisfying, but they do prove useful against the often brutal CPU. Speed, difficulty, and tournament options are also available, and notably, each character has a playable alter-ego unlocked via hidden codes. More than just color-swaps, these doppelgängers come molded with their own quirks and tweaked abilities. But let's be honest – with a cast modelled after someone's art class disaster, maybe more isn't always better.





Reflections: I was once a huge *ClayFighter* advocate, having seen some early, quixotic screenshots of the original in magazines like *EGM*. Unfortunately, my evangelization proved too effective, resulting in my more privileged friend getting the game first. Naturally, he invited me over, and together we learned the terrible truth: *ClayFighter*, at best, is a saccharine distraction, lacking the meat and longevity of a *Street Fighter II*. And yet… the game at least has heart, which is more than I can say for its half-baked sequel. – DA

ClayFighter: Tournament Edition

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Originally only available from Blockbuster Video stores, this is an updated version of *ClayFighter* that hones and refines game modes and has better sound, character combos, and color palettes. A lengthened opening sequence depicts the story's setup: a meteor crashlands over a disused funfair and creates eight warriors all vying to become King of the Circus. From vicious jack o' lantern Ickybod Clay and muscle-headed wrestler Tiny to Viking opera singer Helga and pliable candyman Taffy, the same cast as the original is here, but now the gameplay has been tweaked with quicker speeds, making everything play smoother in best-of-three-round matches. The controls, however, are still poor, and combatants can often pull off moves regardless of which button is pressed between the light and heavy attacks. In addition to the single player campaign and the two-player VS. Mode, Tournament modes can now be selected, catering to couch co-op with up to eight friends duking it out in knockout brackets with optimizable round numbers. Customization of characters via editable names has also been added. Character stages have been remixed, with some featuring completely new backgrounds, but the fights don't last long enough to check them out in this button masher with what feels like an unbeatable AI at times. Ultimately, this is the definitive version of a game that nobody asked for. For more information, please refer to the review of *ClayFighter*.





Reflections: It's strange sometimes what games are deemed special enough to be granted another crack at the whip; this version was rumored to have been a rental only (hence its scarcity), but it was also sold at retail by Blockbuster. If this had come out instead of the original, it still would have been merely an average game. The characters are wacky and wonderful, garnering mainstream attention at the time because they stood out, but due to the graphical style and frames of animation, the controls are hampered. Everything is disjointed to the point of it not being fun outside of seeing what each character has as their special moves. I found Blob to be much faster this time around, almost to the point of him being capable of a barrage of unstoppable punches, whereas Bonker the clown went the opposite way to feel almost useless. The improved commentary and sly jibes from the announcer are enjoyable, but not enough has been done overall to make this game worth another run. – JE

Claymates

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts Entertainment
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Professor Putty has been kidnapped and his claymorph serum stolen, so it is up to his son, Clayton, to retrieve them both in this average platformer. Clayton has been turned into a ball of clay and can roll, jump, and punch. The stages he faces have different colorful blobs that can be used to transform him into a rat, cat, fish, bird, or gopher, each with their own unique abilities. For example, the cat can climb surfaces, and the fish can swim. Collected blobs can be stacked to act as shields, but when Clayton gets hit without them, he loses a life. By grabbing gems, Clayton can open up bonus stages for obtaining 1-ups, and a pinball bonus area is awarded by spelling out the word CLAY at the end of each board. The levels' various settings, which include Japan, Africa, and outer space, each contain stereotypical enemies such as snails, samurai, and aliens, all made using Claymation-style graphics. To get to the next stage, a top-down puzzle mode is activated in which the player must guide robots to remove barriers to proceed – a novel touch breaking up an otherwise humdrum experience.





Reflections: As a part of the Claymation series along with *ClayFighter*, this game's concept is pretty novel, but the execution is one of malaise and boredom. It's a cool idea in that character traits are used to solve puzzles to gain access to secrets, but they aren't used enough. Characters should have a specific set of stages to make the most of their abilities, but only the fish has a prolonged water section. The end-of-stage puzzles are fun, and being allowed to go back to previous levels adds longevity, but it doesn't do anything new in the genre. It's like they tried to shoehorn as many mascots as possible into a single game, but none of them have any real personality – not even any '90s 'tude that was running wilder than Hulkamania at the time. I owned the NA version as a kid, and it had a really cool lenticular cover with the characters on it. It's probably the best thing about *Claymates* – sad when the box is more fun than the game. – JE

Cliffhanger

Genre: Beat 'em Up, Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







After receiving a radio distress call, veteran rescue climbers Gabe and Hal embark on a daring mission to the heart of the Colorado Rockies. Following the discovery of the stranded hikers – who are revealed to be terrorists in disguise – they're forced to recover three stolen briefcases containing 100 million dollars. Based on the nail-biting action-adventure film starring Sylvester Stallone, you take control of Gabe as he's thrown into a deadly game of cat and mouse across a perilous snowy mountain range. Be prepared to face danger at every turn as you leap over bottomless chasms, scale treacherous cliffs, and take on dozens of suspiciously similar enemies with questionable hitboxes. Although you'd expect the combat in a side-scrolling brawler to be smooth and precise, every fight on this rocky mountainside feels sluggish and unresponsive. If you're facing an enemy attacker and a second assailant approaches from behind, you're forced to stop your assault and spin around before you're able to deal any damage. If you're unarmed, you'll occasionally be able to elbow a second aggressor in the face, but because your attacks don't always chain together smoothly, triggering this specific move is unreliable at best. Enemies are able to begin their assault with a melee strike, knife, or – more uncommonly – a machine gun. While these weapons might sound menacing, they never pose much of a threat and can be knocked from an assailant's hand with a blow to the chest (leaving their former weapon free for the taking). Generally speaking, enemies aren't exceptionally challenging; the platforming, however, is a different story. Navigating the hazardous terrain is made even more difficult with some bafflingly imprecise controls. You'll often find yourself faced with lengthy platforming sections that require you to leap between uncomfortably narrow ledges, swiftly moving logs, or crumbling bridges, all while battling with a jump arc that can't be altered in midair. With a few changes, this could've been a fantastic adaptation of the source material, but lackluster combat and frustrating controls lead to a repetitive and overwhelmingly forgettable experience.





Reflections: *Cliffhanger* gives me this inescapable sense of déjà vu. I completely lost track of the number of times I encountered the same platforming challenges, in exactly the same order throughout my hour-long adventure. I've honestly never seen such a blatant reuse of assets before. Maybe the developers just assumed that we'd be too absorbed in the *gripping* story to notice. – AF

Clue

Genre: Board Game, Strategy
Release Date: July 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Parker Brothers
Players: 1-6
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Mr. Boddy's been slain! To solve the crime, you must implicate one of six persons, one of six weapons, and one of nine rooms in this board game adaptation. You and your real or AI competitors play as the suspects – Mr. Green, Colonel Mustard, Mrs. Peacock, Professor Plum, Miss Scarlet, or Mrs. White – and roll a die to push pieces corresponding to those names around a board representing the victim's mansion. Hurrying into the nearest room initiates a "Suggestion," in which you propose that someone wielded something in that location (e.g., Mrs. Peacock with the Rope in the Hall). A scene plays to confirm or refute some of your suppositions, and you should pencil these hints, as well as those given only to you at the game's start, into your physical Detective Notepad (scratch paper will also do). A Suggestion's resulting clues become somewhat annoyingly vague and fragmented at higher difficulty settings. After several turns of ferreting out information (and also recording what your opponents unearth), you might try one of two allowed "Interrogations" to test out a theory, or you can launch straight into an "Accusation," but be careful, as a false one ends your investigation. This title does a reasonably good job of recreating the beloved board game's experience while enhancing it with clever animations and harpsichord, violin, and flute melodies that evoke a classic mystery feel. It doesn't quite get away with murder, but it's good for killing a little time.





Reflections: The Boddy Mansion is posh but not without its problems (aside from recurrent homicide, of course). It has luxuries such as a Billiard Room, Ballroom, and "secret" passages that everyone knows about, but where are the more practical things, like restrooms? Did the home's builder construct a Conservatory in place of a Lavatory or install a Lounge in lieu of a Loo? Also, some of the murder weapons seem out of place in this grand estate. I can picture the Knife (which looks like a letter opener) coming from the Study, the Candlestick probably jumped over from the Dining Room, and Revolvers go 'round everywhere, but what's a Lead Pipe doing in the Library? Was Mr. Boddy a heavy reader? Were his jars of grape jelly so hard to open that he needed a Wrench in the Kitchen? Why's a Rope hanging out in the Hall? Forget murder! These are the mysteries I want solved. – AP

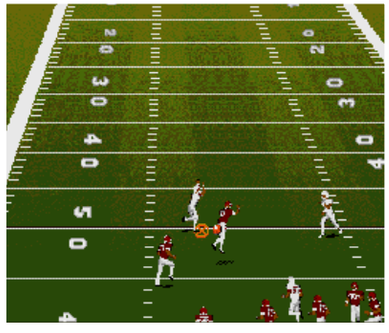
College Football USA '97

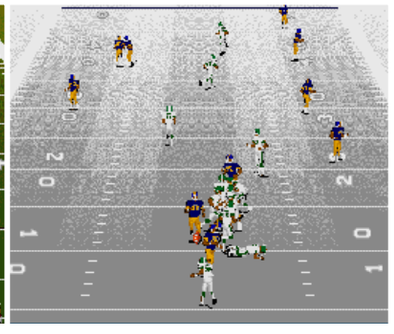
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Ceris Software
Publisher: Black Pearl Software, EA Sports
Players: 1-16 (1-4 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Real NCAA athletes aren't used in this three-quarter view, 11-on-11 college football simulation; however, actual conferences, colleges, and appropriate stats to represent each player are here, along with the addition of four authentic bowl games and the use of the USA Today/CNN heading for weekly team rankings. Team playbooks include option and pitch plays, which are more commonly used in the college game. Armchair quarterbacks can put themselves into the action by creating custom players, and season play can be set for a certain number of weeks, which culminate either in end-of-season bowl games or a playoff based on rankings. There's even a tournament mode so that as many as 16 players can pit their favorite squads against each other in round robin or single-elimination formats. This sounds great on paper, but there's a rather substantial problem: This game is a poor port of a Genesis game, and it has technical issues that hamper the on-the-field experience. The frame rate bogs down significantly, making play controls less responsive while presenting a jittery look in motion as players stutter around the field. Runners feel like they're moving in quicksand, and knowing when a receiver is open for a pass becomes more difficult than it should be. It's possible to get used to the slower speed by adjusting timing, but the effort may not be worth it for most. It's too bad, because the presentation outside of play is well done; score tickers, post-play cutscenes, and deep stat tracking would otherwise make this a nice package. The sound is pretty good, too, with upbeat music and above-average sound effects, which are a staple of EA Sports games. This one's for the most hardcore college football fan – and even they may struggle mightily with how it plays.





Reflections: There is seemingly little effort put in here to optimize the experience for the slower SNES hardware. This port is based on a Genesis game (itself based on the popular Madden series) that is faster and smoother, though the sound quality is a bit scratchier. The SNES game sounds good, but its slow, jerky animations lead to gameplay problems. This formula was pretty much what we saw during the first year or two of EA Sports games for the SNES, before developers began to account for the differences in hardware and deliver experiences that were closer to their Genesis cousins. It's hard to excuse this giant step backwards. – PS

College Slam

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1996
Region: NA
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★





This side-scrolling, two-on-two basketball title is an arcade-style game, through and through. Over-the-top dunks are the rule, as combining the Shoot button while holding the Boost button executes a variety of different rim-rattling jams. Players can take off from almost anywhere inside of the three-point line, and the results are often spectacular. Dunks can be blocked, however, so players must learn how to pass out of dunks to the open teammate for jump shots or to reset for another approach to the hoop. Speaking of defense, this game doesn't call fouls, so stealing the ball is as easy as shoving the player with it to the floor and taking possession. Quick swipes with the Steal button can also be effective at knocking the ball loose and transitioning from defense to offense, and blocking shots can keep opponents from scoring. Since this is a college game, no real-life players are included; however, their stats (as of the 1995 NCAA year) are, and there is an option to rename players as desired. There are plenty of ways to play, from quick Head to Head competitions to Season and Tournament modes which utilize the cartridge's battery to save progress. Even optional power-ups are available. Visually, the athletes aren't very detailed but are animated well and move quickly on the smooth-scrolling court. The digitized crowd looks great and occasionally reacts to on-court action with movement. The sound is very good, highlighted by one-liners from Tim Kitzrow, the voice of *NBA Jam*, and the music is also top-notch. This blue chip sports game is worthy of a spot on your SNES roster, even if you're not necessarily a hardcore fan of the genre.



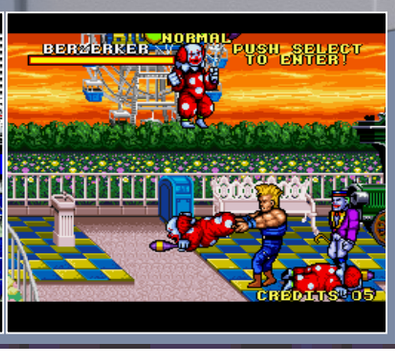


Reflections: *College Slam* is *NBA Jam Tournament Edition* in an NCAA shell, and this is okay. The controls are identical, the gameplay is virtually the same, and the fun factor is largely intact. My only real gripe is not as much the game's fault as it is the structure of college basketball's. Two halves instead of four quarters feels longer to play, even if the clock speed is at its fastest setting, which affects pacing. It's not awful by any means, but it doesn't feel as tidy as a *Jam* session. I still prefer *NBA Jam* or *T.E.* to this title, but it's not by a wide margin. More Tim Kitzrow is never a bad thing. – PS

The Combatribes

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Technōs Japan
Publisher: American Technōs
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Three heroes have made their way to the epicenter of evil – New York City – to battle against the sinister criminal organization known as Ground Zero in this vibrant beat 'em up. Select Bullova with his superior strength, Blitz with his incredible agility, or Berzerker with his balanced skills, and fight your way through six intense levels – the first five are controlled by different enemy gangs, including the Demon Clowns and the Motorcycle Nuclear Warheads. Dispose of your enemies by banging their heads together, swinging them by their feet or pounding their faces into the ground once they're down! Deadly cyborgs, hockey goons, and killer clowns will grant no mercy, and no mercy should be offered in return! Don't be fooled by the boisterous music and colorful settings such as the amusement park, disco, and baseball stadium; vicious bosses including Salamander and Master Blaster wait at the end of each level, ready to crush any valiant vigilantes who approach. Passcodes given out during the main adventure allow a number of playable characters to be unlocked in Vs Mode. Take a tour through futuristic New York City with some familiar yet decidedly altered backdrops including Times Square and Coney Island. Big boss Martha Splatterhead waits to take you on for the final showdown. Fortunately, the whole thing is as strange and as fun as it sounds!





Reflections: Legend has it that *The Combatribes* heroes were once considered the "Fab Four" of vigilante justice. Rumors have circulated for years in street brawling circles that Blitz, Bullova and Berzerker used to have a fourth teammate that helped them dish out punishment to evildoers everywhere. His name was Bob. A superior warrior with a mastery of every single form of martial arts, Bob made the hearts of his vile enemies thump with fear. But years ago, despite his value to their cause, Blitz, Bullova and Berzerker voted their fellow fighter out of the gang. Was it due to jealousy or frequent infighting behind the scenes? Doubtful. Believe it or not, many say it was simply a matter of Bob's name not sounding cool enough. What a shame. Not everybody can be born with an awesome name like Berzerker! After getting booted from the team, Bob walked away from vigilante life. Trusted sources reveal that he opened a successful bed and breakfast back in 1998, enjoying quiet evenings with his knitting and pet cats. That sounds like a perfect life for any Bob. – DM

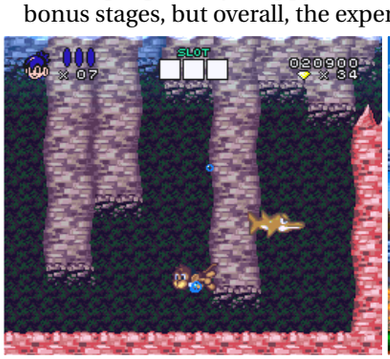
Congo's Caper

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Data East
Publisher: Data East
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Players control Congo, a half-monkey, half-human kid who must rescue his girlfriend, Congette, from a demon. The six themed worlds are each broken up into four stage pieces consisting of jungles, valleys, volcanoes, rivers/lakes, a pirate ship, castles, and even the insides of dinosaurs. Using a club, Congo must battle Fuzzyneck cavemen and flying Pteranodon while navigating past stage hazards, such as moving flames, spiky balls, and pits. The abilities to dash and jump and to springboard off of stunned enemies can help reach higher platforms, but dive-bombing and tumbling down hills onto foes are of very limited use. The need to push and roll enemies doesn't come up often either. Most stages are short, and much of the challenge lies in those that contain an abundance of moving blue platforms to traverse. Auto-scrolling levels, ones where Congo must run to avoid an oncoming boulder or dino, and swimming levels offer a fresh change. Pickups are limited to diamonds (100 small or one large for an extra life), sapphires (to spin a slot machine for more lives), and rubies. Congo usually reverts into a monkey if he takes one hit and loses a life with a second. However, collecting three rubies without taking damage unleashes Super Congo mode. In that state, he can be hit three times before reverting, and he also gains super jumping and hovering abilities. Boss battles are mixed; they can be entertaining, but they're often either irritatingly long or too easily won by spamming attacks. There's some decent work here, highlighted by snappy music and the variety of world types and bonus stages, but overall, the experience seems unfocused.





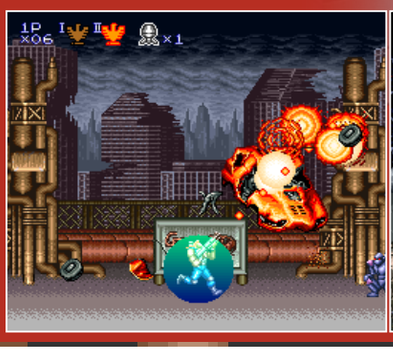
Reflections: The sequel to *Joe & Mac* in Japan, this title is obviously built heavily on that game's engine even as it attempts some new things. A few work nicely and were incorporated into the true sequel, while others were not. You can't really tell that this is set in the Joe & Mac Gaming Universe (JAMGU), if not for the Joe statues that stand in some of the bonus stages. Taking a step back, this title reminds me a bit of *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* for the Sega Master System – and not just because both main characters look like monkeys. Speaking of which, there's some wholesome group monkey twerking after you defeat a stage boss... if that's your sort of thing. Don't answer that.
– PC

Contra III: The Alien Wars

Super Probotector: Alien Rebels (EU)

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★

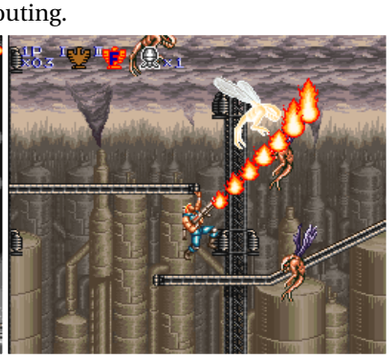






In this high-octane run and gun shooter, players must defeat the Red Falcon alien invasion. Most stages scroll horizontally and vertically as dastardly alien soldiers, monsters, winged creatures, mutant bugs, sentry guns, and more barrage the player from all angles. To fend off attacks and potential one-hit deaths, the default machine gun can be shot in all eight major directions while players stand in a locked position, run, or jump. Weapon Wings often float in to be shot for gun upgrades – Laser, Homing, Spread, Fire, and Crush – and each have their own strengths and weaknesses. Players can hold and handily switch between two weapons, both of which can be fired simultaneously in a jumping 360-degree circle via the L and R triggers. Limited shields and useful screen-clearing bombs can also be collected. The action is very intense, requiring quick reactions and precise platforming skills to survive. Stages frequently shift focus and orientation to introduce new hazardous elements and challenging minibosses to keep players engaged, including sections where players have to hand-walk on girders and ceilings, scale walls, commandeer a tank, ride a jet bike, and even travel on missiles. Breaking up the standard levels are two top-down, freely moving stages, but they don't feel as polished as the side-view ones. Boss battles are all fresh and different, calling for a high level of precision and pattern recognition to get past. This game is technically top-notch, with superior graphics, excellent sound effects, and a very good soundtrack. While not for the faint of heart, skilled and patient players will find this a rewarding outing.





Reflections: Like the first two NES Contra games, this was retitled in PAL regions under the "Probotector" moniker and the protagonists were replaced by robots. In North America, Bill and Lance from *Contra* and *Super C* became their descendants Jimbo and Scully, even though they look alike (what?!). Although it's a sequel, in some ways this game works as a soft reboot of sorts since it repeats moments and environments from previous games. It also acted as a great early showpiece to demonstrate the improved graphics and power of the Super NES, including the new Mode 7 effects seen in the two overhead stages. The daunting challenge (even on Easy or Normal) is helped a bit by being able to adjust up to seven lives in the options, but continues are limited. There's also no 30 lives code in this version to bail you out, but only gaming wimps would need that, right? – PC

Cool Spot

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Virgin Games
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Spot's slick, serendipitous surfing spares him from the villainous Wild Wicked Wily Will's cages, but now it falls upon this marketing icon to liberate his branding brethren. What follows is a challenging action-platformer with stunning polish; Tommy Tallarico's tunes mix nicely with impressive environmental art and detailed enemy sprites, giving you a good sense of Spot's diminutive size and vibrant world. In addition to running and jumping, Spot is equipped with Cool Shot, allowing him to fling carbonated attacks at foes in any direction with the Y button. Collecting spots and logos increases Spot's cool percentage, of which a certain amount is needed in each level before you can free a trapped Spot from its cage. Additional coolness earns admittance to a bonus level (both target numbers vary by difficulty selected). Collecting each letter of UNCOLA in the bonus levels unlocks the next, while the letters themselves function as continues. Time is limited, so finding stopwatches is key. Levels and their hazards play with many themes, from boxer-clad hermit crabs on the beach to chattering teeth and pencil toppers on toy shelves. Having the player spend the second half returning to previous stage themes in reverse order gives a clever "heading home" vibe to Spot's journey. Completing the game on Hard without using a continue and collecting UNCOLA unlocks the true ending, including a screen you could photograph and mail in for a secret prize from Virgin Games. For a game pushing lemon-lime liquid, it is a surprisingly solid result.



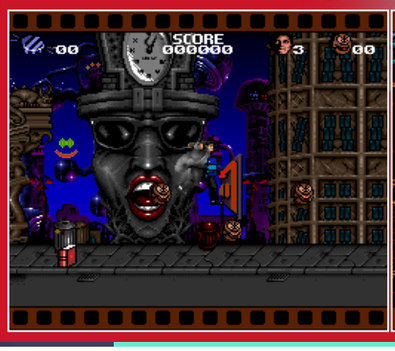


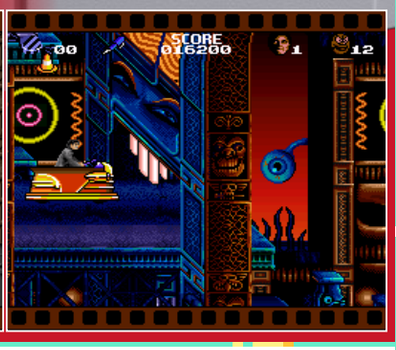
Reflections: Can we take a moment to recognize a great instruction manual? There are these really cool sketches of Spot built into the sides of its pages, so you can use it like a flip book and watch him saunter along. It documents each of the game's 11 levels, provides some tips for getting through them, and features informal writing throughout. It was even an integral part of the contest, holding the rules and keys to acquiring the secret prize. As for the game, it suffers a bit from Spot's minimal moveset, and the level design teeters on frustrating, but it rarely feels unfair. Spot's limited abilities also mean you master the basic platforming with relative ease. It is the weaving layouts and various enemies that give the explorative collectathon its notable difficulty. Taxing platformer fans and classic soda marketing aficionados each have something to enjoy here, but I would call it an acquired taste. – DG

Cool World

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Painting by Numbers
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Become comic book artist Jack Deebs as he gets sucked into one of his own creations in this platforming adventure game that's based on the eponymous 1992 film. To begin his journey, Jack falls from the heavens and lands in the middle of Cool World, where he must fend off cops and various other "Doodles" while searching for the voluptuous Holli Would. Jack starts off the game only being able to jump, but eventually he acquires a glove with an extender attached to it. This arm extension lets him attack enemies from afar as well as grab onto platforms to pull himself up. When not dealing with Doodles, Jack collects nickels which he can use for bail money or to purchase quest-related items from various characters. To progress the story, Jack must travel through the Slash Club, the Ocean Hotel, and other locations inspired by the film to search for objects to give to Doodles who are denying him access to Holli. While figuring out what items to give to which characters can be fun, navigating Cool World is insanely frustrating. Jack's controls are super stiff, and his attacks go straight through some enemies. To make matters worse, all of Jack's inventory can be lost in seconds by running into a certain Doodle who is nearly impossible to avoid. At random times, Jack has to go back to the real world to use his pen to suck up Doodles that have crossed over. This can be annoying since the Doodles bounce all over the screen and are a chore to catch. Toss in some ugly visuals, boring sound effects, and a dreadful driving sequence, and you have the perfect recipe for a horrible game.





Reflections: Oh, Holli Would! When the trailer for the *Cool World* film came on the TV, my friends and I would stop what we were doing to get a glimpse of Holli. Forget Jessica Rabbit; this was our new animated crush! It's a shame *Cool World* was such an awful movie. Even though the game is terrible, I can't say that I didn't enjoy it. Well, some of it anyway. If it weren't for the Doodle who shakes Jack down for all of his inventory, this would at least be playable. Having your full inventory disappear at the drop of a hat is deflating. – MV

Cutthroat Island

Genre: Beat 'em Up, Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







You are a pirate! Time to plunder treasure before your pirate rival Dawg does first. One or two players can be Morgan, a lady pirate, or Shaw, her thief friend. Morgan jumps higher and moves faster, while Shaw is stronger, but they're otherwise identical. You can attack, block, run, check, slide, double-jump, somersault jump forwards or backwards, punch, kick while jumping, and kick behind you (when enemies are present). Along the way, you're given button combinations for new special moves, such as a spinning attack. From the options menu you can choose either "swordplay" or a superfluous "brawling" style where you just punch people. Temporary weapons, such as bombs, knives, and extra swords, sometimes appear on the ground along with power-ups including 1-ups and health-replenishing food. In swordplay mode, you keep knives to stab with, but you throw them in brawler mode. There are different soldiers and pirate enemies, plus animals such as panthers and bats. You can move left, right, up, and down, but the playing field is narrow and some areas, such as bridges, only allow lateral movement. Elements from beat 'em ups and platformers are used, and a carriage chase, a jungle maze, and a minecart track lend variety, but everything is frustrating and banal. Fighting is straightforward, but your awkward jump complicates the platforming, and falls are easily fatal. The film is followed well by including dialogue and cutscenes, but using its drab colors doesn't work; the graphics are simultaneously realistic and flat, featuring small sprites and poor shading. Meanwhile, the music and sound are passable. If you collect special treasure chests, a long-defunct sweepstakes appears at the end. Yes, they needed a sweepstakes on the box to sell this.





Reflections: Although the cart label displays Acclaim Entertainment, this was published by LJN but "sold by" umbrella company Acclaim. This was also released on Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis, but I don't know why. This game is my only memory of *Cutthroat Island*. A short review for it appeared in *Game Players* magazine, and they joked about how everyone was avoiding the movie and should avoid the game too. The film was a colossal flop, costing $98 million while only making about $10 million, according to IMDB. Now everyone has forgotten it ever existed, even as a "so bad it's good" flick. I watched some clips from it, and indeed, it looks utterly forgettable. In a way, that's worse than bad. – KN

Cyber Spin

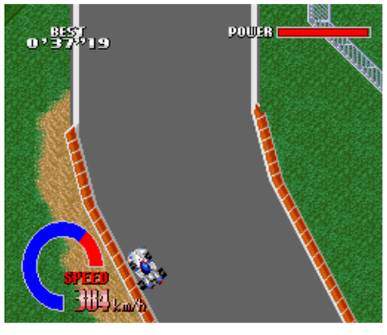
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Arc System Works
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







A futuristic top-down, vertically scrolling racing tour, this game takes the player through qualifying heats and competitive races in various world locations. Each race requires a certain lap time in order to qualify and move on to the actual race, which is itself multiple laps of the same course. Gameplay requires carefully turning left and right to manage the weaving road while also trying to pass competitors. The player has an energy meter that can be used for extra speed on demand but also depletes when collisions occur, so careful consideration has to go into when to spend and when to save. Pit stops are available but cost valuable seconds. Other racers on the course function, as in most top-down racing titles, as moving obstacles to be avoided. These ideas sadly fail to combine into an inspiring experience. The strong soundtrack is muddied by the persistent roar or hiss of the engines. The tracks don't really evoke their nations. The margin for error is so slim that pit stops and energy decisions fall by the wayside. Course memorization and flawless execution are the only ways to win races, and winning is mandatory to advance. For players explicitly looking for the challenge, there's plenty to be found here, and winning always feels earned rather than lucked into.





Reflections: This game intrigues me, particularly for how far the team went to purge it of the branding and theme of its origins. Lying at the heart of *Cyber Spin* is its source game, *Shinseiki GPX Cyber Formula*, part of a larger franchise of Japanese anime and games that spans decades. Despite its demand for nigh-perfect play to progress, it has actually been notably pared down from its predecessor. Not only were the characters, car selections, cutscenes, and some game modes removed, but also the car sprites were given an overhaul and the track layouts simplified from track two onward. I cannot fault them on that last decision, however. Though the car handles well enough, this truly is a game of memorization and lightning reflexes. I have rarely seen a password system so critical for a game so short. – DG

Cybernator

Genre: Action-Platformer, Shooter
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: NCS Corporation
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★½







This side-scrolling shooter/platformer sees the player controlling a giant mech suit in order to fight the evil Axis power and reclaim the Earth. A mission briefing plays out, and then it is down to the mech's fists, vulcan cannon, missiles, and lasers that can all be leveled up by collecting power chips. Energy chips scattered about can also replenish the health bar, as rushing into a fight will most often cause a quick death. The mech has a shield which will block most projectiles and is also equipped with a dash boost to avoid enemy fire and propel itself to higher ground. Weapons have lockable directional fire which assists in shooting then blocking. Stages range from battling warships in space and dodging through asteroid belts to destroying comms centers in snowy hilltops and taking the fight to hostile streets; the graphical variety is a much welcomed one over generic robot shooter titles. The attention to detail in this game is fantastic – bullet holes dent the floor, and enemy soldiers flee exploding mechs before scurrying away. The only questionable aspects are the shoehorned in, nonsensical anime characters and their relationships with one another that get in the way of this Konami classic. A must for any SNES enthusiast.





Reflections: Everything explodes and explosions are big. That's basically all you need to know about this game. The mech is purposefully chunky and clunky which only adds to the gameplay rather than stifles it with poor controls – every movement and attack feels weighted. The animation for it is also excellent as you can see the parts of its limbs working together to create motion. Weapon upgrades feel powerful – even the basic cannon gets beefed up to deal out serious damage as expended bullet cases fly into the air. It is one of those games that I will play at least once a year, and that speaks volumes of how good it really is. Just ignore all the anime waffle and the fact that the hero of this tale is simply named Jake. Characters come and go, and to this day I haven't a clue as to who some of them are, but it really isn't important when the game is as good as *Cybernator*. Five stars if no trite dialogue! – JE

D-Force

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Cream
Publisher: Asmik
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







After a power-hungry dictator declares war on the world, the D-Force Nuclear Apache Helicopter is deployed to combat his reign of terror. Protecting the planet from such a ruthless tyrant is no easy feat in this vertical shooter, so strap yourself in and prepare for a bumpy ride! Your perilous journey puts your piloting skills to the test as you battle your way over inhospitable glaciers, barren deserts, and top secret military bases, all while engaging in high-altitude combat across two distinct top-down mission types. "Shooting" missions – which account for the majority of your offensive strikes – task you with eliminating entire squadrons of merciless enemy fighters, while "exploration" assignments allow you to avoid attacks from dinosaurs, centaurs, and other unusual adversaries by adjusting the altitude of your aircraft. Although this ability introduces some much appreciated variety to combat, it also presents a unique set of problems. Seemingly innocuous environmental features – which pose little threat at higher altitudes – can unceremoniously destroy your craft if encountered at a lower height. Because there's no simple way to identify what you can and can't hit, you're forced to dodge around or fire at anything that could be perceived as a threat. To make your journey a little easier, however, your helicopter has been outfitted with the ability to equip six different weapons – Cannon, Multi-Cannon, Super-Cannon, Sidewinder Missiles, ElectroWave, and D-Force – which can be upgraded and occasionally combined on the fly. Destroying enemy supply ships during shooting missions rewards you with power-up chips, which are then used to increase the destructive force of your shot. While this added firepower does a fantastic job of defeating adversaries, it's rendered completely useless thanks to frequent and oftentimes crippling slowdown. Overly ambitious enemy counts, multiple on-screen projectiles, and even music changes can trigger these jarring drops in speed. Aside from a few interesting ideas, this journey is a largely forgettable adventure that fails to get off the ground.





Reflections: *D-Force* isn't exactly an easy undertaking at the best of times, so you can imagine my surprise when I discovered that developer Cream had neglected to include a way of detecting enemies directly above you in exploration stages. This glaring oversight has an unfortunate tendency to lead to the destruction of your aircraft. All we really need is a flashing prompt declaring "DANGER!" whenever there's an enemy overhead. Just tell me where they are, and I won't fly into them. I promise. – AF

Daffy Duck: The Marvin Missions

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: ICOM
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Duck Dodgers in the 24½th century! This action-platformer has Duck Dodgers, AKA Daffy Duck, rescuing different planets from the world-dominating intentions of Marvin the Martian and his instant, "just add water" aliens. Before landing on each planet, Dodgers can purchase weapons, such as the Freeze Gun, and abilities, such as the Nutty Attack, which damages everything on the screen. Using his many firearms, which he cycles through with L/R, Dodgers can defeat enemies that drop cash to spend on his next trip to the shop. If he finds his foes on the aggressive side, X lifts a shield to block projectiles. Throughout the stages, Dodgers finds pickups, including more weapons, health (displayed in the lower left), and fuel for his jet pack that he uses by holding B in midair. Each of the five planets comprises four stages, with minibosses at the end of the first few levels and Marvin in one of his contraptions as the world's boss. The planets are all distinct and affect gameplay with their varied climates, such as the slippery ice world of Zeus-3. The movement feels loose with the different ways momentum is impacted by actions and the environment, so it can be tough to defeat the enemies that Dodgers so desperately needs for funds to resupply between planets. This game is a challenge that rewards intelligent use of resources while not overly punishing mistakes. There are Looney Tunes cameos that should satisfy cartoon fans and bright, colorful graphics that anyone can appreciate. The final world has an amusing twist that is absolutely fitting for this game based on classic characters, and it's worth the effort to find out what it is.





Reflections: I have always found Marvin the Martian to be an adorable villain, so I was excited to see him on the SNES. Marvin and Daffy's alias lend themselves well to this genre of gameplay. The physics are well done, if sometimes frustrating. Shooting pushes Dodgers back, making it difficult to spam shots at an enemy. On the other hand, this method can (and sometimes must) be used to propel Dodgers, especially with the exaggerated motions of Aquarion-4, the underwater planet. While levels can be confusingly large, START brings up a stage map, and there are purple arrow checkpoints throughout. The experience is simultaneously challenging and makes me feel like a kid watching a cartoon… except in this episode, it's *alien* season! – KY

Darius Twin

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Get behind the throttle of a Silver Hawk spacecraft and fight flotillas of fishy foes in this entry of Taito's flagship shoot 'em up series. One or two players traverse six of 12 horizontally scrolling stages, weaving through a branching tree-style level select and shooting their way through waves of Belsar forces, many of which resemble sea creatures. Having a second player fly along is seamless, with simultaneous play and distinct ship colors. Enemy-dropped power-ups include strength boosters for the primary and secondary weapons, alternate primary fire mode, shields, extra lives, and screen-clearing bombs. The Options menu allows changing the number of starting lives, toggling Rapid Fire, and switching difficulty levels. Unique endings are available based on multiple factors, such as the route the player takes to complete the game and the lives lost along the way. Unfortunately, there is no indicator on the planetary map as to which routes make for a harder or easier path to the final destination of Darius, the player's original homeworld. Different routes do include different bosses; these aquatic antagonists, ranging from squids and octopi to turtles, lobsters, and whales, each come with unique attacks and movement patterns. The soundtrack and backdrops are adequate efforts but do not stand out, especially in light of the unique enemies. This game is a fine enough starting point for novice pilots, as the weapon systems are not complex, and the power-ups persist through death. Expert pilots, however, should probably look elsewhere.





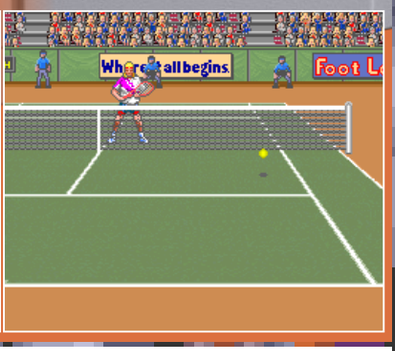
Reflections: For the most part, *Darius Twin* can be aptly described as mundane. However, give credit to the character design team – the varied ocean-themed foes, particularly the bosses, are integral to the Darius formula. For certain bosses, such as Full Metalshell or Dual Shears, I find the best strategy is to be patient, hide on the vertical edges, and just let the secondary weapon do its thing. While effective, it's not terribly exciting. Other bosses, such as Red Mist, prove to be significantly tougher, so I suggest trying multiple routes over time. Independent buttons for primary and secondary fire feel unnecessary, particularly if playing with the Rapid Fire feature. The limitations of the SNES do not allow it to import some of the series' iconic features, such as the widescreen playfield of its arcade brethren (which I cannot hold against it), but gaps in the action in some levels feel like they are a victim of this constrained viewport. – DG

David Crane's Amazing Tennis

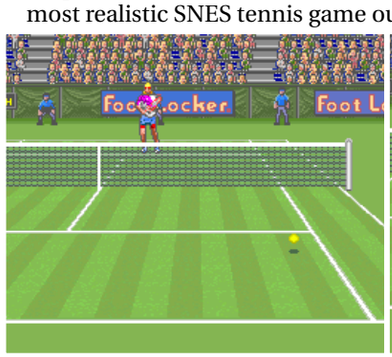
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







This singles tennis simulation offers competition against 15 possible opponents. There aren't a lot of bells and whistles here; exhibition matches or bracketed tournaments on clay, grass, or hard courts are the only modes of play to choose from. It's also worth noting that set lengths cannot be changed, so expect a decent time investment for each match. On the court, players have a full arsenal of shots at their disposal, including lobs, normal and hard ground strokes, and drop shots. The buttons for each are easy to learn, though the proper timing and player placement before making contact requires a fair amount of practice to obtain the best results. Serving is a bit odd, as players can't reposition themselves before the serve; instead, speed and placement of each serve is based on which button is pressed and where the D-pad is aimed – if at all. Faster serves are less accurate but have a better chance of catching opponents off guard if they wind up in play. The game's fatal flaw lies in the camera angle. The view is just above net level and never changes to follow vertical flight of the ball. Moreover, it's set behind the near-court player at the bottom of the screen; far-court players are smaller, more difficult to maneuver, and often fall victim to having balls obscured by near-court players who charge the net. This creates a harsh disadvantage when playing the far court and makes each pair of games played there extremely frustrating. It's a shame, really, because the gameplay is decent and the aesthetics are solid, including very clear sound effects and umpire calls that enhance the overall experience. It's perhaps the most realistic SNES tennis game out there, but it's not the best.





Reflections: I put this game into the "That's too bad" category. Practice is rewarded, and CPU opponents run the gamut from challenging to harrowing. Each win feels like a win, as nothing is given away here. The sound, in particular, really stands out. I'm even okay with the very basic gameplay modes on offer. Ultimately though, all of the good in the game is tainted by the flawed camera angle. It's set that way for the sake of realism, but I'm surprised that QA testers didn't figure out that it massively penalizes back-court players to the point of John McEnroe levels of frustration and expletive drops. – PS

Daze Before Christmas

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Funcom
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Rare
★★★







With rogue toys and imprisoned elves and reindeer, Christmas is in danger! Santa must save the day by destroying evil creatures, such as Jacks-in-the-box and possessed snowmen, and by collecting stolen presents throughout 24 stages. Blue presents are dropped by defeated enemies, while freestanding red or yellow gifts can be shot to expose what's inside, good or bad (e.g., freed elf, enemy, health, etc.). Should Santa pick up a cup of coffee, he briefly transforms into the evil Anti-Claus, who is invincible but cannot collect presents. Every fifth level ends with battling a boss, such as a giant snowman or a sinister alarm clock, while the stage following it is an auto-scroller where Santa drops gifts from his sleigh into smoking chimneys for children around the world. The platforming stages have checkpoint bells, some hidden in presents, so if Santa loses all his health (represented as hats), he can revive at the last bell. Even if he exhausts all his lives, he can continue at the beginning of the last stage reached. The difficulty builds nicely, offering new obstacles every few levels (such as conveyor belts and rising water Santa must outrun), making the game challenging without feeling unfair. While the view may seem too zoomed in for the scale of the levels, resulting in leaps of faith or uncertainty of where to go, the opportunity to play as Father Christmas himself in a cute platformer is too good to pass up.





Reflections: I love the idea of having a holiday-themed video game and wish there were more! *Daze Before Christmas* certainly isn't perfect; I sometimes had to stutter step through the levels to avoid running into enemies or off platforms due to Santa's movement speed. I also think that the mechanic of Anti-Claus isn't utilized well. There isn't a point to the transformation being evil. Sure, you're stopped from being able to collect presents, but they're not really required anyway, so little is lost. The musical compositions are exactly what I want from a Christmas game: a pleasant mix of familiar carols and new tunes fitting to the theme. Also, there are neat title screens before each level that add more to the atmosphere and background of the experience. Oh, what fun we could have had if Sunsoft's American division hadn't gone bankrupt before they could release this game in NA! – KY

The Death and Return of Superman

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment, Sunsoft
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Metropolis is in danger, leaving its greatest superhero, Superman, to fight against a group of villains who plan a takeover. You begin this beat 'em up as the titular hero, punching your way through cycles of baddies to advance the screen. You can also fire a laser projectile with A or press X for a limited screen-clearing attack (tracked with the red dots below the health in the upper left corner). At the end of each stage is a boss fight which, as you progress, mainly turns out to be against other forms of "Superman," such as Man of Steel. Over the course of the game, you control those same characters in turn, playing out their rather drab comic book story. Each of the Supermen has a similar set of moves – punches/kicks/strikes, body throws, and a laser-style projectile – and they can all fly, although this is an underused ability outside of forced platforming. On the other end of the spectrum, the enemies themselves are overused, with each level featuring only a few types that are often repeated in later stages. In addition, controlling each Superman as he takes down Cyborg in a boss fight becomes stale well before the end of the game, and the scant shooter segments only shake things up slightly. At the outset, this title offers a promising experience, but with constant reappearances of assets as well as limited variance in gameplay, few people aside from hardcore Superman fans will find themselves grinding through continues to reach the conclusion.

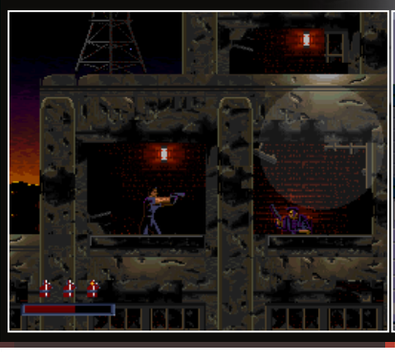




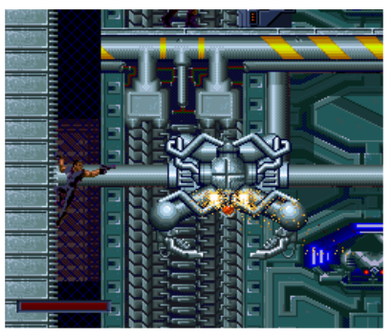
Reflections: The first three or four levels of this had me rather excited. I always enjoy a good twist in a game, this one being the array of Supermen as well as finding that you (spoiler!) even play as the main villain himself. Shortly thereafter, however, I became exasperated, finding myself incessantly pounding through the same crew of enemies. All too easily, I was using a continue in each level because enemies would stunlock me off my feet seemingly out of my control and straight into a death. I love the graphics of this game and wish the developers had provided an opportunity to experience five truly different forms of Superman or otherwise added to the variety, as with the shooter parts. Ultimately, this title deserves a stint in the Fortress of Solitude, where it can contemplate its mediocrity. – KY

Demolition Man

Genre: Action-Platformer, Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Alexandria
Publisher: Acclaim, Virgin Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★⋆




Players step into the shoes of Los Angeles police officer John Spartan to hunt down the notoriously dangerous criminal Simon Phoenix in this action-packed platformer that's based on the 1993 film of the same name. Like the film, the game begins in 1996 Los Angeles. Spartan is tasked with infiltrating an abandoned warehouse where Phoenix is holding hostages. The mission is a success, but due to Phoenix setting off a series of explosions, the hostages die, and their deaths are pinned on Spartan. This leads to both Spartan and Phoenix being cryogenically frozen in the city's new Cryo-Penitentiary. The remainder of the game takes place many years later, after Phoenix escapes the penitentiary during a parole hearing and Spartan is thawed to hunt him down. The majority of gameplay is of the side-scrolling platformer variety. Most stages have the player killing wave after wave of Phoenix's cronies before finally coming face-to-face with Phoenix himself. This always results in him escaping, which leads to the next stage. A few overhead levels are thrown in as well, tasking players with rescuing hostages while fending off bad guys. Spartan is armed with a basic handgun, but more powerful weapons, such as shotguns, magnums, and grenades, can be found throughout each stage. Controls are a mixed bag. Spartan constantly moves at full speed, making jumps hard to time. Small platforms with descending ladders also become an issue and will have players climbing down when they are simply trying to duck. Stages are visually impressive and full of variety; players will be shooting their way through a hijacked monorail, the Cryo-Penitentiary, and even a wasteland filled with zip lines. Getting used to the controls takes time, but it's worth it. Fans of the film and action-platformer junkies will enjoy this thrillride.

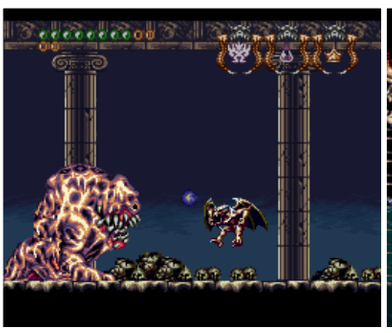
Reflections: I'm not going to lie – I was expecting the worst before first playing *Demolition Man*. Previously, the 3DO version was the only version that I had any experience with. That game is horrific. It features poorly executed one-on-one fights and corny FMV sequences that seem to have been filmed with a camcorder in my backyard. The SNES version is a joy! The zip line level in particular had me grinning ear to ear. I loved it so much that I went straight to eBay after I completed it and purchased a copy! – MV

Demon's Crest

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★⋆




In this side-scrolling action-platformer, players control the demon Firebrand (from the Ghosts 'n Goblins series) as he travels his native realm in search of six powerful elemental crests that were taken from him. Firebrand starts off with some basic functions – well, basic for a demon anyway. He can hover and fly (but no higher than the apex of his jump), latch onto walls, and spit fireballs from his mouth. After completing the first area of the game, players are taken to an overhead map where they can fly Firebrand around to visit other portions of the demon realm at will. As the game progresses and Firebrand retrieves the stolen crests, he becomes able to morph into different gargoyles with special functions, such as breathing underwater, flying upwards, or breaking large stones. Revisiting areas with these newfound skills allows Firebrand to reach parts of the environment that were previously inaccessible. The demon realm also plays host to several shops where Firebrand can use acquired coins to purchase numerous spells and potions, play a whack-a-mole-like minigame for prizes, or gain information about any talismans that he may have found. The moody organ music throughout the adventure is simply amazing, and the gothic visuals are downright gorgeous. Between the monstrous enemies and goop-filled bosses, everything about this title screams horror. Some may dislike the game's cryptic nature and lack of direction, though. Once the intro stage is complete and the overhead map opens up, the player is left guessing what to do next. Switching between gargoyles is also cumbersome and can only be done through the game's item screen. Those small issues aside, this is one of the SNES's best.




Reflections: I still remember the first time I fired up *Ghosts 'n Goblins* on the NES – the game's intro scared the living daylights out of me! I spent hours trying to get past the first "Red Devil" (his official name in the manual) and still have trouble with him to this day. Years later, *Gargoyle's Quest* was released on the Game Boy. That's when I learned that the game's protagonist, Firebrand, was actually the Red Devil in *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. I got to control the enemy that tortured me! Firebrand quickly became one of my favorite characters of all time. *Gargoyle's Quest* and *Gargoyle's Quest II* (on the NES) are great games, but *Demon's Crest* really shows off how powerful Firebrand can be. – MV

Dennis the Menace
Dennis (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Take control of the titular scamp in this subpar side-scrolling platformer where the aim is to explore each stage in search of four coins and the exit coin which completes the level. Only the first stage, Mr. Wilson's house, resembles the movie; the four other areas are multipart platform fodder: the park, the boiler room, the sewers, and the woods. The first level has several collectible weapons, ranging from sling shots to peashooters, which can be switched out on the fly but are incredibly underpowered, sometimes doing nothing at all against the usual stable of bats, cats, rabbits, and owls. The water gun, for example, should be perfect against fire enemies in the boiler room stages, but it's useless. Another source of frustration is the auto-scrolling stage in the park; it requires fast reflexes for jumping between logs and a dog-drawn cart, but there's a delay in the controls. Dennis has a health bar which can be replenished by collecting sweets, and several generous lives are available, but the poor hit detection and cheap damage combined with bottomless pits, steaming pipes, and oozing slime hazards render the game painful to play. Each time Dennis is hit, he jumps into the air and pauses for a couple of seconds, halting the action completely. At the end of each stage set, there are some big, fun bosses to take on before the final showdown to rescue Dennis's friends, but these are few and far between in what is just a poor, lazy cash grab on an even worse film.





Reflections: Ocean was the pioneer of the movie game back in the '80s on 8-bit home computers but really struggled during the 16-bit era. This game feels a bit like *The Addams Family* but even less fun. Nonsense collectibles thrown in to prolong it is just lazy developer work, but to be fair, I'm not sure how else they could have made this game from such an uninspiring movie, so the experience becomes as generic as generic gets. The only positives from this are the boiler room stages, which actually look great, but everything else just goes through the motions. The only thing this game has to do with the movie is the Walter Matthau sprite doing his very best jaundiced Marlon Brando impersonation. The UK D*ennis the Menace* character should set his dog, Gnasher, on this Dennis and put the poor lad out of his misery. – JE

Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts
Ported By: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★

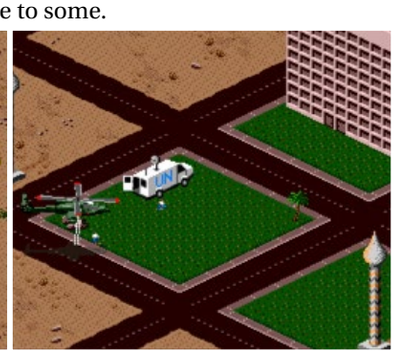






Stop a madman that definitely isn't Saddam Hussein in this stylized isometric top-down shooter set in the Gulf. Your fully loaded Apache chopper is fitted with machine guns and two missile types that are ready to take down a raft of enemy tanks, anti-aircraft missiles, and infantry to fulfill objectives laid out on a helpful battle map accessible when the game is paused. Duties, such as destroying radar dishes or rescuing hostages, can be switched out at will depending on the intel the player has; some missions only reveal intel of later ones once they've been completed. The chopper has a selectable co-pilot that operates the winch to pick up ammo and hostages, and depending on how good they are, they also affect weapon aim. The most skilled one, Lt. Carlos Valdez, is missing in action but can be found during the game. Not only does ammo run out but also fuel, so being aware of stocks on the map always plays a part in how far to go during a mission. Found hostages increase crucial chopper armor once saved, so keeping a few on board will assist in preserving the three lives available during each level. Completing all the missions on a board moves the player on to the next, each with varied objectives that always keep the game feeling fresh. The game is beautifully detailed, from the isometric buildings to the little foibles that the pixel infantrymen have once they get shot. It is a shame this game is so difficult because it is an absolute gem; not only does it have excellent presentation, but also it plays incredibly well. The chopper responds perfectly to the controls, and weaving in and out of enemy barrages is incredibly satisfying during a firefight, but the extreme challenge will make it inaccessible to some.





Reflections: Having to constantly keep an eye on ammo, fuel, and armor reserves adds a tense feeling to proceedings, but it is also a hindrance because it distracts from having fun with it and completing missions. If there were an option added on that gave the player unlimited ammo and fuel, then the havoc one could unleash would be brilliant. The first game of a series that really gave EA something to be proud about back in the 1990s. – JE

Dig & Spike Volleyball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







It's time to hit the beach – or the court – in this volleyball simulation game. Women's beach volleyball is played two-on-two, which is easier to follow for casual fans. More traditional court-based men's volleyball is a six-on-six international affair where it becomes crowded and tougher to position players properly. The first stop for newcomers should be the Training mode, which lets players practice basic and advanced skills. Serves, spikes, and blocks are key concepts to be learned here, with drills of 10, 15, or 20 reps. There are four different serves to learn, and it takes some time to figure out proper positioning and timing to block opposing spikes effectively. The Controller mode teaches advanced concepts and their more complex play controls, such as attacks from the back row and feints to avoid having spikes blocked by opponents. Play controls are, in general, easy to learn and quite responsive; however, positioning players to receive serves can occasionally be frustrating. Once they're ready to test their newly honed abilities, players can choose exhibition matches or full tournament play for both volleyball types. Tournament results can be saved to the cartridge's battery and resumed later, which is a nice touch. The CPU puts up a good fight, so be prepared. Visually, the game looks good. The animation is smooth, and the players have character. The tournament court has some Hudson Soft advertising for effect, while the exhibition court has less fanfare. There are stat screens when players change ends and at the end of each game, too. The sound is a bit understated; there are a few music stingers after points, and there aren't any referee calls – but the menu music is upbeat. All told, this is an above-average volleyball game that sports game fans should check out.





Reflections: This game caught me by surprise, as I hadn't played it before doing so for this review. There's a little bit of a learning curve, but once you cross that hurdle, *Dig & Spike Volleyball* is pretty fun. I definitely recommend the beach volleyball mode, which is less busy than its traditional counterpart. Having only four total players on the screen makes it simpler to position players and see what's going on. It's not quite as good as, say, *Super Spike V'Ball* for the NES – which is my favorite volleyball game – but it holds its own and is easy to recommend. – PS

Dino Dini's Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Dini & Dini Productions
Ported by: Eurocom
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★







Upon sitting down to play this game, an avid soccer fan's first thought might be, "I'm an avid soccer fan; why have I never heard of Dino Dini?" Alas, Mr. Dini is not a professional soccer player; he's actually a British video game developer famous for creating the Kick Off series of soccer games. Now that you're equipped with that knowledge, you can begin by jumping into the selection screens. There are several tournaments to choose from, and you can build a custom team. You even have the ability to challenge a pal or computer opponent in a "friendly" match for some quick practice. Options allow you to customize your pitch and your scanner, which is a sort of radar view of the top-down soccer field that shows the location and movements of your teammates and opponents. Build teams by choosing your preferred home country and specific players, assigning positions, picking formations, and even choosing uniform colors. With that accomplished, get ready to field your team of 11 for the upcoming soccer skirmish! Pass and shoot your way to victory, all while keeping a sharp eye on defense. Gameplay is fairly basic overall, and the clock can be mercilessly fast, so be sure to set the match length according to your comfort level. Along with passing and shooting, running with the ball and some very basic jukes and fakes are all you really have control over. There's no nuance to dribbling upfield, and players generally feel slow on offense. It's possible to slide tackle your opponent on defense, but doing so will almost certainly earn you a foul or penalty card. It also seems frustratingly easy for computer opponents to steal the ball away whenever you're in possession. The graphics and animation are rudimentary, but the crowd cheering sound effects are a nice touch, and the player celebrations after scoring are a cute bonus. In the end, the disappointing gameplay may keep most off the pitch.





Reflections: This released initially on the Sega Mega Drive as a conversion of *Goal!* Apparently, the SNES port of that version did not have Dini's direct creative input, hence the underwhelming result. At least there is a plethora of pregame options to allow you some control, from dictating weather conditions to experimenting with a multitude of possible team formations. All in all though, this game rates nil on the scoreboard of fun. – DM

DinoCity

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★

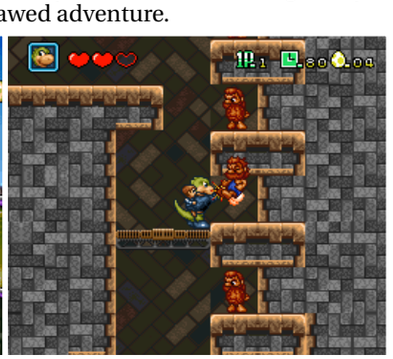






When friends Timmy and Jamie accidentally transport themselves into the prehistoric TV world of DinoCity, they team up with dinosaurs Rex and Tops to find a way home. Discovering that Neanderthals plan to destroy the city, Timmy and Jamie also find themselves on an adventure to prevent the extinction of their newfound friends. Taking control of either Timmy and Rex or Jamie and Tops, you'll need all of your platforming wits about you as you make your way through the game's six challenging stages, each with multiple sections connected by doors. In a way, the character selection doubles as the difficulty setting: While Jamie and Tops have the benefit of a ranged attack to safely pick off enemies from a distance, Timmy and Rex are limited to nothing more than close-quarters combat. In addition to this, each team is also able to defeat opponents by performing a well-timed jump to the head. Although you'll spend most of your journey astride your dinosaur companion, it's also possible for Timmy and Jamie to dismount and solve puzzles independently. Occasionally, you'll come across environmental obstacles that can only be passed by leaving the safety of your ally's back – you might need to use your agility to jump to a tower of crates or take advantage of your ability to temporarily freeze enemies in order to progress. Moments like these – where you're asked to work cooperatively with Rex and Tops – are some of the highlights of the experience. Unfortunately, these cooperative puzzles are few and far between, and the abilities of the riders are largely ignored. It feels as though this part of the journey wasn't fully realized, but despite this, you're left with a delightfully challenging, albeit occasionally flawed adventure.





Reflections: You could be forgiven for thinking that Irem developed *DinoCity* for a younger audience, but don't let the bright and cheery presentation fool you – this entire game is incredibly demanding. You're expected to make your way through enemy-laden environments, tasked with completing difficult platforming sections and faced with the very real possibility of miscalculating jumps and plummeting to your doom. Added to this, you're only given a maximum of three hearts at a time to complete your prehistoric quest (although it is possible to replenish your health with heart icons and to earn extra lives by amassing eggs). Make no mistake, *DinoCity* is going to test the mettle of even the most experienced platforming veteran. – AF

Dirt Racer

Genre: Racing
Release Date: May 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Motivetime
Publisher: Elite Systems
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★







One of the system's true patience testers, this rally race title sets players loose across checkered polygonal fields in one of three vehicles: the balanced car, stable truck, or speedy formula car. League mode pits players in one-on-one heats to accumulate points in their division spanning various versions of maps, while Cup mode's heats all use the same map and rank by time. The final mode, Practice, lets players get comfortable with the game's curious physics and unfriendly controls. Separate buttons for light and heavy acceleration help, as keeping the player's vehicle stable at even modest speeds is a daunting task – the controls are lacking in response and often feel floaty. Failing that, all racers have a stock number of lives that are lost in violent collisions. If a racer's stock is spent, they are eliminated, and harder difficulties provide fewer lives. Being the only European-exclusive SNES release to use the GSU-1 revision of the Super FX chip gives the game anecdotal value, as does its ambitious eight-player hot-seat support. Options allow for setting the difficulty level and mapping buttons. Beyond that, the experience is fundamentally flawed; the frame rate cannot adequately present the gameplay, the vehicle has no natural relationship to the track, the limited view distance means objects appear far too late to react to, the tracks are both devoid of personality and functionally ill designed, and the only way to reasonably traverse them is to nurse the acceleration and liberally apply braking to stabilize spinouts.





Reflections: Before playing, I like to admire the introduction. Watching the AI helplessly spin out and struggle in the demo mode is cathartic in a way. I did the same, after all, playing through numerous matches before developing something akin to comfort with this title. The redeeming qualities in this otherwise unplayable mess are few and far between. A lot of ideas went into this game, as evidenced in the menus, from the various track types and modes to the AI opponents and password saves, but the core experience is so damaged that they get lost in the process. It is hard to reward effort points or praise ambition in a title that comes out this irredeemably bad. Still, I feel obligated to end on a high note; the emoji representation of being in first or second place is stunningly ahead of its time. – DG

Dirt Trax FX

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Players choose from a roster of eight fictitious motocross riders and compete against others in this Super FX chip-enhanced polygonal racing title. There are a total of 22 tracks to race on, spread throughout five different circuits. Race difficulty is determined by bike power (50cc, 125cc, 250cc), which the player selects before beginning a circuit. There is a 500cc difficulty, but it needs to be unlocked. As circuits progress, riders that finish at the bottom of each race are eliminated, and riders who advance are awarded points based on their positioning. Once the circuit is complete, the rider with the most points is crowned the champion. Players who finish first are given a password and can then advance to the next circuit. Each selectable rider has different speed, acceleration, braking, and turning attributes, which determine how they perform on the track. Riders are also accompanied by their own theme song that plays when they're in the lead. This is an interesting concept but can get annoying during close races due to the constant shifts in song between competitors. While racing, players are given a full view of the track from behind their rider. The 3D models of the bikes and tracks are visually impressive, and the racing is smooth, although the two-player split-screen mode results in a terrible frame-rate drop. Controlling the bike is simple enough, but players who wish to win need to land their jumps properly while avoiding obstacles such as mud and ice. Other than racing, there is a Training mode and a minigame called "Rad Tag" where two riders compete in a fun, albeit bare bones game of tag. This is a good title for players who enjoy arcade-style racing games.





Reflections: I was expecting to dislike this game, but I ended up enjoying it, although it's not amazing by any means. The Super FX chip gives the models that chunky look and works well in that regard, but the choppy frame rate takes a while to get used to. I believe the charming characters are what got me hooked. The 3D models of their faces on the character select screen reminded me of Sega's *Virtua Fighter*, and watching their animations after each race had me giggling. My favorite rider is the hardcore Talon – she is one woman I would not want to mess with. – MV

Donkey Kong Country

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★½





Although Donkey Kong's likeness graces his ocean-enclosed Country, no ape is an island – his splendid side-scrolling quest against the conniving Kremlings (who stole his bananas and split) thrives on helpers, starting with the Silicon Graphics workstations used to fashion the fantastic pre-rendered 3D images. Combined with evocative music, the sumptuous visuals see DK teaming up/trading off with on-screen buddy Diddy Kong to use their respective rolling and cartwheeling attacks and more in six multistage sections comprised of jungles, mines, snow, and so on before confronting cold-blooded King K. Rool. Running, hopping, baddie bopping, and even swimming through a level alone or together unlock mapped paths to more sites, some for sore eyes (cute Candy's Save Point), sore heads (cane-waving Cranky's Cabin), or sore feet (Funky's Flights). The latter ally conveys Kongs to conquered lands in search of missed secrets, hinted at by level names lacking exclamation points. Finding elusive bonus areas is fun – it tests observation, intuition, and persistence, as some are only reached by dangerous leaps. Fortunately, extra lives are abundant – collecting bananas, letters, balloons, or animal tokens bestows a trove of tries to withstand traps such as flaming oil drums, rolling millstones, and blasting barrel cannons. Throwing other barrels proves useful against Klump, Krusha, and the rest of the bestiary, while crates contain benevolent animal friends: Enguarde (swordfish), Expresso (ostrich), Rambi (rhino), Squawks (parrot), and Winky (frog). Altogether, the look, sound, and gameplay of the SNES's third-best seller make Donkey and Diddy's banana journey quite appealing.





Reflections: I prefer Diddy over Donkey due to his superior jumps, but my favorite Kong is Cranky. I even thought of having that ornery star of the original *Donkey Kong* take over these Reflections, as reminiscing (while grumbling about *DKC*) is his specialty. However, the old dear didn't want to get off his rocker, so I'll have to instead! Frankly, I've always found this game's bosses underwhelming – they're mostly just oversized versions of average enemies. Nonetheless, I've never forgotten Queen B. Through the magic of childhood thinking, her stage name, Bumble B Rumble, became inextricably linked to my cat, The Bee, and seeing it again as an adult summons sweet memories of a beloved pet now long gone. In a great game packed with treasures, this one is the most precious to me. – AP

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★





What does it take to be a hero? Persevering through peril unparalleled, punishing evil and saving lives? Well, sure, and Diddy and Dixie do all that to rescue Donkey (Kong-napped by nasty Kaptain K. Rool), but there's even more to heroism in this supreme side-scrolling sequel – there's coin collecting! Yes, collecting coins is key to enjoying the brilliance of this game, with three currencies to keep the primate pair pinching pennies. First, Cranky has stowed a "DK" disc in each standard stage to see if Diddy merits the mantle of "Video Game Hero." To find these golden tokens, cartwheeling Diddy and hair-gliding Dixie must run, jump, climb, duck, and throw barrels, chests, and each other. They can also ride or become a menagerie of animals, including Rambi the ramming rhino and Squitter the web-spitting spider, magnifying the treasure-hunting fun as they fight lizards, sea life, and other foes. However, the mighty monkey and his gifted girlfriend might not even reach every mapped locale if they don't pocket Kremkoins. Craftily cached within well-concealed Bonus Levels, these ducats fund Klubba's tolls for entering the Lost World in pursuit of the best ending. If booty's elusive, the Kong Family can help!... for a price. Banana Bunch Coins abound for buying Cranky's hints, Wrinkly's lessons and additional saves, Swanky's quiz show chances, and Funky's flights to previous areas, such as Gangplank Galleon and Krazy Kremland. These and more comprise evocative environments ranging from volcanic crags and icy caves to creepy coasters and adhesive hives. The challenges are also delightfully varied; maneuvering amidst thorny tangles, riding rising wind currents, and swimming through steaming waters are only some of what Diddy and Dixie face, whether alone or together – happily, extra lives are ample. Graced by gorgeous Silicon Graphics visuals and David Wise's superb score, this rightful bestseller is the apex of platformers.





Reflections: Ol' Cranky's critical again, crabbing that this amazing game's "story's even worse than *DKC*!" and that he'd "have never been kidnapped in [his] day." But Cranky, isn't that kinda the plot of *Donkey Kong Jr.*, one of *your* illustrious titles? Oh well, I can't gripe at an old guy who's secretly spry enough to stash coins across Crocodile Isle. Seeking them and ultimately winning the center Video Game Hero pedestal away from Mario himself is an incredibly addictive incentive – it sure beats bananas! – AP

Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





Coins and nanners and bears – oh my! The stellar simian series' final SNES installment is slightly saddled with excess elements. Don't go ape now; it's still an excellent game crafted with crisp graphics, clever secrets, and a capable baddie-bopping duo. Indeed, Dixie's floating Helicopter Spin and toddler Kiddy Kong's stronger toss make them a terrific platforming twosome; it's just that their side-scrolling quest across eight multistage areas seems crammed with disparate tasks that don't quite mesh. The cause of their voyage is already cloudy – Donkey and Diddy are gone too long on a jaunt as KAOS and Kremlings creep – but to earn the true (and truly strange) ending, the paired primates must collect 15 Banana Birds, five cogs, four of Funky's map-traveling vehicles, three currencies, and a bevy of baubles for a baker's dozen of Brothers Bear. These ursine oddballs usurp the spotlight from familiar Kongs (particularly Cranky, relegated to Swanky's Sideshow minigames) without making lasting impressions themselves. The middling music also fades fast from memory, but along with Ellie the Elephant and other "Animal Friends," the robust hazards are tough to forget. From shinnying up singeing ropes and sidestepping shot fireballs to blasting off in a barrel rocket, the creative challenges make keeping Dixie and Kiddy together tricky but worthwhile, especially for reaching Bonus Levels. Triumphing in these timed bits is also trying yet satisfying, but finding and fleecing Koin enemies for "DK" tokens is less so – the need to slay them with steel barrels curbs where they can lurk. Ultimately, Dixie and Kiddy are more than competent Kong heroes, but a few minor imperfections evoke a Japanese adage: Even monkeys fall from trees.





Reflections: Go Banana Birds! Freeing most of those flying flora-fauna combos takes success at crystalline *Simon*-style games, but allusions to other properties (e.g., Wrinkly playing *Super Mario 64* on a newfangled Nintendo 64 in her Save Cave) don't end there. At least one is surprisingly literary – the sinister snowman level, Bleak's House, recalls the title of a Charles Dickens novel, while the series' perennial lizard louse goes by Baron K. Roolenstein in a nod to film adaptations of Mary Shelley's masterwork. That rotten reptile also lifts the classic "meddling kids" line from Scooby-Doo villains, yet he's not the only chiseler – Brother Bear Bazaar bilked *The Legend of Zelda*'s Link out of 500 rupees! – AP

Doom

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: id Software
Ported by: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★







An unnamed space marine takes on monsters and demons on the moons of Mars in this port of the blockbuster PC first-person shooter. Players must travel the mostly dim and often scary assemblage of rooms, hallways, stairwells, caverns, mazes, and more to reach the exit and move on to the next stage. Of course, a horde of possessed marines, imps, demons, and other hellish monstrosities stands in the way. Players are initially armed with a pistol but can thankfully find more powerful weapons: the shotgun, chaingun, rocket launcher, plasma rifle, and killer BFG 9000. For melee attacks, the default punch is accompanied by the chainsaw. Ammo must be maintained and health and armor pickups collected to help stave off the enemy onslaught. Elevators, switches, secret rooms, and numerous traps are in store for players as they obtain colorful door keys to advance and complete stages. The dark and tense atmosphere is a delectable blend of grim, bloody imagery and a moody rock soundtrack, and the fast-paced, violent action is both gripping and addictive to play. Console limitations necessitated some cuts from the full PC experience, resulting in several stages missing, downgraded graphical detail, a stuttering frame rate, and the action displayed in a window rather than on a full screen. Still, the port is faithful to its roots, with the game's secrets, weapons, power-ups, monsters, and raw gameplay mechanics intact. It may not be the complete version, but the cartridge delivers the best experience possible on the SNES.





Reflections: id Software followed up their groundbreaking first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D* with the demonic and violent *Doom*, a phenomenon that set a new benchmark for PC games, broadened the appeal of the gaming platform, and firmly established the genre forever. Fortunately, enough years passed for the Super NES to handle a competent port of the smash hit by utilizing the Super FX 2 coprocessor chip on the cartridge to help handle the graphics. It's not the best possible *Doom* experience, but if you did not own a PC at the time, you could still wade knee-deep in the blood of demons. By this point, Nintendo had softened their anti-violence stance, so a majority of the gore remained intact, although just about every Satanic reference and image were removed, as were tortured/dead bodies. It remains a remarkable port, even including XBAND modem support for online multiplayer. – PC

Doom Troopers: Mutant Chronicles

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Adrenaline Entertainment
Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Courageous commandos Mitch Hunter and Max Steiner are called upon to cleanse the solar system of The Dark Legion in this run and gun shooter that's based on the *Doom Trooper* card game. Players can go it alone or have a friend join in the action as they literally blast apart waves of mutant enemies. These aren't your typical bad guys, though; these mutants continue to attack after having their arms, legs, and even their heads blown off! The grotesque violence is shocking at first, but most will become desensitized to it due to the lack of enemy variety. What's not lacking are the stages and the great tunes that accompany them. The commandos jump from tree to tree in the harsh jungles of Venus, dodge fireballs while inside a volcano on Mercury, and avoid ice spikes while searching out a hidden base on Pluto. Other than their choice of guns, Mitch and Max are nearly identical when it comes to gameplay. Each can dispatch the enemy by way of gunfire or melee attack. Their weapon ammunition can run out, but more is always just a jump away. Thankfully, running out of ammo is never a big deal since their guns replenish up to ten rounds automatically. Powerful special weapons can be acquired as well, but these are rare and lost upon death. Unfortunately, the commandos don't control very well. The main issue is that players are forced to hold down the R button to aim instead of simply using the D-pad. Jumping can also be a chore due to poor collision detection, and hanging from a ledge can be problematic since the commandos can only climb up and not drop down. The above-average visuals and rockin' tunes are nice, but the clunky controls make this a bit hard to recommend.

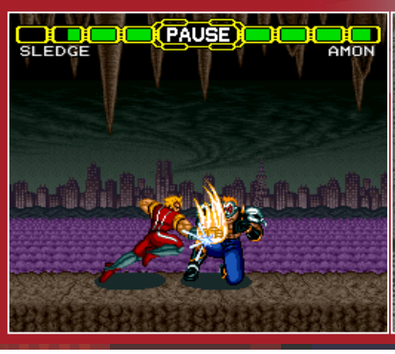


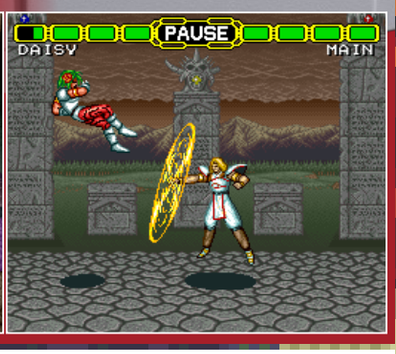


Reflections: I couldn't believe my eyes the first time I shot off a mutant's head in *Doom Troopers*. Watching the blood squirt out of its neck wasn't something I was expecting to see in an SNES game. What shocked me even more was when the decapitated mutant started firing erratically since it couldn't see. It's a shame that the game controls so poorly. I hate when developers decide to make the player hold down a button to aim their gunfire. There is nothing wrong with D-pad aiming. Sure, you can't aim down, but that's what diagonal aiming is for! – MV

Doomsday Warrior

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Shin-Nihon Laser Soft
Publisher: Renovation Products
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Earth has fallen to the Doom Squad, a force of seven intergalactic conquerors hellbent on enslaving mankind. Pulling their strings is the potent Main, who needs the planet to magnify some dastardly powers. But lo! One warrior has overcome the manipulative spell to challenge Main's six remaining minions (and three unplayable bosses). Unlike many other one-on-one fighters, the seven "saviors" here are essentially blank slates – archetypes holding no personal story beyond the player's imagination. Nevertheless, the roster itself is well diversified, including the gelatinous, shape-shifting Nuform, the wolf-reptilian fusion known as Grimrock, and Daisy, a gal possessing (apparently) an affinity for nature. The fighting system, sadly, is less inspired, relegating attacks to a simplistic three-button scheme, with blocking assigned to the shoulder buttons. These maneuvers are rather pedestrian in nature – the amorphous Nuform notwithstanding – and even special moves, although helpful, are not particularly exciting to see. Grabs, however, are a different matter; each character has at least one theatrical throw in which an opponent is hurled violently across the arena, joined by a bang and some fancy flashes. These techniques add a certain thrill to the proceedings, but their ease of execution often reduces matches to lifebar tug-of-wars as characters get repeatedly tossed about. More successful is the game's health and leveling dynamic; the characters' energy gauge is segmented into four parts, and each portion is regenerable so long as it contains some residual stamina. Upon victory, the remaining energy is converted into points which can then be used to boost five fundamental stats: Arms, Legs, Defense, Vitality, and Soul Power. Moreover, these upgrades can be saved via a password, allowing gamers to "import" their souped-up character for two-player battles. Unfortunately, the title's short length, thin roster, shallow tactics, and unbalanced combat render these latter two innovations largely irrelevant. Bland graphics, repetitive backdrops, and limited options do the game no favors either, unfolding an experience that feels incomplete… and woefully obsolete.





Reflections: *Doomsday Warrior* is a peek into a scary alternate reality in which Capcom's *Street Fighter II* didn't prove nearly so influential – a reality in which fighting games are sloppy, clumsy affairs with no sense of technique or balance. Indeed, we owe Capcom a debt for standardizing the fighting genre's basic foundation in terms of control and mechanics. Otherwise, we'd only have this and its miserable ilk, *Power Moves* and *Street Combat*. A frightening prospect, indeed. – DA

Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





There are a few classic properties that set the fighting game phenomenon in motion, immortalizing the genre with innovation and quality. Then there are the games that followed, attempting to capture that same magic but ultimately falling short. This is one of those latter games. Based on the 1993 animated series, this versus fighter stars brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee, AKA the Double Dragons. The famed martial arts vigilantes are joined by 10 other selectable fighters (two unlockable via a code), including a sampling of baddies from the cartoon, such as Trigger Happy, Countdown, and Jawbreaker. There are a handful of different game modes to choose from, such as Tournament, Vs Battle and Quest Mode. Options allow you to select the difficulty, the time limit for rounds, the number of continues, and more. Controls should feel familiar to even casual fighting game players, with three punches and three kicks of varying power serving as basic attacks. Fighters can also execute individualized special moves, usually projectiles or acrobatic battle maneuvers. You face your foes in a variety of settings, from Dusty's Garage to the Metro City Sewer System, and you can customize your combatant with a palette swap and by skewing parameters towards bolstering/weakening strength, defense, and special moves. Music and sound are both adequate, with some crispy-clear lines of dialogue adding a fun dimension. The most interesting characteristic of this game is its Overkill mechanic. Each character has a hidden weakness which can be exploited by an opponent using the correct basic attack to deliver the final blow of a match. Doing so triggers a death animation, unique for each character in the game. Aside from this brutal wrinkle, however, there's little here to hold attention for long.

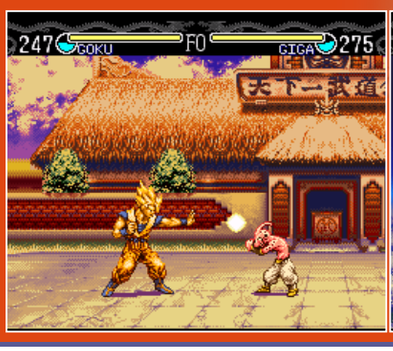




Reflections: The graphics in this game aren't pushing the boundaries of creativity, but the art is colorful and otherwise serviceable. What ultimately hurts this title is its lackluster gameplay. The physics are executed poorly, with no hang time for jumps, extreme lag, and very low tolerance for button and special attack inputs. Chaining moves for combos is impossible because of the slowly responding controls, making the experience feel rigid, rudimentary, and lethargic. There's a real lack of fluidity here, leaving the impression that the game simply can't keep up with you. Players with even limited fighting game know-how are not likely to spend much time with this one. The legendary Billy and Jimmy Lee surely deserve better. – DM

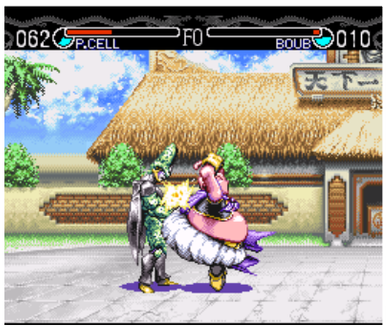
Dragon Ball Z: Hyper Dimension

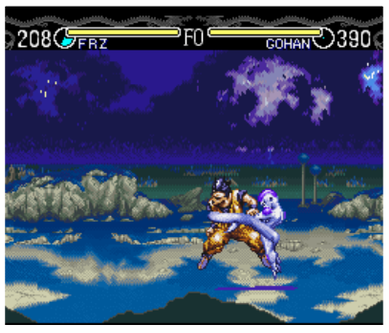
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Feb. 1997
Region: PAL (France)
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





In the fourth outing, players take control of their favorite Dragon Ball Z characters and beat each other to a pulp in this fun one-on-one fighting game. Big franchise names such as Goku, Perfect Cell, Vegeta, and Majin Buu round out the roster of 10 fighters. There are three modes to choose from: Combat, Championship, and Training. Combat is a basic versus mode where players can set ki, attack, and defense handicaps before fighting the CPU or a friend. Championship mode has up to eight players choosing their favorite characters and taking them through a bracket-style tournament. Training is a practice mode where players can hone their skills against a non-functioning opponent. Fights start off on one of several horizontal stage planes, but special attacks can knock opponents to several other areas, including the sky, where they can continue the conflict. What's interesting about each character's life bar is that it's actually two meters in one, which adds tons of strategy. Fighters' life bars won't deplete until their ki (represented by the numbers attached to their meters) is low. At any time during the battle, players can hold down Y + B to replenish this force, which in turn fills the health meter. Combatants have basic punch, kick, dash, projectile, and grapple attacks, and special attacks can be performed with specific D-pad inputs. A special dodge ability moves fighters to the stage's background and then returns them to the foreground with a strike of their own. When a character's health is low, they can unleash an amazing desperation attack. These are hard to pull off but can turn the tide of a losing battle. Although a great fighting game, the missing story mode, which is in the Japanese version, is a major bummer.





Reflections: My favorite of all the SNES Dragon Ball Z fighting games is *La Légende Saien*, mainly because of the incredible multi-layered story mode. I was severely disappointed when I learned that the PAL version of *Hyper Dimension* had the story removed. Without it, you're basically missing half of the game. You really have to feel for the creators. Imagine developing a story for a video game only to find out that it was eliminated for a huge chunk of the audience. If you're a fan of *Dragon Ball Z*, I highly recommend seeking out an English translation of *Hyper Dimension*'s Japanese ROM. – MV

Dragon Ball Z: La Légende Saien

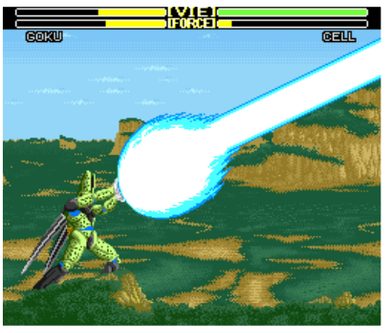
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: June 1994
Region: PAL (France, Spain)
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Players take control of a host of Dragon Ball Z characters and duke it out in this second installment of the fighting series. 10 fighters are in the stable this time around, including fan favorites Goku, Gohan, Piccolo, Trunks, and Cell. The first game's Combat, Championship, and Story modes all make a return. Combat is a standard one-on-one mode where players battle the CPU or a friend. Championship allows up to eight players to compete in a bracket format tournament. Story mode is excellently done, especially considering that this is a fighting game. To begin, players must choose between Gohan, Piccolo, Vegeta, or Trunks. The story plays out differently depending on character selection and additional choices that come up in between battles. Fights are one on one and take place across 18 stages. Most are basic canyons, beaches, and forests, but more familiar areas, such as the Hyperbolic Time Chamber, are also present. Once again, the stages are very large, and if players drift too far apart, the screen goes into a split view. Due to smoother transitions, the split screen works much better here than in the first game. The fighting is also faster and flows much better in this sequel. All combatants have punch, kick, throw, dash, and projectile attacks. They can also take flight by holding down the X button. The fighter's Force meter (below the life bar) is used for stronger projectile attacks and can be charged by holding down Y + B. These special attacks are truly devastating. Fortunately, opponents have a chance to counter with a blast of their own, which can start a frantic, button-mashing blast battle! Everything about this sequel is an improvement. Faster fighting, smoother split-screen transitions, and a solid story round out the package nicely.



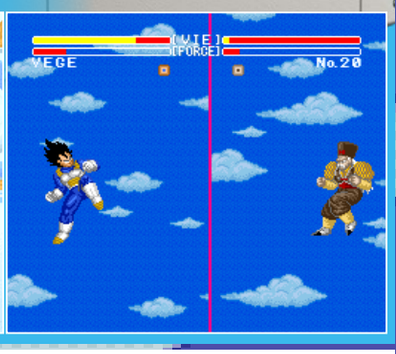


Reflections: I've watched several episodes of the *Dragon Ball Z* anime, so I was excited to see what the Butōden fighting games had to offer. I was expecting fast, over-the-top action with astounding ki blasts thrown into the mix. The sluggish first installment of the series had some of that, but I wanted more! Luckily, *La Légende Saien* had exactly what I was looking for. Each fight made me feel as though I was the show's director and in charge of creating an epic battle, and the branching path storyline was the proverbial icing on the cake! – MV

Dragon Ball Z: Super Butōden

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: PAL (France, Spain)
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-8, 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





In this first installment of the fighting game series based on the beloved anime franchise, players choose between eight characters (13 once all are unlocked via code) and battle it out in one-on-one matches. There are three game modes – Combat, Championship, and Story. Combat mode lets players choose any character and battle the CPU or a friend. In Championship mode, up to eight players can enter themselves in an eight-fighter, sudden-death tournament bracket. The single-player story mode begins with the player controlling Goku in a fight against Piccolo. With progress, series favorites such as Vegeta, Gohan, and Future Trunks become selectable, and the stages, music, and sound effects throughout the game will also be familiar to franchise fans – Planet Namek, Cell Games Arena, and the Hyperbolic Time Chamber are all represented nicely. Fighting moves are the standard fare of punch, kick, projectile, and dash attacks. Each fighter has their own set of special moves as well. Unfortunately, most attacks feel sluggish and tend to slow down the action, and battlers who take a lot of damage enter an incredibly prolonged stunned state, impeding the proceedings even further. Holding down the X button makes the fighter fly, which injects a dose of strategy into matches. Blocking attacks or holding Down on the control pad while flying fills the Force meter (below the life meter), which is used to perform special attacks. Rounds take place on a massive horizontal plane. If the combatants drift too far apart, the screen splits until they are back in close proximity. This makes things confusing, especially when a fighter is flying above a grounded opponent, but dots below the Force meter that represent each character's relative position help. Fans of the series may enjoy this title, but others should look elsewhere.





Reflections: While *Dragon Ball Z: Super Butōden*'s fighting mechanics may not be that great, the special moves are really easy to pull off. This makes battles at least look epic, even though they feel sluggish. The interesting story mode in this fighter really surprised me. The story blended so nicely with the fighting that, at times, I actually felt like I could be watching an episode of the anime. It's too bad that the stages are so big. The split-screen feature is interesting in theory, but when the stages are this large, players may end up wondering where their fighter is versus the location of their opponent. – MV

Dragon Ball Z: Ultime Menace

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: PAL (France, Spain)
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★





Players compete in one-on-one battles using characters from the Dragon Ball Z universe in the third game of the series. There are a total of nine fighters this time around, including fan favorites Goku, Gohan, Trunks, and Vegeta. A tenth character, Future Trunks, can be unlocked via code. The large horizontal stages are once again featured, and the split-screen view that appears when characters drift too far apart also makes a return. Even though there are a total of nine stages, three are simply night versions of their daytime counterparts. During battle, each combatant's life and force meters are at the top of the screen, with a minimap below to alert players of fighters' positions. One or two-player Combat and eight-player bracket tournament Championship modes make a return and are similar to the previous two games, but the story mode is disappointingly missing. With basic punch, kick, throw, and projectile attacks, the fighting remains mostly the same. Both forward and back dashes can be performed using the L and R shoulder buttons, but the forward dash attack has been removed. Holding down the Y + B buttons fills the force meter, which is used for projectile attacks. Unlike the previous games, the meter builds a lot faster and can be completely filled in just a few seconds. The ki blast battles from the second installment are once again activated when both fighters unleash their special ki blasts at the same time. Even though the fighting is fun, the package as a whole feels incomplete. With a missing story mode and just a handful of dull stages, this is a bare-bones fighter that could have benefited from more time in development.





Reflections: What happened to this game? After playing through the quality *La Légende Saien*, I was expecting a lot more. If it weren't for the title screen, I would have thought this was just an unfinished version of *La Légende Saien* that was given to publications for preview purposes. Besides the missing story mode, what disappointed me the most were the boring stages. One of them is simply clouds! And to make matters worse, a second stage is the cloud stage – but at night! If this were to come out in today's market, we'd be waiting to download the story mode a year after release. Yeah Capcom, I'm looking at you. – MV

Dragon View

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Love lost and love sought cross the heart of this stirring sequel to *Drakkhen* that sees your cherished Katarina captured to meet a mourning madman's ambitions. Though your aim to save your sweetheart is singular, your perspective is not: It switches from a side-scrolling style in satisfying "Town and Battle scenes" to a pseudo-3D "Outer World" between labeled locations. This expansive first-person view is both freeing and difficult to explore when venturing outside the confines of collected maps, so be sure to consult your compass, seek teleportation stars, and listen carefully to friendly folks' directions – the conversations are eccentric as well as instructive. Once inside caves, temples, marauding mists, and more, you wield a sword or hauza (throwing blade) to fight foes with strikes, jump attacks, and self-damaging blows. Slaying lizard men, gargoyles, cyclopes, and so on grants experience points and bounties: jade to spend on arrows, bombs, potions, etc., hearts to replenish health, and stars to restore potency to magical artifacts. Most notably, three elemental rings are crucial to accessing new areas amidst ice, swamps, and stones, but items ranging from Fire Boots to the fairy Blessing are also essential. Even more so, however, is your persistence, as copious obstacles await. Flames, pits, spikes, and other challenges test your resolve to rescue Katarina, but they're varied and fun to overcome. Besides, there are many helpful enhancements to discover, and leveling up dramatically eases combat. It's only a shame that recording your quest is restricted to scattered healers (especially if a boss beats you), but the robust story and soundtrack sustain engagement. Who knew that Kat-napping could lead to this dream of a journey?





Reflections: "You don't need to play *Drakkhen* to enjoy *Dragon View*, but you know what I like best about this game?" I said to no one in particular. "What?" no one replied. "All the dialogue tags!" I exclaimed. "What're dialogue tags?" no one asked. "Y'know," I explained, "words like 'said' or 'replied' or 'exclaimed' or 'asked,' but this game's got some fancy ones, like 'chirps' and 'chimes'!" "Really," no one said incredulously. "Oh, and it's got adverbs, too!" I gushed cheerfully. "You can't be serious," no one scoffed. "In a great game on a big island full of cool stuff to do, that's the part you like the most?" "Well, that and the cheesy romantic scenes," I admitted. "You're hopeless," declared no one. – AP

Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Virgin Interactive
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
(PAL: Virgin Interactive)
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★







This title is based upon the fictionalized biographical film of the same name and features one-on-one and one-on-two fighting stages. In Story Game, the player, as Bruce Lee, must battle with adversaries after brief, mediocre cutscenes that explain the situation via dialogue. The graphics during bouts are well-defined, the animation is smooth, and Bruce Lee's attack sounds are memorable. He has light and heavy punches and kicks, crouching and jumping attacks, a throw, and the ability to flip forward and backward. His enemies are varied in appearance as well as in style but are as tough as a two-dollar steak, dishing out attacks that do far more damage than Lee's. A standard health bar exists in these single-round affairs to reflect damage incurred, but the chi bar is what really matters. As attacks land, this meter builds, allowing the player to first unlock Fighter Mode (for a faster Lee with lightning-quick punches and kicks) and then Nunchaku Mode (for delivering devastating blows with Lee's trademark weapon). The chi meter depletes after a heavy strike, missing an attack, or being hit, leading to lost abilities. Unless using the Nunchaku, most fights are difficult, especially those involving two enemies at once, which can become incredibly unfair. However, holes in the AI can sometimes be exploited to help. Two players can team up as double Lees in Story Game, and up to three players can face off in a versus mode that, disappointingly, only offers Lee as a playable combatant. Overall, the game is somewhat entertaining, but the legend deserves better.



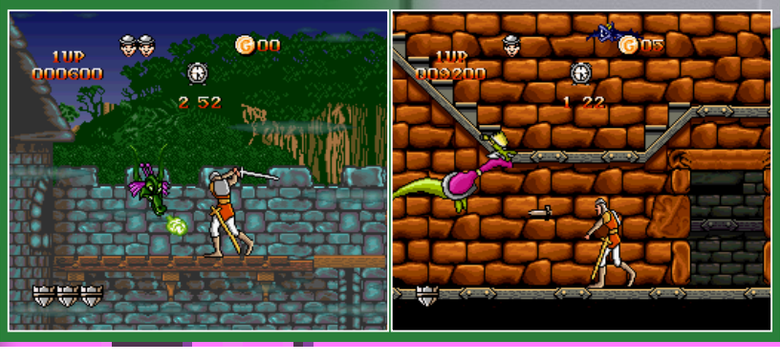


Reflections: Bruce Lee is the most famous martial artist to have walked this planet due to his iconic films, but he is also regarded by many as the father of mixed martial arts. He ingeniously incorporated techniques from several different disciplines into his tao of Jeet Kune Do ("the way of the intercepting fist"). This philosophy was decades ahead of its time, and that, along with his charismatic personality and film presence, is why Lee is still so fondly remembered today. To its credit, this game decently reflects Lee's style of martial arts and movement. The gameplay leaves a lot to be desired, though, and it requires a bit of expertise just to survive the second fight. We shouldn't have to be as adept and as skilled as Bruce Lee was in order to enjoy his game, but perhaps that's the way he would have wanted it? – PC

Dragon's Lair

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Motivetime
Publisher: Data East
(PAL: Elite Systems)
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Storm the battlements and brave Mordroc's Castle! As Dirk the Daring, the player(s) must navigate through the malicious, maze-like residence of the evil wizard, locate Princess Daphne, and rescue her from the clutches of the dragon Singe. Dirk scampers around the castle fending off medieval enemies with a sword and a throwing weapon. Breaking open jeweled containers reveals thrown weapon upgrades, gold, shields, time, or extra lives. Exiting a level with enough gold coins unlocks a bonus round. Levels often have more than one exit, and it's possible to discover loops back to previous ones. These tangled pathways make for a complex world map, while individual levels are short and almost puzzle-like in their design. True to his animated origins, Dirk has a penchant for skidding around, and the game reflects this with noticeable inertia. Additionally, platforms are often placed out of sight or just beyond jump's reach, giving Dirk ample opportunity to plummet to his demise. Time is extremely limited, and pesky "baiter dragons" appear with increasing frequency as it diminishes. If the game were not challenging enough, the password screen is itself a timed affair, requiring attacks to cycle spherical letters in specific flags while rushing to the exit. Despite all this, it is a functional action-platformer with some meritorious ideas. However, this feels every bit a game both hampered by its mechanical failings and designed with them in mind – a well-intentioned calamity befitting its ambitious and clumsy protagonist.



Reflections: To its credit, migrating away from the animated quick-time events of the Cinematronics arcade classic to an action-platformer suits the capabilities of the SNES, and it's leagues ahead of the atrocious NES incarnation. The sprite art does its best to reflect Don Bluth's creations, the sound suffices, and the music occasionally charms. There is even some appeal in Dirk's lanky animations and the cumbersome way in which he handles his small yet distinctly *Castlevania*-esque repertoire of weaponry. Alas, the game itself is too laden with flaws to forgive its aspirations. The settings grow repetitive. Moreover, Dirk is no Belmont; his interia-heavy control does not make him particularly fun to handle, he can hurt himself with his own throwing stars, he swings his sword like a kid that has just found his dad's golf clubs, and he is relatively frail, even on the Easy difficulty. Combine this with scant lives, the game's penchant for employing blind jumps, required exploration on very narrow time limits, and useless dummy exits? Frustrating stuff. – DG

Drakkhen

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Kemco/Seika
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★





The dragon princes and princesses have eight magical tear jewels that must be obtained to restore peace to the world of humans and dragons. A group of adventurers, comprising either the default fighter, magician, priestess, and scout characters or a quartet of created heroes/heroines, roam the impressive first-person, real-time 3D land, exploring dungeons, castles, and villages in their quest. When a location is entered, the game shifts to static scenes so that the party can explore, look at items of interest, and pick up useful objects and equipment by using selectable icons on the screen. Random battles occur throughout; these bring all the characters on-screen to fight foes ranging from spiders and snakes to screen-filling dragons and even beings from the stars themselves. The player can assist the team by telling each character how to attack, defend, or use magic. After each fight, treasure is given, and sporadically, each character levels up to gain new abilities and spells. A map screen has a compass that is essential for traveling in the right direction, as wandering the wrong way can result in the party being wiped out in quick fashion. However, visiting Anak Shrines can fully heal and revive dead party members. This is an ambitious title for the console; it's rich in lore and scale but gets quite menu-heavy at times, and at others, instant death feels incredibly infuriating. Save often.



Reflections: On one hand, I could see myself losing hours to this game, but on the other, it becomes so laborious I wonder if it is worth it. For every cool aspect it has, such as an actual day and night cycle in real time, the way picking up torches dims the current room, and how equipped weapons and clothing actually appear on the characters, there's a maddening game breaker that hinders it. Random battles appearing by a river or lake, practically guaranteeing that at least one party member will drown, and the way a castle you have been asked to return to now has a shark in the moat that will wipe your party out immediately are things that are beyond me. If a die-hard *Dungeons & Dragons*-type game is your bag, then you will enjoy this, but be warned, fair adventurer: It is not for the casual. – JE

Dream TV

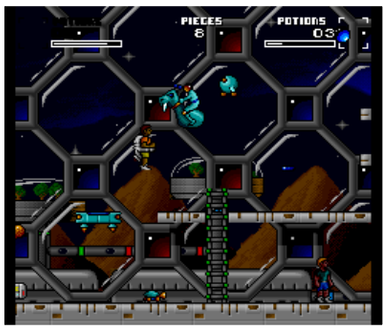
Genre: Action
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Rollogame
Publisher: Triffix
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★







After a mysterious game cartridge arrives at the home of video game champions Jimmy and Charlie, they find themselves flung between dimensions at the hands of cruel emperor Critic. Stranded in their captor's Dream Worlds, Jimmy and Charlie must work together to escape their fate and defeat Critic once and for all. Taking control of either one of these reluctant heroes, you're tasked with finding and collecting puzzle pieces scattered across each of the game's four creatively named stages – Medieval World, Egyptian World, Prehistoric World and Future World. While never explicitly mentioned, you'll quickly discover that many of these pieces are hidden beyond obstacles that require both characters to solve. Some ledges can only be reached with the use of a seesaw, and you'll occasionally come across switches that trigger a platform on the opposite side of the stage. Navigating these areas requires you to switch between each character, leading to a unique set of problems. You can choose to view both characters at once by playing in horizontal split-screen mode, but this means that you're unable to see enemies or traps far above and below you. Alternatively, you can play on a full screen, but then you're blind to the fate of the idle character. The only way to avoid these problems is by using a potion that allows one character to shrink down and be transported in the pocket of the other. This isn't a permanent solution, however; each potion is limited by a timer, and the potions themselves are few and far between. Running out at an inopportune moment means that this lackluster game is reduced to nothing more than an exercise in tedium.





Reflections: The most disappointing thing about *Dream TV* is that the developers chose to take the concept in such a dull direction. The beauty of working with alternate dimensions is that you're never limited to any one time, place, or even gameplay style. Triffix could've had fun with the idea and sent us on an action-packed journey through exotic worlds, yet we're left with a game that's incredibly and unashamedly boring. *Dream TV* doesn't introduce any new ideas after the first stage, so completing each successive world begins to feel like a chore rather than an exciting adventure. I don't know how anyone could've thought that a game built around collecting puzzle pieces was a good idea, but that's exactly what *Dream TV* is. – AF

The Duel: Test Drive II

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Distinctive Software
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Get behind the wheel of one of three legendary sports cars and drop the hammer in this first-person street racer. Players can race against the clock or one of three computerized opponents. Four spans of highway await, each with more comically named gas station checkpoints, sharp turns, and inclement weather than the last. The difficulty slider increases the skill of the optional opposing driver and the tenacity of the police, and on its upper half, switches the car from automatic to manual transmission, forcing players to monitor the tachometer to keep from burning out. Strategically, the cars vary in their handling, acceleration, and top speed, giving each a different feel. Police await along the race route, however; the player must either slow down when the radar detector is pinging to avoid detection or floor it and attempt to outrun the law. Being caught by the police costs valuable time, while wrecking or running out of gas costs the player one of their cars. Conversely, running a leg flawlessly awards a bonus vehicle. Even as the car gets to higher top speeds, steering feels manageable, though it can skid or go airborne. The SNES rendition of the main theme is great, but players must select from three adequate music tracks (or silence) during actual gameplay. The visuals and frame rate are strong, and the different dashboards for the cars are a nice touch. The controls are simple, but three mappings accommodate different player preferences. The game lives somewhere between arcade and simulation, and those looking to test themselves will find it a worthy opponent.





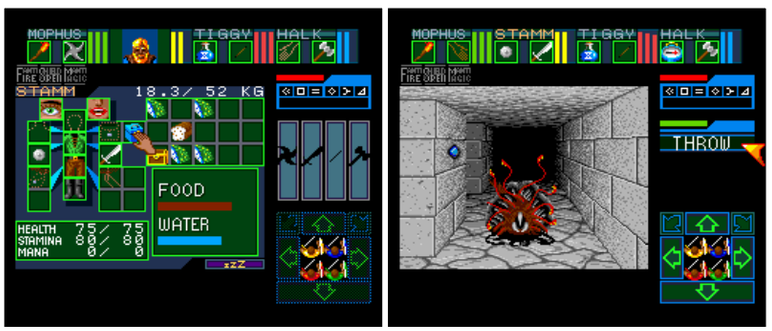
Reflections: I loved *Test Drive* for the Commodore 64 as a kid, and this SNES port of the sequel is very faithful to the feel of the franchise, if not the terrain. Even at the higher difficulty settings, I find it is typically better for your score to just floor it rather than to stay under the radar gun's notice – the police's pursuit is not as full-throated as the instruction manual suggests. Speaking of authority in blue, the gas station attendant is none too shy about telling me that I should not quit my day job or prodding me to put my lead foot down as it is "only a game." Buddy, you are wearing a onesie for Nozzles R Us, and I am throwing away Lambos like they come in six packs. Which one of us should be dispensing advice, and which one of us should be dispensing gas? – DG

Dungeon Master

Genre: RPG
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: FTL Games
Ported by: NCS Corporation, Victor Entertainment
Publisher: JVC
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



You must resurrect four bygone champions and lead them through 12 dungeon floors to fight Chaos in this real-time RPG. First, in the Hall of Champions, you form your party from the 24 available heroes. They are varied in appearance, statistics, and specialties (fighter, ninja, priest, and wizard), which are each associated with certain actions. For instance, climbing a rope is a ninja skill, whereas being attacked is a fighter's. Each time an associated action is performed, your character's experience increases. The game has a first-person view that takes up most of the screen. At the top are your champions' names, what they hold in hand, and bars representing their health, stamina, and mana. On the right are the interfaces for moving, using weapons, and casting spells (shown as a series of symbols you select). To interact with these areas, as well as objects in view, move the cursor and press B. Hit SELECT to enter Move Mode, which changes movement to the D-pad and triggers. When you encounter enemies, use the buttons on the right to attack, cast a spell (such as Poison Cloud), or turn around and retreat. If a character's health runs low, you can use a potion by pressing Y to enter the inventories and place it on the mouth icon. It's not just trolls and elementals blocking your way through the dungeon – much of it is guarded by puzzles that involve finding keys, using teleporters, and stepping on pressure plates. Obtain the Firestaff and take down Chaos to bring peace and balance back to this world.



Reflections: I thought this was a neat RPG with puzzle elements and an uncommon magic mechanic. Unfortunately, being ported from a computer game, the control scheme is awkward. Too bad it's not SNES Mouse compatible. Move Mode is great, but before performing a different action, you have to remember to revert back in order to use the cursor. Oh, the health my characters lost from unintentionally ramming into walls! It's nice to be able to save anywhere and anytime in the game, although take note of where you saved for when you return (I recommend drawing a map anyway). There isn't much music while exploring, but this does allow you to hear important sound clues, such as nearby enemies or traps. Despite my complaints, this is a solid game with fun elements that I'd recommend to hardcore RPG fans. – KY

E.V.O.: Search for Eden

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Almanic
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Rare
★★★



Crawling from the oceans of the NEC PC-98 and onto the SNES, this game is a spiritual successor to the previous title in the 4.6 Billion Year Story series, *The Theory of Evolution*. Despite migrating from the top-down RPG presentation of its predecessor to a side-scrolling action-platformer, it keeps much of the spirit of the former, including some thematic elements and musical arrangements. The player travels through multiple eras, each a map with various stages that are progressively unlocked. Each level is filled with flora and fauna, some dangerous, which the player must eat to gain EVO Points. These are spent to shift into newer, deadlier forms. Unfortunately, Earth's guardian, Gaia, is not the only power at work, and forces (terrestrial and otherwise) have their own goals. Crystals of curious origin offer unexpected changes. For players willing to grind out EVO Points, there are some fun hidden creature types to discover, and myriad options help counter the monotony with motivation. Thankfully, levels can be revisited, so savvy players can make the most of ideal dining locales. Mechanically, the platforming feels responsive, but the combat often devolves into stun locking, with the player either as victim or perpetrator. Unexpected twists to the storyline can be found by more ambitious explorers, some of which lead to alternate endings. Musically, the soundtrack starts with promise – when in the ocean, "Birthplace of All Life" plays, setting a stunningly high bar that Kōichi Sugiyama's composition rarely returns to once ashore, save for perhaps "Sorrow" or "Extinction." Though its educational content is anecdotal at best, there are heartfelt moments that teach lessons all their own.



Reflections: *E.V.O.: Search for Eden* is, like its soundtrack, an inconsistent experience. There are certainly things to like; the presentation is visually appealing, and the evolutionary trees are just deep enough to encourage experimentation. Beyond the exploratory phase, though, the game rarely feels rewarding or complex enough to justify a revisit. *The Theory of Evolution*, released three years earlier, cuts more deeply into science fiction, with a compelling story told in the theoretical cosmic timeline of its manual. By comparison, *Search for Eden* just scratches those ideas in its later chapters. Balance between world enemies and bosses is questionable. If you are stuck on one, I find it helpful to bring plenty of EVO Points to the battle; swapping an ancillary part is a cheap way to go back to full health. – DG

Earth Defense Force
Super E.D.F. (alt.)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Defend the galaxy from the evil AGYMA forces in this brutally difficult side-scrolling shooter. Six stages of bullet-hell dodging insanity await, but luckily, the player has a plethora of selectable weapons and option craft controls at the ready to help even the odds. At the start of each stage, a main attack is chosen from among eight selections, including lasers, atomic grenades, and homing missiles; this weapon can then be leveled up by shooting down enemy ships to increase damage and range. A tap of the option craft button releases two mini ships as alternate fire modes; these can also be used as a spinning defense to absorb incoming fire. The player has three shields, and although more can be earned with point scoring, when they are lost, it is back to the start of the stage, minus a precious continue (these are finite in supply). Fortunately, shields are replenished at the end of each stage, and the level-up bar always remains in place, even if a continue is used. The unique addition of a ship speed button is also included; it has three settings that can be switched out on the fly if needed. Casual gamers, beware: This game is for genre aficionados only as the difficulty remains high at all times.





Reflections: Here's an actual "Nintendo hard" game that never lets up – even its opening act doesn't hold your hand. The vast array of weapons available from the start sucks you in to believe you might actually have a chance, but soon enemies appear from all sides, without warning, to bring the instant pain. I never bothered with anything other than the middle speed setting for the ship, but I found the option ships to be invaluable – when leveled up, they can become the difference maker, even against the biggest foes. The game looks great for an early SNES title, a standout moment being a looming space station that appears in the background before getting wiped out by the boss you are about to face. This is a seriously hard game that takes a lot of practice and even more patience to master. – JE

EarthBound

Genre: RPG
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Ape, HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







When a UFO crashes in your hometown, you begin a journey to save the world. Along the way, you'll discover new powers, allies, and yourself. Will it be enough to defeat the evil Giygas? This is a turn-based RPG with an overhead angle, but its world is modern, with pizza, taxis, and telephones blending fantasy with mundanity. Psychic powers (PSI) function like magic and consume Psychic Points (PP), and weapons are things such as baseball bats and frying pans. Most actions are menu-based, including talking or using PSI and items. Your central protagonist is a boy, and eventually other children join you: a girl, an inventor, and an Eastern Prince. There are sequences where you play as the others individually, adding variety. Each location is unique, complete with eccentric NPCs, and you save by phoning your dad, who contributes to your bank account when you win battles. To spend money, you use ATMs, but carrying cash is risky since you'll lose some if your party is defeated.



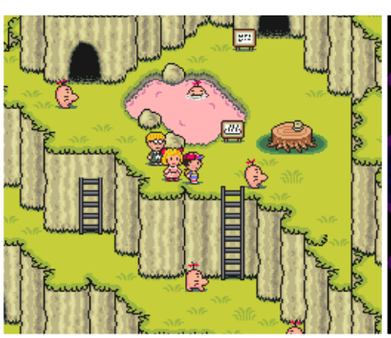


The colorful overworld includes woods, towns, caves, deserts, and more. Monsters walk on-screen, and you can attempt to sneak up on them or evade them, but getting caught with your back turned gives the enemy an advantage. Battle screens are static but have animated backgrounds and quirky flavor text. Player characters don't appear in battle, represented instead by boxes showing HP and PP, and PSI attacks appear as vibrant patterns. You can attack, use PSI, items, or characters' special abilities, for instance "Pray," which aids the party. Enemy sprites are motionless but memorable, including hippies, coffee, ants, mushrooms, robots, etc. When you're injured, your HP rolls downwards, and you can attempt to heal before it reaches zero. HP and PP are fully replenished by sleeping in hotels, and you can buy food such as burgers, magic pudding, condiments, and more. Status ailments such as crying, falling unconscious, being mushroomized, and others can be cured with PSI, items, or visiting a hospital. Although you can stash goods at home, your capacity is limited, making inventory management tricky. The difficulty can be rough, and grinding may be required, but fortunately, there's an auto-battle feature. Obstacles including ghosts and pencil statues block your progress, and you must defeat bosses and gain allies to continue. Along the way, you also collect melodies from "Your Sanctuary" locations that unlock your potential. Bosses, including a cult leader, living vomit, aliens, and more, can be intimidatingly mysterious, sometimes requiring strategy. As an RPG, this game is good, but its humor, surprises, and unconventionality make it great. Quality abounds in its locations, dialogue, graphics, and music. Like any work of art, it won't resonate with everyone, but if it does, you'll never forget it.





Reflections: I first played this in 2001 and still use PSI sounds as ringtones today. I remember talking about it with my first boyfriend in college, telling him, "*EarthBound* isn't a game you play. It's an experience that you have." He understood. "Are video games art?" isn't a question anymore, but in 1995, nobody was asking. Yet this game exemplifies the distinctive storytelling potential of video games. *The Legend of Zelda* was revolutionary for its implication that "the player is the star," allowing players to feel like they're adventuring. *EarthBound* implements that differently. Video game stories are often derided as power fantasies, but here your characters are vulnerable, such as when the protagonist boy periodically becomes homesick as a status ailment, curable by visiting his mother. Homesickness makes him ineffective, so you actually experience the effects of his emotions. That's only possible through interactive media. When you significantly out-level enemies, they run away, but you can chase them down. Would that make you feel strong or guilty? Such feelings are a part of the game, but they come from *you*. Besides literal monsters, you encounter exaggerated real-life villains such as crooked cops, criminals, corrupt politicians, etc. Yet you don't defeat them by killing them; they're only human. Even the prime villains, Pokey and Giygas, are pitiable. Although the game becomes darker near the end, its innocent appearance kept it from Western popularity. *Game Players*, for instance, rated it at 69% in 1995, calling its humor "pretty juvenile." In the "Extreme!" '90s, everyone confused "edgy" with "mature," but eventually the game found its audience, and today it's a coveted cart. Part of its uniqueness comes from its Japanese origins, although appropriate changes were made during localization. The biggest loss was ultimately the other two games. In Japan, *EarthBound* is *Mother 2*, sequel to *Mother* on the Famicom, which was translated but not released here until 2015 on the Wii U. *Mother 3* came out in Japan in 2006 but hasn't been sold in English officially. A devoted fan base keeps interest in the series alive, itself proof of how potent great storytelling can be. – KN





Earthworm Jim

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
Publisher: Shiny Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Join Jim – a worm in a super suit for no other reason than it fell on him from the sky – in his quest to rescue Princess What's-Her-Name from the clutches of Queen Slug-for-a-Butt in this comedic action-platformer. Jim's suit allows him to run, jump, and use his big, red Plasma Blaster to battle all manner of foes including dogs, lawyers, goldfish, and arch-nemesis Psy-Crow over various beautiful stages. He can also detach his head to use it as a whip for attacking or latching onto hooks to reach secret areas containing 1-ups, ammo, and much needed suit power. The last of these replenishes the suit's energy (shown as a percentage), but if this figure reaches zero, Jim loses a life. End stages consist of races through space between Jim and Psy-Crow where orbs can be collected and continues earned. Lose the race and a fight breaks out, potentially depleting the suit's energy further (the percentage rolls over onto the next stage). Gameplay-wise, no two levels are the same, which adds variety ranging from maneuvering a bathysphere through the watery depths to having a bungee cord fight with a snot monster to skinning a cat of its nine lives in Heck. There is plenty of humor abounding in this silly game, but it offers a stern challenge to beat it.





Reflections: "Cruising through the universe, having lots of fun, here comes Earthworm Jim – you know that he's a mighty one – LOOK OUT!" This platform game was so big, it spawned its own Saturday morning TV show in which Jim was voiced by none other than Dan "Homer Simpson" Castellaneta. From Jim's wonderful animation to the whole atmosphere of the game, this was one of my favorite titles as a kid. It still plays brilliantly, despite the difficulty of some of the platform jumps, whipping from hook to hook, and the aforementioned bathysphere sequence that has one very long part that will make you pull your hair out – it's akin to the water section in T*eenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* on the NES. However, the constant variety, jokes, and puerile, irreverent comedy make this a must-play on the system. The only major downside to it is that I find the music better on the clangy Genesis version – it really suits that grungy tone. – JE

Earthworm Jim 2

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
Publisher: Shiny Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★½

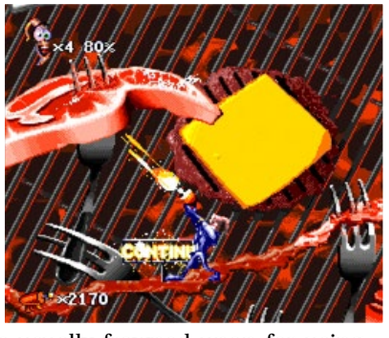






Jim returns with all new skills and weaponry to save Princess What's-Her-Name from the nefarious Psy-Crow across land, sea, and space in this zany platformer. From triple-shot finger guns and literal homeing missiles to the useless bubble gun, the player is armed to the teeth in dispatching foes such as blunderbuss-wielding octopi, Scottish grannies, salt shakers, and filing cabinets. Exploration is key, not only to discovering secrets which hide extra lives and continues, but also to obtaining the three flags that collectively bestow a password in each level. Aside from the wonderful side-scrolling stages, there are also isometric shooter levels in which Jim must deliver a payload to blow up a snot monster, and there's a set of reflex minigames where puppies must be bounced from one side of the screen to the other via a giant marshmallow. If four puppies get splatted, Jim's sidekick, Peter, becomes a giant, angry beast, ripping him apart. This section is fun the first time but frustrating on the third as the difficulty massively ramps up. The entire game is truly an oddball experience that must be played to be believed. What other title requires the player to dunk a cow in a bath before its fuse runs out?





Reflections: Game developers are usually frowned upon for using sprites or characters with no rhyme or reason, but here, it is a blast just to see what happens next. How can you go from using Jim's head as a helium balloon while Evil the Cat tries to pop him to a stage where he is in a pizza box jumping on pepperoni platforms while fighting a fire-breathing rump steak? Somehow this smashing of everything but the kitchen... oh no, there are kitchen sinks too... works with aplomb to create a frantic yet gorgeous-looking game. Having to find three different collectibles per stage for a password is pretty mean, but the game has enough 1-ups strewn about to get the job done. From Tommy Tallarico's brilliant musical score to Jim's abundance of animations, the whole package has been lovingly crafted. It is a shame that Jim fell from grace so quickly thanks to his horrendous N64 outing. Simply put, Jim is a platform mascot worthy of third place after Mario and Sonic during the 16-bit era. – JE

Eek! The Cat

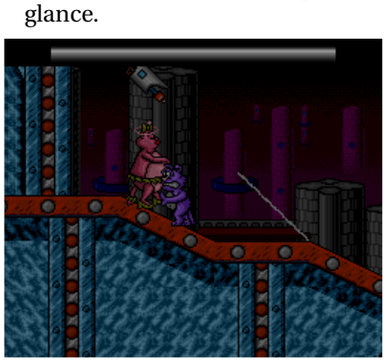
Genre: Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: CTA Developments
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







Eek can't help wanting to do good for others; after all, it's his motto: "It never hurts to help!" In this game, his task centers around helping six individuals who are incapacitated in some way, such as his girlfriend, Annabelle, who has been hypnotized by aliens. While each character blindly walks forward, Eek must assist them by performing various acts of mobility in environments including a zoo and a cavern. For example, he stops their motion by facing them, turns them around with DOWN, and kicks them to a higher platform with the A button. Eek's goal is to escort his ward to the exit of each of their stages without depleting all of their gray health bar at the top. Standing in his way are hazards, such as pits and falling rocks, and enemies, such as coconut-wielding monkeys and laser-shooting aliens. Eek needs to scout ahead to find the best route and prepare parts of the journey by activating switches, killing enemies, etc. Considering the trial and error involved as well as the risk of completely losing track of Eek's charge, there are bound to be failures, so thankfully, he has continues to restart a level. While this game seems like an interesting idea, the controls overshadow most of the fun. Movement is slippery and too fast, making it difficult to carry out precise moves as is sometimes necessary. This creates a game that's overly difficult without offering much of a reward for completion. It isn't worth more than a passing glance.





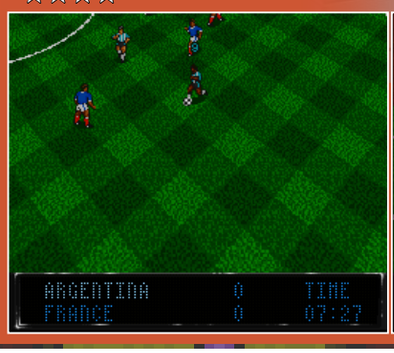
Reflections: You're either here because you're a fan of the *Eek! The Cat* cartoon, or you're systematically reading every review. If it's the latter, please enjoy my following review for the wonderful *Elite Soccer*. If it's the former, though, prepare for disappointment after the beginning cutscene, which has the same style as the cartoon. The actual gameplay has an odd-shaped sprite for Eek as well as background graphics that don't convey the same feel as the opening. This is not surprising considering that this is a reskin of a computer game called *Sleepwalker*. I wish the controls weren't so awful; rather than struggling to guide another character, I was more frustrated at trying to control my own. On the plus side, it's nice to see the cast of *Eek!*, and there are rocking tunes, but good luck getting through the game to hear and see it all. – KY

Elite Soccer

World Cup Striker (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rage Software
Publisher: GameTek, (PAL: Elite)
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







The World Cup is within reach in this soccer game where you control a team as they play their hearts out on the field. You have many options to customize your experience, from the tournament type to weather conditions, game length, and referee attentiveness. Before choosing your group of men from a list of 32 global teams, you can adjust the visual look of the teams, including their names and uniform designs. The mix of player and computer-controlled teams is up to you, but if two player-controlled teams face off, you'll have to find another soccer enthusiast to take the second controller. If you have a multitap and even more folks around, you can connect up to five people by assigning specific members of either team to a controller in the Multiple Players option on the View Team screen before each match. While playing, you are given a vertical, angled view up the field. Movement of the players is clean and tight, although it can be difficult to tell who's ahead on the field if you need to pass the ball. There is an LED display at the bottom of the screen that normally shows the score and time but can also cheer you on with messages like "What a Goal!" or taunt you by showing things such as a sad clown face when you miss a goal shot. These visual touches, along with the player animations after a big play, enhance the game beyond the good controls. There is much to enjoy in this experience, and it's worth what time you have to spare, whether it's for a single, five-minute game or hours trying to win a trophy.





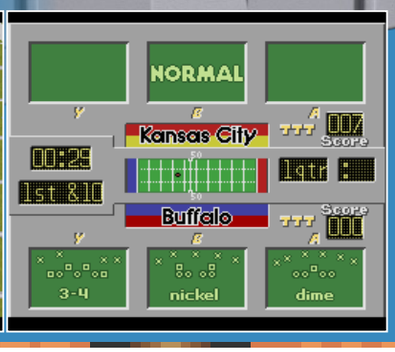
Reflections: You can't tell from the NA title, but this game is a sequel of sorts to *World Soccer '94: Road to Glory*. If you play both these games, you'll see the similarities in how they function and the vast amount of options available to create a personalized soccer experience. You'll also see similar soccer action scenes as the background of the menus but with *Elite Soccer* including better graphics overall. I also enjoyed the energetic music that got me excited to run out onto the pitch and establish my dominance (or lack thereof). The SNES has more than a few soccer titles in its library, and with the ability to play with four friends, this one is a sure standout. – KY

Emmitt Smith Football

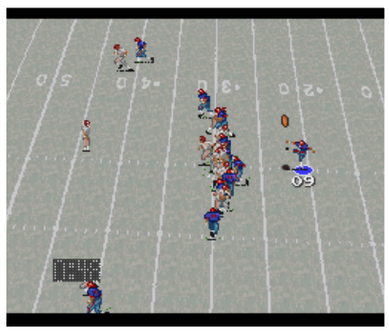
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: NCM Entertainment
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Password Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★







Hall of Fame running back Emmitt Smith lends his name and voice to this football simulation game. It's 11-on-11 action, with passing, running, defensive, and special teams plays to select and execute. There isn't an NFL or NFLPA license here, so generic city names and player numbers are used instead. The game does offer a decent amount of different plays to pick from, broken down into various offensive and defensive formations. When passing, not only does the matching face button need to be picked for the intended receiver, but also a second tap of the same button is required to set the power behind the pass. These motions can be complicated by defenders who chase down the quarterback; such pressure can lead to sacks for players who forget about the second button press to throw the pass. Defensively, the game plays adequately enough, though tackling success seems a bit haphazard. Particularly big hits can see the offensive player's helmet separated from his head and knocked skyward. In terms of features, this game only offers Exhibition play, which hurts its replay value. One thing that did make the cut is a play editor for designing new plays and saving them to the cartridge's battery (deleted custom plays can be recalled/shared via password). This editing ability is nice for more advanced players who understand the intricacies of football and have ideas about positioning, route running, and blocking schemes. Visually, there's little to be impressed with, aside from some scaling and rotation at times. Player models are bland, and the action on the field is pretty choppy. In the sound department, Emmitt Smith occasionally makes post-play comments. The sound bites are clear, though they do repeat before long. All told, this title is a disappointing also-ran in a sea of SNES football games.





Reflections: Here's another game that tries to ape Madden and falls well short of the goal line. The play-calling windows and formations are identical to Madden, the kicking game is identical, and the player positioning on the field is – you guessed it – identical. It doesn't take long, however, to figure out that this is nothing but a bad impersonation. The need to press a button twice to pass is unintuitive, and setting the pass power is unnecessary. The CPU plays poorly, even alongside a skilled human player, and the whole experience is weak. This is not one of Emmitt Smith's finer football moments. – PS

Equinox

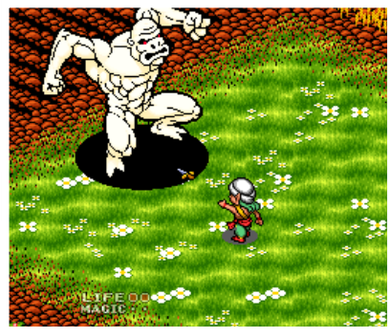
Genre: Action-Adventure, Puzzle
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Glendaal, son of the wizard Shadax, must brave eight isometric dungeons beneath fields, swampland, ice, and more to save his father and the world from sinister sorceress Sonia. He moves, jumps, and fires found weapons in four diagonal directions, destroying not only underground knights and blobs, but also overworld bats and trolls. Filleting the flying foes refills Glendaal's magic meter with potions, letting him cast offensive, strategic, and other acquired spells, while trouncing trolls replenishes and sometimes extends his life meter (also refillable with apples). Its growing length does not preclude one-hit deaths, however. Instead, the meter represents the chances he has in each dungeon to overcome puzzle-filled rooms, find colorful keys and 12 tokens, and defeat a formidable Guardian. Success awards harp strings (for eventual teleportation) and/or longer life and magic meters; it also unlocks more of the world map and a larger lair to conquer, but exhausting all lives returns Glendaal to his last save spot (usually a dungeon exit). The rooms' puzzles get increasingly demanding due to multistep block-moving maneuvers, invisible conveyors, moving/dropping/disappearing platforms, backtracking, concealed alcoves, timed portcullises, and spikes galore. Meanwhile, the tilted perspective creates blind spots and makes spatial relationships difficult to judge – often with lethal consequences. Dying or leaving and reentering a chamber replaces most objects and enemies until a puzzle is solved, and with over 450 unmapped rooms for Glendall to explore, Shadax will have to wait a long time to be rescued.



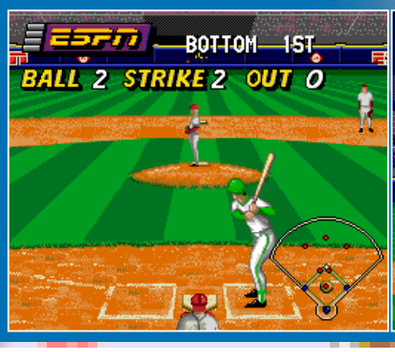


Reflections: As in nature, *Equinox* follows *Solstice*, its NES predecessor that stars Shadax. If you find it easy to Follin love, you'll be glad that Tim Follin, composer of the 8-bit game's impressive theme, also worked on this title's soundtrack with his brother Geoff. Aside from the stirring opening, the music here is largely atmospheric, featuring evocative sound effects interlaced with smatterings of instrumentation and silence. It's too bad that its contemplative feel is frequently shattered by Glendaal's piercing wail, but the precision the puzzles require is hard to achieve without perishing a few times first. Shadax himself melodramatically warns of the difficulty in the manual after charging Glendaal to save him and "the world from a dateless night of pestilence, plague, terror, and despair." Dateless night of despair, huh? Sounds like high school prom! – AP

ESPN Baseball Tonight

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★







This baseball simulation bears the ESPN name, which boosts the game's presentation right from the title screen. Sportscasters Chris Berman and Dan Patrick lend their vocal talents; Berman can be seen before and after each game in the SportsCenter studio, while Patrick delivers one-line observations during games. Scores shown also have network branding, giving the game a televised feel. The in-game sound is very good, featuring music pulled from ESPN programming, and the sound effects are clear. Visually, the game looks quite nice, with smoothly animated players, detailed stadiums, and the camera situated behind home plate. Unfortunately, a great presentation and above-average graphics and sound mean little when the underlying gameplay isn't great. Batting is tougher than it should be; it's difficult to acquire the right timing to make contact with pitches, and when the bat does meet the ball, there's not much force behind it – unless the batter is the CPU. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the Home Run Derby, which should be an exciting display of raw power but often winds up being a sequence of line drives, weak fly balls, and no home runs to be seen. It is possible to string hits together and scratch across runs, but the lack of strength is palpable. Pitching fares better, with simple controls and fair results, but fielding is atrocious, even when the option for assisted fielding is active. Ground balls can be stabbed by infielders, but line drives and some fly balls move too quickly for players to position themselves for making plays. Playing Exhibition games isn't especially fun, so the password-driven Playoff mode probably won't get much use either. Perhaps with exceptional patience and persistence, some baseball fans will find something to like here – but for most others, this game should ride the pine.





Reflections: Reviewing this title was an emotional rollercoaster of sorts. I started out being excited as I heard that familiar *Baseball Tonight* theme while the static logo screen looked like something I would see on the real ESPN. It was cool to see and hear Chris Berman in the *SportsCenter* studio, doing his thing. When the game started, the graphics impressed me. If I stopped there, this title would've been a four-star effort... but then play began, and my excitement gradually faded into frustration and disappointment, thanks to weak hitting and poor fielding. Oh, what could have been. – PS

ESPN National Hockey Night

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This five-on-five hockey simulation boasts an impressive ESPN presentation. Score overlays are appropriately branded, and Bill Clement mans the studio during intermissions with some lines of speech that sound great. The iconic *ESPN National Hockey Night* theme song is also here, adding authenticity. On the ice, gameplay can take place in one of two different perspectives. The Vertical View is a three-quarter, top-down perspective with a camera that is zoomed in a bit more than in other similar games. The Side View scrolls horizontally and is a nice change of pace, though player positioning and learning where to shoot from take some getting used to with this angle. Shooting and passing controls are fairly responsive, but skater controls are a bit loose. Momentum on the ice can lead to skating by loose pucks or wide turns. The physics aren't necessarily unrealistic, but players will need a couple of games under their belts in order to adjust. Scoring is almost too easy on the Beginner difficulty setting, as it's possible to rush with little resistance from one end of the ice to the other and snap a shot past the goaltender. The Pro setting is much more challenging, with good passing and quality shots on net being essential to putting the biscuit into the basket. Several modes of play are available, including Season and Playoffs that are supported by a battery backup to save progress. The Challenge mode offers two skills-based minigames; Fastest Man is a speed challenge, while Shoot Out is a test of shooting accuracy. All told, while the presentation and the bells and whistles are nice, the underlying game is the very definition of average; it's a very playable game of hockey, but there's little here that makes it memorable.





Reflections: *ESPN National Hockey Night* was Bill Clement's video game debut. While he wasn't used in a commentary role here, as he was for ESPN NHL telecasts, his presence was familiar for hockey fans who used to tune in to the four-letter sports network to watch their favorite teams in the 1990s and 2000s. Clement would go on to deliver commentary for other NHL video games in the years to come, most notably reuniting with play-by-play partner Gary Thorne for two seasons of *ESPN NHL Hockey* for Visual Concepts and eight seasons of *NHL* for EA Sports. He's had quite a video game career. – PS

ESPN Speed World

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The NASCAR license may be missing from this stock car racing simulation, but there's still plenty of horsepower under the hood. Virtual drivers can pick from a single race or a full season of racing – which takes place across 15 different tracks – to test their skills. Practice mode is also available to learn each track's layout, while Head to Head mode allows for two players to face off against each other. The Season mode is the meat of the experience, as drivers must net strong finishes in races to earn points and cash. As cash is earned, improvements to the driver's car and crew can be made; this is an absolute must for being able to compete in later events, as the competition also improves and will leave frugal drivers in the dust. Track types include speed and road courses, so different strategies will be needed to excel at them all. Gameplay can be as easy as holding the X button down to floor the accelerator, while sparingly using the A button to brake in automatic transmission mode. Manual transmission mode uses the shoulder buttons for gear shifting, but this really doesn't offer much improved speed performance over using an automatic. One vital strategy is to "draft" cars in front and gain extra speed to slingshot past other drivers; this produces great results. In terms of visuals, the game looks very good; the ESPN presentation works well, and the behind-the-car camera view is perfect for this experience. Cars aren't very detailed, but they offer a decent sense of speed. There's not a lot of music here, and aside from voice lines by Dr. Jerry Punch, the sound is pretty much all car engine noise. Still, this racer is worthy of at least a test drive.

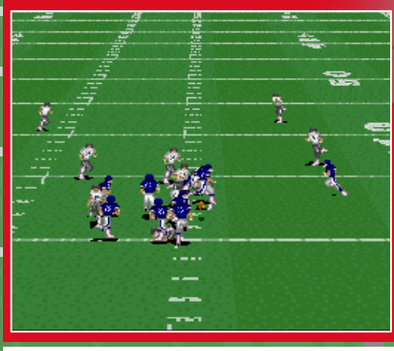




Reflections: This is easily the strongest of the ESPN-branded line of games for the SNES. I'm not the biggest racing fan, but that didn't stop me from enjoying my time with *Speed World*. I did get a bit frustrated with the constant contact between vehicles (it sometimes felt more like bumper car racing), but some nifty driving and knowing the course layouts helped to avoid that issue. Even as a novice, I felt like I picked up the ins and outs of the game easily – and that's definitely an asset for any racing game. – PS

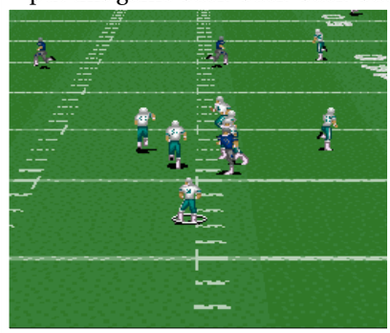
ESPN Sunday Night NFL

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Ringler Studios, Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This ESPN-branded entry into the legion of SNES American football games is an 11-versus-11 simulation that boasts an NFL license for the real teams – but not the real players. Gridiron gurus can try a single game or two different season modes, or they can jump right into the tension of the NFL playoffs. Season play can use the actual 1994 schedule of games, or a random season schedule can be created – the latter is a nice touch. Season standings and playoff progress are saved to battery, which is more convenient than writing down passwords, but individual player stats and cumulative team stats are not tracked. The presentation is all ESPN, with score and standings screens looking like they did on an actual telecast at the time. The on-field visuals and the way the game plays are disappointments, though. While there is some nice scaling to "zoom in" closer to the action once the ball is snapped, the player models are poor – and badly animated. It's tough to tell sometimes why a pass falls incomplete or why a player fumbles the ball. As for the gameplay, the problems start with a needlessly complex grid of play calling that's not intuitive and is prone to having players make mistakes trying to access plays. Once the play is finally called, running plays can be botched if the player moves the quarterback before the handoff, and passing plays rely on the shoulder buttons to choose inconsistent receivers who might be wide open and let the ball sail over their heads or make crazy catches in traffic. Defense fares somewhat better, though the choppy animation and relatively small player models make it hard to react properly. To paraphrase in-game sportscaster Chris Berman, put this game back-back-back-back-back on the shelf; it's a fum-ble!





Reflections: Unsurprisingly, Ringler Studios borrowed from Madden for this game. Here, the imitation lies in the play-calling screen. Many of the plays and concepts are exactly the same, right down to the fonts used. In order to put its own spin on the Madden design, the decision to complicate play calling with a weird grid and a ton of button presses just to call ONE PLAY proved to be poor. BYB? AAX? It's calling plays in a football game, not *Mortal Kombat*. Maybe *Mortal Kombat Football* should be a thing. Oh, Ed Boon... – PS

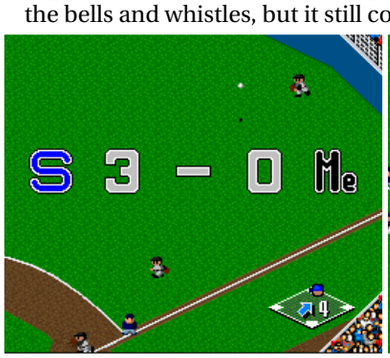
Extra Innings

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Sting
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





It's time to step up to the plate with this arcade-style baseball game. Realism is neither expected nor necessary, as the gameplay is simple and easy to pick up for any player. The focus is on the pitcher-versus-batter battle, shown from behind and above the batter. Pitching is executed with a single button press, while movement can be added by holding the D-pad LEFT or RIGHT while the ball is in flight. Pressing DOWN on the D-pad adds speed to try blowing a pitch by the batter, while holding UP takes speed away to fool an opponent. Hitting is also as easy as a single button press, but it's deceptively difficult because players must swing with good timing and not fall for pitches outside of the strike zone. Fielding can be managed manually or controlled automatically; the latter option affords the ability to take control of fielders at any time. Several gameplay modes are available, including a single game for either one or two players, an All Star game that places the best athletes at every position, and a season mode called Pennant Race that can keep players coming back for hours. In addition, two Edit teams are available; these allow players to be named and stat points to be distributed. Is it best to make a few star players and have a few journeymen, or better to share skills equally? Players can try both strategies. Visually, the game is average, with more detail on the pitcher-versus-batter screen and less when the ball is put into play. There are some nice cutscenes, the music is peppy, and a few clear voice samples are included. It doesn't have all the bells and whistles, but it still comes through in the clutch.





Reflections: Here are a few nuggets of trivia knowledge for you: The Metalics team is made up of various video game press people, including Andy Eddy (executive editor of *VideoGames & Computer Entertainment* and author of *Super NES Game Secrets*) and the Game Doctor, Bill Kunkel. *Nintendo Power*'s Gail Tilden plays for the Rains, while the Stocks team consists of writers and staffers from *Electronic Gaming Monthly,* including Ed Semrad, Steve Harris, and the mysterious Sushi-X. It was nice of Sony Imagesoft to let games press settle their differences on the baseball field instead of sniping at each other online. Ahhh, the 1990s. – PS

Eye of the Beholder

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Westwood Associates
Ported by: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Common
★★





This overly ambitious port of the DOS first-person dungeon crawler tasks players with creating a team of adventures who must investigate a mysterious evil that dwells beneath a city called Waterdeep. Since this is an Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game, players have full creative control of each team member. Humans, elves, half-elves, dwarves, gnomes, halflings… they're all here, as well as the fighter, ranger, mage, cleric, thief, and paladin classes. Character stats are determined by dice rolls, but unsatisfied players can reroll as many times as they like. While players can move their team by using a cursor to click directional arrows located on the screen, pressing the Y button switches to a quicker D-pad movement option, and the SNES Mouse is also supported. Portraits with two icons below reveal what each character is holding in their hands. While in battle, players must use the cursor to click on a character's weapon (or spellbook) to attack. This is easy enough, but the cursor constantly jumps to another character's hand after each blow, making consecutive strikes by the same character cumbersome. Switching between D-pad movement to the cursor can also be confusing and may cause players to move when they thought they were about to attack. Using the cursor does allow each character to be outfitted with newly found loot, however. Additionally, hundreds of switches and levers throughout the dungeon will keep players guessing, but the seemingly thousands of invisible walls will drive them mad! Visually impressive zombies, spiders, and other monsters are in abundance. Unfortunately, the actual dungeons aren't as eye-catching as the enemies. They all look exactly the same and will undoubtedly have players traveling in circles for hours on end. The moody music fits well with the setting, but the battle sound effects fall flat. Stick to the DOS version.





Reflections: While traveling through the first few layers of the dungeon, I started to get into a groove and really enjoy this game. Then I hit a wall – an invisible wall. This game has so many of these unseen barriers that it almost makes it unplayable. I began drawing my own maps with grid paper to understand where the heck I was and where I had already been. It didn't matter, though; there are just too many hidden paths. I spent hours trying to make sense of it all only to end up back at the starting point. I'm relieved to finally be finished with this one. – MV

F-Zero

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Aug. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★





Enthralling, futuristic racing awaits players in this launch title. Four magnetic hovercraft are available, each with different acceleration rates, top speeds, and weights; the last stat affects the momentum and cornering abilities of the racer as well as the damage it can sustain. Players select one of three Grand Prix challenges, each containing five courses, and one of three difficulties. Played in a third-person perspective, races consist of five laps, with the goal of finishing third or better to move on. The sense of speed conveyed is very impressive, with the graphic detail and Mode 7 pseudo-3D effect combining for an exhilarating treat. Besides the other three racers, there are lavender opponents as well as explosive craft that can be struck. Players also have to be wary of several types of course hazards, including land mines, magnets, and rough patches. Some track features can be useful, such as jump plates to help avoid obstacles (and maybe gain a shortcut) and dash arrows to accelerate the racer for a short time. The biggest danger is the energy guardrails which, if touched, decrease the racer's power and can even violently pinball the craft around the course. Thankfully, an energy pit stop can be driven through once a lap to regain some of the power meter, and short turbo boosts are also available. The riveting courses with hairpin and 180-degree turns will give even hardened racers a tough time. Expert steering, knowing when to slow down, and using the leaning tactic are essential for keeping up with the pack and surviving. A practice mode permits training, and best times and records are accessible. The rollicking, high-spirited soundtrack and excellent sound effects only add to the immense fun.





Reflections: The magnetic levitation tech the racers rely on is how magnetic trains function – one of the most famous being in Japan. *F-Zero* was a very important title for Nintendo, as it displayed the firepower the new Super NES had right out of the gate. It was one of the early SNES titles I had as a kid, and I always preferred to pilot the heavy Fire Stingray. Of course, there are a handful of sequel games, but perhaps the legacy of *F-Zero* is most recognizable in Captain Falcon, driver of the Blue Falcon and a bounty hunter who has appeared in all the Super Smash Bros. fighting games. – PC

F1 Pole Position

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This racing game puts players behind the wheel of a Formula One car and lets them compete for the checkered flag against 13 of the world's best drivers on the 16 real-life tracks that were featured in the 1992 Formula One season. There are three modes of play – Test Run, Battle, and World Grand Prix. Test Run allows the player to take a solo drive around any of the game's tracks. Battle mode gives up to two participants the option to race on any track simultaneously while letting them tweak track conditions (from dry to wet), the amount of laps, and which/how many of the 13 opponents they'd like to compete against. World Grand Prix mode permits up to two players to compete in the full 1992 Formula One season. Before each race, the player has an opportunity to tinker with several car settings. The tires, suspension, wing, and much more can be adjusted. While racing in one-player mode, the player is given a split-screen view, with the bottom screen featuring a perspective from behind the car and the top screen acting as a rear-view mirror. The upper screen can also be changed to show the top eight drivers in the current race. While the visuals of the cars are surprisingly detailed, the tracks and backdrops leave much to be desired. Controlling the car can also be frustrating, especially since the steering is overly sensitive. Unless Practice goes well, World Grand Prix mode starts the player(s) off in last place, making any chance of winning a longshot. Players who wish to at least keep up must visit the pits at the proper times. There's also a lack of music while driving, meaning players are treated to the boring sounds of digital engines. Thankfully, there are better options out there if you're a Formula One fan.





Reflections: The constant braking and accelerating that this title requires makes my thumbs throb. The computer-controlled cars don't seem to have any problems, though. They zip all over the track and pass right through each other! On the other hand, if I simply tap the car in front of me, we both spin completely out of control. One thing that this game does let the player do is drive backwards on the track, which is a favorite pastime of mine. As long as I can cause a little chaos, I'm content. – MV

F1 Pole Position 2

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★







This sequel to the simulation Formula One game lets aspiring racers put rubber to asphalt and compete against 13 real-life professional drivers on the 16 tracks that were featured in the 1993 Formula One season. Test Run, Battle, and World Grand Prix modes all reappear, as do the vast amount of customizable options and tweaks the player can make to their vehicle prior to each race, such as alterations to the steering, gearing, and transmission. The third-person behind-the-car perspective also returns but now provides a full-screen view of the action (two-player races are on a split screen). Unlike the first game, which uses the top half of the screen as a rear-view mirror, this game offers two smaller mirrors located on each side of the car. The tracks are also wider in this sequel, giving the player more room to maneuver around competitors. Opponent cars still seem to pass through each other without issue, however. Unless machine options are changed in the Config menu, if the player slightly bumps another driver, both cars usually end up spinning out of control and facing the wrong direction. The computer-controlled cars also never seem to pit during races, which feels unfair since the player's car is almost guaranteed to need at least one pit stop. Thankfully, the player is able to qualify (earn a position) before each race in World Grand Prix mode. Another new feature is the chance to create a racer and add them to a racing team, determining their name, nationality, appearance, and more. The teams and each racer's engine contract can also be edited. Although this sequel still seems unduly tricky in some ways, the wealth of customizable options and improved visuals make it a decent simulation Formula One racer.





Reflections: This game is an improvement over the first title thanks mainly to the full-screen visuals and wider courses. Being able to make a few mistakes without the fear of driving off the track makes races less stressful. Don't get me wrong, though – this game is still as tough as nails. One slight mistake almost guarantees losing a few spots in the standings. If you're not a fan of Formula One racing, some of the options may be a bit confusing. Being able to edit each racer's engine contract is a nice bonus, but is it really necessary? – MV

F1 ROC II: Race of Champions

Genre: Racing
Release Date: July 1994
Region: NA
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Compete against 25 opponents to be the number one driver in this behind-the-car racer. Beginning in Group C, the player must gain promotion to the F3000 class by winning each of eight different tracks; these can be played in any order so long as the entry purse can be afforded. Once these and all F3000 courses have been mastered, the player joins one of three Formula One teams before tackling the 16 unselectable tracks of the F1 Grand Prix. The first tracks of the Group C and F3000 classes are free to enter repeatedly, and using them to practice and earn money is very helpful. Placing high in the positions also reaps dividends when it comes to upgrading the car. Engines, tires, and front and back wings have to be researched, which costs money and takes a couple of races to complete, but during that time the player can rack up more cash. Qualifiers affect the grid in the main race, so learning the responsive twitch controls while screeching around corners assists in shaving seconds off of times. The number of laps in each race can be greatly increased if desired, and making strategic use of the pit stops helps in such lengthy marathons. The AI is tough to beat, but the car upgrades make a noticeable change in the earlier races before the difficulty curve goes up and forces you to replay that same first race over and over until more money is available for research. The game zips about at a frantic pace and feels very tight control-wise, but the package is let down a little by the ear-piercing engine sound effects. The Mode 7 graphics pay off in this fun sequel that finishes high up on the grid.





Reflections: If you squint a bit, this title is basically a knockoff *F-Zero*, which is no bad thing because it plays really well. I find that increasing the number of laps greatly helps in finishing at pole position, as the smaller lap numbers just don't give you enough time to mount a climb to first place. Only one car is available in each group/team, which is a shame; the game would have benefitted from having different cars that could be purchased instead of just spending everything on research. That said, this is still a very good racer and a big improvement over its predecessor. – JE

F1 ROC: Race of Champions
Exhaust Heat (EU)

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★⋆







Players take on 16 tracks from around the globe in this racing simulator with a behind-the-car view. The game has two main modes available: a Training test area and a full Grand Prix where the player races to earn money for purchasing upgrades to the car. Everything from the suspension, engine, and tires to the front and rear wings is upgradable; changing these attributes in turn affects grip, speed, and braking. After a solo qualifying spin on the Grand Prix track at hand, the player must contend with seven other drivers pursuing first place. Better positions win more money for the player to spend on the car, ultimately making the more challenging tracks easier. The game is fun to play as the controls are firm, and handling the vehicle through hairpins and chicanes is easy to navigate – arrow signs frequently flash on-screen to indicate the direction and shape of upcoming turns. When the money starts rolling in, the upgrades to the car can really be felt in its control – even putting wet tires on during a rainy stage makes a big difference. Money is deducted if the player crashes out or hits an opponent on the track. The car can take damage during a race but can also hit a pit stop for repairs if need be. Overall, this is an enjoyable racing sim that gives any budding F1 enthusiast a chance to tinker under the hood – albeit a basic one – before seeking that central spot on the winner's podium.





Reflections: I'm not the biggest racing game fan in the world, but this one keeps my attention because it doesn't overcomplicate things with stats and car tweaks. If the full 16-race mode seems too daunting, then the game also lets you go full on with a hefty wallet to spend on upgrades in the Training mode so that you can play with a powered-up vehicle at your leisure. The AI drivers, however, are quite annoying in that if they hit you, you spin off at no cost to them – and they will *never* mess a corner up. The race is yours to win, not theirs to lose, which adds in an element of unfairness, but that's only a minor nitpick for a fun afternoon of *vroom vroom*. – JE

F1 World Championship Edition

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Peakstar Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment, Domark
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆







Maneuver around opponents at breakneck speeds and capture the checkered flag in this Formula One racing game. Players have their choice of 12 actual Formula One drivers to take through a 16-race championship mode that consists of real-life tracks from around the world (a second player can join via split screen). Points are awarded to drivers after each race based on position finished, and the driver with the most points at the end of the season wins. For those who enjoy more of an arcade racing experience, there is "Knockout Mode." The goal here is to start every race in 12th place and finish in the top six, but failing to do so causes a game over. There's also a practice mode available for Sunday drivers who wish to test their skills before swapping rubber in the other play types. The cars control well enough, but going just slightly off the road results in a complete stop, making even the smallest mistakes costly. Passing opponents proves difficult due to narrow tracks, AI-controlled cars that constantly force themselves directly in front of the player's vehicle, and the game's lack of collision detection. Even though there are a hefty amount of tracks to race on, they're all lacking in visuals, with only slight changes made to backgrounds. Due to the player's point of view being directly behind the car, most won't even notice the differences. Weather conditions can change mid-race, which is a nice touch, but it really doesn't affect the car's handling. Due to the lack of vehicle upgrades, there isn't much here besides racing, making this a bare-bones Formula One game.





Reflections: I didn't realize how terribly some SNES games handle engine sounds until I played *F1 World Championship Edition* for this review. My wife was on the floor above, talking with my daughter about their plans for the day. I was getting all into the game, thumb jamming down hard on the button to give my car as much speed as possible (because we all know that pressing down harder makes the car go faster). All of a sudden, I heard my daughter say, "What is that horrible noise?" It took me a minute to realize that she was referring to the sound the car was making in the game. She came down and stared at me while I sheepishly turned the volume down. – MV

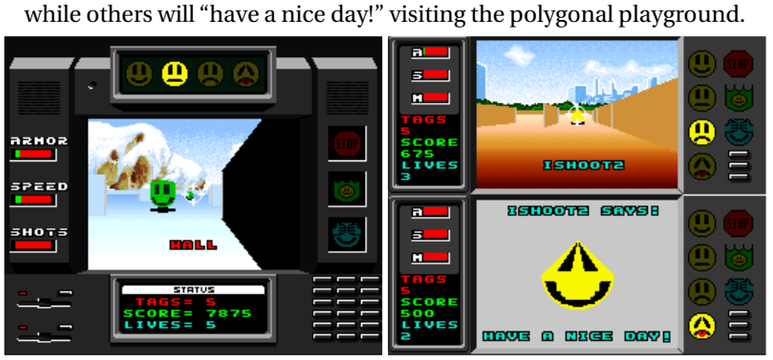
Faceball 2000

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Xanth Software F/X
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Connect to the Inter-Face, become a customized Holographically Assisted Physical Pattern Yielded For Active Computerized Embarkation ("HAPPYFACE"), and take on antagonistic Smiloids in this unique first-person shooter. One player (or two via split screen) can participate in CyberZone or Arena mode. Arena pits players against up to six Smiloid foes of four types in a deathmatch to 10 kills on one of 16 maps. Conversely, CyberZone features 41 levels across numerous mazes and terrain types, where player(s) must earn 10 "tags" by eliminating opponents to unlock the door to the next stage. Flashing opponents, though more durable, drop pods containing points, power-ups, and special-ups that provide various benefits. Bonus levels where players rush to obtain scattered reward pods await after every fifth stage. Players can choose to start at certain levels, but starting earlier allows them to build up strength for more challenging maps later. A code to reveal a hidden mode, Cyberscape, is awarded to those that defeat the Master Smiloid at the end of CyberZone. Carried over from the Game Boy version, Cyberscape contains 70 levels with notably different mechanics and objectives. Options include friendly fire, starting health, and enabling the ambient sounds of the battlefield, chilling voices, and sweet tunes written by George "The Fat Man" Sanger. While novel, the system's limitations stand out, with a constrained viewport that still wants for frame rate. The inability to strafe limits the depth of gameplay and may frustrate fans of the genre, while others will "have a nice day!" visiting the polygonal playground.

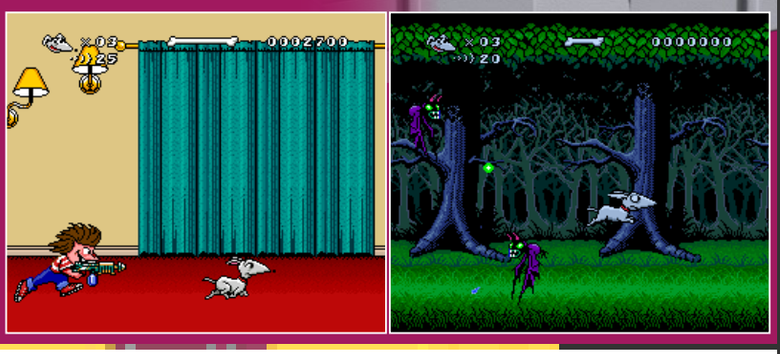


Reflections: *Faceball 2000*, ported from the Game Boy to the SNES, began as *MIDI Maze*, a 1987 multiplayer first-person shooter for the Atari ST, where musical notes shoot it out in an orthogonal maze. It was presumably themed as such for cleverly leveraging the system's MIDI ports to create a ring network that supported up to 16 players. Having made graphic demos for the Atari ST and XE, Xanth Software F/X created *MIDI Maze* as their first commercial work, yet it featured seriously impressive innovations. Besides networking, fluid rotation, regenerating health, and cutting-edge deathmatch gameplay, the original featured Midi-Cam mode, a spectator machine that can cycle between players' views and a top-down map. Swapping 16-player network support for two-player split-screen hurts. The Game Boy version does manage to reproduce *MIDI Maze*'s 16-player support… should anyone have 16 Game Boys, 16 copies of *Faceball 2000*, and seven Four Player Adapters! – DG

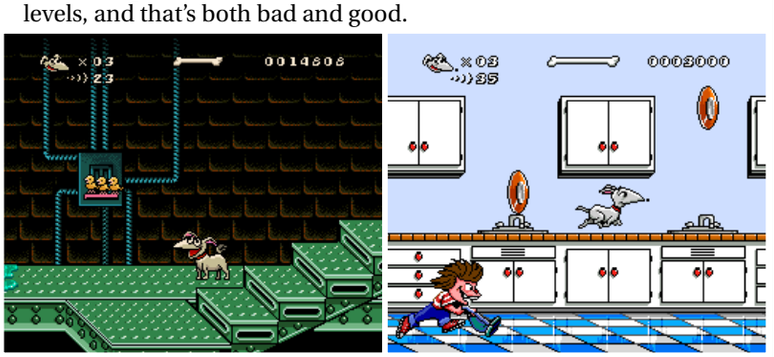
Family Dog

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: : Imagineering
Publisher: Malibu Games
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





You're a beleaguered dog, enduring your cruel owners in an uncaring world. This is a TV adaptation, and perhaps a great one: Instead of only watching the dog's suffering, you get to *experience* it in ludonarrative harmony! As it's a platformer, jumping is key, but the controls are troublesome. You can do a high jump by holding UP while jumping or a shorter forward leap with LEFT or RIGHT. You can also flip in midair for more hang time. Surprisingly, your running leap is short; jumping up from a standstill gains more distance. Levels demand precision, yet you might fall through some platforms' edges. A few objects, such as couches and poles, act as springboards. You bark to attack, but your supply is somehow limited, so you replenish barks with treats placed throughout the game. Bones refill health, rubber duckies grant extra lives, and other items give points. Destroying enemies restores health but consumes barks. If you find a tennis ball at the house, you play fetch with the family's son (who usually torments you with guns and vacuums), but there's little incentive. The dog is expressive and well animated, and other characters from the cartoon look right, but most of the visuals are forgettable. Bosses are nonexistent, and enemies, such as flying books, bouncing balls, spiders, and bats, are either nonsensical or uncreative. Locations from the cartoon are used, including the house and the obedience school, but most are bland. However, some levels require problem solving to unlock doors or locate hidden exits, adding variety. The music is repetitive but changes in pitch and tempo as you progress and attempts to match Danny Elfman's from the show. There are few levels, and that's both bad and good.



Reflections: The series premiered in 1993 but was based on the excellent 1987 animated short by Brad Bird. I saw the game in *Game Players* magazine, and I vividly remember the show, which aired in primetime. I also recall my mother hating it. She wasn't alone: *The New York Times* called it "mean, nasty and brutish," and it was cancelled despite the involvement of Tim Burton and Steven Spielberg. To its credit, it satirizes how careless owners casually neglect their pets. You don't have to be in PETA to understand that pets have feelings and aren't disposable affection machines that exist at your convenience. If you can't see that, suffer through this game and learn some empathy. – KN

Family Feud

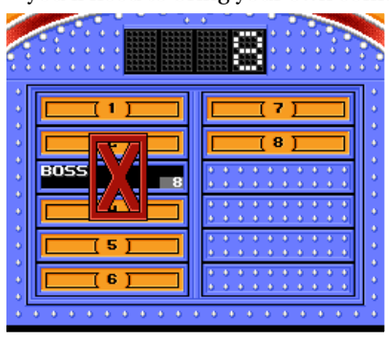
Genre: Game Show, Trivia
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★







This adaptation captures the look and sound of the titular TV game show, particularly the late '80s and early '90s run. Familiar elements including the music, buzzer sounds, scoreboard, and cross-stitch-style lettering for the logo and family names are reproduced accurately. However, the family and host characters lack personality. The game proceeds in three major sections. First is the Bullseye Round, where each family vies to buzz in and provide the single top-polled answers to survey questions. For example, the top response for "something associated with a turtle" is "shell." You need to proceed carefully, though, since it's possible to hit the buzzer before the host is finished reading the question, leaving you with an incomplete prompt. Money won from this stage carries over to the Main rounds (the Double and Triple rounds multiply point values accordingly). These give the family who wins control of each survey question opportunities to guess additional answers to it. After three incorrect responses, the other team has a chance. Only one family moves on to the final round, Fast Money, where two family members answer the same five questions successively, attempting to provide as many top survey results as possible. Your cash winnings are your score, and you're given a "returning champions" continue code to keep track of your total. Music, timers, and the Bullseye Round can be deactivated from the options menu. The computer opponent is quick and even sometimes enters plausible incorrect answers. Two players can challenge each other, and there's a practice mode that fares like a usual game, except without competition. The text input screen works well with the D-pad, and tolerance for misspelling is adequate. If you like playing along with the TV show, you'll probably enjoy this, but you'll need to bring your own comedian to liven things up.





Reflections: I watched *Family Feud* while growing up in the early '90s. The survey answers were my favorite aspect (plus screaming at contestants' asinine responses). I lost interest later, but the show still exists today. I played the Apple II game at school, and if I recall correctly, its questions could be updated with new diskettes. I've also played the DOS and NES versions, and somehow (probably nostalgia) I like those more than this SNES one, even though its overall presentation is superior. A similar game was released for the Genesis, and other platforms have received their own up to the present. – KN

Fatal Fury

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Takara
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







10 years ago, South Town crime lord Geese Howard murdered martial artist Jeff Bogard. Now, using the villain's own King of Fighters tournament, the player sets out to kill Geese and get revenge. There are three playable characters: adopted sons Terry and Andy Bogard and friend Joe Higashi. Matches are best-of-three bouts of punches, kicks, and powers, with the highest health winning a round if time expires before a combatant is felled. Combinations of D-pad and button inputs can trigger special attacks, such as Terry's Burn Knuckle or Power Wave, but these are difficult to execute reliably due to the game's lackluster responsiveness. There are two modes of play. Champion Battle takes the player through the streets of South Town, working their way to the Geese Building over eight stages. The first foe can be selected from four, but from there on, opponents are determined automatically. Street Fight Mode allows one or two players to battle arcade-style, selecting their combatant and a fight location. The full character roster is only playable in Street Fight Mode for Player Two, while Player One settles for the three choices from Champion Battle. The individual zones change from round to round, progressing from day to night and/or adding weather effects to evoke a "prolonged struggle" feel. An options menu contains a difficulty slider, variable game time and continue stock (including infinite for both), and remapping for the game's three buttons. Compounded with mediocre audio and wonky hit detection, SNK's first foray into fighters and the foundation of the Fatal Fury franchise fails to make a good first impression on the SNES.





Reflections: The argument in favor of *Fatal Fury* has been that it is the proper sequel to the original *Street Fighter*, given that SNK brought on board its creators, Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto, in 1988. The simplistic button scheme and combat style meshes with that notion. Unfortunately, the actual sequel, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, arrived first, stealing the spotlight. By the time *Fatal Fury* was released, almost a year later, the bar had been raised beyond its reach. Moreover, the SNES port was substandard; shifting from foreground and background lanes was lost, as were detailed cutscene images. Simultaneous cooperative play, where two players gang up on one computer opponent before fighting each other, is also nowhere to be found. *Fatal Fury* never stood a fighting chance. – DG

Fatal Fury 2

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Takara
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







The King of Fighters tournament has expanded from South Town to across the globe. This sequel features eight tournament participants; Terry, Andy, and Joe all return, joined by five new playable characters. Three modes of play are offered. 1P VS COM Mode takes the player across 12 stages to face seven other combatants, a mirror match, and four boss battles, with two bonus stages along the way. 1P VS 2P Mode allows two players to compete and has handicap and stage select features. Elimination Match lets players select lineups from the eight playable characters, tracking wins, losses, and ties from battle to battle, with the loser moving on to the next character in their lineup. In all three modes, confrontations are a best-of-three-rounds affair. Gameplay feels fairly responsive, and fighters not only exchange blows and execute special moves but also can move to one of two lanes, foreground and background, adding both visual and mechanical depth. At times, backgrounds also serve as ways to deal environmental damage to combatants. Tapping twice on the D-pad allows the player to dodge, and ducking players can slowly advance while doing so; these innovative features contribute to the game's active playstyle. The passage of time can be seen in backgrounds, as the day turns to night from round to round. If a player reaches low health, their bar flashes, unlocking desperation attacks that, while complex to initiate, are effective enough to warrant the practice, particularly because the CPU proves a more than worthy adversary on most difficulty settings. Options allow players to tweak that difficulty, as well as remap controls and adjust round times. The series' second SNES effort easily outshines its first.





Reflections: As the SNK titles were not too shy to boast about their games' gargantuan memory profiles, scaling *Fatal Fury 2* down to a fifth of its arcade profile required compromises in many places, including the loss of cutscenes, reduced fidelity in the audio, and the like. The missing "physics" for series icon Mai Shiranui and the truncation of Lawrence Blood's name to Lawrence B., however, can be attributed to Nintendo of America's standards and practices. That aside, they're not missed much otherwise, as the gameplay remains largely intact... a massive step up in port quality from *Fatal Fury*. Throw in the secret code that allows you to play as the four boss characters, and you've quadrupled the roster from the prior entry! – DG

Fatal Fury Special

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Monolith
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★⋆

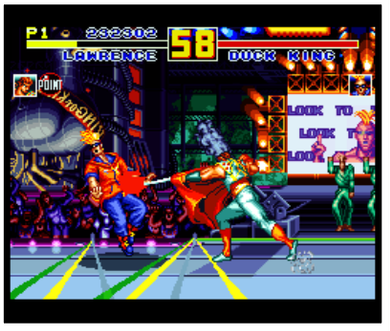






SNK's sluggers from South Town circle back for a third and final scrap on the SNES in this enhanced version of *Fatal Fury 2*. A packed roster of 15 international fighters from the first two entries in the series is available for players to choose from, along with one additional unlockable character. There are three gameplay modes. 1P Game challenges the player to fight through the other combatants in best-of-three-round fights. If they can survive the tournament without losing a round, a showdown with Ryo Sakazaki, the "Fighting Dragon" from the Art of Fighting series, awaits. V.S. Game lets two players battle it out, though a stage select is missing, so the confrontation takes place in the second player's level. Replacing Elimination Match, Count Down mode mixes things up by giving the player infinite health while challenging them to defeat as many opponents as possible within three minutes, awarding a score based on performance. An options menu offers a CPU difficulty slider, remappable controls, four round timer settings, and support for mono, stereo, or Dolby surround sound. While some frustrations remain from previous entries, such as how finicky the engine can be at recognizing special attack inputs and the CPU's propensity for plane shifting, the improved speed and the attention to the combo system make this the best of the series' ports on the Super Nintendo.





Reflections: *Fatal Fury Special* is an improvement over *Fatal Fury 2*, which is an improvement over *Fatal Fury*. The combo system is a nice addition, though I found myself beating up on a vacant second player in V.S. Game to get the hang of the moves. That's not to say this last SNES entry for the series is not without its faults. Arriving well into 1995, it once again fell too far behind its peers, and the work necessary to get it onto the system meant compromises. In particular, the PAL version was scaled down significantly, losing Big Bear, Cheng Sinzan, Axel Hawk, and Lawrence Blood entirely, as well as frames of animation for other characters. Bonus stages also appear to have been left on the cutting room floor for this edition. One last thing: The Ryo fight requires not losing a round, but if you do, you can lose a second, continue, and try to win without losing (again). A good proverb for the series: "If at first you don't succeed…" – DG

FIFA International Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Extended Play Productions
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★



Compete for glory as 30 different international teams in the original soccer simulation that started a sports revolution. Exhibition, tournament, league, and playoffs modes are available, and all try to recreate the beautiful game. With play set out on an isometric angle, it can take a while to learn the ropes, but soon enough, headers, volleys, and overhead kicks will be raining down, making the atmospheric crowd cheer. Each sprite has excellent animations, and every time a goal is scored, a Jumbotron-style screen pops up with celebratory imagery that contributes to the overall slick presentation. Adding in strategy control and formation tweaks all builds up the package as a whole. Gameplay-wise, the current player is clearly marked under his feet, making switching to nearby teammates easy to navigate, and a power bar shows shot strength. Opponent AI is solid, with players running into place, but the difficulty can be fierce at times and ramps up against the better teams (all teams have varying stats such as attack or defense). Goalkeepers are always superhuman, pulling off the biggest of saves, yet more often than not, player-controlled tackles miss the mark. A fun and well-presented title only let down by a harsh difficulty that may put beginners off.



Reflections: My brother and I always used to play the Genesis/Mega Drive version of this, and from playing both over the years, this one's difficulty is far more inaccessible. Still, there is a labor of love here, and it shows in its gameplay and similar presentation as part of the EA Sports series along with the Madden and NHL franchises. It was this game that started it all as a template for soccer titles to follow, *FIFA Soccer 95* being the best one for me (it inexplicably did not come to the SNES console). However, *International Superstar Soccer* quickly followed, and these two titles began a conflict in the UK as big as the 16-bit console war! If you own a multitap and a few extra controllers, switch the fouls off and let the carnage begin! – JE

FIFA Soccer 96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Extended Play Productions
Ported by: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



Choose from 12 international leagues comprising over 200 teams – all with real player rosters – in this officially sponsored game of isometric-perspective soccer. Player animation is of a good standard, utilizing motion capture technology for more realism, and some commentary is provided by English legend John Motson to create a lifelike representation of matchday. Individual players have personalized features, such as their correct hair color, which is a nice touch rather than everyone looking the same. The club team selections can make for excellent dream matches against the best teams in the world, or club versus international is also an option. However, the gameplay itself can be frustrating because the controls occasionally become unresponsive, and players just stop dead until everything catches up, allowing the computer to gain the advantage. A sprint button is available to assist in tracking back to defend, but tackling feels unfair and, more often than not, won't connect at all. On the plus side, shooting is exciting and frantic, and a goal provides a chance to press controller buttons to set off fireworks or bullhorns to add to the celebration. Overall, the game is an authentic reproduction of a soccer matchday, but the presentation has been upped at a sacrifice to gameplay.



Reflections: I am not a fan of this game at all – it looks the part but sadly comes up short in the fun department when compared to its predecessor. I love having authentic players and more team choices, but it is all in vain when the game isn't up to task, and it definitely feels like this is a case of style over substance. I fear that this version was an afterthought because the game was also released on the 32-bit consoles, which must have taken precedence over this generation. Still, there is joy to be had with setting up a league with a few friends and getting super competitive when two player-controlled teams go head to head, but the game itself has too many foibles that get in the way of simply having fun. – JE



FIFA Soccer 97

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rage Software, Extended Play Productions,
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Over 200 teams drawn from 11 regional soccer leagues and a world league are available for tournaments and cups, and a seven-a-side indoor pitch is also featured in this isometric soccer title. The gameplay is fast and frantic, and at times the camera can't keep up with the players. The AI is erratic, which can make the team with even the worst stats become an unstoppable force, detracting from the realism that the game is trying to portray. Instant replays occur when a goal is scored, and an electronic scoreboard appears calling for halftime. The indoor pitch gives a fresh slant to the traditional field mode, as the ball bounces off walls instead of going out of play, but sometimes it is impossible to see where the ball is amongst all the bodies flying in for tackles. It is an interesting feature but feels bolted on to make the game seem more attractive and valuable for the money, but a new mode can't stop this title from feeling stale and uninspired.





Reflections: There is only so long that EA should flog a dead horse, yet they are still doing it to this day with the franchise. But hey, why change up the formula when it will still sell millions? I had the PlayStation version of this game, and while it also had its faults, I can see where the effort was spent, and it was not in the Super NES version. While playing, I found that some teams are far too strong. Tunisia (yeah, that superpower on the world soccer stage) is apparently as good as Germany, which isn't quite right. The lazy design in reusing sounds and options from *FIFA Soccer 96* is pretty slack, and the whole game doesn't feel like much of a departure from that previous iteration. There is fun to be had from the title, though, and the indoor mode is okay for a kickabout, but it is more a novelty than a revolutionary update. The cracks are showing, EA... roll on next year to see if you have behaved yourselves, as I will be reviewing that one, too. – JE

FIFA: Road to the World Cup 98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1997
Region: PAL
Developer: XYZ Productions, Extended Play Productions,
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★





The leading isometric soccer simulator returns for its last Super NES outing. Based around World Cup 98, the game offers 11 domestic leagues and 172 national teams with real team names and player rosters as well as the initial group stages that lead up to the knockout tournament itself. The standard pass, shoot, and lob functions can be powered up with a hold of their designated buttons, and the usual sprint, header, and slide tackle mechanics are present as well. There's also a penalty shootout to try. The gameplay is pretty fast but at times unfair, as even the lesser teams can punish the player, forcing the loss of ball possession before having a chance to attack. The controls are sluggish and periodically delayed, and if the ball is hit hard enough, the camera can't keep up with it, which usually results in losing the ball. There are an impressive number of teams, but some of their stats are way off the mark (for example, Iraq being as good as Argentina), which hampers any realism the game is trying to achieve. As is expected of an EA title, the presentation is slick with its well-detailed sprites and all the formation, tactics, and statistics options, but this does not necessarily make a good game.





Reflections: I think it has to be pointed out that the FIFA franchise had pretty much ditched the 16-bit consoles by this point, and I remember loving the PC version at the time, reveling in all its 3D graphical glory and live commentary that gave the whole package a big matchday feel. On the SNES, we still get a game of soccer – ahem – *football*, but it just doesn't play well at all. I can forgive bad graphics or sound design (in this case, they are decent), but if the gameplay is fundamentally poor, then it doesn't make for a good experience, which is evident here. I think the major issue for this game is that EA had the France 98 rights, so they milked it for every single penny, and considering that this was a PAL-exclusive, they shunted it onto the only market they knew would make a return on their investment. Stick to the International Superstar Soccer games for the premier league of soccer sims. – JE

Fighter's History

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Data East
Publisher: Data East
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Hmm… a dubious stranger has beckoned nine would-be champions to compete in his "Great Fighter's Competition," a deadly one-one-one tourney of best-of-three-round battles to determine the world's best fighter. Naturally, each contender is happy to participate in this life-or-death contest, including young judo master Ryoko, flamboyant gymnast Jean-Pierre, and Matlok, an English punk rocker. Every character comes equipped with a unique set of punches and kicks, special techniques, and simple combos spread over "small, medium, and big" classifications. Generally, "small" attacks are faster but weaker while "big" assaults are slower yet stronger. Thankfully, play control is fluid and intuitive, allowing for easily performed specials and counters. Actress Fei-Lin, for instance, can fire downward aerial projectiles with a mere quarter-circle combination, kung fu expert Lee can launch opponents across the stage with a button tap, and by pressing two equivalent punch and kick buttons together, kickboxer Samchay can initiate his flying knee. Standard mechanics for the genre, no doubt, but the game does offer each character a unique "weak spot" that flashes upon repeated strikes. Focusing on this area can quickly stun an opponent and even cause extra damage. A hidden code also unlocks the two bosses; Clown and former gaming hero Karnov (interesting for his inexplicable turn to… villain?). In addition, the game grants a vanilla Versus mode and a vaguely unnecessary Survival challenge which allows players to pit teams of five against each other. Graphically, the game is uneven, combining colorful, lively backdrops with underwhelming sprite work, but the audio proves worse, its tepid tunes and scratchy voices instantly dispensable. Nonetheless, this title's greatest sin is its derivative foundation, grabbing more from the genre than it's willing to return. Indeed, it sacrifices identity for homogeneity and thus still fights to be respected in the present day.





Reflections: One could easily dismiss *Fighter's History* as being a shameless *Street Fighter II* knockoff, for that's what it is – Data East was even (unsuccessfully) sued by Capcom for infringement. But after suffering through such painful fighters as *Power Moves*, *Rise of the Robots*, and even *ClayFighter 2*, I have to be honest – playing this was sublime by comparison. Tight controls, decent graphics, a respectable roster of 11 characters – this ain't no classic, but in a genre flooded with 1990s mediocrity, *Fighter's History* at least surpasses the average drek. – DA

Final Fantasy II

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







The King of Baron orders Dark Knight Cecil to capture the power crystal guarded by another nation. When Cecil questions the king's motives, he is expelled from his squadron and given a mysterious mission to the nearby town of Mist. In this RPG, Cecil ventures forth to discover what is going on with his liege and what evil is brewing across the land. Whether in a location or on the world map, Cecil is controlled from a top-down view. In applicable areas, random encounters send him and his party to a side view, with Cecil and company on the right and enemies on the left (unless he's attacked from behind). Thanks to the newly developed and patented Active Time Battle (ATB) system, actions are allowed in real time (contingent upon a combatant's agility), meaning the longer it takes to decide on a move, the more attacks enemies may get in the meanwhile. The menu provides options to cast spells, equip items, or change the order of the shared inventory or spell lists. When on the world map or at the many save points, Cecil can use a resting item (tents/cabins) to restore health and magic. With its wonderful use of cutscenes and music, this game presents a riveting story that is sure to evoke emotions. While the narrative determines who is in Cecil's party, the change in members offers a dynamic combat experience, with each person having class-specific abilities, such as a Dragoon Jump or a Karate Kick. In sum, there are a lot of innovative ideas that makes this a unique early release RPG on the SNES.





Reflections: Known as *Final Fantasy IV* in Japan (*II* and *III* weren't localized until later), this game wows with its amazing music and story! Okay, the graphics aren't equally spectacular with their small sprites and mostly bland backgrounds, but this deficit and a drastic increase in difficulty towards the end are my biggest issues with what is otherwise impressive. For me, the story shines brightest. Square did a fabulous job of weaving together dialogue, cutscenes, color, and changes in music to create an emotional experience. I was right there with the protagonists, getting teary at their losses and cheering for their comebacks. *Final Fantasy II* is a quintessential example of how a game can marry spellbinding narrative with compelling combat. Check out the next review to see if the sequel can one-up it! – KY

Final Fantasy III

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







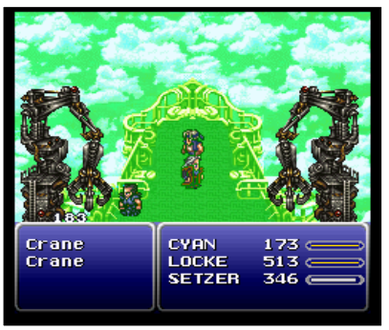
Another epic entry in the Final Fantasy series, this tremendous tale takes place a millennium after a great war resulted in the disappearance of magic. While technology has risen in its place, the Empire has found a mysterious magical source that it seeks to capture. In this RPG, you control a band of protagonists as they strive to stop the Emperor from gathering all that power for undoubtedly nefarious purposes. Rather than a single main character, you control a party either forced by the game or of your own choosing, depending on the point in the storyline. Regardless of the party construction, you have complete control over the formation: the order of the members (the leader becomes the sprite you control in towns and on the world map), the front/back line, which affects their damage/defense, and their equipment and Espers. While most game perspectives are overhead, when you take a vehicle such as a Chocobo bird or the Airship for a spin, you get a pseudo-3D view courtesy of some fancy Mode 7. When walking around dungeons or the world at large (where you are offered a minimap in the lower right), you randomly encounter enemies. This is where you see the major differences among the characters, as each one has a unique combat ability, such as Locke's Steal or Mog's many Dance moves. To add to their specialties, equipping certain Espers (which you acquire later in the game) earns a selection of magic spells in the same way experience points gain levels and stats. Combat is also the only part that allows you to use a second controller to help direct the characters once their power bar is full. In the beginning, you're limited in what to do and where to go, but as the game progresses, you're allowed more freedom to enter several locations on the world map.





This RPG offers a high-level experience across every aspect, from the expressive sprites and varied backgrounds to the emotional music and cutscenes for excellent storytelling. Although there are several areas where you are tasked to create a party without knowledge of what's ahead, this is counterbalanced with the game-over system, which sends you back to your last save with your earned experience points intact. Even if you make an unfortunate party choice, you can simply force your way through a difficult scenario by leveling the characters. This is not only a standout title on the SNES, but also it holds its own against a strong field of RPGs specifically. Whether you've played through all the Final Fantasy games or this is your first, you will surely be impressed.





Reflections: Released in Japan as *Final Fantasy VI* (the fifth game was localized later) this entry does exactly what I desire out of another installment: Square further improved on an already amazing setup. I admit I enjoy the storytelling in *Final Fantasy II* more, but that only comes naturally when going from a completely directed storyline to one designed to work in a more open format with access to a range of characters. This game does so many things right and very few wrong, so it's extremely hard to complain about any aspect of it, but I'll try. The overarching issue I have, as mentioned in the review, is that there isn't a lot of direction when you're creating parties, especially when you don't have an opportunity to change your mind later. For me, I worry about situations such as leaving enough strong characters in case you have to form a second party or not taking the maximum number should you need an open slot for new members (a scenario that actually occurs). I appreciate the developers creating a more open, choice-filled world than the previous title, but my personal preferences have me yearning for the mindless direction of Final *Fantasy II*. I know; this is a minor quibble, but I had to dig deep to offer a balanced view of a truly fantastic experience that excels in graphics, sound, story, and gameplay. Just please don't ask me what my favorite Final Fantasy SNES game is. I don't think I could choose between *II* or *III*. Although, if you'd like an opinion of the oft-ignored third child, check out the next review. – KY





Final Fantasy Mystic Quest
Mystic Quest Legend (EU)

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





RPG: It's as simple as ABC! That's what this title hopes to be as an elementary introduction to Japanese role-playing devised for American audiences. You guide a Knight questing to wrest the Crystals of Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind from monsters that are siphoning their strength and upsetting the balance of nature. Your top-down journey doesn't just take you to towns, temples, forests, and more, however – it takes you by the hand. Destinations are denoted on the Overworld by labeled Icons, themselves flanked by arrows indicating available or unlockable paths. These prevent wandering; you instead proceed from stop to stop as if on a track. Within most Icons, you walk where you choose, but usually, you don't go unchaperoned. At various junctures, companions Kaeli, Tristam, Phoebe, or Reuben team up to provide a second participant for turn-based battles initiated by touching visible foes. You don't even have to select their commands; set them to AUTO to let them strategize attack, item, and spell usage themselves. You should still watch your characters' conditions and life bars (or, if you can handle fractions, hit points), but defeat is penalty free. Besting palette-swapped enemies yields stat-improving experience points, but for those unfamiliar with level grinding, it's gently suggested by Battlefield Icons. These groups of optional confrontations are good for testing acquired elemental and support spells along with your four weapon types, but arms aren't only for attacking. Within locations, axes chop obstacles, claws grapple, explosives destroy barriers, and swords tap things; you can also jump short distances, save virtually at will, find treasure, and spend accumulated money. Along with a good soundtrack, these facets add sparkle to an adventure that succeeds, for better or worse, at being as easy as 1-2-3.





Reflections: The rogues' gallery might actually eke out more personality than some of the heroes do (thanks to the game's straightforward story). This is especially obvious when enemies are injured. Some, such as the Brownie, stoically suffer scars, while Shadow ninjas hide in holes, the cowled cowards! The Gorgon Stheno sheds her snaky locks in shock (worried about the damage to her rep... tiles?), but the most precious reaction comes from Cerberus, who hoists a white flag from his tail. That poor triple puppy! I'd almost surrender to such a sweet showing myself… except that his three heads are still deadlier than one. – AP

Final Fight

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





In this street-pounding beat 'em up, the Mad Gear Gang has kidnapped Jessica, daughter of Metro City mayor Mike Haggar. Across several side-scrolling stages, players must thrash a legion of thugs on their way to rescuing her. Players may select Haggar, a wrestler, or Cody, a martial arts brawler and Jessica's boyfriend. Haggar is slow but has a powerful punch and axe handle combo, dropkick, jumping lunge, and three grappling attacks: a headbutt, backdrop suplex, and devastating jumping piledriver. Cody is more balanced, packing a punching combination, jump kicks, jumping knee, grappling knee, and shoulder throw. Up to three enemies approach at a time, offering a good variety in their appearances and attack patterns. Players have to be quick not to get overwhelmed by the likes of quick-jabbing J, knife-wielding Holly Wood, giant Andore, and others. If surrounded, both Cody and Haggar have a special spinning attack to take out enemies, but using it reduces their energy bar. To assist in the fight, metal drums, crates, tires, and more can be smashed to reveal pickups, including items for points, food for energy, and three weapons: a knife, iron pipe, or sword. The stages (slum, subway, west side, bay area, and uptown) are all unique and detailed, and each features a boss, a few of which can be troublesome. The graphics are nice, the music is adequate, and the "pish! pa!" attack sound effects are satisfying. Unfortunately, the removal of the two-player mode, an entire stage, and an additional selectable character from the arcade version brings this quality brawler down a notch.





Reflections: If *Renegade* and *Double Dragon* shaped the beat 'em up, *Final Fight* solidified the look, feel, and quality of the genre, becoming the benchmark for all subsequent games of this type. Originally titled *Street Fighter '89*, *Final Fight* was an arcade smash and helped to make beat 'em ups a sizable part of the '90s arcade scene, with dozens of different ones developed and released. Having loved the arcade version, the stripped-down SNES port was a disappointment to me, especially with it missing two-player mode and not having my favorite character, Guy, as a selectable fighter. Besides eliminating blood and removing food items such as beer from the proceedings, the only female enemies (Roxy and Poison) were replaced by males, and in the bonus round after you destroy a vehicle, instead of the distraught thug exclaiming "Oh! My God!!", he comically utters, "Oh! My car." – PC

Final Fight 2

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







The fight's not so final in this uninspired sequel that sees the return of the Mad Gear Gang. Apparently, the syndicate has survived and gone international, forcing series regular Haggar, along with newcomers Maki and Carlos, to embark on a baddie-bashing spree spanning the globe. Haggar is still his brawny self, able to squash almost anyone with a few thrusts of his seismic fists, while the nimble Maki serves as his inverted reflection, favoring a flourish of flashy moves. Carlos is the bridge between the two extremes, a balanced fighter who, despite packing a sword, prefers his fists and fancy kicks to break his groaning foes. Indeed, the fighting system is still as rudimentary as its predecessor's, offering a punch and a jump button to express the characters' limited attacks. This usually results in one of two strategies: pummeling opponents with a combination of button mashing and throwing or whittling down encroaching crowds with repeated aerial approaches. By sacrificing snippets of health, the trio can also perform Super Moves that scatter incoming henchman – but make no mistake, a nuanced brawler this is not. The six listless stages are similarly simplistic; despite jumping from Hong Kong to France to a final crescendo in Japan, the levels play like reskinned versions of each other, even reusing many of the same enemies. Barrels and crates can be smashed to reveal knives, nightsticks, and 2x4s, but these weapons are rare, fleeting, and don't always suit their user. The bosses – from a psychopathic clown to a monstrous Kabuki warrior – help grant the proceedings a modicum of personality, but their abrupt wackiness proves inconsistent with the game's more serious tone. The graphics, at least, are well realized, joined by audio that delivers a satisfying "crunch" with its constant fisticuffs. Better still, co-op play is now available, reducing the challenge and giving players reason to attempt the higher difficulties for superior endings. And yet, despite these improvements, the game somehow lacks the tense, tactile sensibilities that made the original a standout.





Reflections: Shamefully, *Final Fight 2* fails to capitalize on its forebear's abundant potential. While the world celebrates such esteemed sequels as *Streets of Rage 2*, *TMNT IV: Turtles in Time* – even *Double Dragon II* – most Final Fight fans skip this follow-up when they feel the hankering to bash some heads. This is a sequel without a vision or purpose – a cash-in content to merely echo what was done before. – DA

Final Fight 3

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Three's the charm, one hopes, in another installment of the never-quite-final franchise. This time, the evil new Skull Cross gang is to blame. Naturally, burly Mike Haggar is back to bash their brains, along with Lucia, a lithe 'n feisty police detective, Guy, the aloof martial artist, and Dean, a street fighter equipped with electrifying skills. Gameplay follows the brawler template, with one or two players walking to the right, exchanging blows on what is essentially a conveyor belt of boorish foes. The good news lies in the upgraded fighting system – along with the usual button mashing, characters can now grab enemies from both the front and back, chain attacks with a dash, "hold" to remain slugging in the same direction, and perform special maneuvers via button combinations. Super Moves are also possible; pummeling enemies fills a gauge that, once primed, allows the character to employ a potent affront against a poor bloke, assuming players are able to input the appropriate sequence. Haggar's Super, for example, injects his piledriver with the thunder of an earth-shattering mortar, allowing him to obliterate surrounding enemies. Per tradition, crates and barrels hold life-restoring foodstuffs and, more significantly, weapons tailored to each character. No doubt, Lucia is a combo-fighting dynamo with her police-issue billy club but proves artless wielding Haggar's giant pipe. Level design has never been a notable strength of the series, but this, too, has been improved, offering alternate paths to experience the game's otherwise rudimentary stages. Additional elements, such as multiple endings, a barrel-busting bonus round, and the option to play co-op with a CPU-controlled character, easily make this the most fully-featured game in the series. Even the graphics and sound are suitably gratifying, and the bosses feel in line with the grit and grime of Metro City. Indeed, this fight's only true weakness is that, instead of adding to the genre, it seems more a correction for the mediocre efforts of before, belatedly delivering the game fans deserved all along.





Reflections: I always thought it odd that, 30 years later, it's only the original *Final Fight* anyone remembers or adores. After playing through the middling *Final Fight 2*, I began to understand why – at least until I tried this surprisingly solid sequel. Indeed, if only Capcom had delivered this a few years sooner… it could've been the game fans now celebrate. Instead, it's merely a footnote caught in the wake of the 32-bit age. – DA

Final Fight Guy

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Rare
★★★★







This sister title to the brawler *Final Fight* again features mayor Mike Haggar having to defeat the Mad Gear Gang of Metro City and rescue his daughter, Jessica, in brawling action. However, instead of having Haggar and Cody as playable characters, this version of the game exchanges the latter hero for his friend, the ninja-like Guy. Guy is the weakest but quickest fighter, and he's equipped with a jab-jab-punch-elbow-spin-kick combination attack. He also has jump kicks, a jumping knee, grapple knees, and a shoulder throw. If overwhelmed by the numerous enemies, such as the brawny Axl or large, charging Bill Bull, Guy has a special jumping spin kick to take out enemies all around, but it costs a small amount of energy. Besides the character swap and changes to the opening/ending cutscenes to accommodate, the game is identical to the original version, with all the same features, stages, enemies, and gameplay elements. It's still a fun and competent beat 'em up but suffers from the same shortcomings and cuts from the arcade game, with no two-player mode to be found and enemy, stage, and other alterations made throughout.





Reflections: Originally released in Japan on the Super Famicom in 1992, *Final Fight Guy* eventually came to the US as a Blockbuster Video store rental-only exclusive a couple years later. Due to this, the title is very hard to find stateside. I welcome this version since Guy was always my favorite character to play as, but that does not change the fact that this remains a lazy port. The most faithful *Final Fight* arcade adaptation released at the time is the somewhat hard-to-find Sega CD version, which features all three characters, stage transitions, mostly unaltered enemies (and more at a time), the otherwise missing industrial stage, and (gasp) the arcade's two-player mode. It also improves upon the original version with a beefed-up soundtrack rearrangement, a separate time-attack mode, and cheesy voice acting for the game's intro and ending cutscenes. – PC

The Firemen

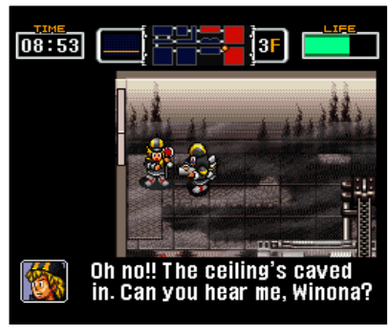
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Human Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★







As captain of a firefighting squadron that's on duty when a chemical company's building catches fire, Pete has his work cut out for him to save the structure and the people trapped inside during this top-down action game. With his autonomous second-in-command, Daniel, by his side, Pete controls the water hose, which he can shoot high or low. Different types of fires (and other hazards) are generally only affected by one of the shots. In addition, the larger, high spray breaks fragile objects, such as glass. If Pete finds himself overwhelmed with flames, he can use an extinguisher bomb to eradicate all fires in his area. While the game keeps track of what percentage of the fire Pete douses, the main goal is to move to certain locations to carry out a plan developed by his team, with whom he is in constant communication. The minimap at the top shows the layout of his current floor and indicates his target room(s) in red. Along the way, Pete and Daniel can rescue victims using the heartbeat monitor, which indicates their proximity. While not required, doing so refills Pete's health. At the end of each stage, there is a "boss" fight, which mostly involves a large blaze that shoots and moves in particular patterns. There are new dangers as the story progresses, such as backdrafts from opened doors and sprays of fire to crawl under. The later levels also become more intense, requiring a switch between hose settings to keep the various "enemies" at bay. While the game is fairly short, the two difficulties and a desire to earn 100% may have Pete reliving the adventure in this fun and unique experience.





Reflections: Playing as an everyday hero fighting fires and rescuing helpless citizens all on Christmas Day? With fluid controls and great graphics, this game has fun written all over it! It only took me about an hour to complete, and it is fairly easy, offering opportunities to refill your health mid-stage. Even if you die, using a continue doesn't cost you any progress, essentially acting as another form of replenishment. This ease doesn't distract much from the experience, so if you're ready for an action-packed rescue game, strap on your flame-retardant overalls, and set your sights for the near future of 2010. Err, near past. Or far past? I suppose I don't know when you're actually reading this… – KY

Firepower 2000
Super SWIV (EU)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Sales Curve
Publisher: Sunsoft (PAL: Storm)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





An evil force has taken control of a mechanical army, and it is up to you to stop the robot uprising in this fast-paced vertically scrolling shoot 'em up. Choose between an attack chopper or combat jeep and a host of firing options such as flamethrowers, lasers, and spread shots, all of which can be leveled up via power crates. Losing a life results in the currently selected weapon powering down, so using a preferred weapon isn't always the best strategy. Temporary shields can be picked up, offering respite, and shooting these can also cause a one-off mass damage screen wipe. The chopper can only shoot forwards but has no obstacles to dodge, and the jeep has eight-way fire but has to traverse each stage, so there are different playing styles to try. The onslaught of planes, tanks, turrets, bombs, and giant, screen-filling warship bosses offers a firm but fair challenge across the six stages. Blowing up certain obstacles releases collectible stars which grant tons of points toward obtaining much needed extra lives, making the potential risk worth the reward. The power-ups offer variety to keep things interesting, and the game has a "just one more go" feel about it for replay value. The experience is let down only by drab stages and forgettable music, so buddy up with a friend and unleash carnage in this lesser-known gem.





Reflections: The joy of this title is in its playstyles, as choosing either vehicle drastically changes how the game feels. I find the jeep easier, as the eight-way directional fire can also be locked into one path, giving a little more time in planning an attack, especially against bosses. It is hardly an issue dodging around the scenery and bullets, whereas the chopper appears to be more of a hard mode setting because enemies have to move into the line of fire to be shot, which becomes difficult with the number of assailants approaching from the rear. The enemy sprites are functional at best, though, as nothing pops out of the screen, and as I write this, I cannot recall a single music note. It is a shame the overall package is a bit dreary, but the gameplay is excellent! A highly recommended title that doesn't command *Contra* prices. – JE

Firestriker

Genre: Action
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Axes Art Amuse
Publisher: DTMC
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★★





Arch Mage Wylde seeks to plunge the land into darkness, and only the heroes of the elemental kingdoms can stop his ambitions by using the powerful Trialight. What appears to be an RPG is, in fact, a unique top-down brick-breaking adventure. The player's character, called a striker, functions like a free-roaming paddle, chasing and attacking the Trialight, a glowing energy ball, to propel it into blocks and foes. The player begins as wind striker Slader but can acquire fire striker Eno, earth striker Garum, and water striker Loa. The strikers handle slightly differently but otherwise play similarly; the key difference is that some are needed to access certain areas of the world. A second participant can simultaneously assist, or a cloaked mage can be controlled with the shoulder buttons to defend a level's entryway (akin to the center drain on a pinball table). The world map allows for some freedom while still maintaining a fairly linear pattern to the stages. Progression can vary, as some zones require killing all enemies, while others may need a barrier to be broken or a key to be discovered. Side dungeons allow the player to find additional health, and temples are defended by challenging bosses. In addition to the story, Multi Mode lets up to four people engage in competitive games. Players can choose from a number of maps based on one of two rule sets: Survival requires knocking an opponent out of play, while Soccer-Style has players trying to score goals with the Trialight. These creative ideas are offset by the Trialight's physics, which leaves something to be desired, and the lack of any save features, resulting in a fun but imperfect experiment.





Reflections: On its surface, *Firestriker* is a very clever idea. It makes liberal use of common JRPG and adventure tropes, borrowing heavily from their aesthetic and narrative alike, but it bundles them in an unexpectedly fresh manner. There are imperfections aplenty, from the tragic cover art to the relative difficulty in keeping the Trialight under some semblance of control. The bosses can also take an inordinate amount of time to complete, which makes me wish the game was a bit longer and had save files so it could be digested in smaller bites. On top of that, Nintendo of America's censorship of *Holy Striker* to *Firestriker* makes for some confusing dialogue, given the elemental strikers' distinction from the career title. Those are modest concerns, so I wouldn't allow them to deter trying a fun, unique title. – DG

First Samurai

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Vivid Image
Ported by: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







A lot of pressure goes along with being the first of anything, and being the "first" samurai turns out to be a particularly heavy burden. In this action-platformer, you take on the role of an apprentice warrior whose master has fallen to the wicked Demon King. The fiend escapes into the future, followed by the courageous samurai, who has sworn to avenge his sensei – but he needs more than bravery to hunt down the Demon King! Equipped with his trusty katana, the avenging protagonist can also use projectile weapons, such as daggers and axes. Food and sake can be obtained to replenish health, and magic pots scattered throughout the levels serve as invaluable checkpoints. The warrior also has the help and guidance of a mighty ally, the mystical Wizard Mage. When summoned with collected magical bells, this ghostly entity uses his powerful sorcery to remove hazards and obstacles that are otherwise insurmountable. Watch out for the Demon King's minions as they swarm! Taking too much damage causes the hero to lose his sword, leaving him to face hordes of enemies with only punches and kicks. The katana pictured on the bottom of the screen is the samurai's Force meter. Destroying enough foes replenishes it, eventually restoring his charmed blade. You must collect a set of five Mystic Runes in each stage to gain access to the Demon King's Overlords for intense boss battles, but getting to the end of each level won't be easy. Neverending waves of monsters, such as vicious frog demons and fierce fire-spewers, attack mercilessly. There's some fun to be had here with the mix of platforming with various puzzle elements and light exploration. Atmospheric levels and thoughtful design help evoke a feudal Japanese aesthetic and later set the tone for more modern and futuristic environments. The graphics, sound effects, and music all add up to make this game feel like a mostly complete and consistent package. Perilous stages await as the heroic samurai hurtles through time to challenge the Demon King and get his revenge in this unique and fairly competent game.





Reflections: After playing, I am left with one burning question: How can our avenging hero, being the known apprentice to a master samurai, be the FIRST samurai? We already know that he's the SECOND samurai (which, incidentally, is the title of this game's sequel – *Second Samurai*). Somewhere in samurai heaven, the real "First Samurai" is looking down with stern disapproval. – DM

Flashback: The Quest for Identity

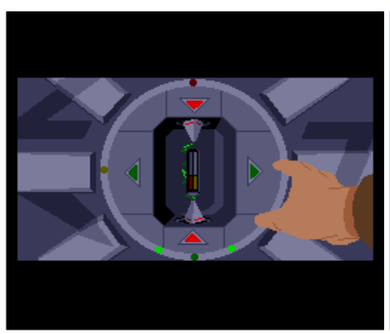
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Delphine Software
Ported by: Tiertex
Publisher: U.S. Gold
(PAL: Sony Imagesoft)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★

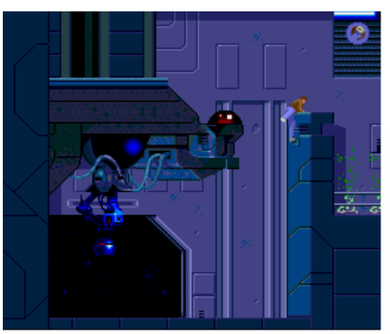






Are you Conrad Hart, Galaxia Bureau of Investigation agent? With your memory erased by alien infiltrators, it's tough to say. Find out who you are and what you're made of in seven strenuous cinematic platforming stages set in the future. During your quest, you brave a lush lunar jungle, do risky odd jobs to buy forged papers, win a ticket to Earth in the televised Cyber Tower competition, traverse mean terrestrial streets, and escape a dungeon before thwarting the aliens' genocidal ambitions. It's a good thing you're packing a perpetually loaded pistol for dispatching mutants, robots, rogue cops, and more, but even though your smoothly studied rotoscope animations let you walk, crouch, or roll with it drawn, you frequently must holster your weapon to run, jump, climb ledges, actuate lifts, or perform interactions. When you encounter someone you can talk with, a device you can activate, or an object you can pocket, its name and associated action icon appear on the screen's upper left; the currently usable item from your inventory is on the upper right. Between these features, you're able to place keys in locks to open doors, teleport short distances, defend with a semi-effective forcefield, etc. Look for save checkpoints and the energy generators that replenish your four life-protecting shields; these terminals are crucial to overcoming mines, lasers, disintegrators, and enemies. Though death awaits everywhere in your pursuit of self-rediscovery and human safety, this PC port's journey is intriguing enough to warrant the effort.





Reflections: This experience is short on music. Aside from some during the title screen, the frequent but skippable cutscenes, and occasional stings, most of what you hear are ambient sound effects, complementing the deliberate feel of your movements across well-illustrated environments that, while sprawling, are surprisingly easy to navigate – you're even given a map to help with the similar-looking stops of New Washington's city subway. A lot of the challenge instead arises from managing your measured motions while making leaps or avoiding being slain by speedy assailants as soon as you step onto a new screen – running while gunning is sadly beyond your capabilities. What's not, however, is reestablishing your memories and knowledge early on – that's only the beginning of "the quest for identity." It's how you go forward and what you do with those things that define you and your future. – AP

The Flintstones

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★





Take control of Fred Flintstone in his quest to save his friends and family from the nefarious Cliff Vandercave in this gorgeous yet ultimately terrible movie cash-in platformer. Fred has three attack types to help him, ranging from ploughing through enemies with collectible bowling balls and lobbing found rocks to using his club for short-range strikes. Iconic features from the franchise are briefly present, such as sliding down a dinosaur's back in the quarry and hitting the streets of Bedrock in Fred's foot-powered car, but the locales soon become bland and generic jungle, volcano, and factory stages. Sprites are animated excellently, from Fred himself to a whole raft of nasties including frogs, apes, cavemen, and screen-filling bosses, but the controls shamefully let the gameplay down. Pixel-perfect jumps are required to reach higher ledges, and Fred bounces backwards if he bumps into a wall, forcing you to correct every jump. This demand for extreme accuracy becomes very frustrating, and the collision detection is questionable at best, resulting in plenty of unfair hits. Fred can sustain damage three times before death, and although 1-ups can be gained by collecting icons of his face, a lost life means returning to the start of the level. This is a woeful game that never had a chance, given how poor the source material is.





Reflections: Considering *The Treasure of Sierra Madrock* was only a year removed from this title, it makes far better use of the license. This game sucks you in with some great visuals in terms of the sprite work, and it has sound clips taken from the movie for authenticity. Credit has to be given to the Fred sprite in particular – you can tell that it looks like John Goodman – but you can't make a game pretty and then forget to add in an actual game! Hit detection becomes annoying when using the club, and the jumping can't even clear a chasm sometimes, so everything has that "cheap death" feel about it. When the fundamentals of a game rely on its controls and they don't even work, then there is no fun to be had. This is potentially the worst movie game on the entire system, and that's saying a lot when *The Wizard of Oz* is out there. Yabba Dabba Don't. – JE

The Flintstones: The Treasure of Sierra Madrock

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





The Grand Poobah is retiring, so it is up to classic cartoon cavemen Fred and Barney to run, jump, climb, and club their way to find the titular treasure and become the Loyal Order of Water Buffaloes' new lodge leaders. The game begins on a board where the heroes roll a die to move along spaces and take part in traditional platforming stages, minigames, races, and boss battles in a decent variety of levels spread across five worlds, including Bedrock, Magmarock, and Junglerock. Platform sections are the main type of stage, where all manners of prehistoric predators are out to stop Fred or Barney from hitting the goal. Dispatching foes and barrels reveals power-ups, such as heart containers, money (clams) that can be used to double-jump or spent at the Park and Cafe, and stars to collect for 1-ups. The cool gimmick is that both characters can go their own way on the board, meaning that double the stages are tackled, but if either caveman dies, the level remains incomplete. Other canon characters, such as Betty and Wilma, also roam the map to give out advice or punishments. These encounters keep the pace going once the novelty wears off due to the unforgiving timer on certain levels. The bold and colorful presentation is top notch, but the game falls flat in some of the harsher stages.





Reflections: How can one franchise get it so right and so wrong at the same time and on the same console? The movie cash-grab tie-in nonsense broken game from the same license is so far removed from this title that it's unbelievable! At least this cartoon love letter is actually playable – very much so, in fact, as its charm and style make me smile from ear to ear until I get hit by a stage with a 30-second timer and go into what I can only describe as panic rage. The map screen harks back to *Super Mario World*, and the game is packed full of appeal – even something as simple as making Fred duck, which results in him turtle-necking, is a joy to watch. The game would have scored much higher had the latter parts continued to change it up like the start does effortlessly. If you want a cartoon romp to take you back to your childhood, then looking here is definitely a great start. – JE

Football Fury

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Sammy
Publisher: American Sammy
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★





This American football game hopes to please those who are looking for a pick-up-and-play experience instead of the convoluted controls and complexity of other football titles. Players start off by choosing one of 28 fictional teams that are spread throughout six divisions. Since this game is without the NFL license, teams take on similar names to their NFL counterparts. For example, the Philadelphia Eagles are cleverly called the Philadelphia Wings, and the Pittsburgh Steelers are now the Pittsburgh Metals. Once players defeat all of the teams in their division, they'll advance to the playoffs. The horizontal on-field gameplay is similar to many other football titles. While on offense, players must choose from a handful of running and passing plays, and the defenders must select a play to counter the offense. The majority of the on-field action has players controlling their teams from a side view. Unfortunately, the camera is too close to the action, which means any pass to a player upfield will be offscreen. The same problem occurs on the defensive side of the ball. Players will not be able to see the receivers they need to cover, which results in blindly guessing where the receiver is located. What does work well is the quick nature of the games. Quarters are only five minutes in length, but since the timer is sped up, they're more like two minutes. Other than the awful music that plays during gameplay (which can be turned off), the presentation is adequate. Cutscenes accompany big plays, and a sports reporter delivers a password after a win. Although fun for a few moments, football fans looking for a solid experience should look elsewhere.



Reflections: Well, this was a disappointment. After looking at *Football Fury*'s cartoony artwork and reading the back of the box, I was expecting an arcadey game of football. To my surprise, I still had to sift through multiple pages of offensive and defensive plays in between the action. Now don't get me wrong; I don't mind having a few choices to pick from, but *Football Fury* had me flipping through just as many plays as a Madden game. *Tecmo Super Bowl* requires some play calling, but at least those plays are all on a single screen. Sim or arcade? You can't be both. *Football Fury* doesn't seem to understand that. – MV

Foreman For Real

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





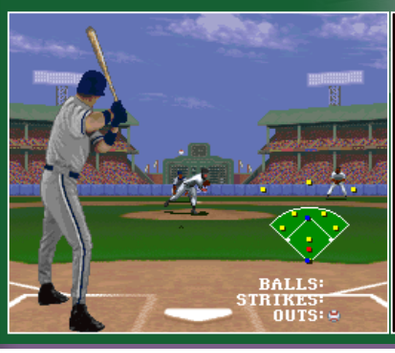
Choose one of 19 motion-captured prize fighters before the ultimate showdown with the titular pugilist in a realistic take on boxing. Three modes are available: Exhibition, which adds Foreman himself to the selectable roster for a single match; Tournament, which features a knockout bracket; and Career, where you start from the bottom and work up to being number one. The game plays from a view over your boxer's shoulder by default, and the impressive digital specimens have a variety of left and right punches at their disposal as well as a block to halt the pummeling. Stamina bars at the top of the screen decrease as the boxers punch and when hits are taken, so there is strategy in wearing a foe down over time rather than going all in. Three rounds are the standard but can be increased to 12 if you want to go the limit, and the boxer with the highest points scored wins after the allotted rounds unless there is a TKO. Hit detection can be way off at times, and the limited facial animations don't change to show damage or fatigue. It's also a shame that, aside from Foreman, there aren't any other licensed boxers or fantasy ones to pick from the roster – who wouldn't want to play Drago versus Foreman? The career mode is potentially a great idea, but there isn't any meat on it. You earn money after fights, but there is no option to spend it on upgrades or even new shorts – it just rolls on to the next bout. The game feels good when you're in the ring and smacking another guy in the face, but it's Glass Joe average when you consider the sum of its parts.



Reflections: This is a pretty fun button masher that looks the business but is let down by its own hubris, as the selling point is all the digitized fighters – but there aren't any real ones. No one wants to be some guy from Acclaim's tax department with his generic face stuck on a beefcake's body – they want to be Bruno, Tyson, or Ali. A cool feature, however, is that you can switch the camera position so that your boxer is punching towards the screen, but again, it is just a nondescript fighter you'll be looking at, which hampers the presentation. – JE

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana UK
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





On the surface, this baseball simulation featuring real MLB players looks and sounds like a winner. The perspective from behind home plate sets the stage for the pitcher/batter confrontation. The visuals are very good, with digitized batter models and impressive swing animations. The pitcher pounds his glove before delivery and looks over to the bases when there are runners on. The dull buzz of the crowd swells to a roar when the home team gets a hit or scores a run. Umpire calls sound clear and crisp. Once the ball is put in play, fielders smoothly run, jump, and dive to make defensive plays. Unfortunately, several flaws prevent this game from being a contender. The first of these is the pacing. It's understood that baseball is a slow, methodical game; however, this version is even slower. Batting is simple, with a button press based on timing, but pitching requires several inputs before delivery – pitch location, type, height, and speed. It's possible to expedite things by selecting the Quick Game option, where one strike means that the batter is out, but that significantly alters the experience. The game also requires players to throw any ball in play back to the pitcher before the next batter can step to the plate. Fielding is an issue as well. After the ball is put into play, the screen briefly goes black before a pulled-back view of the field appears and the camera tries to follow the flight of the ball. A target is displayed that shows where the ball will land; however, fielder control is too loose, and it's easy to overrun the target and misplay the ball. These flaws don't make the game unplayable, but they are difficult to ignore. Even with features like the situation-based Clutch Mode, full season play, and a bevy of customizable options to adjust how the game functions, the Big Hurt falls just short.





Reflections: It's interesting to imagine what real-life baseball would be like if it were played in the same way as *Big Hurt Baseball*'s Quick Mode. With the one-strike rule, the three-hour game would certainly be a thing of the past, and you'd probably miss an inning or two while at the concession stand waiting for a hot dog. 30 minutes for a ball game at $100 a ticket probably wouldn't go over so well, either. "What do you mean, 'it's over'? I just got here!" Whoops. – PS

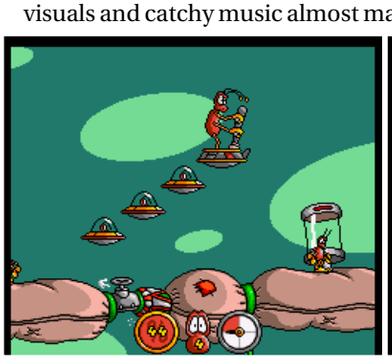
Frantic Flea

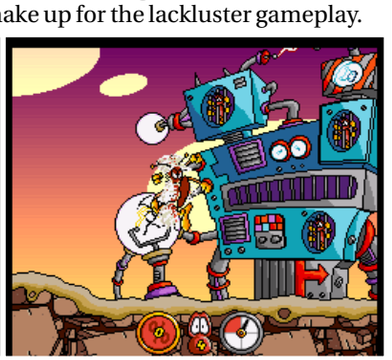
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Häus Teknikka
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The evil monopods known as Insideos want nothing more than to crush all beings who have more legs than they do, making the planet Fleaworld (and all of its two-legged and four-armed inhabitants) one of their top targets. In this 2D side-scrolling platformer, players control Frantic, a flea who has decided to fight back against the Insideos. Frantic must travel through timed stages, rescuing Minifleas before the Insideos capture them. Prior to the start of each level, the player is shown the percentage of these bitty bugs they need to save. It's worth noting this target number since there is no indication of it once the stage begins; only the amount of insects already gathered is shown. As Frantic locates the Minifleas, they follow him throughout the level, but if Frantic is hurt, he loses them and is forced to round them up again. If at any time Frantic takes damage without being in possession of a Miniflea, he dies. Once the required quota of rescuees has been found, Frantic must locate the stage's exit to advance to the next. Since Frantic's only means of attack is a weak spin move, avoiding the Insideos is recommended. Unfortunately, the player's view is too close to the action, which makes both avoiding and attacking the enemy frustratingly difficult. Frantic does have a few tricks up his sleeve, though. If he comes across a Hoverpod, he can use it to fly around the stage. Frantic can also walk up walls and hang from ceilings that have a suction cup-like Stikko surface, and the Y button activates his Turbo-Run ability, causing him to zip across the screen at insane speeds. With the ludicrous amount of spikes and electrical hazards scattered throughout each stage, Fleaworld is more dangerous than the Insideos who are attacking it. The cartoon-like visuals and catchy music almost make up for the lackluster gameplay.





Reflections: Considering all of the hazards contained within Fleaworld, Frantic's Turbo-Run ability is about as useful as an expired flea collar. At any given time, every inch of the screen is filled with peril. Frantic can barely even tiptoe around this place without taking damage! Fleaworld is one of the most dangerous game worlds that I've ever experienced, period. And even if the Insideos aren't quite as threatening as the environment, they're stilI pure evil – early on in the game, you can see them putting baby fleas into machines that disintegrate them! – MV

Frogger

Genre: Action
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Konami
Ported by: Morning Star Multimedia
Publisher: Majesco
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★



Artfully avoid automotive and aquatic antagonists in this SNES port of the 1981 arcade classic. One or two players must control frogs using only the D-pad, hopping from the bottom of the screen to the top, all the while attempting to cross numerous hazards and reach five safe bays on the far side. Mechanics are added with each level, such as the gators arriving in level two and the snakes in level four. The types, frequency, and speeds of cars also increase stage by stage. There are eight levels in total before they loop around. As with most arcade titles, the only pursuit is the scoreboard, and edging the top spot will require swift and strategic traversal across the road and river, as points earned decrease the longer the player takes to safely drop the frog off in one of the open bays. Menus have white backgrounds, and the game is completely without music, giving it an incomplete feel. The "shocked frog" graphic, which looks as if it were pulled from a clipart collection, gets frequent use, showing up on the splash screen, player select, and get ready screen. A second form of the frog, as nonplussed roadkill, graces the shared game over/high scores screen. While mechanically faithful, this proves to be a disappointing version of a great game.



Reflections: *Frogger*, at its core, is a fun title. As one of the early "crossing" games (games such as *Galaxy Wars* and *Space Launcher* paved the way for *Freeway* and *Frogger*), it was certainly the genre-defining classic of the bunch. Morning Star Multimedia, who would go on to port other titles to the Game Boy Color, mightily struggled in this freshman effort, their only title for the Super Nintendo. The chaotic water, strange textures, and overall smudged aesthetic of this particular entry rob the title of much of its charm. The menu screens are stark and barren, as underdone as the in-game assets themselves are overdone. While it maintains the gameplay, this might be the single least appealing port of the arcade classic to ever make it to a home console. Interestingly, this was the last game released for both the Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis, but where the latter received a faithful arcade port, the former got this disappointing effort. I can't be the only person who feels the Super Nintendo deserved a better finale. – DG

Full Throttle: All-American Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Jan 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: GameTek
Publisher: Cybersoft (PAL: GameTek)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★



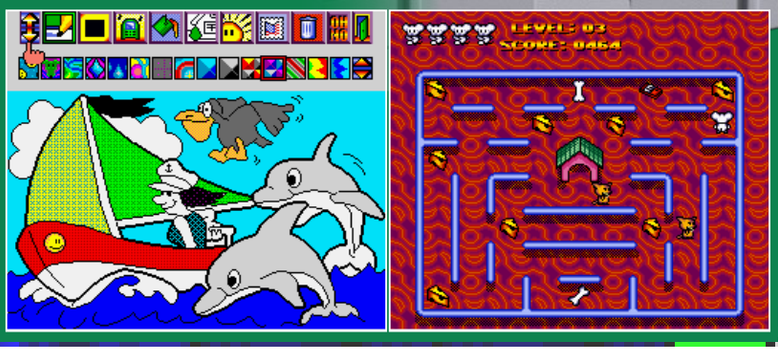
Race around the 48 contiguous states at the helm of a motorcycle, jet ski, or both. It's you against five opponents, who can include a second player for split-screen competitions. Enter a full championship comprising 13 legs of two races for each vehicle or a weekend race consisting of a single leg chosen from the championship. Before each race, you can upgrade your bike (both road and water). Not only can you swap out the tires, alter body strength, and purchase nitros, but also you can buy whole new racers with more horsepower. Your placement at the finish line earns you money, as do riding between the flags in the stage and gathering cash pickups. Other bland collectibles include extra nitros and wrenches to repair damage. Your bike takes hits not just from hazards, such as traffic cones and fauna, but also from your opponents, who are kick-happy! Use L and R to fight back, and keep track of your vehicle's "health" (in the upper left on the road and upper right on the water) because after that last hit, you're disqualified with no cash prize, although you can continue to the next leg. The action in the game is slow and made even worse by the sluggishness of the jet ski sections. While it's nice to see the scenery change as you travel across the country, the courses are rather standard and unimaginative. That's if you even notice while you're fighting off the *very* aggressive kicking competitors. Try this game out if you're looking for a more casual racing experience without much flash.



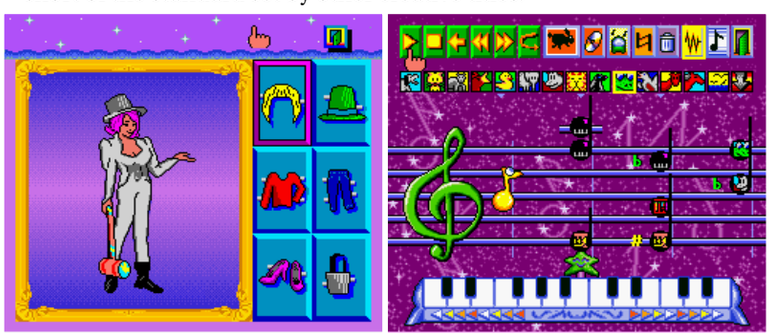
Reflections: This game boggles my mind with how the developers threw away the opportunity to build on the concept. A road *and* water race? Heck yeah! Oh, wait, the cool jet ski sections are slow, with an awful perspective and objects that appear out of nowhere? This is in vast contrast to the motorcycling, where opponents and hazards alike appear in the distance, allowing you to plan your movements; there are also hills and dips for elevation effects. I suppose if you don't mind a mediocre racing experience, then you may want to give this game a shot. If that's the case, sit back and enjoy the upbeat tracks behind the drone of the engines on the highway… Hmmm? You mean I can't have music *and* sound effects at the same time? What does this game even get right?! – KY

Fun 'n Games

Genre: Creativity, Action
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1
Special Features:
SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★★



This small creative collection offers four types of play: Paint, Games, Music, and Style. Paint is the freeform creation mode, including pen, eraser, line, paint bucket, and other drawing tools. It also features stamps and stamp creation, large stickers, textures, rotation, zoom, 30 pre-drawn coloring book pages, 10 unique screen clear animations, an undo tool, and the ability to add creations from Music and Style to the scene. Games mode contains two small titles to play: *Space Lazer* is a point-and-shoot affair with limited depth, while *Mouse Maze* is a maze chase game where the player's rodent gathers cheese, avoids cats, and uses bone power-ups to briefly become a dog. Music lets the player compose a track from 15 instruments and drum loops, 28 sound effects, and three tempos. 14 pre-arranged tracks, most of which are recognizable children's songs, can also be selected and edited. Style, like Games, is portioned into two sections. *Stylin' Stuff* allows the player to dress up a human avatar, while *Mix n Match* has a head-body-legs swap to produce wacky characters. Each section has built-in help menus that explain what the great variety of buttons in the user interface are responsible for. Control is greatly improved with the use of the SNES Mouse, particularly in the Paint and Music sections. Bring it all together, and the results are mixed; there is too much filler, and the parts that feel creative and fleshed out still fall short of the standard set by other creative titles.



Reflections: *Fun 'n Games* is about what you would expect from a TV art game made after *Mario Paint*. There are some unique ideas, including the spray tool for creating happy little trees and the drum loops freeing up composition space for the melody, but most of the offerings feel less polished and years late. Some of the sampled voices are endearing, such as the "Oh No" undo button in Paint, and though a well-composed song in the Music section can make for good background audio while working, the included tracks are short loops that quickly grate. Being able to use the characters created in the Style section as stamps to draw with in the Paint section or looping your own created tracks are nice ways to bring the different game modes closer together. *Mouse Maze* also gets some credit for being a thematically charming *Pac-Man* clone and time waster, even if the cheese looks like pizza and the almost-look-like-cats have questionable pathfinding. – DG

Gemfire

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★



The Gemfire crown has been disbanded, scattering throughout the kingdom of Ishmeria six magicians who have sided with different houses in order to overthrow wicked King Eselred in this turn-based strategy title. With four available scenarios that change the 30 provinces' initial allegiances, the goal is to take over the land absolute and free Princess Robyn. Play is divided into two main sections, the first being the world map, where armies can be purchased, food grown, and negotiations with other factions brokered, but ultimately, victory comes down to the battle screen. A turn-based game of war ensues, and it is up to the player to either capture the enemy flag or wipe them out. Units such as archers, knights, and cavalry each have their own attack patterns and allotted moves, but magicians and monsters can also be hired and deployed to add massive damage and sway a fight. War costs food and money, which can be made by growing and selling crops, so balance is the overall key to success; elves and ogres bring boons and bad happenings semi-arbitrarily, however. Happily, a choice of adviser is available to provide helpful insights about what needs to be done – this is a necessity because the game is initially very daunting. An engrossing experience that demands attention, as each playthrough can take many hours.



Reflections: This is essentially a prettier version of the NES game of the same name, and the core mechanics remain identical. As per usual Koei production, it doesn't hold your hand, so experimentation is needed to see how each scenario pans out. Even when everything is going well, a plague or cold spell can decimate one of your provinces, but at the same time, it can affect your opponents, too. I find that fighting is usually the best option, but never underestimate the power of taking a foe out from the inside – the variety of subterfuge options can really reap dividends if used correctly. Keeping an eye on opponents warring with each other is also useful, as it's far easier to pick off a weakened foe. I don't know what it is about this type of game that sucks me in, but there is a huge amount of satisfaction when your townsfolk survive the winter or a massive coup is won. You'll probably lose several times before you win, but it's a great way to waste a weekend. – JE

Genghis Khan II: Clan of the Gray Wolf

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★⋆





In 1200s Eurasia, the Mongols grew in power but later receded. What if they hadn't? Challenge your military and political aptitude and conquer the world as one of several historical leaders/countries, such as Genghis Khan, King John I, Japan, the Byzantine Empire, and more. To begin, you choose between three scenarios: Mongol Conquest (covers Mongolia only), Genghis Khan, and Yuan Dynasty (a fourth, World Conquest, is unlockable). Then you choose one or two players or computer control, select your nation, and decide whether you'll view battles and wars. On your seasonal turn, you see the command screen, which has actions and symbols for your state's assets (in gold, food, and men) and strengths (in economics, agriculture, and loyalty). Commands are categorized under Policy, Domestic, Order, Diplomacy, Person, Market, War, and Info. Beside your leader's headshot are your points, which determine how many actions you may take. Below that is your adviser, who tells you news and acts as an interface mechanism. Food and gold are needed for war, but economics, agriculture, and government must be managed to produce those. Wars occur on a large overhead map showing the landscape, fortifications, cities, and soldier units. You select units and give them orders to move, attack, talk diplomacy, etc. You may create different types of units depending on what's available, including pikemen, cannons, catapults, elephants, samurai, and more. When two units fight, the view zooms in to show individual soldiers, which you place and command. A glowing area showing permitted movement helps position units, but placement can still be confusing, and bottlenecks occur easily. These battles are engaging, but their frequency lengthens the game considerably. You can delegate them and many other tasks to your generals, but automation isn't always ideal, and if you don't want to play the game yourself, why play it at all?





Reflections: Unfortunately, I didn't know about this game until adulthood. Its meritorious complexity probably resulted in its obscurity. It was released on myriad platforms, including consoles like the Genesis and home computers with controls and display resolutions better suited for the genre. The English/Japanese DOS version might be a superior experience to the consoles because of that and because its battles are portrayed differently. In recent times, the game has been on Nintendo's Virtual Consoles and even Steam. By the way, if you're familiar with retro gaming YouTubers "Clan of the Gray Wolf," this is where the name is derived from. – KN

George Foreman's KO Boxing

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★





In this boxing game, players take on the role of 43-year-old heavyweight boxer George Foreman, who has just come out of retirement. He must defeat 15 boxers to be declared Heavyweight Champion of the World. Since the camera is located directly behind him, players get a first-row view of the action. George can throw basic punches, such as jabs and hooks, and can go on the defensive by blocking or dodging left and right. A limited super punch can be performed to deal massive damage to opponents if it connects. Likewise, opponent boxers all have their own super punch that can, in turn, deplete a large amount of George's health. Boxers' portraits are located at the bottom of the screen and act as health meters, gradually degrading as the fighters take damage. Matches can be won if the opponent is knocked down either three times in a round or four times during the course of the fight. Gameplay consists of learning each opponent's offensive patterns and then dodging at the appropriate times to counter with a flurry of punches (sound familiar?). This doesn't work as it should because the action is too fast. The punches fly at a mile a minute, and most wins happen by pure luck and button mashing. The opponent pugilists all have exaggerated personas. For example, Eddie "The Pirate" Preston wears an eyepatch, and "Beautiful" Bobby Crane resembles a male supermodel. Visually, the game leaves much to be desired. Boxer sprites lack detail, and the crowd is motionless and dull. A second person can take control of George's opponent in two-player mode, but it's unlikely that they would want to. Even George Foreman fans should skip this one.





Reflections: *George Foreman's KO Boxing* wants so badly to be *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, but it fails miserably. To be frank, the characters are all interesting and fun, but it gets the most important part of the game wrong – the boxing. Since the punches shoot out so quickly, they come off as being erratic, even though there is a set pattern to master. At least *Punch-Out!!* gives players the opportunity to learn their opponents during the (easier) first encounter, increasing the difficulty for the rematch. *George Foreman's KO Boxing* just tosses the player in the ring and gives them almost no chance to succeed. – MV

Ghoul Patrol

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: LucasArts, Motion Pixel
Publisher: JVC
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







By reciting from an evil book, friends Zeke and Julie accidentally open a Pandora's box of ghouls and nasties. Now it's up to the duo to travel through time and save the day in this top-down run and gun shooter. They face five multipart eras ranging from modern to medieval, and in each stage, they must rescue a minimum of one to a maximum of 10 victims in order to activate the exit to the next level (speech bubbles appear off-screen in the direction the victims are located). Julie and Zeke use infinite crossbow shots and acquired laser guns, machine guns, and other weapons to fight through the demons before the victims are killed – if all should die, it's game over, but whatever quantity is saved rolls on to the next stage. The player characters have health bars which can be topped up with medi-kits, and keys can be collected to open doors to new areas or rooms full of power-ups. Potions are strewn about that can help, harm, or even transform the ghoul-hunting kids into the Grim Reaper to deal massive damage. This is especially useful during bullet-sponge boss battles against a giant robot and more. Unfortunately, unfair enemy spawning sometimes kills victims before they can possibly be saved, and slow controls hamper a game which is humorous but ultimately falls flat.





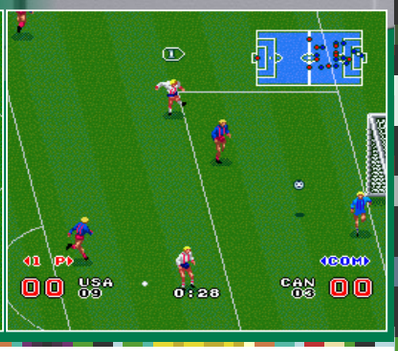
Reflections: The sequel to *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* does not live up to the lofty standards set by its older brother. The on-screen victim map has been swapped out for the directional speech bubble gimmick, which does add style, but there is a distinct lack of weapons at your disposal this time around. Also, even though the addition of a slide move is a welcome feature, the controls overall aren't as tight, and the enemies aren't as noteworthy either – anyone who has played the original will remember the chainsaw-wielding madman or the little demon hatchet dolls, whereas here we just have a pirate, a samurai, or an eyeball. Instead of the fun B-movie feel, this one relies on a generic time travel scheme as an excuse to use a few different locales, and it doesn't quite keep the engagement going. It isn't a bad game, but it's a sequel that's as by the numbers as sequels get, which is a massive shame because the original game is still one of the standout titles of the SNES library. – JE

Goal!
Super Goal! (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★







24 international teams vie for the cup that is every soccer player's fantasy. To get you there, this title offers two modes, each having customizable match options. The first is Exhibition, a single game against a CPU or human opponent, with you competing as your choice of the 24 teams, which vary in ability. Super Cup is the second and main mode, where you again choose your team but now play in one of six round-robin groups. From there, the top 16 teams move into brackets, with the winner garnering that trophy. Game options when starting a mode include having a minimap of player positions and setting the length of each half (one to 45 minutes). Before each half, you choose from a short list of formations; these affect where your teammates go when not directly controlled. On the field, you guide a single player, indicated by an arrow. As the ball travels left and right across the green, you take control of the player closest to the action with L/R. Don't just worry about the number of goals, though, because how many you allow helps determine your round-robin ranking. While passing and kicking the ball, the controls are fairly responsive, although if you lose possession, it's a scramble to get the correct player at the correct time to retrieve it. The match visuals are lackluster since sprites look the same, with basic palette swaps for different teams. Despite that, this is a fun time that can range from a two-minute game versus a friend to a tournament full of 90-minute games likely requiring the save feature. It's not the best SNES soccer offering, but it is worth playing.





Reflections: With the same name as the NES game, this is a separate entry to the Goal! series. While I didn't like the graphics as a whole, I enjoyed a lot of the visuals outside of gameplay, such as players celebrating a goal or the cheerleaders at halftime. Then again, why are there traditional cheerleaders at a soccer game? Fighting for the ball is rough because of how you manage who you control, but if you never give up possession, it won't be a problem! Easy, right?! Fans of soccer games will find this title fun, and if you're curious to see how the series continues, check out the review for *Super Goal! 2*. – KY

Gods

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Bitmap Brothers
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This is a side-scrolling action-puzzle-platformer where the player takes on the role of Hercules, who has been tasked to defeat the four guardians to claim his prize of immortality. In addition to obstacles strewn about four multistage areas of a captured citadel, a hideous bestiary of fantasy monsters, including witches, warriors, and myriads of steampunk contraptions, stands in the way of victory. Hercules fights by using projectiles ranging from daggers and spears to fireballs; these are altered by spending collected crystals. Power-ups can be stacked to increase the strength of Hercules's attacks, and it's also possible to change their trajectory arc, which comes in handy when fighting foes from below since Hercules can only shoot sideways. Puzzle-solving is the main way of advancing in the game; hitting levers stops spike hazards and opens secret passages. However, not all switches help – some open trap doors, condemning power-ups that were sitting on them. A number of keys must also be obtained to progress, but doing so is no easy feat because the enemies can drain Hercules's allotted health bar in seconds. Food and healing potions help mitigate the damage, but once all lives are lost, it is game over. This title offers a very tough challenge, but the interesting presentation and style will keep the player coming back for many more attempts at making it into the pantheon of Olympus.





Reflections: I grew up playing The Bitmap Brothers games on the Amiga. This title, along with *The Chaos Engine* (*Soldiers of Fortune*) and *Speedball 2*, was a big part of computer gaming's backbone in the UK scene back in the 1990s. It's also definitely the hardest out of that trio, leaving you stumped until you find that one little lever or secret button that allows the adventure to continue. Some of the more fiendish puzzles are a bit too cryptic, involving things such as collecting a specific item and then hitting a lever, not once, but twice to overcome the obstacle. If this were just a straight-up run and gun shooter, it would have been all the better for it. A special mention goes out to the enemy character design – some of the creations are wonderful and would not look amiss in the original *Clash of the Titans* movie. – JE

Goof Troop (Disney's)

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Based on the Disney Afternoon cartoon show, this overhead action-puzzler takes the Goofy family (Goofy and son Max) on a swashbuckling quest to rescue pals Pete and PJ from some salty pirates. This means daring everything from haunted castles to trap-filled caverns as the duo progresses through the game's five stages. True to form, our heroes are terrible warriors, only able to attack by using what's available, from kickable blocks to throwable barrels. Fortunately, helpful items are strewn everywhere: Cherries and bananas grant health, diamonds provide extra lives, red diamonds give continues, and various special tools help with the game's many devious tricks and puzzles. The rope gun, for instance, can be fired to momentarily stun pirates and larger threats, defeat snakes and other pests, and cross otherwise impassable chasms, while the bell can be rung to lure said dimwits into traps. But here's the catch – whether father and son play together or alone, only two items can be used concurrently, thus forcing some agonizing strategic decisions. This careful selection even extends to the characters themselves: Goofy is the stronger of the pair, making him a good choice for more aggressive attacks, while Max's swifter speed is great for those more comfortable with hit-and-run tactics. Of course, co-op is the best way to play, not just for dealing with the constant enemies, but also for solving the many puzzles that bar the way. Some are easy, requiring the mere use of a key or flip of a switch; others are more complicated, often demanding that a series of blocks be kicked in perfect sequence over shrewdly placed tiles. Indeed, two heads are often better than one, and this emphasis on both collaborative action and deduction is what makes the game worthy of consideration today.





Reflections: Due to its top-down action and emphasis on puzzle solving, one can easily describe *Goof Troop* as being akin to a greatly simplified Zelda title. Yet it's Capcom's earlier cooperative classic – *Disney's Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers* – that perhaps best explains Goofy and Max's penchant for throwing things. Limited to a 2D plane, the two chipmunks are similarly defenseless unless they have a handy crate or apple to hurl at advancing foes. This mechanic was essentially lifted and converted to work from an overhead perspective, thus forming the basis for *Goof Troop*'s own "throw everything" gameplay. – DA

GP-1

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







16 motorcycle engines revving at the starting line of a challenging course await you in this racing game. You have three modes to choose from: GP Race, 1P VS 2P, and Free Practice. The Grand Prix is the bulk of the game, featuring 13 rounds of races in 12 different countries (plus one just labeled "Europe"). You select one of six bikes, which vary by suspension, engine, and frame. Then you pick from six mechanics, who also have different strengths in suspension, engine, and frame. For each race, you begin by running a solo, timed lap to determine your placement at the starting line. The actual race runs for three laps against 15 opponents. While there is a minimap of the course at the bottom, red arrows also pop up on the screen to indicate the direction and severity of upcoming turns. After the race is over, you receive prize money based on how you placed. Use this money on upgrades for your bike to make it faster and hopefully more stable so you don't get knocked off when the more aggressive drivers give you a love tap. There are no place requirements in the game, so players of all skill levels can enjoy it without fear of being disqualified. While music is only in the menus, there are sound effects such as burning rubber and collisions during the races. There isn't anything special about what this title offers, but it is a solid game that can be enjoyable.





Reflections: The graphics are probably the part I like the most. There are numerous detailed images for the various menus and transition screens. Additionally, during the race, each course has its own distant, scrolling background that gives it some character. I don't appreciate when a game excludes music for a majority of what you're spending your time doing (i.e., racing), but the drone of the engine wasn't annoying at least – just boring. At 13 courses, this game could have used a save feature, especially if you want to spend time practicing each round before going through the qualifying and racing. The two-player mode is nice to have, but since it's strictly head-to-head with neither CPU racers nor the ability to do the entire Grand Prix, it may not keep your attention for long. What can I say? It's not a great game, but it's not terrible either, just more positive than negative. – KY

GP-1: Part II

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Same great name, less appealing motorcycle action! This sequel to *GP-1* has three game modes, including Time Attack, where you race solo on your choice of track, and VS Battle, for a head-to-head, two-player race. The main experience is GP Race, where you compete against 11 others to become the supreme speedster. Before the World Championships, make your way through several preliminary tracks. Your results in those first races determine which bikes you have to choose from for the main set. For example, placing 11th or 12th means you only have one motorbike available for the World Championships, whereas the top spots have the entire spread of six. The actual races take you through different tracks across the globe. You begin each with a solo run around the course, with your time determining starting-line placements. Once you're in the finals with the 11 others, it's five times across the finish line to decide the winner! While on the track, there is no indication of upcoming turns other than the minimap in the upper left, which is difficult to glance at while you're steering. After crossing the finish line, each racer is awarded points based on their rank. These points (along with any earned from betting with other racers) are used for upgrades, so the higher you place, the more you can do to your motorcycle! While this game makes some improvements to its predecessor, what it loses from the original lowers the value of the gameplay and makes it difficult to enjoy.





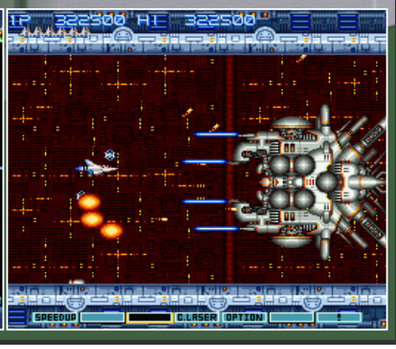
Reflections: Firstly, I love that they added music to the races, alleviating my previous complaint of boredom. This longer game also gives you passwords, so it's not one lengthy marathon to finish! The betting interactions with the other racers are fun and almost add a story element to flesh out the experience. Unfortunately, what the developers took out wrecks all the good they did. Initially, I thought the graphics were somehow worse, but I was just paying closer attention to them because the helpful red arrows that let me know about the upcoming turns are missing! This makes racing more intense than fun. I would only suggest this game to someone who enjoys putting more of themselves into an experience than they will get out of it, like someone who enjoys being in a bad relationship.
– KY

Gradius III

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★







Konami's contribution to the launch lineup of the SNES in North America is this side-scrolling shooter sequel. 10 stages await as you pilot the Vic Viper (called "M.A.X." in the manual) through waves of enemies while avoiding walls and other obstacles. In order to take on the Bacterion Empire, you can strategically arm the Vic Viper with either preset or custom loadouts of weaponry. These weapons are switched on by collecting red power-ups; once enough are obtained and the weapon or assist of choice is highlighted at the screen's bottom, pressing the Power-up Button will activate it. Editing loadouts is a new and welcome feature, as you can experiment to find which missiles, lasers, shields, and more work best for you. Visually, the game looks great, with varying stage environments and some large, imposing boss designs. There is a fair amount of slowdown to be seen as the game progresses, but this is often a help instead of a hindrance in dodging enemies and their fire. The music is excellent and easily holds its own against any of the best SNES soundtracks. It's worth noting that the game's difficulty will test the resolve of many, especially in the final few stages. Summon all of your skills, take Bacterion down, and save the universe! (No pressure.)





Reflections: My earliest memory of *Gradius III* from 1991 is at a friend's house as a group of us took turns playing it to see how far we could get. We never got past the high-speed maze, mainly because we rarely accrued Speed Up assists before that point. By the time we reached that part, it was almost too late to gather enough power-ups to gain ample velocity for making the tight turns and avoiding the deadly walls. It took 26 years, but I finally made it through the maze while playing this game for review. One other memory from back then is the use of the Konami Code, which gave me a big surprise when I entered it like usual to try and get fully armed. Seeing my Vic Viper explode got my friends to laugh at me as I wondered what I did wrong. I had no idea – until much later – that the "Left Right Left Right" in this case meant the controller's shoulder buttons. I guess that Konami trolled me before trolling was even a thing. Well played. – PS

The Great Circus Mystery

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★½







There's evil lurking at the circus and beyond, so help Mickey and Minnie get to the bottom of this big top caper in six multipart, side-scrolling stages set in a jungle, a haunted house, caves, and more. You can play as either one of the functionally identical Disney mice or enlist a pal at almost any time to cooperate as the iconic couple, but even if they travel solo, Mickey and Minnie aren't alone. Pluto and Goofy have cameos, while Donald Duck and a Lonesome Ghost duo offer three costumes to expand the rodents' move repertoire (they're initially able to damage or daze foes with a stomp and toss stunned enemies and certain blocks with a spin). The first ensemble is the battery-powered Sweeper that vacuums up adversaries and spits out coins to spend on health meter upgrades or outfit enhancements in general stores. Next, the Safari gear's hooks are for scaling walls, sliding down vines and other inclines, and swinging from special circles. Lastly, the Western Wear seats the heroes astride hopping hobby horses and arms them with cork-popping pistols and the Desperado Dash. Mickey and Minnie can switch these suits at will as they face hazards (moving platforms, spikes, falling objects, etc.) and fight foes (specters, bat stalactites, electric jellyfish, etc.). Bosses and minibosses also abound, so prepare to battle possessed portraits, a sentient storm cloud, and more. Though this game is short and straightforward, its colorful graphics and cooperative play make the experience twice as mice.





Reflections: As a follow-up to *The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse*, this title reuses many of the same ideas, including treasure boxes filled with coins, 1-ups, and life meter hearts; acquired costumes powered by refillable meters; the ability to grab blocks and baddies; a progress map between stages; and cutscenes with dialogue. Its level layouts and challenges are also considerably simpler than its predecessor's, perhaps to accommodate two players sharing the same screen, but Minnie being on an equal footing with Mickey is very welcome – she didn't enjoy such parity in *Mickey Mousecapade* for the NES. Aside from this feature, the new costumes are the greatest part of the game. If pressed to compare each caparison, I'd say Safari? So goody. I like that one the best out of the three, but the Sweeper? It sucks! And that's as it should be – it's a vacuum! Whoosh! – AP

The Great Waldo Search

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Radiance Software
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★





This adaptation of the picture book series has you searching for Waldo as well as Whitebeard the Wizard's lost magic scrolls in the Realms of Enchantment. When you start, Whitebeard appears, holding a crystal ball from which you select difficulties. These include Normal and Expert, or you can go straight to the hardest puzzle, which has umpteen Waldos. After selecting your difficulty, you choose a scene, all of which are from the books, making things somewhat faithful. Most depict medieval locales, such as castles and caves. They're animated, but barely, with repetitive, choppy loops. The books were lauded for their detail, which made them difficult and rewarding, but here the scenes only scroll horizontally, limiting the graphics and challenge. You move a magnifying glass cursor, pressing A or B when you've found something. A buzzer sounds if you err, docking a few seconds from a timer; to clear a stage, you must find Waldo and a scroll before it runs out. You can score higher by finding other objects, such as point icons, clocks that increase your timer, and Waldo's dog, Woof, who brings you to a flying carpet bonus stage where you collect bones. After finishing a puzzle, you're asked to choose another. When you complete all four, the Land of Waldos comes last for a paltry total of five stages. The Expert difficulty hides objects better and randomly adds extra search requirements, asking you to find something such as a monk with a shield or a red window. Unfortunately, the music is dull and uses unpleasant percussion samples. There's also a "Parent Feature," which allows the second controller to move the cursor and assist, but it's not necessary for something so short and facile. This game is for children, but the books are, too, and they're actually enjoyable, so that's no excuse.





Reflections: I liked Waldo (or "Wally" in some countries) as a kid, although I'm not nostalgic now. I got the books from the library, watched the TV cartoon (a clip from its theme song is featured in this title), owned the board game, and rented the first NES Waldo game many times. Although it's known to be terrible, I liked it somehow, perhaps for its music. However, I didn't know about the SNES one. Had I played it, I probably would've thought it was OK – and I'd have been foolish to think that. – KN

GunForce

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Irem
Ported by: Bits Studios
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Dropped behind enemy lines, it is up to the player to stop aliens from taking over the Earth in this side-scrolling run and gun shooter. Stages vary from jungles to warehouses to alien laboratories, and the action seldom lets up en route to each boss encounter. These generally involve a structure that has to have its gun parts destroyed before moving on to the next stage. Vehicles such as choppers and turret guns and weapon upgrades such as a flamethrower, spread gun, and laser help in a pinch. Enemies consist of typical soldier grunts and nondescript alien creatures that are just as bland as the forgettable music, which would be better suited to a casino simulation. Graphically, the game is pleasant, offering a nice parallax scrolling effect, but it slows down greatly at times. Juxtaposed with the player being able to run faster than the screen can scroll, the poor controls almost always lead to one-bullet death. The enemy fire happens at such a rate that it is nearly impossible to react, and with the lousy hit detection, everything becomes a chore. The player has finite continues, so unfair deaths are not welcome, but it might be possible to glean some entertainment by grabbing a friend for co-op play.





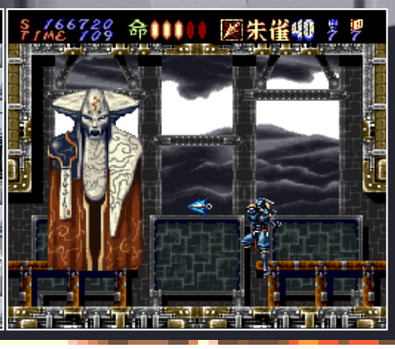
Reflections: What I can only dub as "poor man's *Contra*," this game desperately tries to copy its similar genre stablemate but with poor results. Aside from its ludicrous strapline of *Battle Fire Engulfed Terror Island*, which is just the best set of words ever placed together in a non-sentence, the game has very little to offer. It feels broken at times, as controlling a helicopter is just as baffling as the blood-curdling scream that pierces the air each time you die, and I don't know why everything, and I mean EVERYTHING, explodes. There aren't many positives aside from the aesthetics of it; really, it's just a cobbled-together mess. The player sprite can freely walk amongst enemy sprites without even a hint of damage, but then that one bullet from off the screen flies in to defy the game's own logic. It commands a hefty price tag today, but honestly, there are dozens of better titles – and for cheaper, too. – JE

Hagane: The Final Conflict

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: CAProduction, Red Company
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★⋆







Seeking to steal the Holy Grail – a relic imbued with world-shattering power – the evil Koma clan has slaughtered its ardent guardians. Through the magic of modern science, one man survives… the ninja known only as Hagane. Reborn and reformed into a cyborg warrior, he must exact his revenge across five action-packed stages. Each of these are further split into genre-bending levels designed to keep players guessing, subjecting them to boss rushes, shooter-style zones replete with spinning Mode 7 backgrounds, and even an auto-runner obstacle course filled with inexplicable falls and instadeath. Yes, the game is tough, providing players with a meager three-hit life bar while denying the slightest of courtesies – no continues are offered (save for using a secret cheat), let alone passwords. This means players have to memorize every stage to perfection, savoring each life-extending upgrade and surprise 1-up that comes along. Fortunately, Hagane is a mobile arsenal of weaponry and power; he can toss grenades, fling daggers, command a grappling hook, and wield an atom-dicing sword. And that's just for starters. He can incinerate the screen with expendable desperation moves; flip forward to perform "Dragon Punch" and "Flying Kick" maneuvers; whirl back to evade danger; rain drop kicks from above; and even somersault across chasms. Mastering this latter technique is especially crucial if the game's more onerous platforming sections are to be survived. Enemies pose less of a problem, acting largely as ammo drops, but the bosses are monstrously epic, clearly cribbed from the annals of twisted Japanese folklore. Moody visuals further complement the eerie proceedings, although an average soundtrack makes less of an impression. Controls are similarly split, offering smooth run and gunning despite some fickle jumping mechanics. This yin-yang of contradiction amounts to a rather bipolar journey – an experience undeniably rewarding, but only for those willing to endure its eightfold path of hardship and uneven design. Life is suffering, indeed.





Reflections: *Hagane: The Final Conflict* is its own "Holy Grail"; although claims of it being a rental exclusive to Blockbuster Video have largely been discredited, the game was still widely overlooked until the internet/YouTube revolution. Not surprisingly, it's now a highly coveted collector's item and considered by many as an important supplement to the SNES library. Those in love with the likes of *Strider*, *Shinobi*, and, uh, *Musya*, might consider paying some homage to *Hagane*. – DA

Hammerlock Wrestling

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-8 (1-4 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Pro wrasslin' action awaits in this standout and technically impressive title. Four modes are available: Exhibition Match (single or tag team), Champion League Match (single or tag team), 8-man Tournament Match, and Top Ranking Match, where a single man or tag team has to defeat all the other wrestlers. The 12 selectable stars are derived from real Japanese and American pro wrestlers, such as Great Muta and Hulk Hogan, and have their own movesets and special maneuvers. Performable from a variety of positions, wrestling attacks include normal and special strikes, running attacks, jumping attacks from the turnbuckle, strikes and submissions while an opponent is prone, and light and strong grapple attacks. The last types require precise timing to pull off during a lockup and are tricky to do consistently, even on the easiest difficulty. The grandeur of pro wrestling is nicely represented here, with the entertainment factor spotlighted by a tri-split-screen display. While the in-ring action is in the center, the top and bottom display large, remarkable cutscenes that reflect the action. Every move from every wrestler is well represented, from suplexes to power bombs to DDTs. Adding to the shine are different ring environments, pin breaks near the ropes, tag team partners being able to break up pins, and automatic move reversals. If you can master the controls, there's a fundamentally sound and enjoyable pro wrestling simulation here for you to body slam.





Reflections: Originally released on the Super Famicom as *Tenryu Genichiro no Pro Wrestling Revolution: Wrestle and Romance*, this title is based upon Wrestle and Romance, a now-defunct Japanese wrestling promotion from the '90s. All 12 competitors have real-life counterparts and are embodied effectively despite being named differently. This is a common occurrence in Japanese wrestling games, especially in the Fire Pro Wrestling series, where even when characters are created to imitate a real wrestler, they are humorously renamed. Here, almost all the digital wrestlers look pretty close to their counterparts, but Hulk Hogan (Sam Warhammer) has been made bald and given a beard to avoid any potential trouble. Speaking of the legendary Fire Pro series, its influence can be seen throughout this title in the similar gameplay mechanics and controls. The cutscene visuals are something you may have witnessed in *Tecmo World Wrestling* (NES), but for that title, they were reserved only for special moves – not for every single attack. – PC

Hardball III

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: MindSpan
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



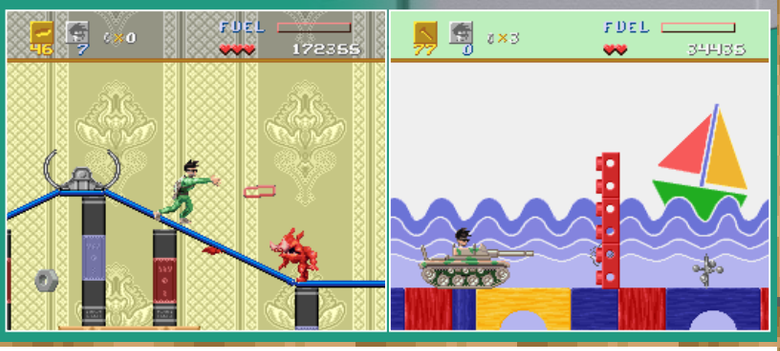
The popular PC baseball simulation from the 1980s comes to the SNES with this third game in the series. There's a large amount of customization here, from creating logos and names for leagues and teams to shaping the desired gameplay experience by manipulating a variety of different options. The game also sports a Major League Baseball Players Association license. While it's unfortunate that the Major League Baseball license is absent, having real-life players plus their likenesses and stats is welcome. Single Exhibition games and Batting Practice modes are available, with the latter also offering a Home Run Derby; however, the League Play mode is the biggest draw. Full seasons of 162 games can be played and simulated, but half-season and short-season options are here for those who don't want to invest quite so much time. In terms of gameplay, it's a mix of menu navigation and action. Menus let players make various choices throughout the game. Pitchers select their pitches via a menu but execute them and set their locations by using the A button and the D-pad. Batters can choose between contact or power swings in the hitting menu, but proper timing with the A button is critical for reaching base. Menus also set up steals, suicide squeeze plays, defensive fielder depth, and more. Defense can be a bit tricky due to the game's use of static camera angles, but setting fielding to automatic can alleviate these troubles. The graphics and sound are not that impressive. Choppy frame rates can affect hit timing, and fielders can be slow to react. The music is okay, but the sound effects are dull and uninteresting. All told, the relatively simple gameplay and customization elevate this to a slightly above-average game, but it could have been so much more.



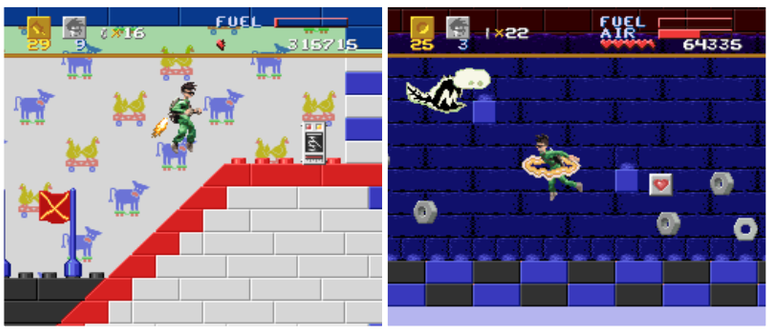
Reflections: The Commodore 64 version of the original *Hardball!* helped to turn me into a sports video game fan. During my high school years of 1986 through 1990, I played that game religiously – I even kept a notebook with stats, wins and losses, and linescores. I learned how to calculate batting averages, earned run averages, slugging percentage, and more... just so that I could keep accurate records for a game that didn't track them. I sadly left that notebook behind after I graduated, but playing *Hardball III* for this review made me wish that I hadn't. Good times, for sure. – PS

Harley's Humongous Adventure

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



Scientist Harley has a small problem: He's turned himself tiny! To regain his stature, he must reconstruct his exploded shrinker invention from parts flung throughout his house and yard. While searching 18 oversized side-scrolling stages, he scales laboratory beakers with suction cups, floats using a soap bubble and parachutes, blasts building blocks with a toy tank, and more. Exploration is a giant part of Harley's journey, and so are the hazards. Sharp silverware and screwdrivers, moving platforms, and an extremely limited (albeit refillable) air supply while swimming in pipes and pools are just a petite portion of the challenges. Fortunately, by braving binder rings, electrified wires, anthills, and secret passages, he can find checkpoint bells, hearts to replenish his health, fuel for his jet pack, and nuts, 99 of which grant a Free Dude (1-up). Unfortunately, a large array of his experimental "Bugs" are out to cut him even further down to size. Vomiting flies, ditzy bees, zapping eels, and obnoxious ants are everywhere, but they're small fries compared to the game's big cheese: a gargantuan, grotesque lab rat that Harley must fight on three occasions by amassing nail, marble, tack, rubber band, and firecracker icons. These become various weapons for taking out all foes, whereas bug spray provides temporary invincibility against regular enemies. While this imaginative game has some cool clay animation graphics, the music isn't memorable and the control layout is slightly awkward. However, it's still engaging, so don't sweat the small stuff.



Reflections: You mustn't let the staid suburban facade fool you; there are strange things inside the Harley home. I don't mean the laboratory's Bunsen burners and poisonous potions, and I'm not even talking about that horrid but persistent rat that grossly loses limbs in battle only to return outfitted with deadlier alternatives. It's the domicile of a fictional scientist, so such madness is par for the course. No, it's Harley's personal lifestyle that seems off. According to a peek inside his pantry, he subsists on beans, cat food, and something called "Hot Stuf." With a diet like that, it's no wonder he has a problem with explosions. However, the real fallout is in his bedroom: countless duckies and moo-cows that have probably been plastered there since preschool. Even though he's on a quest to grow big, he apparently has no interest in growing up. – AP

Harvest Moon

Genre: Simulation, RPG
Release Date: June 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Amccus
Publisher: Natsume (PAL: Nintendo)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★★



Ready for independence, you acquire a decaying ranch to transform into a successful farm. You have two and a half years to see what you can accomplish, beginning and ending each day from your humble abode. There are numerous options for daily tasks. These can be on the ranch (planting/harvesting crops, caring for livestock), on the mountain (fishing, collecting wild fruit), and in town (purchasing supplies, wooing single women with gifts). While outside, time passes in stages from early morning into night, so you must complete your tasks quickly. The shipper, who pays for the goods in the shipping bins outside your home and within each animal shed, arrives at the same time each day and is quite strict – if you place a crop in the bin after collection in the evening, you're not paid for that item. Most of your actions require the appropriate tool, such as the sickle for harvesting grass for feed or the sprinkler to water new crops. As the days pass and seasons change, holiday gatherings occur that you can attend to increase your affection score with various ladies, or you can happily live a hermit lifestyle and ignore these social events. There is a lot of freedom in what you do each day, from spending it at the mountaintop taking in the view or running around raising profitable produce and livestock to expanding your house, garnering the love of the local ladies, and building a family. With 30 days per season and only a handful of tasks allotted per day, it's a delightful scramble to earn the happiest ending with maximum achievements!



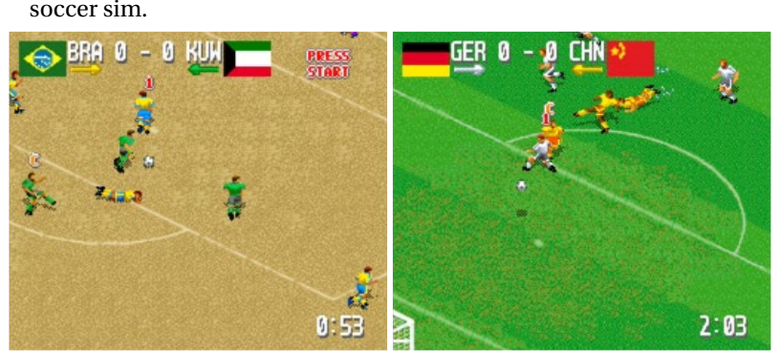
Reflections: This game satisfies so many areas for me: cute graphics, zen-like tasks, and relationship management! The NPCs (the single ladies of interest) have their own schedules, being in different locations at various times of the day, days of the week, and weather conditions, so it's not as simple as bringing them flowers every morning at the same spot. With dozens of ending scenes to earn, *Harvest Moon* offers high replayability. Unfortunately, it's not all butterflies and bunny rabbits. Text boxes can be difficult to read, and the music is mediocre, sometimes even auditorily awkward. These are minor issues, though, and you may never notice them in your pleasant hustle of daily chores that include hugging cows. Yes, that's right – you get to *hug cows*. Enough said. – KY

Head-On Soccer
Fever Pitch Soccer (EU)
Mario Basler: Jetzt Geht's Los! (GER)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: U.S. Gold
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1–5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★



51 teams from across the globe duke it out with their feet and their fists in this over-the-top isometric soccer game. In both the Exhibition and Tournament modes, the emphasis is on arcade action, and the rules are super slack – laying a beatdown on opponents is encouraged, whether it's done by slide tackling them or by shoving them to the ground. Such combative behavior plays into the hands of the game's main gimmick: The player is rewarded for winning in Tournament mode by being given "star players." These new teammates, highlighted by star icons over their heads, have their own special abilities, ranging from excelling as a keeper or shoving anything that comes near the ball to having super striker fireball shots or even being able to take a dive in the hope of a foul. This sounds great on paper, but sadly, the game is sorely lacking in actual gameplay. It is difficult to keep possession of the ball for any period of time because the AI teams are always faster, and the inhumane difficulty is a massive challenge even when playing lesser teams on the easy setting. A lack of any option modes, including the chance to change formation or make substitutions, turns this into a subpar soccer sim.



Reflections: Soccer is bigger than football in scale in the UK, so a soccer game will be punted out of the door at any given chance of a profit. I remember this looking so cool in the magazines and then my sheer disappointment after renting it for a weekend with friends. Sure, the special powers are fun for a bit, and smacking a mate around instead of playing by the rules is a laugh, but the novelty wears off faster than America being obsessed with David Beckham. If this had taken a little more time in development, it could have been a cult classic like *Brutal Sports Football* on the Amiga, but considering this came out just a year after U.S. Gold's soccer title *World Cup USA '94*, it isn't hard to see they were just pumping games out for a cash grab. – JE

Hebereke's Popoitto

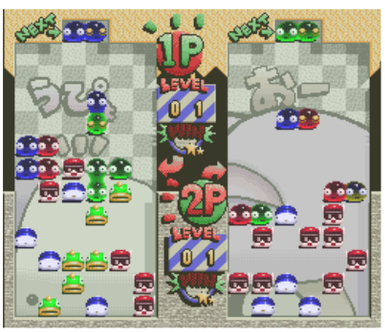
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Sunsoft
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Help Hebe the penguin and a cast of curious characters quash their competitors by popping Popoons and PoroPoros! Perplexed? Precisely! This is a puzzler after all, and Popoons are paired pop-eyed globs that plummet into your lonesome rectangular playfield. Despite tough talk in the strange interstage cutscenes, the avian, alien, anglerfish, and additional challengers don't square off with you in single-player mode – what happens is more of a face off. Each of the eight stage's rounds is populated with three types of PoroPoros – character face icons – and it's your job to eliminate them by aligning them vertically or horizontally with Popoons of the same hue (flashing Popoons match any shade). When a color-coordinated combo of four is composed, the pieces disappear, but there's a catch: most PoroPoros move around! Fortunately, well-placed Popoons pin them, and those doubled blobs can be rotated clockwise and counterclockwise – a special "Fitting in" button even eases scooting them through small spaces. Their drop speed increases during rounds, but if you clear every countenance from your Task list twice without overfilling the field, you proceed to the map to see the next cutscene and stage. The quantity of PoroPoros to remove rises with each new "opponent," but if you seek an actual two-player experience, enlist a friend for split-screen action! You can handicap yourselves with higher numbers of PoroPoros or hinder each other with extra Popoons. Though simple and derivative, the solid play and signature strangeness might put on smile on *your* face.





Reflections: Is there a doctor in the house? A plumber? It seems as if there should be because this game is exceedingly similar to *Dr. Mario*, though it does tamper with that title's pharmacological formula by making the viruses – ahem – *PoroPoros* ambulatory. I mostly find this feature annoying, but it is a blast when their squirming succeeds at lining up the requisite four without intervention. Perhaps it stands to reason that a game with "*Hebereke*" in its name would lift ideas from another – one approximation of that Japanese word is "untrustworthy" – but I can't really fault it much for borrowing from one of the best because it also brings its own brand of bizarreness to make for a fun time. Play this, and you'll soon be seeing a petulant purple penguin and a tittering ghost sporting sunglasses. You don't even have to be Hebereke's other meaning – drunk! – AP

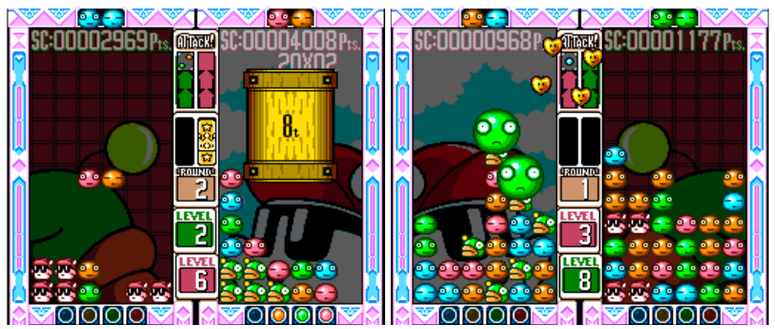
Hebereke's Popoon

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Sunsoft
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Burst gobs of blobs to see who sobs in this quirky competitive puzzler. All three of its modes involve you and your human or AI opponent managing the eponymous Popoons' paired plunges into twin rectangle playfields. Comprising one or two of four hues, the peculiar duos can be rotated to descend stacked or juxtaposed, shifted laterally, and hastened; both fall until there's no space beneath them, thus sometimes splitting apart. When three or more of the same shade align horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, they pop to unleash abilities that clear your playfield or clutter your adversary's. Such attacks' levels are determined by the quantity of both Popoons and colors removed, so cascading combo sequences can be devastating; the first to fill their enemy's rectangle twice wins the match. These simple gameplay concepts are candy-coated in kookiness, commencing with the Option menu. Here, you can drop the Computer Thought Level from expedient Expert to cephalo-plodding Octopus. After listening to the Sound Test's Japanese voice samples, swing by Game mode (single match) or Elimination mode (eight-entrant bracket tournament) and select one of four unusual characters: plucky penguin Hebe, adorably arrogant cat girl Oh-Chan, drooling anglerfish Jennifer, or spectacled specter Sukezaemon. Each has individualized upper-level Special Attacks, but the most commonly employed power is a downpour of PoroPoros (color-coordinated character icons expelled with a corresponding Popoon). In fact, this is the only assault available in Story mode, which has Hebe greeting eight opponents on a map before battling them to escape. Though the gameplay borders on shallow, the experience is deeply weird, so it all evens out for some odd fun!



Reflections: This *Puyo Puyo*-esque title is one of only a few Hebereke games to make it outside of Japan. Its NES predecessor, a side-scrolling action-adventure simply called *Hebereke*, saw a PAL release as *Ufouria: The Saga*. There, the main characters were renamed, and two were retooled visually. I'm glad those differences didn't carry into this puzzler – Oh-Chan's cute cattiness is intact, so I can overlook (to an extent) the unwieldy feel of the Special Attacks. That sensation and the excessive speed of higher levels makes my input seem pointless periodically – like I can only watch and not control the action. And this is when the "Computer Thought Level" is merely set to Monkey – that's bananas! – AP

Hit the Ice

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





This comedically violent hockey game has teams of two players and a goalie battling each other for ice supremacy. You can compete in single games (alone or with/versus a friend) or in a tournament (solo or co-op). Six teams are available to choose from before the havoc begins in horizontal play. On offense, you control one of the two players and can shoot or pass or instruct your teammate to do the same. Strangely, passes to teammates are always magically completed no matter where they are, with no interceptions possible. It is incredibly hard to score with a normal shot against the computer; however, the Super Shot can be charged for a powerful slapshot after about five seconds, likely resulting in a goal. Defensively, you can try for the puck with a standard crosscheck or an individual special attack, such as a kick, slash, hip check, or trip. Play too rough and a serviceable fight scene ensues, with the loser being slowed down for a stretch of time. Goaltending is player controlled but awkward in practice due to the difficulty of gauging where the puck is being aimed. Gameplay usually defaults to attempting a Super Shot or preventing the opponent from doing so, yielding some ho-hum hockey. On-ice shenanigans including an octopus pulling down players' pants, a scared ref, and audio clips such as a Three Stooges-esque "Why, I oughta!" add a little humor. The presentation is nice and the goofy graphics somewhat impress, but the ice play soon wears thin.



Reflections: *Hit the Ice* was originally a four-player arcade title and is very reminiscent of another two-on-two sports game, Midway's *Arch Rivals* (1989), in both gameplay and style. It seems like a sister game in essence, and it is much closer in tone to that title than to Midway's *2 On 2 Open Ice Challenge* (1995), which is naturally more similar to Midway's legendary *NBA Jam* (1993). Although the SNES title is a pretty faithful arcade port, the finished but unreleased NES version of the game is far more interesting, as it combines the standard hockey action with an RPG Quest mode. In Quest, your team travels to take on other teams and meet people on an overworld map, has random encounters with teams, levels up with experience points to unlock new abilities, and gathers money to purchase useful items. – PC

Hole in One Golf (HAL's)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: HAL America
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





This first golf game published for the SNES features an 18-hole course displayed via a top-down view, with an overhead map to help plan where shots should go. Once the best club is selected based on its potential distance, hook or slice can be added to curve around trees or fairway doglegs. Swings are controlled via a three-click meter; one click starts the meter in motion, the second sets the power level, and the third sets accuracy. The third button press must be timed so that the swing dot stops in the blue zone at the bottom in order to hit the ball straight; otherwise, the ball's flight will sail to the left or right of the intended target, and the results can be costly. Putting is a bit easier, but it's tough to gauge how much power a putt needs to find the hole. Despite having only one course in the game, multiple options make for added replayability. Stroke and match play are both here, as is a tournament mode. VS HAL mode is stroke play against a sharp computer opponent with a nice prize for winning. The game looks very good, with Mode 7 used to great effect for hole flybys and close-ups for putts, and the music and sounds fit the game well. An overall solid effort.



Reflections: Over my decades of video game experience, I have just a few codes memorized. The Konami code is one, the pass key to skip to Mike Tyson in *Punch-Out!!* is another, and METAL PLAY is the third. METAL PLAY is the password for *HAL's Hole in One Golf* that unlocks metal clubs for use in the game. These can increase shot distance over the game's standard clubs, which is nearly essential for clearing the water hazards on some of the holes. Playing the game without them means that players often have to lay up instead of hitting the ball into the drink, which adds strokes to the score. I confess that I read about the code in a magazine and didn't earn it fair and square by beating HAL, and I'm sad to report that my losing streak against HAL still lingers as of this writing. Even Eldrick Woods would have a tough time taming that competition. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it. – PS

Home Alone

Genre: Action
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Young Kevin McCallister was accidentally left alone at home and now must hide his family's valuables from a gang of thieves, the Wet Bandits, by collecting items from a different category (jewelry, toys, electronics, and strangely, pets) in each stage. Unfortunately, his bag can only carry a few things at a time, so he has to find laundry chutes throughout the two floors of each level to transport his collection to the basement. Not everything is lying in plain sight, though. Kevin has to open drawers and boxes and flail in the air to make it all appear. If a valuable lands next to an enemy, they snatch it up, so Kevin must take care in fulfilling the requisite number listed at the top, below the safe icon. While he can jump over the robbers, Kevin can also stun them with a weapon. He starts out with a water gun and can obtain a slingshot and other projectiles. The enemies aren't the only hazards because Kevin can be hurt by traps, too, such as tacks and broken toys. After he's deposited the required items, a key appears that unlocks the basement, where he has to avoid creepy crawlies without his weapons to get the pile of goodies into the safe room. Before reaching the vault door, Kevin has to battle a boss creature guarding it. Do this for each of the four levels, and Kevin will be reunited with his mother and send the bad guys to jail! This is a short, simplistic game with slippery controls that will sadly disappoint fans of the franchise.





Reflections: Since it's based on the 1990 film of the same name, I expected *Home Alone* to share similar mischief and humor. While you see the familiar faces of Harry and Marv (as well as a guy in a zoot suit for some reason), the gameplay is rather a letdown. I found myself focusing more on simply avoiding the enemies and running around collecting instead of laying traps, which you only have a limited opportunity to do anyway. Frankly, the NES version of the game does a better job in this aspect. I wasn't expecting them to strictly follow the storyline of the movie, but there were missed chances to connect the two media, such as using the Wet Bandits as bosses rather than a ghost, a spider, and other random creatures. – KY

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Slap your hands to your cheeks and scream – the clever crime-fighting kid is back! Based on the eponymous 1992 movie sequel, this inventive but unpolished platformer stars Kevin McCallister stuck in Manhattan for the holidays after getting separated from his Miami-bound family. It seems that everybody is out to get the young hero, so Kevin must use special items, wacky weapons, and his wily wits to stay one step ahead of danger. Running, jumping, and exhibiting his patented knee-slide help Kevin avoid pesky bats, runaway vacuums, and vicious suitcases. Dart guns, pearl necklaces, and invaluable "flying fists" hidden throughout the levels are essential to defeating waves of belligerent bellboys, crazy chefs, and marauding maids. To make matters even more complicated, the sinister Wet Bandits have returned to wreak havoc, so Kevin needs to use his inventory and his smarts to thwart the thieving duo. A variety of levels takes the resourceful youngster to the Plaza Hotel, Central Park, and inside his Uncle Rob's partially renovated townhouse. Finding pizza slices helps earn extra lives, and locating the credit card awards temporary invincibility. The aftershave grants super speed paired with brief invulnerability, and the pigeon enables Kevin to execute a devastating spin attack capable of eliminating most of his foes, which is the only thing capable of transforming this adventure from tedious to reasonably fun! Otherwise, you're better off painting the town with some friends instead of staying home alone with this game.





Reflections: Everybody knows that video games based on movies are supposed to be bad, and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* is yet another below-average conformist unwilling to break this rule. The in-game graphics are primitive, and the animation is some of the worst you'll find on the SNES. Getting hit by an enemy leaves you with the shortest temporary invincibility period ever to ruin a game, and there are no continues! The music isn't terrible, but Kevin's incessant jumping sound effect may have been designed to intentionally instigate insanity. Running, sliding, and jumping aren't silky smooth, but the controls do at least feel fluid enough to keep you from inserting a different game right away. – DM

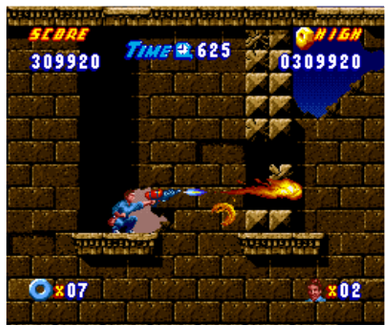
Home Improvement: Power Tool Pursuit!

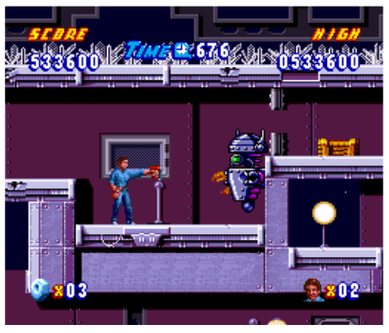
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Strap on a tool belt and become *Home Improvement* TV show icon Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor as he travels to different film studio lots to locate stolen power tools. These aren't any old power tools, though! These are Binford's new line of Binford-Taylor Turbo Power Tools, named after Tim himself. This nonlinear 2D action-platformer has Tim searching for the crates which house the missing tools. As Tim goes from lot to lot, he has to deal with themes pertaining to the type of movie being filmed there. Unfortunately for him, the movies currently being produced are inexplicably full of bottomless pits and deadly enemies. There's a prehistoric lot inhabited by dinosaurs and giant insects, a sci-fi lot that hosts evil robots and aliens, and a pyramid lot crawling with snakes. There's also the obvious haunted house lot that's brimming with ghosts and floating candlesticks! To fend off enemies, Tim starts with a basic nail gun, but other weapons, such as a blowtorch, chainsaw, and dynamite, can be found throughout each level. Tim is also armed with a sledgehammer and jackhammer for breaking through certain walls and floors, and a grappling hook allows him to access harder-to-reach areas. Instead of health, Tim collects scattered nuts and bolts; if he takes damage, he loses them, and if harmed without them, he dies. Although interesting in theory, this game is held back by several issues. The enemies become invincible for a few seconds after each hit, making them incredibly hard to kill. The music is decent, but the sound effects are grating on the ears. Also, Tim's controls are very slippery, making smaller platforms irritatingly difficult to land on. Only hardcore fans of the show should give this a look.





Reflections: Before I play a game, I like to take a look at the instruction manual to get a grasp of the controls. Well, believe it or not, this title didn't come with a manual! Sticking with Tim Allen's "macho" *Home Improvement* character, the game instead came with a piece of paper with a sticker that read "Real men don't need instructions". Um, yeah they do! Especially when your game is as bad as this. The creators must have known this because if you look a little further, you'll find the instructions on the back of the pack-in poster. – MV

Hook

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ukiyotei Company
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★





As adult Peter Banning, you must become the Pan of your past to save your children, Maggie and Jack, from Captain Hook. Crowing is neither required nor included in this movie-inspired quest, but you do have to fly and fight through 11 timed side-scrolling stages set in Neverland's sun-streaked forests, frosty vistas, gloomy caves, and buccaneer territories. These and other areas are full of obstacles, such as pitfalls, spikes, quicksand, water, auto-scrolling sequences, and even tigers that transform you into a statue. Happily, Tink is often there to give you a lift. Her fairy dust fills your fly meter, temporarily enabling you to cross chasms and reach new heights to face bats, spiders, snakes, and of course, pirates aplenty. Those scurvy dogs wield shields, arrows, bombs, barrels, and more, and avoiding their assaults takes effort due to your sluggish movements and jumps. If you're able to evade, you'll retain your projectile-shooting sword (won from Rufio in the first boss battle); taking damage downgrades it to a dagger until another blade can be found. Fortunately, extra lives are easy to obtain, enemies drop treasures for points, cherries and apples replenish your health, and leaves extend your life meter to a maximum of four units. Overall, this game is too easy and short to be an awfully big adventure, but the cutscenes, songs from the film, and appearances of Thud Butt and other familiar Lost Boys might make you feel like a kid again. Bangarang!





Reflections: Before losing a life, Peter Pan reverts to baffled Peter Banning, be-tuxed and between his former and current selves. This occurs after he sheds all his health meter leaves, but does it suggest a naked truth about his nature? Is he still a stuffy, spineless, self-centered adult beneath the green tights and cavalier spirit of his youth? He *is* as slow as an old, fat grandpa man, and the final cutscene reclothes him in formal wear, but his being Peter Pan once more is not simply a put-on. It is instead a marvelous chance to go back and pluck from the past the qualities he needs – compassion, courage, and responsibility – to carry himself and his family into the future. Perhaps this is why we return to games such as the ones in this book – to rekindle good feelings that we need now and to rediscover the happy thoughts that will let us fly again. – AP

The Humans

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Imagitec Design
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Experience all the fun of human evolution in the form of a puzzle game! For each of the stages, you must use the provided number of tribesmen to complete a given task (mainly to get them to a red exit square). Certain levels have you collecting a tool that can then be utilized in later areas. One at a time, you control the villagers, who have the innate abilities of picking up objects and making human ladders. If a villager is wielding a tool, such as a torch, a list of actions appears at the bottom. For example, if they have the spear, they can throw it, use it to spring across a gap, hold it out, or drop it. The number of items is often limited in a stage, so much of the action consists of transferring objects back and forth to the people who need them. There is also a time limit for each level, and from the beginning it's restrictive, requiring you to either learn the trick to each stage quickly or to use the password system for another try. While the number of tribesmen you have for a level is set, they come from your pool of villagers, which dwindles as they die (catching spears is not their forte) and increases when you rescue imprisoned cavemen that you occasionally come across. If all your people perish, it's game over, whereas running out of time restarts the level. The controls work fairly well, although it takes effort to learn to use the items properly. With the strict timer, this title may be difficult for newcomers to this style of puzzle game, but with appealing graphics and a fun assortment of creatures to encounter, it's a worthwhile experience.





Reflections: For a game with so few words, it has the kind of storyline that I rather enjoy! Normally, I feel like these *Lemmings*-esque titles have you completing the stage puzzles without much purpose behind them. In *The Humans*, there is sense in how the levels progress. You slowly acquire new abilities through the items you find, which represent an evolution in tool use by humans (from a crude spear to climbing rope). All the characters are cute in their goofiness, which is enhanced by the great graphics of the cutscenes. If you can look past the frustrating time limits, there is a prehistorically good time waiting for you. – KY

Hungry Dinosaurs

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Magical Company
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★







A nine-by-nine board is the battlefield for dinosaurs to fight for dominance… by laying eggs. You and your opponent are tyrannosaurs that walk tile by tile around the area. You drop an egg (the color of which matches your dinosaur) in each square you leave. You cannot walk over an egg, so when you are cornered, eat one to move into its spot. If you place your ova such that yours are on either side of a line of your opponent's (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal), then it turns all of those eggs into your color, following the style of the board game Reversi. Your goal is to have more eggs than your opponent at the end of the time displayed at the top. For each stage, you must defeat the other *T. rex* three times to move on, but if your opponent does the same, you'll have to use a continue. As the stages progress and you play against increasingly difficult AI, the board stays the same except for minor obstacles, such as boulders in the middle squares that block the ability to transform a board-long line of eggs. The gameplay is fairly simplistic, with more of a focus on basic strategy than variety. There are a few multiplayer modes for up to four controllers using a multitap, such as playing on tag teams. The goofy-eyed dinosaur graphics are cute, but again, there isn't any change in even the backgrounds of the stages to be worth noting. It's an interesting take on Reversi, but with shallow gameplay, there isn't much to distract for very long.





Reflections: I'm a sucker for cute graphics, and this game got me straight away with the title screen animation. You also see an adorable chase scene between the stages. Much like the gameplay, though, it quickly grows stale without much variety. There are little things in-stage that are fun to watch, such as two dinosaurs falling over trying to walk onto the same square or the brontosaurus who warns to "Hurry" when the time is running out, but these are few in number. It's a game where its faults mostly outweigh the fun it offers, but there's little harm if you're intent on trying it out. So, who's up for a game of Hungry Hungry Hippos? I mean, *Hungry Dinosaurs*?! – KY

The Hunt for Red October

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Riedel Software Productions
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: Super Scope (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★




Welcome aboard the *Red October*, a Typhoon-class Soviet submarine with the most advanced nuclear strike and stealth capabilities ever designed. In an effort to preserve peace, Captain Marko Ramius plans to defect to the US with this submersible warship, but Russian forces launch a fierce offensive to keep their secret weapon from falling into American hands. If you're not too claustrophobic, dive into the oceanic depths and prepare for a maelstrom of side-scrolling shooter battles! From the map room you'll receive your mission briefing. Your submarine is bristling with weapons, so fire torpedoes, launch surface-to-air missiles, and drop bombs to stay alive. As seen on the status panel, your vessel is divided into six sections, with each part being able to sustain a certain amount of damage. Yellow dots display a hit, while red dots indicate severe harm to that region of your craft. When all sections are red, your submarine is destroyed. Waves of vicious foes attack from land, sea, and air, bombarding you with battleships, destroyers, submarines, jets, helicopters, and artillery emplacements. Find drones to restock munitions and repair damage. Locating a periscope icon brings you to a bonus level, shifting the action to a first-person perspective as you launch rockets at enemy ships and aircraft. A certain amount of the *Red October*'s damage is repaired depending on your performance, so mastering these bonus games is essential. You can even unsheathe your trusty Super Scope peripheral to really immerse yourself in these sections! Complete all your missions successfully so peace can prosper. Fail, and the *Red October*, along with your pride, will be reduced to a rusting husk upon the ocean floor.




Reflections: Based on the 1990 film, *The Hunt for Red October* is a mildly fun game. The controls are smooth, and your submarine feels appropriately heavy, emulating the resistance of a large submersible craft traveling through deep waters. Your lumbering speed might take a little getting used to, but maneuvering the sub is fluid, and you can even turn 180 degrees when necessary. The gameplay is busy, with your offense consisting of four different weapons, the Cavitation Drive stealth cloak that can be activated for temporary "invisibility," and Electronic Counter Measures (ECMs) that render your foes completely harmless for a short period. Helming an actual nuclear submarine must be a pretty involved task, so making the controls feel complicated is a nice way to add a touch of realism to the experience. – DM

Hurricanes

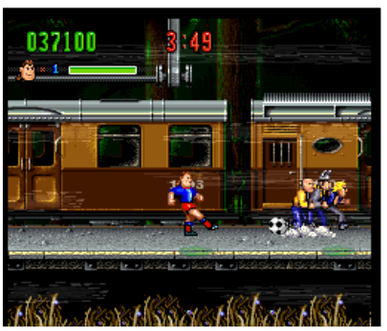
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★





The Hispanola Hurricanes must travel to battle the dastardly Garkos Gorgons in a soccer match in this polished yet peculiar action-platformer. A choice between two Hurricanes players (Cal or Napper) is available for the side-scrolling levels, but both move similarly, dribbling a returning soccer ball that's used for their attacks: a standard kick, an arcing chip, and a standstill charge-up power kick. Enemies, such as snails, junior footballers, bees, scorpions, and bats, must be dealt with while avoiding stage traps including boulders, spikes, arrows, and pits. The graphics and animation do well to reflect the game's cartoon roots. The background art is excellent, reflected in the forests, desert, cavern, Mayan temple, and more all looking great and feeling immersive. Stages are timed and can be a bit of a struggle to get through due to the underpowered standard attack, hazards, and occasional unfair enemy placement. Useful and necessary pickups and power-ups for increasing speed and shot strength and for restoring health are available via enemy death or breaking open crates. Boss battles are inventive but monotonous, usually requiring pinpoint accuracy and timing to inflict damage. The overall punishing difficulty is not helped by the scarcity of continues, which can be obtained by searching the nooks and crannies of the stages. The two-player mode is a waste, as Player One's lives must all be gone before Player Two can get in on the kicking action. This is fun and worthy of a tryout on the pitch, but it doesn't quite make the full roster.





Reflections: *Hurricanes* is a cartoon about an international soccer team of misfits that I watched a little as a kid, but I remember nothing of it today save for the catchy theme song ("We're the Hurricanes!"). This may be the experience for many Americans my age, as the lack of popularity of the cartoon married with the lack of popularity of football (soccer to all us Yanks) is likely why this title is so difficult to find in North America. The cartoon somehow lasted for five seasons in syndication, but that must have mainly been in Europe, as I have never heard anyone on this side of the pond (besides myself) mention the cartoon or the game. – PC

Hyper V-Ball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Video System
Publisher: McO'River (PAL: Ubi Soft)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Indoor volleyball has never been so exciting! Choose a team – there are 12 named ones for the Men's League and eight each for the Women's and Hyper Leagues – or create your own by picking player names, numbers, stats and more. Each team is made up of four players: the server, who can be controlled freely along the length of the court, and three remaining team members who, for the most part, control themselves. When beginning a rally, you have the choice of performing either a simple overhand serve or, if you're feeling confident, a more complex jump serve. Timing the hit for a jump serve can be a little tricky because of the ball's slightly unnatural path, but landing one will reward you with a much more powerful serve. Once the rally begins, you take control of your server, who is responsible for intercepting the ball on return. While most shots can be passed without issue to a teammate who'll automatically set the ball, you may occasionally need to dive to make the return. Once the ball is set, another teammate will automatically position themselves to spike, and then it's up to you to time the hit and carry out the perfect shot. Generally, each match in the Men's and Women's leagues plays out like a regular game of volleyball, but here's where things get interesting: The Hyper League sees you taking control of cyborg players who have much more exciting tricks up their sleeves. You can occasionally perform gravity-defying "Hyper Serves" or "Hyper Spikes" to take your opponents by surprise. The Hyper League adds a nice twist to the standard volleyball formula and makes an already fantastic game truly unique.

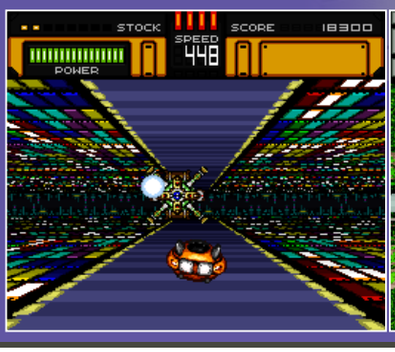




Reflections: On the surface, *Hyper V-Ball* seems as though it'd be like any other volleyball title, but what you get is a surprisingly intuitive gameplay experience. While you only use a single action button to perform shots in the Men's and Women's leagues, it's implemented in such a way that keeps each match challenging without overcomplicating the controls. Changing your shot from a dig to a dive or your serve from an overhand to a jump is as easy as holding the D-pad while you approach the ball. The controls are simple yet elegant and lay the foundations for – in my opinion – one of the most addictive sports games on the SNES. – AF

HyperZone

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: HAL America
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





When life becomes untenable on Earth, space is colonized, only to anger a biomechanical race formed from humanity's careless waste. The player must clear hostile areas of the asteroids of the HyperZone belt to make them safe in this third-person Mode 7 rail shooter. Eight themed levels await, filled with debris, enemies, environmental hazards, and stage-end Bosses. The starting screen allows the player to toggle standard/reverse vertical control. Gameplay is centered on staying in lane while shooting and dodging. The craft can drift off-lane but incurs damage as it does so. At times, this is essential, as the lanes split, and some end early. Glowing Power Zone lanes afford the player the opportunity to refill their power meter based on how long they can stay within. Braking in these lanes helps get the most out of them but can subject the craft to more enemy fire, requiring precise vertical evasion (excessive deceleration also damages the craft outright). A klaxon sounds when the player is at low health. As the player progresses, if they have earned enough points, they will exchange their old craft for a new one. The first unlocks the Blast Weapon feature, and further craft upgrades increase the size and strength of the Blast Weapon, making it critical for players to both avoid damage and eliminate as many enemies as possible. A boss rush awaits the player if they reach HyperZone, the final area. The seriously satisfying soundtrack, penned by Jun Ishikawa, oftentimes mixes a stage element motif with the game's main theme. Overall, this title is simply a satisfying sprint in the shallow end of the shooter pool.





Reflections: I both love *HyperZone* and lament it. The levels, beautifully crafted and cleverly designed as if lost tracks in *F-Zero*, are replete with mundane monsters getting their dance moves and fashion tips from *Space Harrier*. Without a radar of some kind, foes that fly through from behind feel unfair, as dodging comes down to either knowing the movement pattern in advance or getting lucky. The visual effect of the screen mirroring may make it feel claustrophobic, but I find it really helps maintain lane control, particularly when the volume of enemy projectiles ramps up, making fancy flightwork a necessity. It may have been part of a wider plan – a secret code to display the game in stereoscopic 3D exists and can be input on the title screen, but the SNES never leveraged shutter glasses. – DG

The Ignition Factor

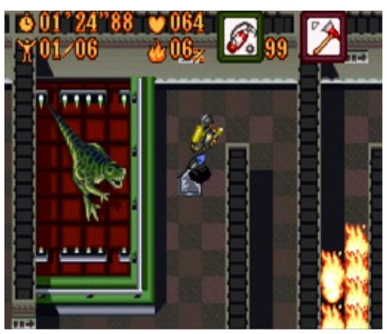
Genre: Action, Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Tackle fires in different locales while saving a number of civilians in this top-down strategy game. Before looking at the briefing where handy tips and a glance at a map are offered, you get to pick a stage (mill, mine, museum, and more) and a loadout of various equipment which will aid in completing the level. There are assorted extinguishers that combat different colorful flames (representing different types of fires), axes for beating down doors, ropes for getting across caved-in floors, etc., but only so much can be carried before the firefighter is encumbered and can no longer run or kick. Aside from the gadgets that have a finite use, the standard extinguisher refills when depleted, and finding more firefighters in the stage replenishes items. A three-time use call can be made to the fire truck outside to wipe the area of flames; this is useful in a pinch or when there is a hard-to-reach victim. Some rescuees won't leave without finding an item or another person first, so trial and error comes into play with only three lives available and a strict time limit. The game is fun and aesthetically pleasing, but the controls are awkward from the start, dampening the proceedings. Still, this is a quirky title and definitely worth checking out.





Reflections: Firstly, this is nothing like *The Firemen* (also available on the SNES); this plays more like a simulation than a full-on action game. The presentation is slick, and the stages are pretty varied, so there is always something interesting going on. I didn't know what to expect from this, but I came out of it pleasantly surprised with its "one more go" addicting quality that adds replay value. This would have scored higher still if it weren't for the poor controls. There is a run button, but I lost count of the number of times I accidentally double-tapped the D-pad (which also runs) and sprinted straight into a fire, wasting precious time. If you want to try something obscure and off the beaten track, then this game has plenty to offer. Just be prepared to put the effort in because it is no easy task, but the feeling of completing a level is absolutely worth the practice. – JE

Illusion of Gaia
Illusion of Time (EU)

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Quintet
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★

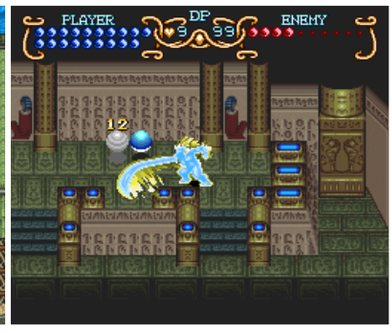






Here's an action-RPG not afraid to explore some daring concepts: Is there a cosmic purpose to human existence? Will evolution bring man's doom… or salvation? Indeed, what first seems a simplistic plot – young Will and his friends must prevent a deadly comet from destroying the world – soon detours into an ongoing meditation on the human condition. Regrettably, these high-minded themes are often curtailed by a scattershot script that sends its heroes crisscrossing an anachronistic land that neatly combines both the legendary and the real world. From the Tower of Babel to the Great Wall of China, Will must search in strictly linear fashion for six Mystic Statues designed to blunt the comet's destruction. Naturally, most of these totems are hidden within dungeons protected by monsters, traps, and puzzles. Will isn't exactly a powerhouse, either, wielding only a flute for both attack and defense. Strategically, this means button-mashing every monster and collecting the Dark Gems they drop (100 earns an extra life). Leveling is likewise streamlined, with Will's defense, HP, and strength stats upgraded only upon defeating the final ghoul of a given area. Similarly, the game contains no additional weapons to equip, offers no means of commerce, and provides few worthwhile items beyond the occasional life-giving herb. Instead, Will must seek the elusive Earth Spirit Gaia to heal, save his progress, learn new skills/attacks, and most notably, transform into his alter egos – the Dark Knight Freedan, a sword-wielding warrior, and Shadow, an ethereal creature not accessible until late in the game. Both beings excel at combat, proving especially lethal against the climactic boss encounters, but are ill-suited for other situations. For instance, players might need Freedan's long-range Dark Friar projectile to trigger a distant switch, then require Will's exclusive Psycho Dash to break down a wall and access another room. This constant interchanging of abilities, combined with colorful visuals, haunting melodies, and a deep, quirky storyline, make this a welcome, straightforward adventure – and yet a decidedly wishy-washy RPG.





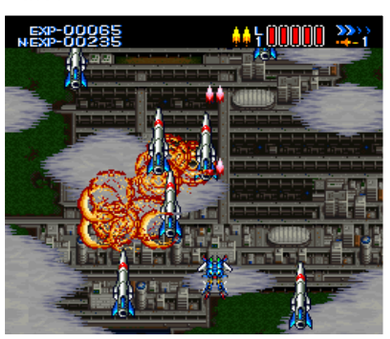
Reflections: *Illusion of Gaia* is a would-be masterpiece, a game bolstered by an ambitious storyline yet betrayed by an unwieldy script. It's an adventure both sprawling yet cruelly linear, a dungeon crawler both endearing and patronizing in its childlike simplicity, a fascinating, existential journey undercut by a cast of mostly one-note, middling characters. Indeed, if cosmic dualism is Gaia's central tenet, the point is reinforced here – quite literally – time and time again. – DA

Imperium

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Jorudan
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★




On a distant planet, a race of high-tech robots rules over weaker mechanized creatures, who build a powerful suit to take down the dominating machines. They need a human to work the suit and save them from enslavement, so in this vertical shooter, you play the pilot for six stages of unrelenting waves of enemies. You start out with a basic double shot and a limited number of full-screen bombs. Throughout the first level, reaching experience thresholds (counted down in the upper left) earns you a wide shot, a laser, and a wave that shoots in the direction opposite of your movement. After being fully equipped, subsequent experience levels increase the power and range of the weapons up to three times. You have great control over your ship in being able to change your movement speed as well as having quick swaps between the weapons. In addition, leveling up weapons replenishes a tick of your health bar, allowing for five hits before death (progressing to the next stage refills your health fully). Being hit lowers the power of the shot you have equipped, forcing you to work with the weaker version or change weapons. If you do run out of health, you can use one of your three continues, restarting that level. Even on the easiest difficulty, this game is sure to challenge you throughout its long stages, but the detailed graphics and fast-paced music should keep you motivated.

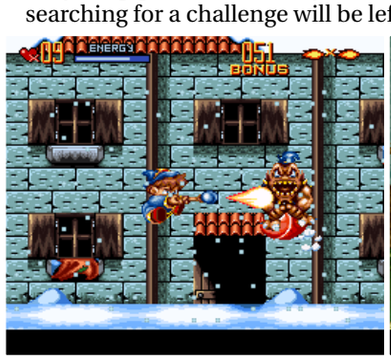
Reflections: This game was deceptive in its difficulty. At first, it seemed easy since there weren't one-hit deaths, as many shooters have. But once I got a feel for the weapon system, I quickly discovered how much the game penalizes you for getting hit. It's not just that a bar of health is taken away; your shots become weaker, making the game as a whole more difficult. This is acutely felt once you reach stage three, where the enemies are much stronger and in more complex patterns. On the other hand, if you're skilled and can continue to level up your weapons, the game rewards you with, well, more of the game because it certainly doesn't get any easier. I greatly enjoyed the multi-layered backgrounds and pumping music so fitting to the experience, but *Imperium* definitely isn't a shooter accessible to everyone. – KY

Incantation

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★⋆




Defeat the evil wizard Necroman and reclaim the Magic Kingdom in this somewhat dull 2D action-platformer. Players control a young magician who possesses a magic wand that can shoot different types of projectiles. At first, the wand produces a basic blast, but fireballs, bouncing rocks, and various other shot types can be found inside chests scattered throughout each level. As the player travels through the Magic Kingdom, they will be swimming through swamps and climbing mountains while shooting their wand at Necroman's minions. The young wizard has a generous health meter and starts off with two lives, and extra lives can be obtained by finding gold hearts or amassing 100 points' worth of assorted items. The enemies are an array of different insects and creatures that are uninspiring to say the least, but rock-throwing demons and lively cannons do keep things somewhat interesting. The land of the Magic Kingdom is an overall letdown, but not because of its visuals – everything actually looks gorgeous and animates really well! The levels are just too short. Each stage has three wheat icons that the player must locate to progress to a boss, but since the stages are so small, the wheat is always in plain sight, making exploration redundant. Unfortunately, the boss battles are also bland, which is a problem since each boss needs to be defeated multiple times. Players expecting a whimsical chiptune soundtrack should look elsewhere. The music here is quite poppy and doesn't fit the wizard theme one bit. This is a good platformer for young gamers who are just starting to cut their teeth, but those searching for a challenge will be left unsatisfied.




Reflections: *Incantation* is as mediocre as can be. Sure, the wizard adds different projectiles to his repertoire as the game progresses, but these don't change up the gameplay enough to keep things engaging. This is one of those games that was released toward the end of the SNES's life cycle, which means it's super expensive! I can't begin to tell you how much money I've spent on mediocre games with high price tags. If spending fistfuls of cash on *Incantation* makes you happy, I say go for it. Just don't tell your significant other that I told you to do so. – MV

The Incredible Crash Dummies

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★





Sentient safety mannequin Slick must vanquish Junkman before that villain can wrest the invincible TORSO-9000's plans from the abducted Dr. Zub. Prior to entering Junk Kastle, Slick smears enemies and slips by obstacles in three other multipart, side-scrolling locations: Crash Test Center, Construction Site, and Military Testing Zone. The hazards therein are varied; missiles, circular saws, oil spills, landmines, and more keep Slick on his detachable toes. Life and limb truly are the same for this dummy – each leg and each arm fall off in turn when he takes damage. Getting hurt after losing all four parts costs a life, but snagging a screwdriver replaces a missing appendage. Even as only a head and body, Slick can move, slide, duck, and leap. Finding lightning bolts kicks him into overdrive for a brief speed boost, while airbags puff him up for limited flight. Though he can jump on enemies, it's somewhat more effective to throw collectible wrenches. Bizarrely, their trajectory changes based on the stage, ranging from a predictable straight line to an annoying loop. This awkwardness and the fact that daffy dummies, Junkbots, and other enemies careen in with little warning significantly slows Slick's pace, sometimes sapping his limited seconds despite the presence of time-increasing blue crash targets. Even with three bonus driving levels and comedic cutscenes, there's little to alleviate the abundant cheap shots, drawn-out boss battles, and lack of continues. Though you needn't steer clear of this kooky game, don't forget to buckle up.





Reflections: The Incredible Crash Dummies games, toys, and cartoons originate from a series of clever public service announcements espousing that "You could learn a lot from a dummy. Buckle your safety belt." The idea is that a dummy, whether mannequin or man, doesn't take proper precautions, and while the former can quip off a crack-up, the latter can't – because he's probably dead. However, by becoming a dummy in this game, that message flies out the windshield: *Go ahead – lose a limb! It's nothing a screwdriver can't fix, and check out that silly "boing" noise from your one-legged hop – bodily harm is hilarious! Get ready to slam the bonus level car into a wall and earn an extra life!* It seems kind of contrary to the point of those PSAs, doesn't it? Remember: Ignorance is bliss, but only dummies think they're indestructible – if you're not careful out there, everything could turn to scrap. – AP

The Incredible Hulk

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





The Leader and his allies are trying to conquer the world. That makes the Hulk ANGRY! You'll be angry, too. This game has comic book cutscenes, the Hulk looks right, and enemies from the comics, such as Rhino and Tyrannus, are included. Yet there's no "HULK SMASH!" excitement in the gameplay, the graphics are bland, the music is repetitive and incongruous, and the sound effects are lacking. There are five boring levels: the city, Tyrannus's lair, two trips to the Leader's fortress, and a biomechanical realm. Sometimes you need to activate switches to open paths, but this proves unchallenging. The controls, however, are awkwardly inconsistent: Your punches miss often, grabbing items is erratic, and even elevators inexplicably refuse to obey you. Performing special moves makes fighting faster and safer, yet knowing the button combinations for them is difficult without a manual. For example, crouching for an uppercut is one of the simplest. Some techniques aren't available unless your health is high enough; your health bar has three green segments signifying Hulk's strength, but if it dwindles to the final section, a purple sliver, you become human (using an acquired transformation capsule lets you change deliberately). Certain pathways and secrets are accessible to Dr. Banner alone, adding variety, but he can't attack unless you find guns (which have just two shots). Collecting Gamma capsules to heal and keeping your health high are essential yet punishing, making Hulk feel weaker than he should. Most levels have new enemies, such as Tyrannus's legionnaires, dragon-like monsters, slugs, etc., but they're reused constantly, especially The Leader's gun-toting androids. You'll also battle the Abomination once per level as a miniboss. The boss fights are more individualized and require learning patterns, but they're unremarkable. Hulk is the strongest one there is, but not here.





Reflections: The Genesis, Master System, and Game Gear each have a version of this game, although they're mostly identical. Since the Hulk has appeared in other games without issue, the controls here are inexcusable. For instance, he's in *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter* and other Marvel vs. Capcom fighting games, and even though his hitbox is huge and he's far slower and stiffer than other characters, he's definitely fun to play. But in this SNES game, the clunkiness is too much. In later years, we'd see new films with tie-in games that were much better at capturing that "HULK SMASH!" feeling. – KN

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Factor 5
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries, LucasArts
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Archaeologist and treasure hunter Indiana Jones sets out on adventures based upon the original film trilogy. The majority of stages involve platforming and exploring environments that usually unfurl both horizontally and vertically. Indiana is armed with his fists at first, but satchels, pots, and more can be destroyed in each stage to gain the bullwhip, pistol, and expendable grenades. Enemies such as bats, rats, German soldiers, Thuggee assassins, and Chinese gangsters must be dealt with, depending on the locale. There are also falling rocks, floor spikes, and other simple traps to navigate, but some dangers are more perilous, including the rising fire inside Marion Ravenwood's tavern and the infamous boulder that Indy must outrun. Most areas require using Indy's bullwhip to swing from pins, but the mechanic isn't the smoothest in practice. The game's difficulty spikes can be frustrating, as several bosses require trial and error to figure out. Also, some parts are long and tedious, such as when Indy has to continuously swing outside Castle Brunwald. Three Mode 7 levels (snow sledding, biplane dogfighting, and minecarting) break up the standard action, but they aren't too deep on their own. The game follows the movies' plots relatively well, and nice cutscenes convey the story, but some major moments are inexplicably absent. Voice samples and a musical score drawn from the films are a great touch, however. There's ambitious work here to include content from three movies, and even though it doesn't always gel, it's still a competent and fun package for fans that does justice to Indiana Jones.




Reflections: This title utilizes the same engine as the Super Star Wars trilogy, with all looking and feeling alike. Han Solo and Indiana Jones even have the same rolling dodge! The sprite for Indy resembles Han Solo's with a fedora and five o'clock shadow added – the advantage of having Harrison Ford as both models. The events of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) take place first chronologically, but the game follows the release pattern of the films and places those events in between the other two when playing. Although many elements and locales from the three movies are included, the iconic truck chase from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) is not represented, nor is the motorcycle escape from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Of note in-game are remaining story references to Nazis and Hitler, although swastikas are redrawn. "Nazis... I hate these guys." – PC

Inindo: Way of the Ninja

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




In this RPG set in feudal Japan, the powerful daimyō Oda Nobunaga has invaded your village. Now you must train and gather allies to defeat Nobunaga before he takes over Japan. While the world map is fairly open from the beginning, the people in towns and castles guide you toward the next appropriate area. You're directed to dungeons across the country to earn ninja skills. There are numerous travelers to meet, and by interacting with them in town, you can eventually invite them to your party. You only have room for two, however, so choose your companions carefully (you're free to part with them at a town inn). While wandering about the world map and dungeons, you encounter foes (or fellow adventurers!) to fight. Combat is turn-based, with enemies on the left and your party on the right. Each unit takes their turn carrying out a single action, mainly moving, attacking, or spellcasting. If someone moves within melee range of an enemy, that same person may also attack. If a member doesn't survive combat, they are taken out and given an "injured" status. Once the fight is done, injured members are brought back, but if they fall in battle again, they may die permanently. At a high enough level, you're able to take jobs from various daimyōs, either spying or serving as an army officer. Completing the missions within the time limit (days pass with movement in the overworld and through actions in town) nets you gold as well as builds trust, which eventually allows you to advise the daimyōs in their strategy against Nobunaga. While the gameplay offers a rich, diverse experience, the graphics are simplistic. That aside, this title is a unique RPG experience that's worth the hours you can sink into it.





Reflections: An RPG by Koei? I was skeptical, but they do a great job integrating their signature strategy style into *Inindo*. In addition to the disappointing graphics, the menuing in this game is bothersome, forcing you to constantly re-navigate the main menu to manage everyone's inventory. On the plus side, the game mostly lets you determine the pace of the storyline, whether you're rushing through the trial dungeons, doing jobs for daimyōs, or even taking the "Grandma Kyh" approach and spending zen time earning chips at the local bingo casino. Just don't forget about Nobunaga; you can't give him enough time to take over *all* the provinces. – KY

Inspector Gadget

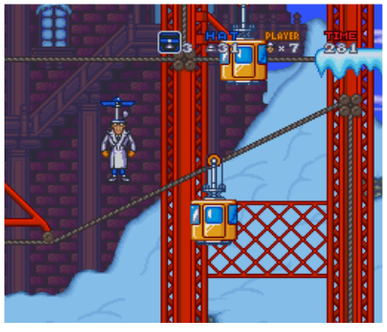
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: AIM
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Wowsers! Inspector Gadget's niece, Penny, has been kidnapped by Dr. Claw and his M.A.D. agents, so the maladroit cartoon detective must use his famed bionic appendages to rescue her. After Chief Quimby informs him of Penny's possible whereabouts, Gadget's on his way to a spooky English castle, a Swiss snowscape and clock tower, an Amazonian jungle, Incan ruins, an Egyptian pyramid, and finally, Dr. Claw's arctic lair. In addition to moving platforms, flames, and spikes, these intriguing destinations host M.A.D. minions, bosses, and other enemies, ranging from sinister snowmen to mummified ghosts. One hit removes Gadget's overcoat, and a second defeats him. The goofy gumshoe strikes back with his spring-loaded fists, feet, and head, and he finds icons to increase his reach, replace his coat, or grant extra lives. He also amasses symbols that unlock and upgrade the gizmos in his hat. These include a chain-gripping hand, a blue copter for floating, a lamp, several weapons, height-scaling suction cups, and bombs that blow up enemies and blocks. These blocks, which are sometimes revealed with Gadget's magnifying glass, contain the aforementioned power-ups as well as hats that function as ammo. Icon-rich bonus areas help the fatuous flatfoot persevere despite his unwieldy attacks, short time limits, and frequent deaths; unlimited continues also make his mission more manageable. Although the cartoon series' iconic theme song is sadly missing, this game ensures that both Gadget and fun are always on duty.





Reflections: Voiced by the legendary Don Adams in the cartoon, Inspector Gadget never seems to get smart about how his cases rely on Penny for her thoughts. She and their dog, Brain, are brilliant crime solvers, but even though their roles are reduced to cameos in this game, the one I feel sorry for is Chief Quimby. Every time he sends Gadget on an assignment, it literally blows up in his face – he should really stop presenting that silly sleuth with *Mission: Impossible*-style self-destructing messages. Besides, Gadget's crumpling and tossing of such sensitive info is more than gross mishandling of covert documents – it's littering! He's guilty of other crimes beyond his comical incompetence, however. When he takes damage, he strips down to his boxers. Perhaps he's trying to put a new spin on "go-go Gadget," but that is still public indecency, Inspector. Wowsers! Put on some trousers! – AP

International Superstar Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Very Rare
★★★★★







26 international teams go head to head to be the best in tournament knockout modes and leagues in this side-on soccer sim. Gameplay is fast and frenetic, and each pass, header, and shot feels weighted and responsive on the controller. The presentation is truly top notch, from the fantastic graphics to the sparse commentator to the crowd atmosphere that really ramps it up when the ball gets near to the goal. A minimap at the bottom of the screen pinpoints where teammates are, making long passes a cinch to pull off. Each player can sprint but loses accuracy when turning, so a mix of "run and relax" assists when skipping past an opponent before making that all-important shot. Interestingly, the game also offers a training mode where the player can take part in timed trials, such as target practice, dodging opponents, and racing through laid-out courses to hone different skills. Scenarios mode is also a welcome option in that the player can choose to overcome nine different situations before the matches end; these become quite tense when desperately clinging on against a better team. Add in player morale affecting their performances, numerous tactics options, several weather choices, and the ability to alter the players' uniforms, and this is the complete package when it comes to a soccer sim on the SNES.





Reflections: Move over *FIFA International Soccer* – the king is here! *ISS* ensures that even running around traffic cones in the practice area is fun, and the scenarios make for excellent gameplay. Everything on offer has been tweaked to perfection, with the only drawbacks being that the experience is limited to two players max and the team rosters do not have their real names. These are only minor nitpicks, however, as the game plays flawlessly. It never feels like an unfair challenge in that the bigger teams, such as Brazil or Germany, are more difficult to overcome than, say, Sweden or Ireland, and that adds to the legitimacy of it all. Graphically, it looks like a full-blown arcade title that could have easily been used to eat up all your pocket money. I used to hammer this game as a kid, and it swayed me towards camp Konami when it came to soccer games as it did for so many back then, becoming the killer app against EA and its sports monopoly. If you want the definitive soccer title, then look no further. – JE

International Superstar Soccer Deluxe

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Major A
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★★



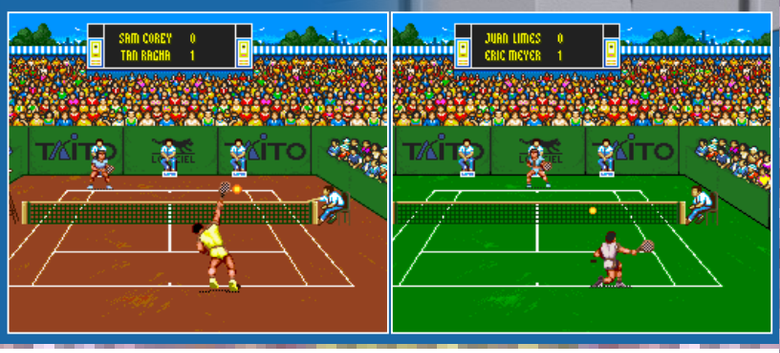
36 international teams go toe-to-toe on an angled side-view pitch to compete for the international trophy or the world series league in this soccer franchise update. The experience is easy to pick up and play, featuring simple pass, shoot, and lob controls as well as run and slide-tackle buttons that round off the precision gameplay. Scoring a goal feels weighted and satisfying, as does scrambling the ball away from the goal line when on defense. Players are well animated, and the goalkeepers make saves with reckless abandon as the stadium atmosphere and crowd chants spur the teams on. Teams noticeably differ in quality between the bad ones and the world beaters, and on the harder settings, the best teams are a challenge to play against. Marked improvements from the previous game include more frequent commentary, the option to have more than two players, and faster gameplay due to the lack of cutaway fades each time the ball goes out of play. It doesn't particularly offer up anything extra gameplay-wise, but it would have been a tall order to make the original much better. The ultimate soccer game on the system just got tweaked that little bit more, but it doesn't make a massive difference to the single-player experience. Please see the review of *International Superstar Soccer* for more information.



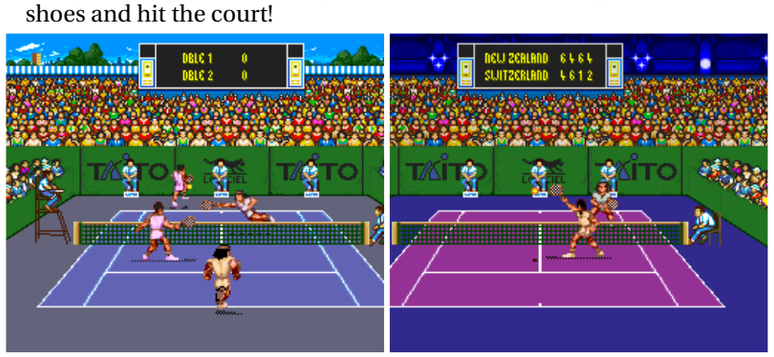
Reflections: The only thing *FIFA* has over this game is the official licensing and domestic league teams – everything else pales in comparison. Add in the major feature of having more than two players, and this becomes what the original *ISS* should have been (which is a bit cheeky, considering both were released only months apart). The game is excellent fun to play, as its presentation and action are nearly flawless, and having a few extra teams and more attractive tweaks to the menus and pace makes it worthwhile for first-time buyers. If you already own the original, then you don't really need to stump up for this as you still have the core experience nailed down, but if multiplayer is on your mind and you have a few football hooligan friends to play with, then having a few *Deluxe* matches can be an absolute riot. If you are to own only one soccer game on the SNES, make sure that it is this one. – JE

International Tennis Tour

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Loriciel
Publisher: Taito (PAL: Loriciel)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



Take control of one of the 32 best male tennis players in the world as you travel the globe for fame, glory, and yes, money. There are five modes of play, many of which allow simultaneous two-player action. The first mode is Training, which helps you learn and practice the six types of hits; these are selected by pressing either a shoulder or a face button. During practice, you can move yourself around the court, but in a game, movement will be controlled by the computer while the D-pad determines where you aim the ball. The other four modes (Exhibition, Tournament, Nations Cup, and Championship) take you through groups of matches ranging from a single one in Exhibition to a series of tournaments in Championship. There is no music, but there are plenty of sound effects during the game, including the announcer, the judges, and the cheering crowd. Each match is fairly long, requiring at least three sets of at least six games each, although it will often be more. In the longer modes, winning a match will raise your ranking and move you on to the next opponent. There is also the added factor of money in Championship since participating in the various tournaments involves an entry fee, travel costs, and the possibility of cash prizes. While the matches feel like they drag on, the controls are responsive and the possibility of in-game riches alluring, so if you're a fan of smashing a ball with a racket, tie up those tennis shoes and hit the court!



Reflections: I never realized tennis matches could be so long… so very long. This feeling is amplified when playing doubles with the CPU and just waiting as the computer players hit the ball back and forth to each other. I do think the atmosphere of the matches is amazing. I often complain when a game lacks music, but here it's done well. The sound effects are realistic, and I especially adore the crowd. They seem to applaud after an impressive play or a particularly long one, affecting your emotional response of pride or disappointment. I wouldn't say this game is for everyone, particularly if you need constant action in your sports titles, but tennis fans should find this delightful. – KY

The Irem Skins Game

Major Title (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1-4
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





The SNES has its fair share of golf simulations, but there aren't too many arcade-style golf games like this 1992 coin-op conversion. Players select one of four golfers to use before hitting the course, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. For example, the power golfer has great distance but poor accuracy. The swing mechanic is as easy as one press of the A button, timing the on-screen marker to land as close to the white zone as possible. The play controls and basics of golf may be simplified, but the game as a whole is deceptively challenging. Difficult hole layouts force players to plan their shots to avoid multiple hazards, including trees, sand, and water. A lack of visual yardage cues means that players must estimate shot distances to select appropriate clubs. Putting is the toughest skill to master, as both distance and power are vague and difficult to judge properly. Leaving putts short or sending them well past the hole are frustratingly common occurrences. Despite the inclusion of only one course, multiple modes of play add some replay value. Stroke play, match play, one and two-day tournaments, and the titular Skins Game give virtual duffers plenty to do. The top-down perspective graphics and average sound won't win any awards, but they are competent enough. The advantage of easy-to-learn controls is countered by the lack of courses and the difficult putting, making this golf game only slightly above average.





Reflections: I decided to play a Skins Game with Ralph, a computer-controlled opponent. Ralph's accuracy off of the tee was, shall we say, non-existent. I always reached the green a stroke or two before he did, which should have put me in position to win the hole and earn that sweet virtual cash. With 250,000 virtual dollars, I could totally buy a virtual house! There was just one problem: Ralph could sink a putt from anywhere on the green. No matter how long the putt was or how much break on the green there was, his putt always found the bottom of the cup. I would stare in furious amazement as each of Ralph's putts dropped and he stole my virtual money. Getting hustled by the computer just isn't fun, and now my virtual house will have to wait. Thanks, Ralph. Thanks a lot. – PS

The Itchy & Scratchy Game

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bits Corporation
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Take control of mischievous mouse Itchy as he does battle with his feline rival, Scratchy the cat. While this title presents itself as something akin to a platformer with large, multi-tiered stages set in the Jurassic period, the Middle Ages, and more, the gameplay is actually closer to that of a fighting game. You're given a time limit of six to 10 minutes per level to find and defeat Scratchy using any means possible (afterwards, you face him again in a more traditional boss battle). You can lure him towards environmental hazards – which pose just as much danger to you as they do to Scratchy – or if you're not feeling particularly resourceful, simply use one of a multitude of weapons to take him down. Itchy begins stages with a mallet that can be used to whittle away Scratchy's health, but exclusively wielding this results in a painfully slow game of cat and mouse. The better option is to find the two or three special weapon tiles that have been placed in each stage. These cycle through a handful of different stage-themed weapons that are much more powerful than the starting mallet. They add a nice variety to the combat – you can be bombarding Scratchy with a line of throwable starfish one minute and striking him with a cutlass the next – but the downside is that these special weapons are only temporary. This leads to the game's biggest problem: While you're limited to a few strikes per weapon, Scratchy has the ability to use them indefinitely. He'll often carry a ranged weapon by default and will commonly appear at the side of the screen, throw a projectile, and run off again. This cycle can be incredibly frustrating and means that successfully completing stages can come down to pure luck. It's disappointing to see a promising game fall flat due to such an irritating oversight.





Reflections: *The Itchy & Scratchy Game* would've been perfect for a multiplayer mode. The lack of one in what is essentially a fighting game absolutely baffles me. While the single-player experience can be fun, Scratchy's AI isn't particularly smart. Sometimes, he'll stand directly behind you without attacking, and then other times, he'll resort to frustrating cheap shots from the side of the screen. Adding a multiplayer mode would've given players the chance to go head-to-head in the world of *Itchy & Scratchy*, and what *Simpsons* fan wouldn't want that? – AF

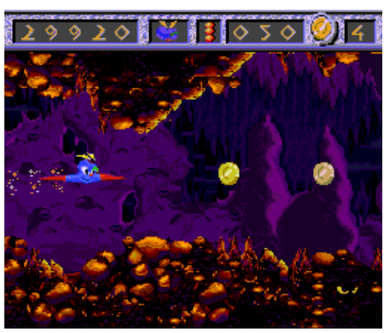
Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Alexandria
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This 2D action-platformer has players controlling Izzy (the official mascot of the 1996 Olympics) as he battles evil forces who are threatening to destroy the Olympic Games. To save the Games, Izzy must locate the five Olympic rings which are hidden in the Torch World, a magical realm inside the Olympic Torch's flame. Players will be traveling vertically and horizontally by climbing ropes and jumping from platform to platform while eradicating enemies by hopping on their heads. The Torch World and its enemies are altogether bland. A Greek village, a Lava Dome, and a land full of goop host evil balloons, walking flames, and winged monsters that all want Izzy to fail. The Lava Dome in particular will frustrate even the most hardened gamer with platforms and walls that seem to blend into the background, making navigation a guessing game. To keep Izzy in tip-top shape, players must collect medallions that are located throughout each stage. Taking damage causes Izzy to lose the medallions, meaning players will need to search out three more in order to withstand another hit. Izzy does have a few tricks; by collecting a special power-up, he can gain abilities by morphing into forms that represent various sports. For instance, warping into a baseball player equips Izzy with a bat, and morphing into a javelin allows him to travel through the stage at super speeds. Special bonus levels called Elder Challenges are awarded if players complete standard levels in a set time. These are mostly simple platforming stages, but some feature Izzy morphing into a rocket that players must maneuver around obstacles while collecting fuel. The morphing ability is a fun feature, but the dodgy hit detection, corny music, and hard-to-navigate Lava Dome make this difficult to recommend.



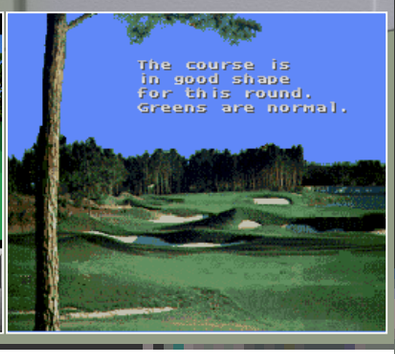


Reflections: I had no idea who Izzy was before playing this game. Apparently, creating a mascot for the Olympics was supposed to entice kids to watch the event. It might have worked if the kids knew what the heck Izzy was supposed to be. Personally, I think he looks like a drop of Glacier Freeze Gatorade with oversized red high tops and lightning bolt eyebrows. Before Izzy made his appearance in Atlanta, he was revealed during the closing ceremonies in Barcelona. He went by the name "Whatizit," which was another way of saying "what is it?" Yeah, that was way more fitting. – MV

Jack Nicklaus Golf

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The Golden Bear brings name recognition and familiar mechanics to the SNES with this outing. Players can choose from Skins or Stroke Play on one of two courses, and they're able to select from two skill levels and three tee distances while naming a golfer or opting for an existing pro. Once on the course, the traditional swing meter is used; the player presses B once to start the meter, a second time at the desired power, and a third time for swing accuracy. Remaining in the blue results in a controlled swing. Divider lines each represent 10 percent of the overall power in a club, so quick division and a distance check can really help with shot placement. Moving the ball at the top of the screen adds angle or, if moved to the edge lines, rotates the player's position, redrawing the screen. The user interface also indicates wind strength and direction, current score, selected club, and its range. Round statistics are tracked, including longest drive, fairways hit, and putt count. Jack previews each hole, providing tips prior to showing the overhead view, par, and tee distances. There are a number of music tracks between holes, but the game falls eerily silent during play, save for the crisp sound of the swing. Statistics, customizable course conditions, a grid overlay to visualize the break on the green, shot replays, and mulligans make for a robust in-game options menu. Practice is also available for individual holes, as are a driving range and practice green for mastering controls. These added features help, but lengthy loading times, limited game modes, no tournament play, and lack of course diversity make this casual round rather forgettable.





Reflections: Through the '90s, three franchises defined golf games for me: Links, PGA Tour, and Jack Nicklaus. In 1992, one of the best entries of the latter was released for DOS in the form of *Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition*. Unfortunately, this SNES port, released the same year, is of the prior title, *Jack Nicklaus' Unlimited Golf*. The dropping of the word "unlimited" is appropriate; the loss of the course designer leaves your selections very much limited. While I had no difficulty spending hours with *Signature Edition*, my experience in *Jack Nicklaus Golf* falls short of that mark. The scorecard each round reads, "USGA rules apply. Replace all divots. Avoid slow play." I'm afraid that last request is impossible to honor when each splotchy view takes nearly 10 seconds to render on-screen. – DG

James Bond Jr.

Genre: Action-Platformer, Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★







Defeat the agents of S.C.U.M. as the nephew of 007 in this cartoon-based platformer/shooter hybrid. The platform sections see James running, jumping, and rolling through Central American jungle ruins, Venetian sewers, and an Antarctic cave, utilizing gizmos ranging from grenades and knockout darts to rocket shoes and a gas mask to aid his progress. He can also wield punches and jump kicks against enemy agents, snakes, bats, and other generic combatants. James has a plentiful hit meter before losing a life, but that doesn't excuse the awful controls and jump mechanics that plague play as an ear-piercing rendition of the theme tune loops throughout. The side-scrolling shooter sections have the young secret agent using a minicopter, a speedboat, and finally, a jet, which are also unresponsive to the controls, making it a chore to dodge a barrage of enemy fire from helicopters, tanks, jets, boats, and giant bombs. Missile, speed, and other vehicle power-ups are available, but touching the ground during the air missions spells instant death, and the boat stage gives little warning before having to make a crucial ramp jump. Overall, this dreadful game has a good idea in offering two play types, but with terrible visuals, gameplay, and presentation, it's simply a cash-in on a license that pretty much nobody wanted.





Reflections: The cartoon was a bland '90s flash in the pan, and this mess is even worse. The vehicle levels seemingly go on forever, which would be quite fun if the controls weren't so vehemently trying to sabotage you. At one point, the chopper level sees you flying through a cave, which is simply rage inducing. The boat section, however, is the worst offender – just think of the speeder sections in *Battletoads*, and you aren't far off from how infuriating it is – except that *Battletoads* has decent controls. The platform sections are poorly made in that they are so generically obvious. Imagine an "idiot's guide to platforming" and what you'd include. Spike traps? Check! Moving platforms that you can't jump on due to awful controls? Yep! Dripping pipes or falling icicles? Absolutely! The game just doesn't offer anything that hasn't been done before and hasn't been done much, much better. A blight on the SNES library. – JE

James Pond 3: Operation Starfish

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Millennium Interactive, Vectordean
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

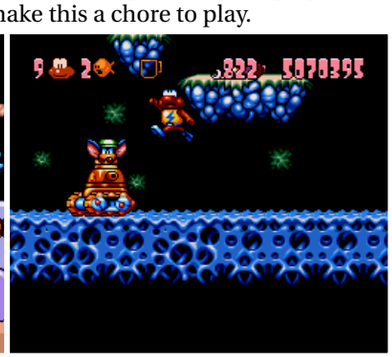






In this third installment of the series, James Pond and his new partner, Finnius Frog, travel to the moon to stop Dr. Maybe and his army of evil rats from mining the moon's cheese. Gameplay is once again of the side-scrolling platformer variety. James's body-stretching gimmick from the previous title has been removed, and in its place are spring shoes and a jetpack. However, these items must be found and are only available on some stages. Other gadgets that James can acquire include X-Ray specs to see hidden blocks, a gun that shoots fruit, explosives to destroy certain floors and walls, and an umbrella that allows him to float. Thanks to his boots, James can stick to particular surfaces, meaning he can run up walls and travel upside down. There are over 100 stages to complete, although most look similar and will have you questioning if you've already played through them. The majority of levels are food-themed and filled with fruit, custard, and of course, cheese. Each requires you to locate and destroy a communications beacon in order to advance to the next, but a select few cannot be completed unless four hidden teacups are found first. Larger stages often contain hidden areas that may lead to secret stages or to an ally that is in need of rescuing. To switch things up, finding a Finnius icon lets you switch to the amphibian sidekick. This should be a welcome change since Finnius can jump higher, but the feature is terribly underutilized. Considering that there are tons of levels and plenty of secrets, this title will take a *long* time to complete. The visuals are nice, but the repetitive gameplay and somewhat strange level designs make this a chore to play.





Reflections: After every handful of stages, you're given a 22-character password that is filled with various colorful icons. This is *INSANE*! It's bad enough that some games throw rows of letters at you to remember, but requiring you to draw and color icons is a bit extreme. I wonder how many kids have jotted down the wrong password throughout the years. This is a huge game, mind you, so one tiny mistake could mean hours of progress lost. Today's kids are lucky! Between hard drives and save states, they'll never know the struggle of video game passwords. – MV

Jammit

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: GTE Vantage
Publisher: GTE Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★





In this urban-themed half-court basketball title, players choose one of three athletes and compete in various basketball games with different rule sets. Since this is street basketball, all of the characters are full of attitude and cringy trash talk. There's the sassy girl, Roxy, who's a great long shooter; the tough guy, Chill, who can dunk with ease; and Slade, a tireless guy with a mean streak. The eight play types range from a basic game of twenty-one to more non-traditional competitions, such as "Slams Only." All games are of the one-on-one variety with the exception of Cutthroat, which pits the player against two defenders. In single-player mode, the player advances by depleting all of their opponents' money by betting on and winning games. These bets are in $100, $200, and $300 increments; the higher the bet, the more difficult the competition. Once opponents run out of cash, the next play type unlocks, but it the player goes broke, it's game over. Players who advance through all eight basketball variants have a chance to compete against The Judge and be crowned the champion. Unfortunately, most will never get past the first game due to the cheating AI. The CPU hardly ever misses a basket. Half-court shot? No problem! Score from behind the backboard? Child's play! On the other hand, the player barely ever scores due to the awkward shooting mechanics. To add to the difficulty, players have to deal with the randomness of the game's dunk cam, which always seems to trigger at the worst times. Due to the muddy visuals, each basketball court looks likes a warzone. This title should never, ever leave the bench.





Reflections: Dammit, *Jammit*! What happened to you? I usually don't end up throwing my controller, but this game made me do it. It's completely unfair! I wish I could find all of the developers behind *Jammit* and force them to play it today. Did any of them realize how cheap the AI was? Did any of them actually *beat* the game? I think that should be a requirement for every game developer – every person who is working on a project should have to beat it before it hits store shelves. I'm sure we'd all have far fewer crummy games in our collections. – MV

Jelly Boy

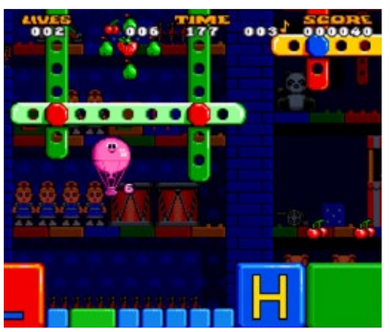
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Punch, bounce, float, and hammer as Jelly Boy, a radical pink blob, in an action-platformer that spans across six generic worlds. All eight stages within an area have a puzzle piece that must be located in order to unlock the boss of that land, be it a snowman in the ice world or a spinning top monster in the toy land. Jelly punches with his belly as his primary attack and can collect various blobs dotted around to morph into different shapes and items, such as a pogo stick to reach higher areas or a hammer to break through blockages. Enemies, including gnomes, teeth, and penguins, drop music notes when dispatched. These provide an extra hit point before losing a life. Picking up fruits littered throughout awards added time, extra lives, or invincibility, but these don't help much because the game is difficult to control and unfair to play. If Jelly jumps up to a higher ledge and hits a wall or other obstacle, he annoyingly bounces backwards, sometimes leading to instant death. Poor controls don't help a cryptic platformer with bad hit detection, and cute aesthetics can't stop this game from being an absolute chore to play. Even if it weren't so difficult, it would only be serviceable at best. Avoid.





Reflections: To put this mess into context – no one likes forced skateboarding levels where you have minimal time to succeed, let alone one-hit deaths, right? Well, that's stage two. The game falsely sucks you in with the bodacious veneer and attitude of the 1990s, but this quickly wears off when you realize that having to find these puzzle pieces on a strict timer with a plethora of blind leaps while attempting to control a blob cretin that bounces back from walls in humdrum worlds is just plain bad. The idea of being an amorphous blob character isn't new, and if implemented properly, it can pay dividends, such as with *A Boy and His Blob* on the NES. Here, it feels more like a cheap mascot with little imagination. One star is for the graphics, which are decent to be fair, and the other half-star is for the fact that when you press the duck button, Jelly actually turns into one. This turgid disaster needs more personality like that, but it is sorely lacking. – JE

Jeopardy!

Genre: Game Show, Trivia
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★

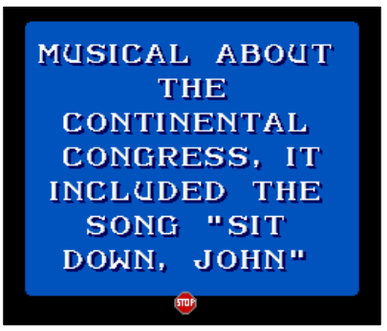






This conversion of the long-running trivia game show doesn't offer real money, but it will test the knowledge of any player, young or old. Host Alex Trebek is here – albeit with just a few sound clips and some rather peculiar facial cues – to preside over the contest in which players must offer correct questions to match the on-screen answers in a variety of categories. Correct questions award money to the player, while incorrect ones take it away. The game looks and sounds good, and it flows identically to what is seen on television. Thanks to smart computer opponents, playing solo can be as challenging as playing against a friend, if not moreso. The biggest knock against it is the need to enter full responses using the on-screen input interface. This process can take a long time, with some questions requiring nearly all of the 60 seconds allotted to finish up. Another flaw lies in its inability to interpret alternate spellings for some questions, leading to unnecessarily lost money. Lastly, champions cannot be held over and are not recognized from game to game, so unless players track results on their own, there's not a lot to come from winning. In spite of the flaws, this is a solid, no-frills game show experience that fans will enjoy and friends might have a quick 30 minutes of fun with.





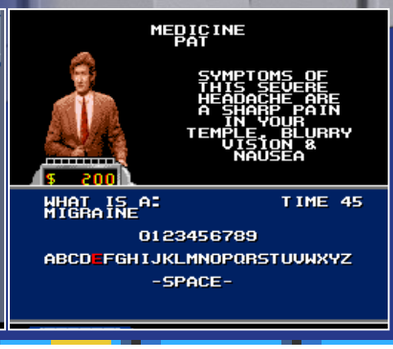
Reflections: Playing this game for review was both humbling and exciting. It was humbling because some of the material really stumped me, even as a 40-something guy who has been watching *Jeopardy!* on TV for decades. One category was all about the Netherlands, and I didn't get a single correct response there. Literature was a common category, and my success rate was just slightly better. The most crushing experience came during Final Jeopardy!, when I was in the lead by only a few hundred dollars. I bet it all because the category was Television, a subject that I thought I knew a lot about... except the answer had something to do with *60 Minutes* between 1965 and 1979. Oops. I redeemed myself in a later game, however, when I scored a correct response about Flag Day to win over 14,000 Super Nintendo Dollars. I pumped my fist and shouted, much to the dismay of my dog; he might have been a little upset that I was shouting in the middle of the night. – PS

Jeopardy! Deluxe Edition

Genre: Game Show, Trivia
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★½







The popular game show returns with this *Deluxe Edition*, which offers more than 3,500 new answers across over 700 new categories for trivia fans to wrap their heads around. The visuals are virtually the same as the original SNES *Jeopardy!*, save for a few new character avatars and more authentic fonts used on the game board, and the gameplay is exactly the same. Please refer to the review of *Jeopardy!* for more detail.





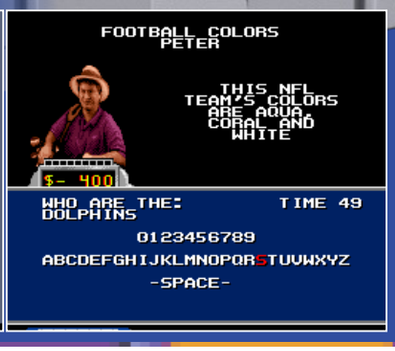
Reflections: This is my favorite installment of the *Jeopardy!* trio for the SNES. The questions are varied nicely, the CPU opponents are surprisingly challenging when playing against them, and the game nails the show's atmosphere. As with the other entries, it's important to keep in mind that the base of questions was intended for audiences in the early 1990s; as a result, if you weren't around back then, you may struggle with some of the material. It's also mildly disappointing that a password or battery save wasn't added to track accumulated winnings, but you can always do what I used to do and record them in a notebook. (Yes, I really did this.) – PS

Jeopardy! Sports Edition

Genre: Game Show, Trivia
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







This game show conversion is almost identical to the late 1992 release of *Jeopardy!*, with a couple of notable exceptions. The first and most obvious is that the game's answers and questions revolve solely around sports topics. Don't expect to find science or art categories here. The second exception is that the presentation has been altered somewhat; contestants now wear sports-related attire, and digitized Alex Trebek's facial animations have been toned down a bit. Please refer to the *Jeopardy!* review for more detail.





Reflections: This game is for hardcore sports fans. It's worth noting that the categories and answers are obviously dated, so younger players may struggle with some of the knowledge needed to accumulate big (virtual) money. I had a tough time with several of the categories and spent more time in negative territory than in any other *Jeopardy!* game I've played. The challenge is certainly here, but the target audience is very limited for this game. Non-sports fans should stick with either *Jeopardy!* or its *Deluxe Edition* cousin. – PS

The Jetsons: Invasion of the Planet Pirates

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sting
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Meet George Jetson: father, husband, digital index operator. Now he's asked to be a hero and save the world from sinister aliens. With the power of Captain Zoom's Pneumo Osmatic Precipitator (P.O.P.), George must fight his way through nine stages of various elements to reach Zora, leader of Space Pirates Revelling in Evil Enterprises (SPREE). Along the way, he battles a variety of bosses, each with their own quirks that must be puzzled out using non-traditional "attack" mechanics. Rather than do damage directly, George's weapon can pull enemies or objects toward him. He can then either shoot them at a wall or toward another enemy to destroy them both. This suctioning action also allows George to pull himself toward surfaces and climb up walls or across ceilings. Unfortunately, handling the P.O.P. is awkward. Even after getting used to how it works, the built-in limit of working with one projectile at a time often leaves George vulnerable to hits. On the plus side, there are clever level designs (e.g., rotating rooms and underwater stages that limit use of the P.O.P.) as well as cute and colorful graphics and quality animation, such as when George is standing too close to a ledge. The interesting gameplay plus the bright colors and upbeat music expected from a cartoon license should combine to form a great game, but the unwieldy suction mechanics bring it down to an average experience

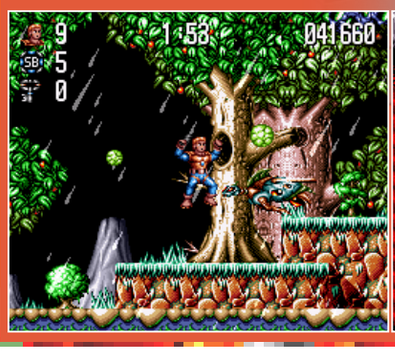
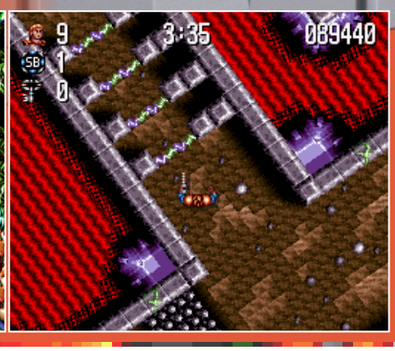




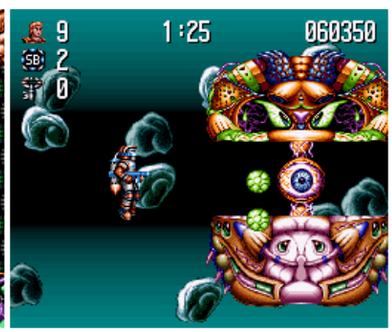
Reflections: I loved watching *The Jetsons* as a kid and was looking forward to seeing what form this game would take. I thought the suction mechanics were appropriate – you wouldn't expect George Jetson to be running around shooting a laser gun – but aside from the aforementioned problems with that weapon, the game also suffers from other issues, such as how it can be difficult to tell where pits are versus areas where you have to jump down to another platform. Interestingly, *The Jetsons: Invasion of the Planet Pirates* is a rare example of a game developed for North America that later went through a story and sprite change for a Japanese release. In *Yōkai Buster: Ruka no Daibōken (Phantom Buster: Ruka's Big Adventure)*, George Jetson is replaced by a 13-year-old girl from the manga *Yōkai Buster Ruka* in a contemporary Japanese setting with a few added features such as an extra level and adjusted difficulty. – KY

Jim Power: The Lost Dimension in 3-D

Genre: Action-Platformer, Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Loriciel
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★⋆

The universe calls upon Special Agent Jim Power to put a stop to the alien Vaprak in this extremely difficult shooter. Players control Power in side-scrolling run and gun, overhead, and horizontal shooter levels that are filled with a variety of mutant and insect-like enemies. To begin, players are given three lives and three continues (five lives if on easy mode or two lives on hard), but most will use all of these up on the first level alone. The difficulty is due to a variety of awful game and level designs. The biggest flaw is the one-hit kill rule that only applies to Power. Enemies, both big and small, require multiple shots to be defeated, even after Power acquires one of several gun upgrades. Power also has a limited smart bomb that can eradicate all on-screen enemies, but they respawn immediately. Environmental hazards, such as fireballs, spikes, dripping acid, and crushing pillars, can also take out Power. Additionally, a timer that is designed to reach zero before completing a level will take a life unless players search out time-adding clock icons while dealing with enemies and obstacles. To progress through the side-scrolling and overhead levels, Power must acquire keys that are hidden and/or in hard-to-reach areas. As if that were not enough, several layers of parallax scrolling move in reverse to the player's movement, which is nauseating, especially when on a platform that is erratically shifting from side to side. Two redeeming factors are the music and horizontal shooting levels, but most gamers will not get to experience either of these since getting past the first level is nearly impossible. Those looking for an unfair challenge and who enjoy feeling sick should search this title out.

Reflections: I'm a stubborn gamer, so I refused to let *Jim Power: The Lost Dimension in 3-D* beat me, but it did. I couldn't figure out if it was the bullet-sponge enemies, the stress-inducing countdown timer, or having to backtrack if I couldn't find a key, but this game drove me mad. I thought maybe it was the nauseating reverse parallax scrolling that was doing it, so I searched out a pair of the 3D glasses that came with the game, thinking those would help. Nope, they just made things worse. Next time I decide to torture myself with this, I'll remember to bring barf bags. – MV

Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blue Byte
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Swing a tennis racquet like Jimmy Connors, one of the winningest players of all time! In addition to training sessions with various coaches, there are two play modes: exhibition, with available two-player options for a singles or doubles match, and tournament, where you strive to end the season as the top player. You have a choice of difficulties as well as control types, deciding whether the CPU moves your character (easy) or you do (full). There are six kinds of court surfaces, including clay and indoor, and they each have varying effects on how high and quickly the ball bounces. When serving or returning, hold down a face or shoulder button (each one performs a different shot, such as a lob or spin slice) to pull back the racquet, then release the button to hit the ball – the longer it's held, the more accurate the shot. Aim the ball with the D-pad and control the length of the shot with UP/DOWN. During tournament play, you enter a competition of your choice for each month. Work your way through a bracket against 15 opponents with their own strengths and weaknesses. Depending on the options you pick, you must win one, three, or five sets to take the match. If you lose, you are out of the competition and continue to the next month. Earn enough competition points based on your standings to garner the top spot by the end of December, and you win the game! This title offers an experience tailored to a wide range of players, whether you want to play a quick and easy single-set tournament or test yourself with high difficulty and full control of movement. The mechanics are challenging to master but satisfying once you've figured everything out, and it's worth a playthrough.




Reflections: If you're familiar with *Jimmy Connors Tennis* on the NES, this game offers a similar experience but with all the niceties you'd expect from a more advanced system. There are many options to change, and if a full tournament is more than you can handle in one sitting, you can use a password to continue later. If you're a numbers person, statistics are displayed after every game, such as speed of serves and number of aces. It's an entertaining title whether you're playing it solo or with a friend. *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour* is accessible to gamers of all skills, and it's sure to serve up a racquet! – KY

Jimmy Houston's Bass Tournament U.S.A.

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Nexus Interact
Publisher: American Sammy
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Rare
★★★





Sporting the finest bowl haircut to grace a professional angler's head, Jimmy Houston brings the excitement of a big bass tournament straight to you! The main mode is the tourney, which is a series of competitions. Each one takes place at one of four lakes with several locations to explore. You have nine hours to catch the five heaviest bass you can snag. After choosing a spot, steer your boat from a top-down view to your desired position. The depth finder at the bottom pings when it detects a fish. From there, get to the casting screen with SELECT. With the view now set behind your character, press L/R to choose where to cast. Afterwards, the bar at the top shows the tension on the line. A jump in tension means a bite! Once you've got a fish hooked, reel it in with A, keeping an eye on the bar to prevent snapping the line. Caught fish go into the livewell, which is limited to five. If it's not within regulation, the fish is released instead. You can press SELECT to change your rod, line, and bait if the fish aren't being cooperative. After attending this school of fish, head to the weigh-in to see how you stack up to your competitors. Make the top three, and move on to the next round. Otherwise, it's game over. This title is fairly simple, and there isn't much variety, even with several locations to explore. Regardless, if you enjoy the zen of catch and release on the simulated open water, this game fulfills those needs nicely.





Reflections: I liked this game and appreciated details I saw, like how the other anglers appear while you're cruising for a fishing spot. What this lacks, however, is help to get started. Only the practice mode provides hints about how conditions affect the fishing. Once you choose to cast, you're just blindly throwing your line. If you figure out how to mesh these aspects, it is satisfying to reel in a big one. Plus, what other fishing game, on the SNES or otherwise, is going to feature a real-life mentor with such fabulous tresses? It makes the weigh-ins all the more exciting for the chance to see Houston's pixelated mane. – KY

Joe & Mac

Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Data East
Publisher: Data East
(PAL: Elite Systems)
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





Joe and Mac set out to rescue their village's missing "cave babes" in this prehistoric but lively arcade port. Armed with a club, Joe (and Mac in two-player mode) must knock out Neanderthals, pterodactyls, mini dinos, bees, piranhas, and more while platforming and avoiding pitfalls and perils such as boulders and lightning. To assist, throwing weapons are available: bones, stone wheels, boomerangs, and fireballs. These selectable projectiles, usually acquired by cracking open dinosaur eggs, each have unique traits and are useful in different situations and environments. Moving about the cartoon-styled jungle, waterfall, ice, and volcano stages is a smooth breeze with the dashing, rolling, and rolling jump moves. Also of note is the ability to stand on and jump off of enemies to reach higher platforms. Boss fights are a challenging blast, with huge enemy sprites dominating the screen in the form of a *T. rex*, woolly mammoth, Venus flytrap, and other extinct baddies. A humorous tone permeates the journey, with exaggerated character facial expressions and movements, such as the Neanderthal enemies scampering away. The difficulty is relatively high due to limited lives and continues, but health-replenishing meat can be obtained somewhat easily in stages. Bonus levels unlocked via found keys are also helpful in keeping your cave heroes alive. A simultaneous two-player mode rounds out this rollicking effort – great if you have a loin-clothed friend around.

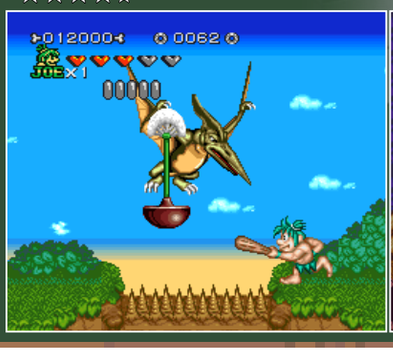




Reflections: The cave babes are a curious lot, as they're not only much taller and slimmer than Joe and Mac, but also they sport wild hair colors that make me rethink the timing of dye appearing in human history. Known simply as *Caveman Ninja* in arcades, the SNES port is a mostly faithful translation. Although lacking the complete graphical power and some bells and whistles that its predecessor features, the console game expands the shorter experience with additional levels (for example, the slippery ice stage) and the bonus stages. This was an important title for the young Super Nintendo, as its graphics, popping colors, and animation differentiated it significantly from the then-aging NES. I knew several children and friends who had this, and it was an instant reminder at the time to beg my parents for a console upgrade. – PC

Joe & Mac 2: Lost in the Tropics
Joe & Mac 3: Lost in the Tropics (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Data East
Publisher: Data East
(PAL: Elite Systems)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★




Joe and Mac return to prehistoric action to recover the village crown stolen by evil caveman Gork. Seven rainbow stones must also be retrieved during the journey through luscious multipart stages that include a jungle, snowy mountain, volcano, and swamp. These locales feature parallax scrolling elements via foreground and background movement. Armed with clubs, Joe and Mac contend with tiny dinos, pesky Neanderthals, pterodactyls, and other critters while traversing environments filled with vines, pulleys, floating platforms, and more. The club is handy, but finding the wave power-up is very helpful; otherwise, the cavemen can spit out a limited number of bones, seeds, and fire breaths after eating meat, fruit, and peppers for health. A comically flailing dash move via the D-pad plus L or R is awkward and of little use. Of more assistance are a few projectile-belching dino friends that Joe and Mac can ride. Levels appear fresh due to their lengthy vertical layouts as well as stage-specific challenges such as avoiding avalanches, escaping lava, dodging a dinosaur stomp, and avoiding a *Pteranodon* that rushes towards the screen from the background. If the cavemen survive these hazards, they face gigantic dino bosses for challenging yet not overwhelming battles. Light RPG elements exist, ranging from an overhead map used to access stages to a village where collected stone wheels can be used to buy health items, upgrades to the heroes' huts, and even flowers and food to court cavewomen and have families. Defeated stages can be replayed to obtain more currency for these cute bonuses. This sequel is anything but primal, with interesting stage design, crisp controls, more to do, and visuals that outclass even its ancestor.



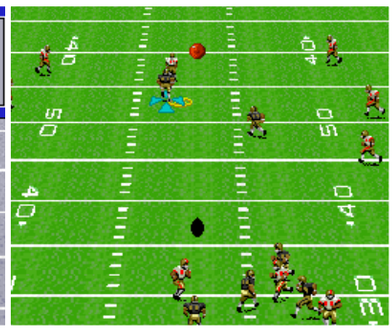

Reflections: Better than a minor upgrade, *Lost in the Tropics* is a high-quality title and one of the better-looking SNES games. It's a shame that the Joe & Mac series doesn't get more recognition, but Data East titles usually don't get the love they deserve. On top of that, cave heroes in general seem to get the short end of the club in modern times. Joe and Mac seem to be retired, and likely Bonk and Chuck Rock. I wonder if they all know each other? Maybe there are Stone Age Sunday potluck get-togethers where the group reminisces about their prehistoric adventures? I'd like to think that Bonk bakes a mean *Triceratops* casserole. – PC

John Madden Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★




This is an 11-on-11 football simulation with a slanted top-down view, and it's based on NFL teams from 1991 but lacks official licenses from the NFL or the NFL Players' Association. Players must call their own plays and execute them on the field, either against a human or a computer-controlled opponent. There isn't any kind of regular season to play through; instead, players can choose either exhibition games or predetermined playoff brackets. Two significant concepts are established here. The first is the three-window play selection screen for the offense and the defense. Via these windows, players choose their personnel groupings, formations, and plays before breaking the huddle and attempting to execute the play on the field. The second is the introduction of passing windows. Pressing the B button during pass plays brings up windows for each of the three receivers that show in real time whether they are open or covered. This tool is key in identifying which receiver to throw to or whether the quarterback needs to buy more time in the backfield. While the foundation and concepts are solid, the game has some performance issues. The frame rate is very choppy, adding unnecessary difficulty until players adjust to it. Running backs feel slippery, manually moving receivers to catch passes often leads to overrunning the target, and player-controlled defenses over-pursue and completely miss ball carriers. Even the kicking meter is affected by the poor frame rate, which can be a real problem when trying to make that game-winning field goal. It is possible to adjust to the stuttering frame rate, but it's not fun to do so. Add uninspired visuals, weak sound, and a generally lackluster presentation, and the recommendation becomes clear: Leave this one on the bench.

Reflections: *John Madden Football* was my first 16-bit football game, and I was terrible at it. I was used to arcade-style games such as *Tecmo Bowl* and *John Elway's Quarterback*, so I struggled with *Madden*'s more realistic play calling and concepts. It also didn't help that I kept picking New England, being a Massachusetts native. New England was awful back in 1991 when I was playing this game, going 6-10. That included a loss to Cleveland, whose head coach was some guy named Bill Belichick. You might've heard of him. – PS

John Madden Football '93

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★



The popular coach-turned-broadcaster returns with his second game and new features in tow. Eight former championship teams and two All-Madden teams join the 28 regular squads to pick from, each with updated attributes based on the 1992-93 NFL season. The championship and All-Madden teams can compete for supremacy in the new All-Time Greats playoff, while all 38 teams can be used in the new Sudden Death mode where the first score wins. On the field, it's easy to follow and control the 22 players, thanks to the isometric view and smooth animation. Calling plays is as simple as pressing one of three buttons, which are also used to run, pass, juke, dive, and tackle after the ball is snapped. The run-and-shoot formation makes its debut, introducing its own set of passing plays. The option to call a no-huddle offense is also introduced in this game for the first time, allowing teams to save precious seconds or catch defenses off-guard. There's even an interesting and possibly game-changing option to overturn a penalty call when playing head-to-head against a human opponent, which was well before instant replay challenges were introduced in the NFL. New presentation features include instant replay, text summaries showing the result of the previous play, and expanded stat tracking for teams and players. This a solid effort, though it lacks the extras to make it really stand out.



Reflections: *John Madden Football '93* was released less than two months before The Comeback – a historic playoff game in which Buffalo roared all the way back from a 32-point deficit in the third quarter to stun Houston. Not that anyone would ordinarily substitute Frank Reich for Jim Kelly at the quarterback position, but that's exactly what happened due to injury on that fateful January afternoon. It's interesting to note that, according to the *Madden '93* player ratings, Reich was identical to Kelly in all categories except one: pass range. It was a fun experiment to substitute Reich into the game against Houston and reenact that contest while playing the game for this review. Reich threw for three scores. Granted, I never fell behind by 32 points, but the outcome was the same: Buffalo won, Houston lost, and then I watched an episode of *Married... with Children*. Did you know that Al Bundy once scored four touchdowns in a single game? Unbelievable. – PS

Judge Dredd

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★



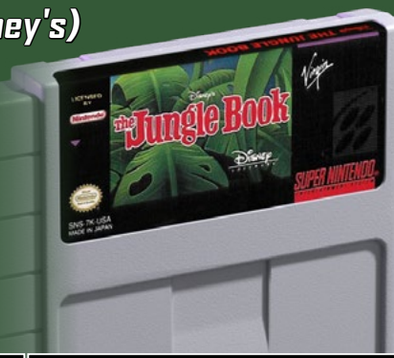
Become the law in this side-scrolling movie adaptation that follows Judge Dredd in his quest to mete out dystopian justice and uncover who has framed him for murder. Dredd can punch, kick, headbutt, and use his trusty Lawgiver hand cannon to kill or arrest the perps he comes across. The gun itself has several fire modes. In addition to infinite general-purpose shells, Dredd can acquire heat seekers, ricochet missiles, grenades, and more; each ammo type has different effects on the varying foes. From the standard block-war thugs to the impressive ABC Warbots, the feel of the original comic is present across the 12 stages. These are broken down into separate levels that feature primary and secondary objectives requiring acts such as blowing up an ammo cache or dealing with every enemy. Scattered computer terminals reveal what percentage of the level has been completed. The game encourages exploration to find ammo, health, and 1-ups, all of which are needed because it is no easy task to bring peace to Mega-City One. Interestingly, once the film story has been completed, a new set of missions begins with the Dark Judges, so there is plenty of game on offer in what would traditionally be just another movie cash-in.



Reflections: Sly Stallone movie games have always been a bit rubbish (aside from some of the earlier 8-bit computer titles, such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Cobra*), but this one surprisingly isn't too bad at all. It captures the feel of the subject matter well, and the presentation is pretty solid throughout, with digitized images of the characters from the film and hulking ABC Warbots that look menacing. It's not without its issues, though, as the game is quite difficult. I want to be a tough guy like Dredd, but more often than not when I play, I find myself dangling on a ladder, shooting enemies while staying out of range so that I won't take damage. The game is also long, so steamrolling in will just get you killed. I feel that the end of the film would have been a decent time for the game to wrap up, so the extra levels seem excessive. But at the same time, they add bonus content when it wasn't required. How many other blatant cash-cow film games ever go that extra mile? – JE

The Jungle Book (Disney's)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Virgin Interactive
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★⋆







Raised in the jungle, Mowgli is a child with friends among wolves, bears, and other animals. However, the arrival of dangerous tiger Shere Khan forces Mowgli to climb, swing, and jump through 11 action-platforming levels to reach the safety of the human village. His journey takes him past trees, a waterfall, ancient ruins, and other jungle settings. In the stages, Mowgli attacks by jumping on foes or tossing unlimited banana projectiles, and he finds pickups that include hearts for health (displayed in the upper right), extra lives (shown in the lower left), and a variety of additional fruit weapons which can be swapped around with L/R. Also spread throughout are two types of collectible gems; acquiring enough red ones earns an extra continue, while gathering enough green ones every two levels opens a bonus stage. Fighting against Mowgli's progress are jungle creatures ranging from bats and bugs to fish and an army of monkeys. Some animals are helpful, though, including the chameleons, whose tongues become platforms, or Baby Hathi the elephant, who acts as a checkpoint. The controls are tight, and falling into the plethora of pits feels like an issue of execution rather than a failure of the game. For being centered in a single locale, the variety of backgrounds is fantastic, and the music works with the gameplay while featuring tunes from the 1967 Disney classic of the same name. The graphics do sometimes get in the way of figuring out what's solid, what's climbable, or what platform is going to crumble, but being flexible with the constantly changing environments helps make this an enjoyable experience.





Reflections: This gameplay is perfect for the storyline from the movie, but while the graphics put me into the setting, the foreground images are bothersome and not worth what they add visually. Nothing irks me like getting sniped by a nearly invisible projectile when I'm trying my best to move quickly and smoothly through a level! Also on the negative side, I'm disappointed that the other movie characters don't have a stronger presence. You only see the antagonists as bosses at the end of stages, and Baloo the bear is only occasionally seen for a mid-level appearance or to indicate the exit. I sure missed the loveable animal cast. Maybe they should have called this *Mowgli's Adventure* rather than *The Jungle Book*. – KY

Jungle Strike

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Gremlin Interactive
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Stop terrorist Ibn Kilbaba and drug lord Carlos Ortega from bringing America to its nuclear doom in the isometric shooter sequel to *Desert Strike*. A Super Comanche Attack Chopper armed to the teeth is at the player's disposal across nine missions, each with their own objectives. From saving prisoners and blowing up target buildings to escorting the President's motorcade to safety, there is an enjoyable variety in what is essentially a search-and-destroy mechanic laid out over an isometric perspective. The game boasts all-new vehicles to use during campaigns, such as the MX-9 Attack Hovercraft and even the F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Fighter; each has its own unique armor and fuel capacities as well as loadouts, such as submarine-busting water mines. The map screen acts as a useful guide that explains where targets and much needed yet limited resources are located, so planning accordingly is the best way to success. Gameplay is fast and responsive, giving the player a sense of panic and excitement when the bullets fly, but the difficulty can be a hindrance, so having the right choice of wingman onboard to operate the recovery winch and guns will help in an all-out dogfight. This is a fun title that doesn't add too much to the original game's formula but does just enough tweaking to make it fresh and appealing.





Reflections: I defy anyone to say that they never blew up the monuments on purpose during the first campaign. Of course, the game quickly makes you realize that you can't just wade in like Rambo, firing on everything, because the difficulty curve will punish. When the strategy element dawns on you, it soon becomes clear that there is a pretty deep game on offer behind all the explosions. Do you take out that last enemy guard post with little fuel or stock up before attempting it just in case, losing precious time making a detour when you could use that fuel drum on the next pass? The overall presentation is also an improvement on the original. However, I have one major issue: They swapped the map and pause buttons – so annoying! Still, this is a must-have title for gamers and collectors alike. It is also as cheap as beans, so treat yourself to a copy! – JE

Jurassic Park

Genre: Action-Adventure, First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







"Welcome… to Jurassic Park." As Doctor Grant, the player must traverse the island park, collecting eggs and access cards, restoring various systems, and finally escaping via helipad. Gameplay switches between a top-down, action-adventure outdoors and a first-person shooter indoors, a novel trick that keeps each half of the experience feeling fresh. In both, the player can fire their cattle prod or various limited-ammo weapons found around the park, such as rockets and tranquilizers. Those, along with extra lives and health pickups, help the player survive raptors, spitters, and other deadly dinosaurs roaming the grounds and buildings. The game combines visual and narrative elements of the novel, the movie, and its original creation into a single cohesive open world to explore. Sadly, no sampled version of the film's iconic main theme is to be found, but composer Jon Dunn's in-game tracks are still quite good. The interiors can feel claustrophobic, given the maze-like layouts and the ambush-minded placement of dinosaurs, but they also add to the tension. Giant, transparent pop-ups with island notables, such as Ian Malcolm and Tim Murphy, provide guidance and information for the player, while interactive computer terminals and user interface text are used indoors. The game supports the SNES Mouse for first-person segments, and it can greatly improve the experience with its fluid control in turning and firing. Without save features, it might take repeated tries and patience in order to complete the game. Thankfully, the audiovisual quality and a good balance of challenge to skill make the island worth revisiting.





Reflections: *Jurassic Park* is one of the titles I enjoy picking up once I've forgotten where to go and what to do. Like many adventure games, half the appeal is trying to survive while discovering those things. In this way, it succeeds, albeit with a caveat: the game is not terribly long for the experienced player, but it's long enough that a save feature would have been welcome. Speaking of welcome, the elevator music between interior floors is a nice respite from dilophosaurus and velociraptor encounters, as are Nedry's traitorous bad advice pop-ups. (Sorry, Newman, but I'm pretty sure acid spit does not give me more power.) Slyly, the Kenner toy company, who made *Jurassic Park* action figures, managed to work their brand name onto the cargo boat's hull. If you can't collect those toys, collect the bola weapon in the game. It can travel through multiple foes, so don't waste it on the occasional procompso… pocompogan… compy. – DG

Jurassic Park Part 2: The Chaos Continues

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Dr. Alan Grant is sent back to the dinosaur-ridden island park to regain control and stop rival group BioSyn from taking its secrets for themselves in this side-scrolling run and gun shooter. Six different missions are selectable from the start; from fighting the enemy task force to gassing out a raptor nest or stopping the *T. rex* from terrorizing the island, there are many things to accomplish. The player has a raft of lethal and non-lethal arms, from rifles and shotguns to cattle prods and tranquilizer weapons, that frequently need to be switched between when taking on the various human and reptile foes. If too many valuable dinosaurs are killed, the game ends, so it's best to harmlessly subdue all attackers aside from BioSyn agents, raptors, and the *T. rex*. Theoretically, there's an ideal way to handle each enemy type given the variety of weapons available, but in practice, the game offers zero tolerance in the difficulty stakes. Stages aren't linear and there's no map, so it's easy to get lost, making harshly timed sections nearly impossible. The player has a health bar which can be replenished with medi kits strewn about the beautiful-looking stages, but it's game over once it's depleted, and with finite continues, it's a tall task to get anywhere. The game controls excellently, and the presentation is high quality, but the challenge is simply too much – even on the easy setting.





Reflections: I adore the first *Jurassic Park* game on SNES, and this could have been an absolute smasher were it not for the insane difficulty. You can't even get the proper ending on the medium setting, so good luck seeing it on the hardest one. The game offers enough variety, and it feels very atmospheric with the broken electrical fences and dank passageways filled with dinosaurs, but there is no reaction time to cope. The dinos are huge and menacing, and there is always panic when encountering raptors. I like the idea of not killing dinosaurs in an attempt to preserve them once the island is back under control, but you'll never defeat that many before you hit a game over. The enemy AI for the BioSyn group is laughable – they will just keep running at you until mowed down – but tense gunfights can occur at times. Two player co-op is fun, and that is where the difficulty balance evens up a little, but it is still too tough. – JE

Justice League Task Force

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sunsoft, Blizzard
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The evil Darkseid is attacking Earth, so superheroes Aquaman, Batman, Flash, Green Arrow, Superman, and Wonder Woman must defend humankind via one-on-one combat. In this fighting game, you play as your choice of these Justice League teammates during nine matches. For each opponent, win two rounds by either completely draining their health (at the top over their name) or by having more health than they do when the timer runs out. Characters have three types of basic punches and kicks, and sequences of D-pad and button presses can unleash more powerful moves, such as bringing opponents in for a kick with Wonder Woman's lasso or throwing Batman's batarang. If your opponent wins two rounds, you have a chance to start the fight over thanks to unlimited continues. When you're done with Story mode, there's Battle mode, which allows you to play as one of the three villains, and there's Versus mode for two-player fun. While the challenge of getting some of the moves down might scare off beginners to the genre, the options allow you to adjust the difficulty (for one-player battles) or the strength of the combatant you control (for Versus bouts). The character sprites look good, but while the parallax backgrounds add depth, the environments aren't exciting or compelling – it isn't until the last stages that you get some sense of the fantastical setting. DC fans may enjoy fighting as one of their favorite Justice League members, but this title doesn't have much beyond that to grab a player's attention.

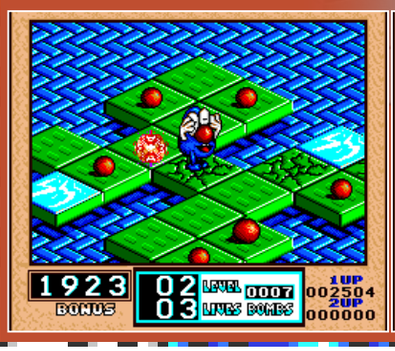


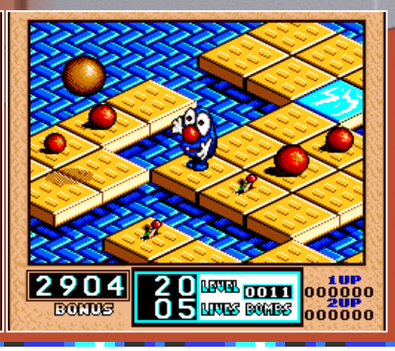


Reflections: I'll admit my unfamiliarity with this title before this review, but I hunkered down and did my best to learn the moves and find ways to stun my enemies to defeat. I found (through sheer effort) that it's not just my skill level but also the game's unresponsive controls that make it difficult to pull off many of the special attacks. In addition, the experience lacks any sort of "wow" factor. If you compare it to another fighter from the same year, *Mortal Kombat 3*, it offers fewer characters, fewer stages, and a dull storyline that is identical no matter who you play. I appreciate a DC Universe entry into this popular genre, but aside from that theme, it's not a polished product that'll get anyone excited. – KY

Ka-Blooey

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Image Works
Ported by: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





You're a blue creature tasked with safely setting off all the bombs in each of the 130 levels of this isometric puzzle game. You ignite an explosive by standing over it and holding A, but you need to be mindful of its blast radius as well as the kinds of tiles on the stage. Explosives come in several types (regular, aerial, swell, and mines) and different sizes. The smallest ones only destroy the block they are on, whereas a medium-sized blast radius is a diamond five blocks long, and a large one is a diamond seven blocks long. While these are the directly affected areas, other explosives one square outside of any blast radius are also triggered. For example, a small bomb only destroys its own block, but any cardinally adjacent explosives are triggered as well. Aside from the bombs, you also have to worry about where you stand (e.g., ice blocks you slide over, cracked blocks you can only step on once), so you need to carefully plan where to move in a level. The best way is with START and SELECT, which show a top-down view of the entire level and a close-up, respectively. This also pauses the bonus countdown that causes you to lose a life if it runs out. Additionally, being idle for too long (presumably, plotting your next move) creates a spinner that shoves you in a random direction. This likely means needing to restart since you're often pushed onto a bad square or off the stage completely. While not all puzzle fans will enjoy plotting their moves in a pause screen before their first step, the game stays interesting with new hazards, blocks, and explosives in varying combinations.





Reflections: Don't let the title or premise fool you – *Ka-Blooey* isn't an action-packed Bomberman game, but this UK-developed title still has things to offer. The controls work well, and having to hold down the trigger button means not restarting over a mistap (of that kind at least). The in-game instructions, which scroll by during the opening screen, take a staggering 14 minutes to complete (yes, I timed it), so read the manual to see what everything does! Unless it's teatime and you don't mind gazing at it as you munch on some biscuits. Once you've dabbed the corners of your mouth, tune your ears to the female announcer, and *Player 1, get g-g-g get ready!* – KY

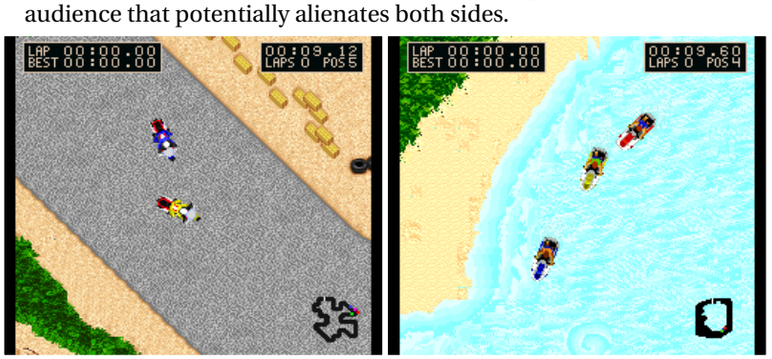
Kawasaki Caribbean Challenge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Surf 'n turf on an SNES, this game offers action on land atop a motorcycle and on the sea aboard a watercraft. There are three modes of top-down play: solo races on either a Ninja® motorcycle or Jet Ski® watercraft or a combined experience in the Challenge. For the individual modes, you choose among three vehicles to race on one of three islands, each with their own tracks. After time-trial qualifications, you tackle the course with several CPU drivers, who can be tracked on the minimap in the lower right. Depending on the mode, there are various hazards that slow your progress, including oil for motorcycles and whirlpools for watercraft. In addition, your driver automatically brakes if a collision is imminent, mainly if you're about to ram an opponent. Challenge starts you on the slowest vehicles without a choice of tracks. Each island has a point requirement to qualify for the races on the next one; points are awarded based on your standings after taking spins on each vehicle type. If you beat the final island, you're bumped up to the next level of vehicles to make your way through the three sets of tracks again. Aside from the flashy digitized photos of the Caribbean, the graphics are nothing to get excited over. Because of the top-down viewpoint, there is little sense of realism in the action, despite that being touted in the manual. Controls are squirrelly, and maneuvering is intentionally difficult to master, so this may not be very enjoyable to casual racers. With only three courses for each mode of transport, there might not be enough here for hardcore racing enthusiasts either. It's a game without a clear audience that potentially alienates both sides.



Reflections: I can admit that the perspective in this game just rubs me the wrong way. I don't like being forced to memorize courses in order to do well (because there's no way I can sneak a peek at the minimap without crashing). I prefer a reactionary style of play. Putting that aside, the game lacks variety in the courses as well as in the scenery of the races. Your involvement in how the Challenge mode progresses is nonexistent, with no choices to make, just a vehicle to control. Unfortunately, this experience doesn't have much to offer, but it's at least a playable game that I could certainly see someone enjoying for a brief moment, and that's something… right? – KY

Kawasaki Superbike Challenge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Lankhor
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive, Domark
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Take control of a high performance Kawasaki motorcycle in this first-person racing game. You can choose between racing in Championship or Suzuka 8 Hour modes. Championship takes you through a gauntlet of 14 courses across the globe. For each course, you have to do three laps to determine your placement for the actual race, which is itself your choice of five, seven, or 10 laps. If you're looking for an endurance challenge, you can do Suzuka 8 Hour – after the usual three lap placements, you race around the track in much the same way as Championship except for having to make pit stops to refuel, repair any damage, or change your tires. Before any of the races, you can change the way your bike handles through three different settings: gearing, manual/automatic shifting, and tire style. During the races, you will find a bright and colorful background (unless it's rainy weather) that shifts up and down to show your change in elevation. In addition, along the course there are large monochrome blocks that vaguely resemble buildings and stands. With no music during the races, you only have the whine of your engine to keep your ears company. While the bike controls well and there are many options to customize your experience, such as difficulty and weather effects, it isn't much of an experience to enhance. Strictly for motorcycle racing simulation fans only.



Reflections: It's unfortunate that Kawasaki decided to put its name on this game because there is not a lot going for it. None of the sizeable amount of options has a great effect on the gameplay. And, oh, how I loathe the lack of music. Nothing in the game could relieve my boredom at the constant droning of the bike engine, especially during the Suzuka 8 Hour race. The mode must be endless, unless they actually expect you to do an eight hour race on your SNES. I can't say for sure; after lap 20, I gave up. The game's only saving grace is the two-player mode, where you at least have someone to keep you company. You certainly aren't going to get that from the empty stands. The only people you'll see are the daredevil families who decided the best place to watch a motorcycle race was along the track. Somehow I get the feeling this game didn't get many people to buy a Kawasaki bike. – KY

Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball

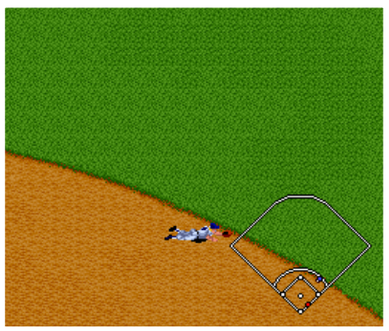
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





This peppy arcade-style baseball game features a Major League Baseball team license and stars phenom Ken Griffey Jr. Season mode is available in three lengths, with the option of either the traditional four-division format or the newer six-division format. Gameplay on the diamond is quick and smooth, showcasing very precise pitching controls, powerful shots off the bat, and fielders that can dive and jump for the ball and who have cannons for arms. Shortcomings tarnish the shiny proceedings a bit; each base runner requires separate button presses to lead/steal, pulling the ball for power when batting seems to be slightly broken, defensive shifts are not present, and it's very difficult to strike out CPU players when pitching. On the surface, there are some simulation-style features, such as stats/abilities for every 1993 MLB player along with a physical approximation. However, names must be edited to match their real-life counterparts, neither trading nor player creation exists, and season stats are only tracked for the player-controlled or coached team. All MLB stadiums are represented, but some are far more generic than others. Additional elements are mixed, with a nice All-Star game but a boring Home Run Derby. Still, little touches amuse, such as an actual umpire's voice, fielders knocking themselves out running into walls, and batters reacting humorously when striking out. Feisty, rocking music highlighted by a stadium organ fills the background, but eventually you may want to find the option to mute it.





Reflections: The use of Ken Griffey Jr. and his promotion for this title were a natural fit, as Nintendo had purchased his floundering Seattle Mariners team and saved it from moving out of the city in 1992 (they sold off most of their ownership stake in 2016). The manual for this game is impressive, as it contains nice artwork and an overview of all 28 MLB teams; it even provides a history of professional baseball going back to the mid-1800s. I was very excited for the release of this game when it was first announced and remember trying it out at a FuncoLand before bringing it home. However, suffering through a full 162-game season was another story, and one I eventually regretted. It didn't help that in the middle of my season all the real player names that I had spent several agonizing hours adding in were erased back to their generic team-themed ones. – PC

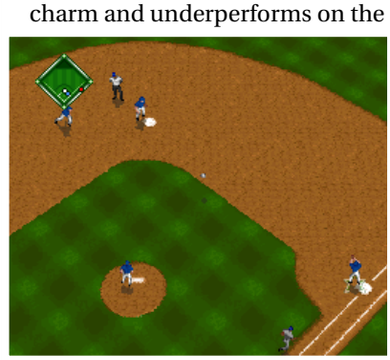
Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run

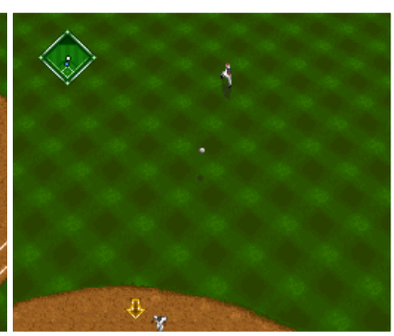
Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1996
Region: NA
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★





This baseball title claims to have simulation aspects and features a full-season mode, exhibition mode, All-Star games, Home Run Derby (for up to eight participants), the World Series, and MLB Challenge, where the player must defeat all other teams. The graphics are fairly realistic with their smooth animations, but gameplay is a mixed bag. A highlight is batting/pitching. Here, the third-person face-off between pitcher and batter is engaging because the pitcher is able to choose between four pitches and select a location without guiding the ball in after it's thrown. Batting is challenging; it requires proper timing and quickly identifying which pitch is coming and if it's in the strike zone. Players can attempt bat control with the D-pad to pull the ball, slice it, or hit it in the air or on the ground. Unfortunately, things go downhill from there. Attempting to lead and picking off runners look good, but base stealing is tedious, as CPU pitchers almost always attempt to pick off runners if they lead too soon. Fielders throw the ball far too quickly to simulate baseball, while fielding fly balls is difficult due to the unrealistic speed they travel off the bat into the outfield, resulting in too many dropping in before adjustments can be made. Outfielders can be shifted per batter in options, but by default they play too shallow to snag some fly balls. Games can feel overlong due to the aforementioned factors. Managing MLB teams and having the ability to trade players are nice things; however, no real players' license exists, and names cannot be edited. There's an attempt to present a full MLB experience with real stadiums and season stat tracking, but the overall product lacks charm and underperforms on the field.





Reflections: This is a strange step down and sideways from its predecessor, starting from scratch with an all-new experience. The change in developer is both surprising and unfortunate, as the original Ken Griffey Jr. title was a solid and fun foundation that could have been built upon. I'd be remiss not to mention the awful techno menu music that sounds like a track from a bad mid-'90s hacker film. It's incredibly out of place, featuring cliché voice samples like "No one can stop this!" and a deep-voiced "Bass." Or maybe it's "Base"? Either way, it's terrible and will make you want to forego options to get to the actual game to celebrate the warm embrace of the quiet stadium ambiance. – PC

Kendo Rage

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Affect
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Trying to get to school has never been so complicated! As exchange student Jo, the player must fight through seven side-scrolling stages of ghosts and miscreants. Jo can wield her kendo sword, jump, and perform a dash attack at the expense of some health. Colorful orbs unlock additional abilities, from flaming lasers to rapid strikes. Attacking reduces the Psychopower meter; if it is at least half full, Jo fires projectiles with her sword swing. Items include health-recovering food, extra lives, and critical "Time Stop" clocks that buy Jo precious minutes in her quest to get to school before 9:00 a.m. Creative bosses/minibosses await throughout the game's levels, from a Jo impersonator (with a visible zipper on the back of their costume) to a volleyball team. While the random enemies are less interesting, the sprite work on Jo and the bosses is excellent, and the game's levels are varied and vibrant, though poor level design holds them back from being truly memorable. A comedic anime stylization and goofy localization keep things lighthearted despite the game's noticeable difficulty. Nicely drawn cutscenes await between stages, documenting Jo's commute while providing exposition. Each passing moment increments the clock, and time is carried between levels, reinforcing the story while creating a unique sense of pressure. A boss rush and a deadly final encounter await players able to reach the game's seventh and final stage. The ending can change depending on what time the clock is showing when finally entering school. The Configuration menu has three difficulty settings, button remapping, and tests for the monitor and controller. Overall, this title is challenging but charming and full of character.





Reflections: Enemies in *Kendo Rage* often rely upon spontaneously appearing somewhere near Jo, making progression a matter of shuffling and swinging. Building up speed is risky, and dashing consumes health, making it a last resort. Thankfully, bosses have predictable patterns that can be studied and overcome. For an otherwise above-average title, it's got a nifty ancillary use – the Configuration menu monitor and gamepad test. It's no 240p Test Suite, but it's a cool addition that might be one of the better reasons to own a copy! Plus, if the game frustrates you enough to want to hit it with a wooden sword, the instruction manual explains kendo and provides contact information for the All United States Kendo Federation of Lomita, California, which is still in operation 25 years later. – DG

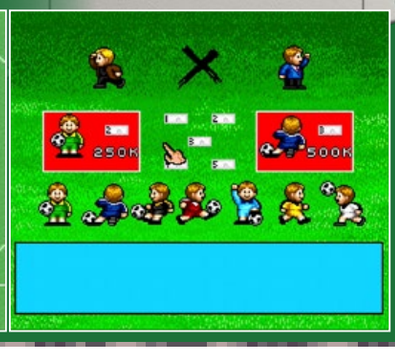
Kevin Keegan's Player Manager

K. H. Rummenigge's Player Manager (GER)

Genre: Sports, Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Anco Software
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★







Take up a managerial role and bring a team from rags to riches in this soccer simulation. Initially, it is the job of the player to choose the team to be playing each week, keeping them trained and sending out scouts to look for potential new players. Star players are denoted within the roster page, and it is best advised to keep them happy by negotiating big money contracts. Once the team has been selected and match day chosen, the player is given a choice of either controlling the team by using a version of the game *Kick Off*, spectating the action with a managerial focus, or having the computer predict the outcome. The soccer game itself is clunky to play, with basic passes, shots, and headers being the functional inputs. The ball pings all around the overhead pitch, and players lose control quickly, leading to counterattacks, so the latter two options are the best. Win a game and sponsorship goes up, meaning better players can be hired, whereas losing may bring the job to a close. Ultimately, this is a game that would be a fun and in-depth experience if it didn't use absolutely baffling screen icons to represent everything, giving little context as to what their purpose is.





Reflections: No one wants to be Kevin Keegan, even if he does have the world's most luxurious mullet. I owned this game as a kid and became stupidly good at it, but I was having a tough time just navigating the menus some 25 years later. Why three different types of hats choose the difficulty level (no joke – that's what they actually do) when trying to start a game is beyond me, and this sets the tone for everything. Why does clicking on Kevin's big, garish face gain access to team menus, and what does a referee with two hands in the air mean over a ref with only one arm raised? It is this obtuse silliness that lays a major detriment over the experience as a whole, and that's really unfortunate because underneath the nonsense is a cracking little footy manager game. From hiring to firing, dealing with player injuries, reading what the newspaper is saying about the team that week, and jumping ship to apply for new clubs, this here is quite the comprehensive stat cruncher. – JE

Kick Off

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Anco, Enigma Variations
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★







If you're fancying a little footy, this title offers several soccer game modes with a plethora of options to adjust your sporting experience, including both cooperative and competitive play for two participants. Whether you try a single friendly game, a domestic (English) tournament, a European league, or an international affair, you control a team in a top-down view with the field running vertically. The player with possession of the ball incrementally kicks it ahead, simulating reality. This mechanic makes it easier to lose/gain control of the ball, creating some frantic action. You naturally dribble with the D-pad but can also kick or pass the ball. The players are fairly nondescript, only having few visual differences, although there are numbers to indicate who they are. Both the uniforms and player names can be edited from the main menu, allowing personalization. Customizing where each person is positioned on the field as well as team formation as a whole is also possible. While the action on the pitch feels fast-paced and exciting (movement speed is adjustable in the options), whenever a play ends from events such as an out-of-bounds ball or foul, the transition back into regular play delays the game just enough to remove you from any focus you had. Despite the field's bland resemblance to a sea of green, there are small details to appreciate, such as the shadows and shake of a ref's head as he admonishes a player for a foul. As much as the variety of options is appreciated, the lack of accompanying visuals brings down a promising experience.





Reflections: Unlike what the title suggests, this is not a port of the computer game of the same name. This is a different entry to the Kick Off series specifically designed for consoles. I try to go into a game with an open mind, but the distorted crowd sounds in the main menu are telling of the experience ahead. There's a neat feature for saving and viewing action replays after making a goal, but that's all the excitement you get from this achievement. This would have been a great opportunity for the developers to insert a colorful animated celebration screen. As it stands, I suppose I'll ignore the disappointing graphics and focus on the aspect of soccer games I most enjoy: seeing how many dangerous sliding kicks I can get away with before being carded by the ref. – KY

Kick Off 3: European Challenge

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Anco
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1-4 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







With over 100 different teams, this soccer game has countless possibilities of playstyles to master with each squad's mix of abilities. There are three basic modes of play: a single friendly match, a local European league, and a larger cup tourney. In addition, a practice mode plus a Challenge mode that pits you against mighty Anco United are on offer. You have choices in many aspects of the game, such as the pitch type, duration of halves, rules, and general difficulty. You are able to play simultaneous competitive two-player matches, and in tournaments, you can assign a different team to up to four people. On the pitch, you're given a top-down view with the field running horizontally, and the player you're controlling is highlighted with a circle. While whoever is in possession of the ball can generally just pass or kick it, if they have a particular attribute, such as agility, they are capable of additional moves, such as overhead kicks. When pausing, you can change your team's formation as well as how you want your teammates to approach the ball, such as rushing it or relaxing in their designated areas. This game has fluid controls and brisk action, although it can be frustrating when you don't have a player on the screen, leaving you unsure of which direction to press. The sprites are big enough to have character, especially while celebrating a goal or rolling on the ground with an injury. The menus have energizing music, while the crowd provides cheers and chants during the matches. With numerous game modes to challenge your choice of team, there's enough to keep you busy through some exciting soccer matches.





Reflections: I'm sure some of you are wondering, "What about *Kick Off 2*?" Well, that entry was actually released under the name *World League Soccer* in North America. This title seems to have been destined for a release in the States, with a blurb in *Nintendo Power* in July 1994, but no game followed it. I'm curious how they would have adjusted the content considering that so many of the teams and leagues are focused exclusively in Europe. There are differences between this title and the previous one, including the loss of realistic dribbling and the lack of a minimap. While there isn't as much player control here, I find the graphics and audio more appealing. I guess I'm just a sucker for flashy plays and celebrations. – KY

Kid Klown in Crazy Chase

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Space pirate Blackjack has kidnapped Klown Planet's Princess Honey, and now that joker's gambling on big bombs to deal with Kid Klown's rescue attempt. He'll plant one at the bottom of five different areas, and if Kid can't shuffle downhill faster than the long, lit fuse, the explosion will give him a game over and a few continues. The forest, town, volcano, ice, and cave levels all proceed from the upper left to the lower right, and gauging jumps and movement in this isometric perspective is tough. Trying the four available input configurations, including a surprisingly effective upside-down controller option, may ease the challenge; this is needed because Kid's downhill trek is an uphill battle. Rolling logs, zooming cars, flames, icicles, a creepy ghost, and many more hazards waste time and deplete Kid's health meter, so grabbing life-replenishing HP icons may be helpful. What's essential, however, is finding four playing card symbols (spade, heart, diamond, and club) hidden in each stage's striped balloons. Missing just one of these forces Kid to redo the level. Complicating matters further is his inability to move backwards uphill and the fact that some balloons contain booby traps or coins for Air Hockey and Whack-a-Blackjack bonus games (coins also appear openly in stages and secret areas). Even if he collects the key at each level's end, he might still fail by opening the wrong locks on Honey's cell. This game is extremely cute, clever, and colorful, but the repetitive and stringent requirements are not clowning around.





Reflections: Noses are red, vile plots go boom, sugar is sweet, and Honey's... *va-va-voom!* At least, she is in the game's best ending, where her passionate kisses make Kid pass out with joy, but earning that outcome is not simply a matter of saving her. You have to win her Honey Heart, not once, but *five times* by playing flawlessly – no lost lives and no missed card icons. Otherwise, Honey's not as sweet as she is strong willed. She boldly back-talks to Blackjack and even addresses you during the opening sequence. She's hardly a demure damsel, which is both refreshing and a tad dismaying when you only manage to eke out the regular ending. Beating the game is difficult enough, and seeing Kid getting rebuffed as a reward is a letdown. However, it's realistic. After all, if everyone fell in love with and married their rescuer, there'd be a lot more kitten-fireman weddings. – AP

Killer Instinct

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







Ultratech, the future's most profitable weapons dealer, hosts the Killer Instinct fighting tournament as a proving ground for their wares. This arcade port of the series' first entry features 10 combatants, including cybernetic soldier Fulgore and secret agent B. Orchid; each has their own unique move list. Special moves are often combinations of D-pad inputs and one of the six attack buttons found in earlier genre staples. Where this title shines, however, is in the ability to chain moves together for fluid combo attacks that look impressive and feel satisfying when executed correctly, helping to sell the game's high learning curve. Attacks come in three strengths, forming a rock-paper-scissors relationship for Combo Breakers that integrate another level of strategy. Rather than resetting the life bars in a traditional best-of-three-rounds format, the fighters back off briefly after either has their health bar emptied the first time. Upon a second depletion, the losing combatant wobbles in place, providing an opportunity for finishing moves that include environmental knock-offs, merciless finishers, and Humiliations. If the 100-second timer expires, the healthiest fighter wins the match. Tournament Game allows up to eight players to vie for top billing, with wins and losses recorded – great for hot seat competition. Training Mode provides an invaluable sandbox for practicing combo Openers, Auto-Doublers, and Linkers. Beautiful sound samples and aggressively '90s tunes make it easy to crank up the volume, and the digitized sprites look great. While compromises were understandably made to get this to run on the Super Nintendo, the result still oozes personality from the core of its sleek black-plastic cartridge, maintaining the style and compelling gameplay that made it such a smash.





Reflections: In the mid-'90s, Rare was in rare form. The same advanced Silicon Graphics tools they used to create *Donkey Kong Country*'s assets formed the world of *Killer Instinct*. Equipped with advanced hardware and intended for the Ultra 64, getting the glossy arcade experience home was a massive feat. The pack-in tunes help, too; there are few sounds as quintessentially '90s as *Killer Cuts*, the arranged soundtrack CD that came with day-one copies of *Killer Instinct*. Crank it up! Of all the compromises, the endings are the only ones that disappoint me. Substituting pre-rendered cutscenes might have been essential, but a series of stills would have outperformed the stilted attempts at using the game's assets. – DG

King Arthur & the Knights of Justice

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: July 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Manley & Associates
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★







King Arthur and his knights are imprisoned by the witch Morgana, so Merlin calls upon the Knights, a modern-day football team lead by Arthur King, to save England. Throughout this top-down action-adventure, King and his men seek the 12 Keys of Truth, each one "belonging" to a knight. The keys are mainly obtained within castles guarded by Morgana's warlords. King always has two companions (of your choosing), each with their own defense, strength, speed, and special attack (such as Breeze's pike throw) that becomes available after finding their shield in the wilderness (shields may not be accessible before the party goes for the corresponding knight's key). His party explores areas of the land, shown on the map (accessed from the START menu); King also uses the map to revisit previous places. His team helps attack enemies, and if a boss guards a particular knight's key, that knight volunteers to fight. However, a shieldless knight is usually ineffectual and often should be left behind to allow King to battle, but only the knight associated with the key can collect it afterwards. This fact frequently forces a return to Camelot, where party selections are made, followed by backtracking to the boss room to retrieve the key. These ideas of unnecessary travel and essentially wasting time are also seen in the side quests that lead to a key's location. Unfortunately, the experience feels like a giant session of fetch meant to create a longer game, with only a smattering of enemies and boss battles to give it action.





Reflections: I never saw the cartoon this game is based on, but I like the idea the developers seemed to be shooting for (think *A Link to the Past* in medieval times with multiple protagonists). It's too bad that the game doesn't deliver in any aspect. The storyline is uninspired, the structure creates anticlimactic victories (due to having to go back to Camelot before returning for keys), and the battle system lacks proper feedback (by featuring delayed enemy deaths with no indication of damage). Now, I did like some of the graphics, like the backgrounds of Camelot, but places such as the forest, which covers most of the land, look drab, lacking the same care to aesthetics and distinguishing landmarks to guide the way. *Knights of Justice* had the right idea but the wrong execution, and the entire game suffers for it. – KY

King Arthur's World

Genre: Puzzle, Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







King Arthur must fight a crusade in 23 levels of puzzle strategy with the help of knights, magicians, and other fighters. At the start of a level, a tent which represents your base is erected. The bottom of the screen displays two rows that provide information on your men. Once Arthur has summoned a follower from those available for the stage, their portrait appears in the upper row, while the lower one shows a list of actions. For instance, engineers can build many useful devices, such as catapults and battering rams, whereas knights can only fight. To position your people, press the controller's D-pad, or left-click with the SNES Mouse on the field with the appropriate directional arrow. On their path to ultimate victory, Arthur and his army have to survive spiked pits, fiery oil, and a maze of passageways. Also standing in Arthur's way are hordes of foes, such as sling wielders, alien creatures, and evil wizards. Bring King Arthur to the enemy leader to beat the level. If Arthur doesn't make it, he can bribe his captors with gold to get another chance. Otherwise, the stage's password can be used to continue. This game has great, detailed backgrounds ranging from the trees and mountains of the Real World to the alien structures of Cloud World. While it feels slow at times as units plod across the map, King Arthur can use this time to strategize the actions required to restore peace and return home a hero.





Reflections: It's difficult to play this game without comparing it to *Lemmings*. It has a map layout that requires some puzzling to use the correct units in the correct way in the correct order. I love that it is more than directing Arthur's army since you have to interact with objects, such as finding keys to open hidden doorways. The controls are fluid, and the interface is intuitive. Each area has its own background music as an appropriate theme. Some of the later stages do feel long and tedious, so if you feel the need for a break, tap the button with the paws. It pauses the game! Get it? Because "paws" and "pause" are homophones and… oh, just say it aloud, and it'll come to you. Then, get back to the game because it's one you'll want to play to the end! – KY

The King of Dragons

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Capcom
Ported by: Prism Kikaku
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







To keep red dragon Gildiss from turning Malus into a crispy fried kingdom, hotfoot it to his lair as one of five fantasy heroes: a sword-swinging Fighter, a speedy Elf archer, an axe-brandishing Dwarf, a Cleric that wields blunt weapons, or a Wizard that fires elemental blasts. These characters have various movement speeds, strike ranges, hit points, self-damaging magic attacks, and more. For example, the Elf shoots arrows from afar while the Cleric battles up close, and though the Dwarf and Fighter use flame magic, the rest summon lightning bolts. By defeating palette-swapped orcs, skeletons, lizard men, etc., and by collecting gold and gems, your hero obtains experience points and levels up, periodically increasing his life meter. He'll also find upgrades to his arms or armor, reflected by changes in the appearance of the Wizard's staff or the Fighter's shield, for instance. Chests, barrels, crates, and vases not only contain these aforementioned treasures, but also they hold healing fruits, rare continues, floating icons that cast attack spells, and booby traps. These, the onslaught of monsters, and large, interesting bosses such as the Orc King and Hydra will keep you busy through 16 timed side-scrolling levels. Each is featured on a map, giving an engaging sense of progression as you journey through forests, caves, and castles, but the lack of different enemy types falls a bit short of the settings' creativity. Unlike Gildiss, this arcade port won't totally set the world on fire, but it will spark lots of challenging enjoyment.





Reflections: Several bosses, such as the Black Knight and the second Wyvern, have hostages that speak to you when you free them. Most of their talk is rather ho-hum, updating you about enemy attacks and Gildiss's purported whereabouts. The best prisoner has to be the sentient, goofy-faced tree who exclaims "Oh thanks buddy" when you wrest his leafy limbs from Giant Spider infestation, but my favorite piece of text in the game comes before play even begins. After the title screen and a demo sequence, an old man appears to tell you that "Gildiss has crushed Peace under his iron tail." His tail? That's the most fearsome part of a dragon? Not his claws or his jaws? What does he do, take world conquest sitting down? I'd have thought that Gildiss's business end would be his flame-spewing face, but then again, when you're a dragon bent on obliterating kingdoms, you gotta be *all* business. – AP

King of the Monsters

Genre: Fighting, Wrestling
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Genki
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Giant monsters create mayhem across Japan as they battle each other in this interesting fighting/wrestling game hybrid. After choosing from a massive beetle, lizard, rock creature, or hero, players are tasked to defeat an opponent in a Japanese city setting that's flanked by electrified barriers; these bounce wayward beasts back like wrestling ring ropes. The monsters have simple punches and kicks, a chargeable beam, a dashing attack, four grappling moves, and the ability to jump around the sizeable stages. A successful grapple attack (body slam, bear hug, backdrop suplex, or piledriver) results in a floating Power Point orb. Collecting Power Points allows the monster to level up at two intervals, changing its color and unleashing stronger strikes, including a more powerful beam. When a combatant's life gauge is depleted, they can be defeated via a wrestling-style pin. The one-on-one fighting isn't too deep, and the grapple attacks are slightly more complicated than they need to be, but the eight Japanese city stages impress. Each one is nicely detailed, colorful, fairly large, and somewhat intricate, featuring an array of buildings and landmarks that can be destroyed when a monster stomps or falls onto them. Military vehicles, such as tanks, battleships, and jets, attempt to attack the monsters, but they can also be grabbed and thrown at opponents. The small variety of battlers and stages isn't built for much repeat fun, but it's fine for a little monster mashing here and there, and it can be a blast to toss a friend into a skyscraper in the two-player versus mode.





Reflections: The Neo Geo MVS arcade version of *King of the Monsters* is indeed the definitive version of the game and one I plunked many quarters into as a child. It not only features two extra cities but also two extra playable characters, including an ape-like King Kong creature called Woo. The extra horsepower of the MVS also allows two people to team up against a CPU monster. My personal preference was to select Astro Guy, a giant superhero character loosely based on the Japanese hero Ultraman. The lack of extra characters, stages, and a co-op mode is a detriment to the SNES port, but it's still a title that stretched fighting games a bit beyond the safe confines of the genre at the time. – PC

King of the Monsters 2

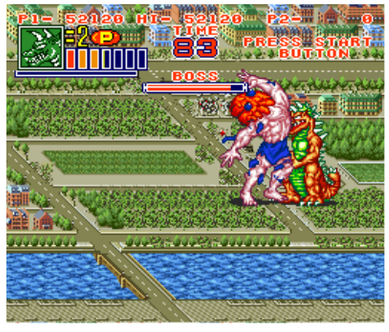
Genre: Fighting, Beat 'em Up
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Takara
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Three surviving monsters must defend Earth from alien attackers in this arcade sequel. One or two players can team up to tackle massive invaders across seven areas, including Paris, the Grand Canyon, an "American City," and more. Atomic Guy, Super Geon, and Cyber Woo are the selectable heroes, each with a unique set of three melee strikes, three meter-charged attacks, and two grappling moves. The destructible environments return from the initial installment in a smaller form, and now the player(s) must contend with alien enemies and some military threats while traversing left-to-right stages that culminate in a fight with a giant fiend. Grinding down these grotesque opponents can be a hassle depending on their wily attacks and the size of the health bar, but the wrestling-like grappling moves help. However, the D-pad "waggle" required to get the upper hand in theses struggles is tiresome and takes too long to complete, slowing down what should be fast-paced action. The charge-up attacks also seem to lack effectiveness versus the time required to ready them. The stages and monsters are nicely designed, but the lack of focus on destructible environments in lieu of minor alien aggressors doesn't suit the gameplay mechanics. Power-up orbs, including life restorers and one to level up the monster's HP and special attack power, can be obtained by destroying buildings. This is a very short game, with it only elongated by having to defeat prior enemies again on the last stage. The havoc is a bit brighter in co-op mode or versus a monstrous friend.





Reflections: It's somewhat interesting that this story is a direct sequel to the original, but Astro Guy is now Atomic Guy, the Godzilla-esque Geon is now Super Geon, and the King Kong-like Woo is now transformed into the robotic Cyber Woo (he may have had some work done to avoid a lawsuit). This title eschews the wrestling personality of the original, much to my chagrin, for a more traditional fighting style of play. While it may technically be a better game, I much prefer the original *King of the Monsters* due to its more intricate and fun city environments and wacky wrestling style, even if it's hamstrung on the Super NES. As an aside, the last boss, King Famardy, is a wretched creature both to look at AND battle, as his health bar seems to be longer than several normal bosses combined. – PC

Kirby Super Star
Kirby's Fun Pak (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer, Variety
Release Date: Sep. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







You are what you eat, especially when you're Kirby! Not only can this pink cutie fly, dash, swim, and more, he can also swallow enemies and "copy" over 20 powers, such as Beam, Hammer, and Yo-yo in this action-platformer medley. Most abilities work in multiple ways; for example, Parasol lets you strike, float downwards, prevent damage, and so on. Play with your food by transforming an assumed power into an AI- or human-controlled "helper" that follows and attacks. Both Kirby and the helper have life meters that you can refill with tomatoes and other goodies; doing so is necessary for beating most of this awesome cart's eight advertised games. *Spring Breeze* is a learner's mode that culminates in King Dedede's boxing ring. *Dyna Blade* ends levels with cannon challenges as you quest against a rainbow bird. In *The Great Cave Offensive*, you'll unearth 60 treasures using keen problem-solving skills on switches, hidden doors, wind/water currents, etc. *Revenge of Meta Knight* introduces timed stages and scheming enemy dialogue as you seek to duel the titular villain. *Milky Way Wishes* exchanges the "swallow and copy" system with ability icons that, once collected, can be used at will. *Gourmet Race*'s only fight is to the finish of three running courses as you try to eat more food than King Dedede, and both *Megaton Punch* and *Samurai Kirby* are minigames that test timing and reflexes. Though the fare can get a teensy bit repetitive (especially the bosses/minibosses), you won't hunger for fun with this sweet smorgasbord of games.





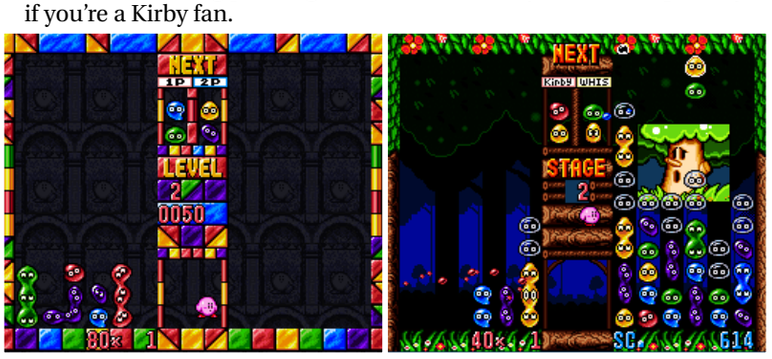
Reflections: I'm glad this is the first Kirby game to make him sprout little outfits when he absorbs a power – they illustrate his current ability, *and* they're adorable! Kirby's hot stuff with Fire's flickering headdress, but with Ice and a cool palette swap he becomes a chill, true blue pal. Swallowing a swordsman makes him cut a cute figure in a dreamy green nightcap, yet I can't decide if his duckbilled Cutter helmet is the sharper style or not. To get these looks and more, Kirby has to consume something – can you imagine getting dressed in real life that way? Would you be forced to wear loafers after having bread? How about fastening your shirts with candy buttons or getting a green, sickly hue from a nice, healthy salad? Like Kirby, we are what we eat, but I'm glad we don't also *wear* what we eat. Unless you're a sloppy eater. – AP

Kirby's Avalanche
Kirby's Ghost Trap (EU)

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Compile, HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★



Taking a break from his usual work defending Dream Land, Kirby organizes a tournament of the puzzle game *Avalanche*, which consists of two players placing pairs of colorful blobs onto their own boards. When a group of four or more blobs of the same color is created, it disappears, and everything above falls to fill in the space. Creating chains of these groups sends boulders (called an "avalanche") to the opponent's board to hinder their progress. You can only get rid of a boulder by making a match of blobs adjacent to it. The longer the chain and the more blobs within a group, the greater the field of boulders that is sent. If your opponent's board fills to the top, you win the round. When playing Competition mode, winning takes you to the next of 13 total opponents from the Dream Land universe. The other modes available are 1P VS. 2P and Practice, which allows one or two players to play without fear of avalanches. This game has a high difficulty curve, requiring you to quickly become proficient at setting up blob chains for boulders. Fortunately, the main mode offers unlimited continues, but brute force and luck are not enough to get you to the final match against King Dedede. This title has cute characters in the many familiar faces from the Kirby universe. The high difficulty means it isn't accessible to everyone beyond the first few levels, although it works well for two-player fun regardless of skill. It's an entertaining puzzle game that will make you smile, especially if you're a Kirby fan.



Reflections: I think Kirby is one adorable character, but that pink puffiness belies the challenge of this game. I was genuinely surprised by the skill required to beat it. Not only do you need quick reflexes to handle the ever-accelerating drop speed, but you also must plan your moves to create those avalanches. While all the characters are pleasing to see, the other graphics, such as the menus, aren't on par with the cuteness and lack the sparkle I would expect from a Kirby game. This title is a fun way to spend an afternoon, and it's even better if you have a friend to harass as you send a wall of boulders their way. After all, what other reason is there to play a head-to-head puzzle game than to delight in your opponent's frustration? – KY

Kirby's Dream Course

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★



King Dedede has stripped Dream Land's sky of stars, so Kirby's *teed off!* To restore the stolen celestial lights, you must help him become a ball and smash into the monarch's minions in 64 holes of golf split among eight isometric courses; afterwards, Kirby battles the penguin regnant himself. Use the D-pad and dotted guideline to determine Kirby's direction and whether he rises or rolls. You can apply topspin, backspin, or a curve before activating the shot power meter's single up-and-down sweep – stopping it fires Kirby forward, spending a tomato. Losing all four fruits from excessive shots, damage, or falling off the playfield costs a life, but aces award 1-ups, and hitting foes such as Waddle Dee recovers the pink linksman's lycopene. Certain enemies give Kirby special abilities, including Hi-Jump and Freeze, to help him overcome hazards ranging from bumps, bunkers, and water to spikes, turntables, and trampolines. When he's eradicated all but one adversary (Kracko, Gordo, and Whispy Woods notwithstanding), that final foe becomes the hole-ending cup. After sinking eight shots, Kirby's score might merit a gold, silver, or bronze medal – amassing these unlocks bonuses, including one for two-player games. With Kirby pitted against his yellow twin, these contests offer multiple courses, handicaps, chances to steal points and powers, and other fun features. Though doing well in this game can be challenging thanks to the precision it requires, cute graphics and music are par for the course, so quit puttering around – try putting instead!



Reflections: Parasol is my favorite Kirby ability, but its incarnation here is a bit unintuitive. You can use it to slow and steer Kirby's descent from a higher tier, but the way he turns is based on his perspective, not yours (i.e., if he's facing you, hitting LEFT on the D-pad pivots him to your right). The same goes for the U.F.O. and Tornado powers and even the guidelines themselves. Those dotty directors also don't exactly reflect a weaker shot's effect on Kirby's path, so you'll have to use finesse, a guess, or a boosting A button press to strive for success. At least entering your name isn't hard – you can use stamps and a golfing-appropriate stubby pencil to draw whatever you'd like to be displayed during your playthrough. I realized too late that I should have doodled a donut instead of my name – guaranteed hole in one on every screen! – AP

Kirby's Dream Land 3

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★

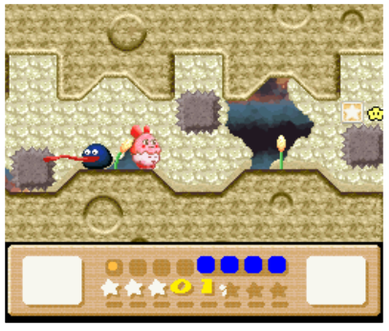






An evil cloud has possessed citizens of Planet PopStar, so Kirby must dispel its inky grip from five levels, each comprising six stages and a boss battle. Though Kirby swallows enemies to "copy" one of eight different attack abilities (Broom, Burning, Cutter, Ice, Parasol, Needle, Spark, or Stone), the real interest is in how he gets by with a little help from his friends. He can summon the Kirby-like Gooey at will as an attacking assistant commanded by AI or a second player. More importantly, during his journey through woods, water, deserts, clouds, and ice, Kirby meets up with Nago (cat), Coo (owl), Rick (hamster), Kine (fish), Pitch (bird), and ChuChu (blobby cephalopod). When he "unites" with one of these, he gains not only their personal skills, such as Nago's triple jump, but also their unique applications of his copied abilities, such as Kine's use of Spark to produce a light bulb. Some of the 48 possible combos of friend and attack are more novel than practical, but learning them is fun and often necessary to collecting a crucial Heart Star in every stage. These icons free each level's boss from possession and ultimately open the sixth and final level, but finding them requires clever problem solving to satisfy conditions ranging from tiptoeing around tulips to reassembling R.O.B. of NES fame. This game, the final Nintendo-published one for the SNES, is challenging but also reliably sweet, smart, and lovable – all things that make for a treasured friendship experience.





Reflections: The strong devotion of each of the animal friends to Kirby seems understandable – not only is he their planet's hero, but also he's a swell, all-around kind of guy! However, some details make me wonder if they aren't a bit *too* attached to him, possibly to the point of being unhealthy. Each one reacts very negatively if Kirby selects another companion within their view – Rick, ChuChu, and Coo all look despondent, Kine weeps, Pitch rages, and Nago seethes with silent anger. Then there's their jealous behavior in some of the inter-level cutscenes, where ChuChu absconds with Kirby to Rick's chagrin, only for Kine to steal him from her by *trapping him in his mouth*. There's an old saying that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," but for this game, maybe it should be reworked into "the friend of my friend is my enemy." – AP

Knights of the Round

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Broadsword. Sabre. Battle axe. These are the righteous tools needed to retrieve the Legendary Grail from evil, and in the singular grip of their respective wielders, their metal might mete out the justice that'll see Britain unified – *if* the fair knights fare well in your hands. Choose Arthur, balanced bearer of Excalibur; Lancelot, agile Adonis of blades; or Percival, pauldron-sporting powerhouse; and proceed to the right for seven timed levels of medieval assault across castle and countryside alike. Using simple strike sequences, leaping blows, self-damaging attacks, and a smattering of moves such as Percival's dash, you must lay low ubiquitous Soldiers, lithe Sky Walkers, beaky Bird Men, and other palette-swapped malefactors ere they empty your life meter. This is no mean feat; your quietus can come quickly courtesy of a few unguarded hits, even as you evolve in vigor. Verily, vanquishing villains and collecting treasure and health-restoring food from them and crushed casks accords experience, as does completing stages expediently. Once a point threshold is crossed, you attain a higher level with attendant image alterations. The increasingly elaborate armor and weapons are encouraging as you crusade, rescuing outmatched allies, pursuing a pilfered pennant, and battling bosses such as Muramasa and Braford. The latter knave can be unseated from his rideable steed, and horseplay also happens should you score a certain item, but such diversions from your straightforward quest are rare. Nevertheless, the sumptuous soundtrack, varied graphics, and stout challenge should engage whoso putteth in this cart of this arcade port.





Reflections: Aside from axing three-person simultaneous play and sending most stallions out to pasture, this game is a fairly faithful translation of its cabinet-kept predecessor. I quite enjoy its visuals, from the level preview/continue screen's war-room array laid on a decidedly *rectangular* table to the way the guffawing Tall Men fumble with their helms when felled. My favorite thing, however, is the treasure. Not only can you acquire anachronistic sterling tea services, but also you can often increase the point value of chests – by busting them apart! This "hit coin" investment strategy is intended as a way to divvy spoils between a pair of heroes, but adventure alone and it's all yours – forsooth! – AP

Krusty's Super Fun House

Genre: Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: June 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Audiogenic
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





The famous entertainer from *The Simpsons* has a rat problem in this platforming puzzler. The player must solve each of the fun house's 60 levels by carefully maneuvering the violet vermin to a manned rat trap somewhere in it, waiting to destroy them one by one. Falling too far or being hit by roaming enemies damages Krusty, who fights back with limited pies or SuperBalls; when the player runs out of lives, the game is over. The player has a single inventory slot that can be filled with blocks, pipes, springs, jars, and blowers; strategically repositioning these objects is critical to solving the levels. Clever exploration can also reveal hidden items inside kickable bonus blocks for points, extra lives, health, ammo, and timed bonus stages packed with prizes – but rapidly completing the level can reward the player with extra points via the Timer Bonus. If the player needs to reset a level, pressing SELECT will do so at the cost of a life. Passwords are awarded at the completion of a section, each of which contains up to 14 levels. Digitized samples of Krusty's voice and character sprites that accurately mirror series creator Matt Groening's art clash against level tilesets and music that feel less in step with that same source material. The result is a functional, lengthy title with just enough challenge to keep players thinking.





Reflections: Curious decisions abound in this Acclaim reskin of Audiogenic's *Rat Trap* for the Commodore Amiga. If certain parts of the SNES version feel out of place, it's because they didn't get the conversion treatment. The items and character sprites were changed, and Homer, Bart, and other familiar figures were added to the traps, but the levels were virtually untouched, helping explain why nothing about them feels much like a "fun house." Making the player return to the door after completing a stage feels laborious, the time for the Timer Bonus isn't visible, and Krusty can take multiple hits but very poorly communicates his current health. Even the idea of scoring a game like this with points, when the real sense of accomplishment comes from solving the "how" of each room, is a strange choice. Overall, this run-of-the-mill rat race feels every bit as slapdash as it looks; *Krusty's Super Fun House* is a perfectly passable platform puzzler but little else. – DG

Kyle Petty's No Fear Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil only)
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





This arcade-style stock car racing game tests the skills of virtual drivers on a variety of different courses and conditions. Players can jump right into the action in a single race, or they can take on a challenging 28-race season. There's also a track editor that allows players to design their own courses and race on them; however, there's no battery backup to save these creations once the console is powered off. Whether it's a single race or a season race, the flow of the game is the same. Before each competition, players can upgrade their vehicles. Purchasing these upgrades, especially in the Season mode, is imperative to winning. Buying additional tires and fuel system upgrades is important on longer tracks, as both of these degrade over the course of a race and need to be replaced and replenished during pit stops. A nitro booster is also available and can only be replenished during pit stops or by running over special icons on each track. Once the upgrades are complete, a qualifying lap is run to determine starting positions. Then, the main race is about speed and resource management; the crew chief comes on the radio to report when tires, fuel, or nitro are in need of replacement. Each course has curves and twists, which the game's choppy frame rate make difficult to anticipate, and it's tough to see the signs indicating turns. Braking is rarely needed, but skillful accelerator use is key to avoiding the wall. While the course settings are different, the courses themselves feel very similar before long. The graphics may struggle, but the sound quality is spot on, led by commentary from Larry "Supermouth" Huffman. It's not the prettiest racing game, but there's some solid arcade action here.





Reflections: This is essentially the stock car version of *Super Off Road*. The major difference lies in the perspective, which is now behind the car instead of from a bird's-eye view. While this new angle is different, it's also kind of a detriment and fixes what wasn't broken in *Super Off Road* and *Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat*. Not only does the frame rate suffer significantly because of the pseudo-3D visuals, but also it's tougher to navigate the turns than it should be. That said, the game is still fun to play after some practice and is worth a test drive. – PS

Lagoon

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Zoom
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Streaming from Lagoon Castle, Lakeland's limpid, life-giving waters have been defiled by evil – the contagion spreads as demons menace humans, hobbits, elves, dwarves, gnomes, and nymphs alike. As Nasir, young ward of the wizard Mathias, you must purify the realm of ills, evaporate the underlying manipulators, and distill your destiny as Champion of the Light. Your top-down journey flows through villages, vales, caves, and castles, and though the vistas vary from sylvan to molten to frozen, the hazards hardly alter: Aside from infrequent jumpable pits, most locales feature mazes of dead ends and deadlier enemies. The latter are manifold – wicked knights, cyclopean crabs, and cloaked ghouls are mere drops in the bucket of baddies to battle for experience and gold. However, close combat is not fluid, and no matter your sword's strength, its length is nil, making damage difficult to avoid. Fortunately, your health meter and magic points regenerate outside of boss battles, five mystical rings provide temporary benefits, and 16 combinations of acquirable staffs and elemental crystals allow projectile and screen-flooding spells to be cast. You can also find or buy defense-raising armor and shields – your appearance even reflects your current equipment. As you chat with fellow Lakeland denizens, encounter the odd-eyed, enigmatic Thor, seek the safety of Princess Felicia, and obtain keys, scant health items, and path-opening artifacts, you'll appreciate the ability to save at almost any time. Though the fiddly fighting does dampen the proceedings a little, the soundtrack and story still hold water.





Reflections: What a freeing sensation it is to max out Nasir's stats at level 35 and thus not feel obligated to engage with every pickaxe-wielding pig and sundry slime while using a sword that seems less effective than a wet towel whip (shorter range, too). It must be a sad thing for Nasir to peak at the precocious age of 14, though – to discover that he literally has no capacity to be any better than he is. That's almost as tragic a turn as this tale takes with Thor. The game's manual indicates that he's a figure of Darkness who parallels the Champion of the Light, but he wasn't intended to be evil by the gods who created them both to instill worldwide balance. I could say more about his fate, but not wanting to spoil anything, I'd rather not reveal much – it's just better to be safe than Thorry. – AP

Lamborghini: American Challenge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional), Super Scope (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Speed into the fast-paced world of illegal street racing, where you'll compete for big bucks and even bigger bragging rights in your Lamborghini Diablo. You can challenge a friend in the split-screen VS Mode or choose your driver and head straight for the Championship. From the Map Screen, select one of the yellow stars representing competitions across the United States. Once you agree to enter a race, you can place monetary bets against some of your opponents, who have the ability to raise your wager. Racing your beloved Lamborghini in a behind-the-car view simply involves staying on the track while avoiding collisions with fellow racers and other traffic. Controls are basic but fluid and generally responsive. Taking damage along the way does negatively affect your Diablo's performance, but hitting roadside trees or poles barely slows you down, making the game feel relatively easy. Unfortunately, the various tracks and courses all feel very similar to each other, with no real variety other than the visual settings and weather conditions. You'll have to pass opponents quickly while using nitro boosts to escape from police pursuers who aim to catch you and impose hefty fines. Earning cash for performance upgrades is a fun aspect of the racing, with it needed for repairs and essential post-race improvements like tire, exhaust, and engine modifications. Four cutthroat divisions await with 60 tracks from Portland to Boston. Serious street racers such as Otomo, Felicia (and Bozo?) yearn to take your money and your dignity, so fire up that snarling Lamborghini and show them who's boss, early '90s style in this very average racer!





Reflections: On the surface, *Lamborghini: American Challenge* isn't exactly pushing the boundaries of innovation. But not so fast, speed demon! Stomp on those brakes and power up this game with the Super Scope peripheral plugged in. Now you can take aim at your screen and literally blow away your competition! That's right, fire at your opponents with the massive light gun, and turn those enemy automobiles into balls of flame! Player Two can even join in on the shenanigans, using the SNES Mouse peripheral to pilot your Lamborghini while you have all the fun annihilating your fellow racers. Don't worry; if you don't have a friend to get behind the wheel while you have the time of your life blowing up rare and exotic supercars, the computer will do the driving for you. Simply ingenious. – DM

Last Action Hero

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bits Studios
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







When a magical movie ticket transports Danny Madigan into the world of his favorite action hero, he finds himself teaming up with the indestructible Jack Slater to save the day. After discovering that mobster henchman Benedict has stolen the ticket and traveled to the real world with his sinister crew, Jack and Danny must work to thwart his plans before it's too late. Based on the 1993 action-comedy film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, this game throws you into the battle-hardened shoes of Jack Slater as he fights his way through Benedict's army of ruthless thugs. What should be a thrilling adventure, however, is constantly let down by some incredibly uninspired combat. Despite holding the title of "action hero," Jack Slater is limited to two measly attacks – a lackluster punch and a sluggish kick – which, even more bafflingly, can't be chained together for a more powerful assault. You'll find yourself performing the same mundane moves against adversaries who couldn't be more apathetic if they tried. Enemies strike lethargically and – provided you approach carefully – can be stun locked with a few well-timed blows. Even their movement lacks enthusiasm. Opponents crawl into new side-scrolling areas at a snail's pace, and you'll often be left waiting for them to appear as you stand helplessly in the middle of a completely empty screen. To make matters even worse, you're forced to frantically race your way through each stage thanks to an unbelievably restrictive time limit. Throw in a couple of out-of-place driving sequences and a few unimaginative boss fights, and you've got the perfect recipe for an immensely unsatisfactory game.





Reflections: I get the feeling that Bits Studios was running on an extra tight animation budget. It's honestly difficult to ignore the fact that Jack Slater's always punching with exactly the same arm in exactly the same way. It would've been nice to see a little more variety in our hero's animation – even just a slight change to the angle of each blow would've been great! I guess I was just expecting more from a game that calls itself *Last Action Hero*. – AF

The Lawnmower Man

Genre: Action, Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Sales Curve
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Jobe, a formerly docile human test subject in a virtual reality experiment, has gone mad and gained the power to control electronics worldwide. Dr. Angelo – the scientist responsible for Jobe's transformation – and his friend Carla must stop him in this loose adaptation that uses imagery from the eponymous movie. You can choose between Dr. Angelo or Carla, but they're identical. Gameplay alternates between "reality" (a run and gun platformer), and "virtual reality." Reality takes place in streets and buildings where you shoot repetitive enemies, such as agents, soldiers, and lab chimpanzees, before they shoot you. Everything seems too small, especially bullets, while an oversized HUD with score, life, and other information covers the top and bottom of the screen. Enemies drop items including weapons, bombs, and data CDs, but you lose everything upon death, which only takes one hit unless you have armor. Secret computer terminals which yield more power-ups and lives if you solve timed pattern puzzles provide some variety. You also briefly fly a helicopter and spend a level driving a motorcycle in a top-down horizontal shooter fashion. Floating hexagonal portals on each level lead to 3D-style virtual reality sequences. There are two general types: first-person flight simulations where you fly forward automatically and avoid obstacles, sometimes shooting enemies, and a third-person variant with a faster pace. While these sequences are frustrating due to delayed controls, they represent the movie well. Reaching the exit of a VR section grants access to a new reality area. Two players may play simultaneously but take turns on VR courses; only one needs to win to open the portal. Generally, none of the many gameplay types are great, and while the music isn't bad, it lacks variety. Level bosses are often boring machines with too much HP, although more important bosses have unique VR battlefields. The final boss is, creatively, not who you'd expect, but there is little explanation for him and scant satisfaction for beating the game.





Reflections: As a child, I was fascinated with this movie because of its early CG, which I still like. Clips from it were on a CGI compilation video I had called *Beyond the Mind's Eye*. I didn't own this game, but I wanted it because it resembled the movie. Since the movie is about video games, it's disappointing that the actual game is mediocre. The current availability of VR devices makes the movie silly now, but it's an interesting time capsule. – KN

Legend

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Arcade Zone
Publisher: Seika
(PAL: Sony Imagesoft)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★⋆




Vanquish Clovis, the king's evil son, and bring peace to the land of Sellech in this medieval hack and slasher. A combination of weapon, jump, and magic attacks is key to completing the six stages on offer. This is no easy task when venturing through forests, swamps, castles, and taverns to fight against skeletons, spearmen, wizards, and even swamp monsters. Items appear from fallen foes who drop health-restoring food, keys to open chests in bonus stages, and magic that can be saved up to unleash deadly screen-wiping attacks or used when one of the difficult bosses needs to be chopped down to size. These master enemies are an interesting mix of gigantic sprites that includes tree monsters, dungeon executioners, and fire-breathing dragons. They can take a huge effort to defeat because the difficulty ramps up significantly for them, so keeping the health bar full before an encounter might save precious lives. The action never lets up, but the characters are quite slow, and the experience does become repetitive. There is a turbo option in the PAL version's main menu that speeds up proceedings, but the solid yet rinse-and-repeat gameplay does let down what would otherwise be a very good brawler.




Reflections: This has the potential to be on par with Sega's *Golden Axe*, as it clearly draws some inspiration from/blatantly plagiarizes it. The screen-filling magic is definitely a nod to its predecessor, as are parts of its overall presentation. The game looks great, and I love huge, chunky sprites, but more variety in the playable characters would have increased longevity. Both heroes are nearly identical and have the same limited moves. If this had the moveset and diversity of, say, *Streets of Rage 2* but in a *Willow* setting, then it could have been a contender for one of the greatest beat 'em ups of its era. As it stands, it ticks all the boxes but doesn't go that little bit extra, presentation aside. Grab a buddy, though, and have a blast through it – there is much fun to be had. Just remember to uncheck the option to share lives in the main menu, as that is just the worst idea ever. – JE

The Legend of the Mystical Ninja

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Feb. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★




When trouble brews in ancient Japan, Kid Ying and Dr. Yang spring to action in this memorable action-packed adventure. Spanning nine Warlock Zones full of foes, shops, and hidden areas, each level has players explore an open-world area with a beat 'em up style to it, followed by a side-scrolling platformer section that functions as the level's dungeon, often capped off with a unique boss. This formula gets shaken up from zone to zone with the inclusion of vertical scrolling, looping rooms, auto-scrollers, mazes, etc., yet the primary gameplay of running, jumping, and melee attacks remains consistent throughout. Along the way, players collect coins to spend on bombs, armor, skill training, extra lives, and key items needed to progress… or they can throw the currency as a ranged attack! Foes drop helpful items, such as melee weapon upgrades and power scrolls to spend on Judo skills. Zones reflect the journey across Japan, from the capital to distant corners of the country, and gorgeous cutscenes only improve the experience. Unlimited continues are welcome, and the game allows saving through a journal system, but the passwords are among gaming's most complicated. If things get too difficult, players can take time to farm cash and stock up on items, either by fighting foes or playing in one of countless minigames. Simultaneous play makes the trip even more enjoyable, so players should find the Dr. Yang to their Kid Ying and prepare for an ambitious, entertaining adventure across Japan.




Reflections: The world of Goemon and Ebisumaru (changed to Kid Ying and Dr. Yang, respectively) is a testament to the good and bad that come from localization. That it even made it to North America is a blessing, given that the other four Super Famicom titles in the series didn't, but what makes the Goemon universe so charming is how replete it is with Japanese lore, from the settings drawn from real-world locations to the people inhabiting them. The heroes are based on Robin Hood-style thieves from legend. Special attacks, weapons, items... everything is rich in cultural references. Just asking questions and getting immersed in *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja* can be a great way to learn, and opportunities like that are wasted when localization coats gems like this in a veneer of terrible stereotypes. Thankfully, most of those efforts were confined to the manual, so the game is largely intact. If you haven't experienced the world of Ganbare Goemon, this is the perfect title to begin your own journey with. – DG

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★



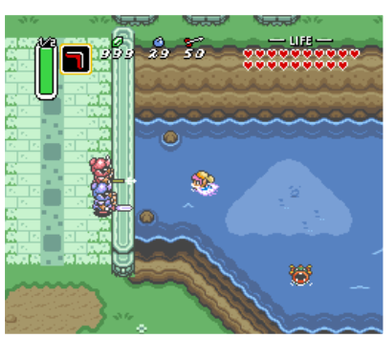




The seal that blocks the bleed of evil is soon to shatter, lashed by the vanishing of six lasses at the hands of wicked wizard Agahnim. Should Princess Zelda also succumb to these machinations, Ganon, corrupt keeper of the potent Triforce, will emerge from his Dark World lair to lay waste to the corresponding Light World of Hyrule. Psychically seeking assistance, Zelda establishes a vital Link by summoning you to become the legendary Hero. Please heed her plea, not only for her and Hyrule's sake, but also for yours – after all, this tremendous top-down quest is a peerless pleasure sustained by its own trio of 16-bit triumphs: the power of gorgeous graphics, the courage of inspiring music, and the wisdom of engaging gameplay.

Massive, memorable, and mapped well, the kingdom is captivating to explore, from the perilous peaks of Death Mountain to the deep waters of Lake Hylia. And behold: There's twice the world to wander, thanks to the tarnished Golden Land. There, stout trees acquire attitudes, a soggy swamp drenches the desert, and even you undergo a *hare*-raising change (at least temporarily). The twin territories' transformative interconnections tickle your thinker into considering cause and effect between them, but their myriad dungeons offer even more to perplex you. Whether you're leading Zelda through royal sewers, securing mystical pendants to merit the Master Sword, or rescuing the crystalized missing maidens, there's a multilevel maze of trap-laden rooms to test your wits. Locked doors, sneaky switches, pits, pitch darkness, bombable walls, and additional obstacles pose puzzling challenges, but if you're brainy enough to overcome these trials (with the help of maps, compasses, keys, etc.), then surely you realize that almost every area is also haunted by hateful adversaries. Possessed soldiers, jumpy skeletons, sorcerous Wizzrobes, and other cunning creatures are aching to empty your growing heart meter, but you obtain many means of battling back. Your swordsmanship allows you to strike, spin attack, and so on, but you can also spend magic to cast attack spells, fling the stunning boomerang, fire expendable arrows, and more.





Indeed, you're able to perform amazing acts across your adventure, especially as you score the Pegasus Boots, Power Glove, Hammer, Hook Shot, and other intriguing items – you can uproot bushes and boulders, dash through tall grasses, dive into whirlpools and warp tiles, and much else to make your way around areas abounding in delightful details. There are so many secrets to search for and sights to see as you seek peace, from treasure chests and Mysterious Ponds to the stained-glass Sanctuary and the haze that hides thieves in the Lost Woods. Speaking of thieving, copious characters are here to steal your notice – and perhaps your heart. The telepathic elder Sahasrahla, the tragically fated Flute Boy and his father, even your own fallen uncle – these and others are who you're fighting for, lending your mission emotional resonance. Of course, Koji Kondo's supreme soundtrack furthers the stirring feelings with elegant arpeggios, the clarion call of the classic overworld theme, and the driving drumbeats during boss battles. If those big baddies or their minions harm you, consume a potion purchased with collected rupees or release a bottled faerie – the little ladies and their mighty mistresses are major allies, but help also comes from dwarven smiths, a laconic lock picker, a music-loving bird, and many more who want to see you succeed against Ganon. You, too, will be glad for embarking on this wondrous journey of justice, so hold high the blade of evil's bane, and feel the majesty, the beauty, and the strength it throws off into one of the finest titles, not just in the series, not just on the console, but of all time.





Reflections: I know that many of you reading have played this game of games, have played through it more than once, and are happy to return to 16-bit Hyrule again, even though you know the exquisite quest by heart – and by pieces of Heart. It seems sweetly fitting that we search the worlds of Light and Dark for those precious emblems – they not only give us life; they symbolize love. I so strongly love this title, from the initial Nintendo twinkle through the characters I care for to the triumphant ending that, I admit, makes me tear up a bit. For me, it's the sheer force of feeling that slowly builds, just like the story and skills, until a lasting Link is forged – even when I call the Hero by something other than that classic name. If you haven't yet tried this title, fear not – you are fortunate. You get to experience for the first time this rightfully adored adventure, and it's my humble hope that it evolves into a cherished love for you as well… forever! – AP





Lemmings

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: DMA Design
Ported by: Psygnosis
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Migrating in an orderly line from their computer origins, these brave but fragile green-haired heroes need a guiding hand to make it to their destination safely. Using a point-and-click interface to target Lemmings and assign them skills, players must carefully study maps, identify what skills need to be given to what Lemmings, and rescue as many as possible, with a certain percentage required to advance. There are 120 levels in all, 30 each of the four difficulty ratings – Fun, Tricky, Taxing, and Mayhem. The user interface shows the skill of the targeted Lemming, how many have entered the map, what percentage have been rescued, the remaining time, the rate of Lemming release, how many assignments the player has left of each skill type (from left to right: Climber, Floater, Bomber, Blocker, Builder, Basher, Miner, and Digger), the Lemming Bomb (which gives all Lemmings on the screen the Bomber skill for free as a quick and colorful end), and a minimap of the level layout. Early levels teach the player how to apply the various abilities with a cursor, while later levels, particularly Taxing and beyond, require pinpoint usage of multiple skills to complete. Two-player mode is even more frenetic, with participants competing on one of 20 levels to steer all the Lemmings to their own flagged gate on a vertically split screen, where released Lemmings alternate color to key which players can assign skills to them. The soundtrack is a mix of arranged versions of famous tunes and original compositions that fit the settings, which vary from aquatic antiquity to fiery factories, each presenting a new challenge to overcome.





Reflections: Oftentimes, when games like *Lemmings* make the long, treacherous migration from computer to console, something gets lost in the experience. Thankfully, little does here. The level designs remain as clever yet merciless as their prior incarnations, the music maintains most of its charm, and the spectacular sight of dozens of Lemmings exploding is as cathartic as ever. The use of the D-pad is sufficient, but the game would have benefitted from SNES Mouse support. There are some smart decisions to compensate, such as using the X and Y buttons to cycle skills and the L and R buttons to pan the map. Personally, I'd prefer if skills could be assigned while the game is paused, particularly when trying to execute a pixel-perfect plan, but the mayhem of micromanaging mindless murids makes *Lemmings* as fun as it is. – DG

Lemmings 2: The Tribes

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: DMA Design
Ported by: Psygnosis
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional), Super Scope (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







To escape prophesied darkness, 12 tribes of Lemmings must voyage to a new land, so it is up to the player to carefully micromanage their side-view journey with the aid of a cursor. Drastically expanding the skill set of the previous title, there are now 50 different abilities to teach Lemmings, ranging from the familiar Basher, Floater, and Digger to the extreme Laser Blaster, Surfer, and Super Lem. Players must use their cursor to assign Lemmings skills to help them escape each level alive. The various tribes function as level themes and include Sports Lemmings, Space Lemmings, Medieval Lemmings, and more. Each tribe also has a particular combination of skills to work with, giving their levels a unique look and feel. The addition of a fast-forward button allows for quicker resolution of maps that have been fully solved. The difficulty curve is much steeper this time around thanks to more complex skills, the introduction of the fan cursor (used to control certain wind skills, such as Parachuter and Icarus Wings), managing multiple spawn gates, and trying to keep as many Lemmings alive from stage to stage (each tribe's losses persist, meaning fewer and fewer available to solve later levels). While this poses a real challenge and an ambitious expansion of the original game's vision for die-hards, this sequel loses some of the prior entry's charm in its pursuit of complexity and should absolutely be experienced after, and not before, its legendary predecessor.





Reflections: Despite its passionate fans, it's hard for me to view *Lemmings 2* as anything more than a cautionary tale. If eight skills are great, why not 50? Remembering lost Lemmings across levels? Mixing up the suites of skills to give the tribes personality? These ambitious ideas come at a cost; the cohesion of the original work arises, in part, from identifying and mastering the use of fewer skills to account for increasingly difficult scenarios. Many of the skills in *Lemmings 2* feel overly specific. Combine that with this game's far less forgiving difficulty ramp and the potential for soft-locks, and the result is an experience that can be unexpectedly frustrating. Thankfully, unannounced Super Scope "support" in the game lets you take out said frustration by blowing away Lemmings with it! For an added bit of fun, be sure to poke the "i" in the *Lemmings* part of the logo to enable overhead text for some of the Lemmings' reactions. – DG

Lester the Unlikely

Genre: Platformer, Adventure
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: DTMC
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★





Gutless geek Lester falls asleep at the docks and is accidentally loaded onto a ship that's later hijacked and sunk by pirates. He swims to a nearby island, and it is up to the player to get him home in this platform adventure. 22 diverse stages are on offer, ranging from beaches and caves to a tribal village and a pirate ship, and Lester can run, jump, and kick his way through them. Or at least he could if the AI wouldn't routinely have him cower and run away from stalactite drips, turtles, bats, and almost anything else that is generically on a tropical island. He can pick up weapons, such rocks, a boomerang, and a sword, to aid him against foes, and he must also solve routine puzzles, such as snagging a key or replacing an emerald crystal, to progress. Eventually, he meets Tikka, daughter of Hector, the island leader whom he must save to escape his plight. Lester has a health bar that's replenished by drinking from canteens, but he dies immediately if he plunges into a spike trap, so edging through each stage becomes the way to go. Visually, the game is quite varied and interesting, featuring rotoscoped graphics, but it falls apart with unresponsive controls that, when married with required pixel-perfect jumps, spell an all too likely disaster.





Reflections: This game would have stayed off the radar had it not been for a certain Angry Video Game Nerd making it famous. After all, having the controllable avatar run away by his own volition is counterintuitive to gaming. Later on, Lester gains more confidence in his abilities and turns his amble animation that looks like his pants are full of custard into a manlier walk, but that improvement is a case of "too little, too late" because the controls are still painfully woeful. There are some nice touches, such as stealing a key from a guard to escape a prison cell or avoiding ghostly hands trying to grasp at him, but these are stamped out by the sheer number of negatives laden throughout. If a game can't be controlled, then it is broken, regardless of the content on offer. The whole point of our hobby is escapism so that we can be that superhero or sportsman or sarcastic dog in a Mackintosh that solves crimes – not a stereotypical nerd that is scared of a crab. – JE

Lethal Enforcers

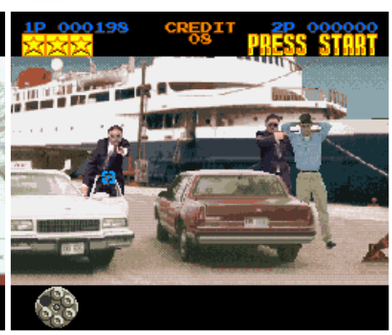
Genre: Shooting Gallery, First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Justifier (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★





Players assume the role of police officers in this arcade-style light gun shooter. A training mission and five stages await, offering the opportunity to take down bank robbers, gang members, gunrunners, terrorists, and more. Digitized images of these lawbreakers appear on-screen, often from behind cover, and fire on the player shortly thereafter. Armed with a six-shot revolver, players must be quick on the trigger to deliver justice, and similar speed is required to reload by pressing a single button or shooting off-screen with the Justifier accessory. Along the multi-area stages, players must avoid both being shot and shooting hostages, civilians, and assisting officers, lest their five-hit health bar be eliminated (eight credits are available to continue). The five stages, which feature some scrolling sections but are mostly stationary scenes, may be played in any order the player wishes. The challenge definitely ramps up if stages are tackled in sequence, as seen in the frequency of enemies, how quickly they fire after appearing, and the difficulty of stage bosses, such as a baddie armed with a rocket launcher in a van, a knife thrower on a train, and even an attack helicopter. Weapon upgrades in the form of a magnum, automatic handgun, assault rifle, shotgun, machine gun, and grenade launcher are available by shooting their icons. The digitized backgrounds, enemies, over-the-top voice acting, and cheesy, up-tempo music all blend into an entertaining experience, even if it's somewhat repetitive and thin.





Reflections: The blue Justifier pistol, which was similar to the popular arcade game's accessory, was packed in with this title, but it wasn't compatible with anything else on the SNES. A pink Justifier for a second player (connected by daisy chaining it to the blue one) was available directly from Konami via mail order from the game's manual, and it worked with both the SNES and Sega Genesis Justifier. *Lethal Enforcers* was one of the titles spotlighted during the violent video game controversy that happened in the early '90s, along with games such as *Night Trap* (Sega CD) and *Mortal Kombat*. In fact, Senator Joe Lieberman wielded a blue Justifier pistol in 1993 during one of the congressional hearings on violence in video games, the highly publicized government meetings that would eventually lead to the rise of the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board). The violence was toned down in the SNES port by eliminating blood, something that Lieberman probably wasn't aware of. – PC

Lethal Weapon

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Riggs and Murtaugh, those dynamic, mismatched detectives from the famous films, are back on patrol in this criminally difficult platformer. The "fun" begins at police headquarters, where they must choose between four missions of acrophobic proportions before unlocking the final climax. No question, whether searching the sewers for hidden bombs or infiltrating an enemy stronghold for stolen weaponry, their greatest threat is gravity – spike traps, shark-infested waters, and even giant, dicing fans will quickly retire the doddering officer. Yes, hurling oneself across dangling cables, moving elevators, and withdrawing platforms while under constant enemy fire is all part of being a cop in this nonsensical world, as is getting sucked into air ducts, hopping across electrified floors, firing at foes with a puny handgun, and outswimming hungry, hippo-sized gators. In keeping with their varying natures, Riggs sports the faster trigger finger while Murtaugh boasts the better jump. Yet, once the mission begins, the characters can't be swapped until the first falls in battle, rendering their differences largely irrelevant. Play control is similarly eccentric; when landing on a static surface, characters pause, just slightly, before resuming forward at top speed. But on smaller, more ephemeral platforms? That subtle delay is removed, creating a capricious set of physics that ultimately leads to more suicidal falls. And that's just the beginning – neither hero can fire while ducking, the time limit is insufficient to complete most missions, enemies attack off-screen and show no reaction when damaged, level objectives are obtuse or unclear, stages are long-winded and can feature punishing backtracking, ammo must be hoarded, the secondary kick attack is mostly useless, the bosses are unremarkable, and that hallmark of desperate game design – the obtrusive switch puzzle – is used with relish. Obligatory ammo, time, and health pickups do little to soften the frustration. Graphics fare no better, with heroes and foes alike resembling sprites from the 8-bit era, although the excellent, synthy soundtrack almost makes the game worth playing anyway. Almost.





Reflections: I struggled with this one – no doubt, the game is bad, but just how bad exactly? *Rex Ronan* bad? *Musya* bad? Or maybe just good enough to be on mediocre *Metal Morph*'s level? Indeed, at its best, I do believe *Lethal Weapon* is more a two-star game, but its never-ending list of unnecessary frustrations forced my critical hand. Nevertheless, kudos to maestro Dean Evans for delivering the game's one shining positive… that wonderfully engrossing soundtrack. – DA

Liberty or Death

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





In this turn-based historical strategy sim, players guide the American or British armies in an attempt to take control of the colonies during the American Revolution. Each side offers a different scenario. If America is chosen, the player starts with little in the way of resources and must build their power through the support of the people and the prowess of Commander-in-Chief George Washington, whereas if the Brits are picked, the player is tasked to crush the rebellion with the King's armies and coffers. The main screen has options that can be used to attack other colonies, offer bribes to bring enemy territory down from within, disseminate propaganda, recruit more soldiers, train them, purchase cannons and ships, etc. When troops are sent to attack, the game cuts to a top-down, turn-based affair where the object is to destroy the opponent forces. Infantry, cannons, and cavalry have a set number of moves before their turn is up, and using terrain such as hills to position them awards attack and defense bonuses. If the colony under attack is connected to the sea, ships can be used for additional firepower support. Battles have food and gunpowder rations, so avoiding lengthy skirmishes is vital. Overall, this is an interesting yet initially daunting experience that features many famous faces from the past, including British General Thomas Gage and Patrick Henry, whose impassioned 1775 speech lends this title its name.



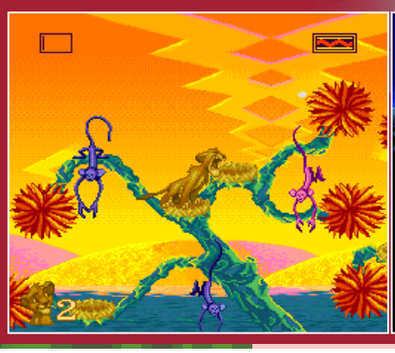


Reflections: "Eat, sleep, rinse, and repeat" should be the Koei mantra by now as yet again they put out another game that's essentially the same as their others, albeit with minor tweaks here and there. The titles in their back catalogue predominantly consist of taking over the land while scratching your brain with all the nonsensical options on offer, but each is always fun and engrossing to play. The wall of difficulty is present, but once the game clicks, it's easy to learn from previous mistakes. Having the choice of either army is a fun slant here, providing different hurdles to overcome and increasing the game's already lengthy longevity. After playing what can only be the billionth one of these games for this book (and also for a certain NES guidebook), it is safe to say that I am a fan of their Historical Simulation Series, warts and all. This entry doesn't do anything fancy (hence the score), but it is a decently entertaining game that's worthy of your time. – JE

Lion King, The (Disney's)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Westwood Studios
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







Be prepared to help young lion Simba through 10 mostly side-scrolling stages that follow in the paw prints of the titular animated masterpiece. On the path unwinding through the Pridelands, an eerie elephant graveyard, a thorny wasteland, and more, you'll be regaled with renditions of "I Just Can't Wait to Be King" and other tracks from the film, while voice samples from Mufasa, Scar, Pumbaa, etc. bring the lushly illustrated landscapes and Disney-animated characters to the circle of life. The experience is not all "Hakuna Matata," however – there are plenty of worries. Dodging an auto-scrolling wildebeest stampede, leaping on waterlogged logs, outrunning rolling boulders, swinging from bones and rhino tails, and puzzling through interconnected caves aren't even the lion's share of the perils you'll face. You'll also battle lizards, frogs, vultures, cheetahs, and, of course, those slobbering, mangy, stupid poachers, the hyenas. Fortunately, Simba (who begins as a cub but grows up) has a life bar that is replenished by grabbing certain beetles; red bugs extend its length, while blue ones increase his roar meter. This gauge allows him to vocalize, dazing or hurting some foes. He also attacks by pouncing, and adult Simba can strike, maul, and toss certain enemies, while little Simba can roll. Even with these abilities, level checkpoints, and the chance to earn extra lives and continues in Timon and Pumbaa's bonus games, Simba's quest to heal past scars and subdue current king Scar is extremely challenging. You must be truly lionhearted to triumph.





Reflections: You know what's the pits? Zazu, huffy hornbill and Mufasa's right-paw bird, is nowhere to be found in this game. In the North American version, all he manages is an unceremonious spot in the back of the manual, just above the warranty information, where his downturned beak and upper-crust air evoke his indignation. While he's not a central character, I find the classy, crisp comic relief he provides the film to be on par with, if not superior to, the garrulous and gaseous stylings of Timon and Pumbaa. Their boisterous voices and visages both appear in the game, but I really miss the dulcet tones that the man behind Mr. Bean could've provided – a little Atkinson-comma-Rowan could have kept me goin'. What's more, even love interest Nala is nil here, so when "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" plays over the game's end credits, Simba must be lion alone. – AP

Lock On
Super Air Diver (EU)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Copya System
Publisher: Vic Tokai (PAL: Sunsoft)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆







Take to the skies as experienced jet fighter pilot Jake Steel and bring the pain to a Middle Eastern dictator who is menacing the world. In a third-person perspective, players face both air and ground forces throughout eight missions while piloting four types of aircraft (F-14D Super Tomcat, FS-X, A-10A Thunderbolt II, Tornado IDS). Before starting an objective, players choose which of these they'd like to control (an additional jet becomes available for the last confrontation). The planes have both advantages and disadvantages depending on their weight and the two types of missiles they carry, but it's hard to tell these differences in battle. During flight, helpful information such as missile count, radar, plane damage, and fuel amount is located on the upper portion of the screen. Air missions consist of destroying enemy jets while shooting off flares to lure heat-seekers away from the player's plane. After a set amount of kills, the boss makes an appearance, and these dogfights may be difficult for some, considering the massive damage the enemy jet can withstand. Fancy barrel rolling and loop-the-loops mixed with precise gatling gun fire are required to take down these tougher adversaries. In contrast to the air combat, ground missions are extremely easy, tasking players to simply shoot missiles at targets while dodging enemy fire. Besides the eight story missions, there are also two special missions that award players two extra lives if completed successfully. Visually speaking, there isn't much to get excited about. The jets lack detail, and the desert and city missions are filled with blurry, overly pixelated Mode 7 graphics. The soundtrack, on the other hand, is packed with memorable tunes. If it weren't for the drawn-out boss battles, this game would be a lot of fun.





Reflections: Beginning the first mission of *Lock On* was a thrilling experience. I was zipping through the air and taking out enemy jets left and right while performing barrel rolls for no reason other than it looking cool. My smile faded when the first boss showed up. This guy just didn't want to die! I must have hit him with over 75 missiles before he finally decided enough was enough. I wish I could have seen the jet after our battle. Considering all the damage I did to it, I'm picturing a skeleton holding a throttle in a smoldering pile of ashes. – MV

Looney Tunes B-Ball
Looney Tunes Basketball (EU)

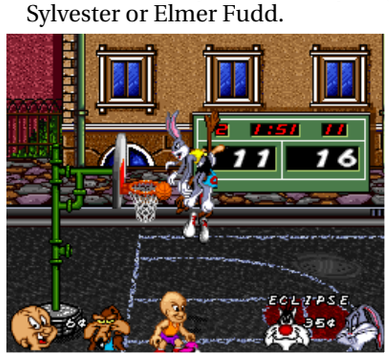


Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: SNES Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and more from the Looney Tunes crew compete in this zany two-on-two basketball outing. After selecting options such as quarter length and CPU difficulty (adjustable for single games but not tournament mode), players choose two of eight characters, each with varying levels of five different attributes: Shooting, 3 Pointers, Defense, Speed, and Stamina. In quick horizontal action, players pass and attempt jump shots, three pointers, layups, and incredible-looking slam dunks on the opposing team. On defense, players steal the ball, push, and try to block shots. A turbo button gives a temporary speed boost on both sides of the ball, but it must be rested after use. The game plays very smoothly and looks true to its cartoon roots with its excellent animation, especially in the acrobatic and wild dunks. Gems collected on the court can be cashed in for one of several selectable offensive/defensive ACME plays, adding a wacky and comedic element to the mix. Best amongst these are the character-specific Long Range and Defense! ones, which permit moves such as Wile E. Coyote strapping the ball to a rocket for a shot attempt or Yosemite Sam firing his pistols at an opponent's feet to make them drop the ball. Other ACME plays including Cream Pie, Eclipse, and Bomb Squad are much more limited in effectiveness. A big flaw is the unbalanced AI, as teammates are less helpful on both sides of the ball than they should be. Stealing is also too difficult, often leading to open layups/dunks if missed, and blocking dunks is impossible. There is some fun here, but a lack of gameplay polish means multiplayer is the way to go – if you can find friends to be Sylvester or Elmer Fudd.





Reflections: This could have been an excellent *NBA Jam* clone, with better sound effects and graphics than the SNES port of the Midway classic. However, the ACME plays are both a blessing and a curse, as they tie in well with the Looney Tunes world, but they overcomplicate what should be a distilled, simple basketball experience. The inability to block dunks is also a weird design choice, as the game can devolve into a back-and-forth slamfest with little strategy involved. I appreciate the nice touches here, such as character-specific dunks (Marvin the Martian in his spaceship!), but there's not enough of a true basketball feel to justify the fancy fluff. – PC

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



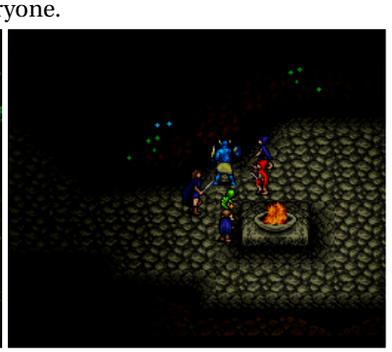
Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional), Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★





In this action-RPG that's after the hearts of Tolkien fans, control Frodo, and later Aragorn, with a band of companions to carry the One Ring to the elven city of Rivendell (and beyond). You begin in Hobbiton by helping Frodo gather a few friends. Speak to NPCs for info about your current goals by walking near them. With a Multitap, up to five people can control characters (once you've acquired enough), but if you're adventuring solo, you can direct the other sprites by holding R. You need to do this in order to level up your companions through real-time fights against wolves, orcs and other enemies. While allies do attack on their own, the AI does not actively try to gain experience. Care for your party by leveling them up and keeping them healthy or else lose them. If the whole party dies, however, you continue with your levels and items intact. While transporting the One Ring is the overarching goal, throughout each location you are sent on various fetch quests to gain access to the next area. When you get the requested item (often after much backtracking), you equip it from the SELECT menu with B, then use that item near the corresponding NPC. While there is great music, the graphics are dark and muddy. The vast amount of backtracking required for each section plus the large, maze-like caves create times of plodding rather than action. Whether or not you're a Middle-earth enthusiast, this game is a slow-paced adventure that isn't for everyone.





Reflections: No, this is not a port of Interplay's 1990 computer game of the same name. Based on the character portraits and rotoscoped animations, I suspect this is derived from Ralph Bakshi's 1987 animated movie, although it doesn't even cover the entirety of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. For the game itself, the controls are an interesting setup, being able to move everyone around with a single controller or to plug in a multitap and rope some friends into joining mid-game. Unfortunately, the multiplayer doesn't work with the SNES Mouse, but I found the mouse controls awkward anyway. Personally, I don't mind a slow-paced, zen-like game, but given the loose structure of the dungeons, I often had a difficult time knowing where I was, even with the maps included in the manual. I would rather get myself lost in Tolkien's written work, but I suppose this is a digestible alternative. – KY

The Lost Vikings

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Silicon & Synapse
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







Erik, Baleog, and Olaf are mighty Vikings, close friends, and neighbors. One night, they are transported from their houses to an alien spaceship, so you must help them puzzle their way through 37 platforming levels to return home. The goal of each stage is to get all three Vikings to the exit. Along the way, they encounter various puzzles and obstacles that they overcome by working together. You swap between characters by using L and R; each one has special abilities that make completing the levels possible. Erik runs, jumps, and breaks barriers with his helmet; Baleog slashes enemies, such as scorpions and laser-wielding robots, and hits targets from afar with his bow; and Olaf's shield allows him to withstand attacks, float during a fall, and enable others to use it as a platform. Throughout the levels, there are objects to collect and use, including colorful keys and health-refilling food. As you progress through the game, the Vikings encounter different environments that present unique obstacles, including a desert with quicksand and a silly land with pumps that inflate Olaf and make him fly. In later stages, you are required to do some quick character swaps and actions, making the game increasingly difficult without being frustrating. Don't worry if you don't get the moves right the first time since you can infinitely restart the stages or use a password to return later. With upbeat music, humorous dialogue between levels, and tight controls, this is a game that is as satisfying as it is challenging!





Reflections: I grew up with this title and was so relieved that I still enjoy it. I love how the bits of conversation build the unique personalities of each Viking. While it's quite a feat to beat this game in the first place, once you discover that there are hidden pathways and items, you'll enjoy coming back to it even more. The two-player mode helps set it apart from other action-puzzlers by giving you the opportunity to combine your knowledge and skills to solve the levels, emulating what the Vikings do themselves. *The Lost Vikings* has it all, combining responsive controls and difficult but fair puzzles with adorable cartoon graphics, goofy animations, and a way of not taking itself too seriously. Give it a try and find out which Lost Viking you are. Here's a hint: If you enjoy picking your nose, you're an Olaf. – KY

The Lost Vikings 2

The Lost Vikings II: Norse by Norsewest (EU)

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: May 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★







The trio are back in this puzzle-platformer, where they are again taken by the evil Tomator. On their journey home, Erik, Baleog, and Olaf are joined by helpful newcomers Fang the werewolf and Scorch the dragon. The Viking friends are also aided by some additional abilities: Erik swims and uses boosters to jump high and break blocks; Baleog wields a sword and now has a grabber arm to reach items and swing across gaps; and Olaf has a shield with many skills, plus the powers to shrink and to use farts for short hops. Each of the stages have three of the five characters trying to collect items for someone who will transport them to the time machine that will get them home. Standing in their way are hazards and barriers, including deadly spikes, cannons, and enemies that range from bats to electrifying robots. You must use each character's abilities in the correct way to complete each level, swapping between them with L and R. If at any point you get stuck or one of the characters dies, you can quit and retry the level with START. Throughout the stages are additional items to gather and use, such as bombs to destroy obstacles, shields to absorb hits, and food to restore health (the food differs based on the setting of the level, with beer on the buccaneer ship, burgers in the future, etc.). This sequel keeps the same graphical style as its predecessor and includes similar amusing dialogue. With the new abilities and constant change of cast for each stage, the gameplay feels fresh throughout. If you enjoyed the first game, you'll love this one. Even if you're new to the three Viking friends, this title offers a good-looking, challenging experience.





Reflections: This game is everything I could hope for in a sequel to a title that I adore. While the gameplay formula isn't too different, it definitely features improvements. Now you have to be aware of which characters you control to determine how to traverse the mazes of platforms. The difficulty curve is steep but well done, and it produces a satisfying feeling to complete the levels as they get progressively more intricate and hazardous. *The Lost Vikings 2* is an enjoyable game that has lots to offer: great graphics, good music, challenging puzzles, humorous writing, a two-player mode… I could go on, but Tomator awaits. – KY

Lucky Luke

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

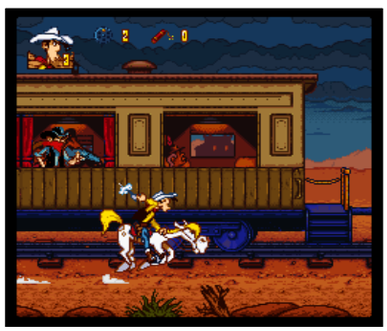






The Wild West is a dangerous place. Thankfully, Lucky Luke is here to save it from the dastardly Dalton quartet of brothers. He must make his way through stages by running, jumping, and climbing while taking down unwholesome criminals. Luke's portrait in the upper left indicates his health, with the number showing his remaining lives. Also at the top are the number of bullets loaded in his weapon, how many sets of bullets he has, and his inventory of dynamite. Throughout the side-scrolling levels, Luke finds pickups such as sheriff stars for health and pistol cylinders for ammo. Most levels have a puzzle element, such as finding a bone to collect a key from a dog or using explosives to launch objects into the air. Stages occasionally end with a boss fight and Luke either capturing one of the brothers or finding information about where the next one is. After completing locations ranging from a jailhouse to mines, Luke participates in a bonus stage by, for example, armwrestling his horse, Jolly. A cutscene follows to progress the storyline with a sprinkling of humor. Thrown into the mix of platforming stages are ones in a side or third-person view of Luke (and sometimes Jolly) as he avoids obstacles and shoots at enemies or projectiles. With all the action, this title has a great variety of gameplay that keeps the experience from feeling stale. It has an amusing, cartoony look, and other than the slippery jump mechanics, the controls are solid. The game offers a fun time for any pardners interested in playing it.





Reflections: *Lucky Luke* is based on the famous Belgian and French comic of the same name, so it's no surprise that it was never released in North America. While I generally have little interest in the Western genre, I quite enjoyed this and its variety of stages. It does include an unfortunate portrayal and stereotyping of Native Americans, but none of it is used for comedic effect, which may make it possible to focus on the positive aspects of this otherwise well-made game. While the puzzles are fairly straightforward, I found them to be a pleasant way to stop this from becoming a boring affair of simply running to the end of the stage, shooting down bad guys. With unlimited continues, players of all skills will be able to saddle up to this wild, wild adventure! – KY

Lufia & The Fortress of Doom

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Neverland
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







A century ago, the evil Sinistrals brought Terror, Chaos, Death, and Destruction to the world. Led by Maxim, a group of heroes defeated them, and now, as a descendent of Maxim, you and childhood friend Lufia must prevent their return. You voyage across the globe, helping townspeople, exploring dungeons, and discovering the nature of the Sinistrals' plot along the way. Combat plays out in turn-based battles, with commands chosen via an icon-based menu. High-quality enemy portraits give personality to the random encounters against a bevy of fantasy monsters. Magic is learned automatically as characters level up, providing an arsenal of elemental damage, attribute manipulation, and healing abilities. Before acquiring the multi-purpose Falcon vehicle, the Warp spell assists with the game's healthy amount of backtracking and fondness for fetch quests. Single-use items, such as arrows or potions, expand your toolkit in battle, weapons and armor improve fighting performance, and rings provide additional stats or special effects; these are found both in the game's dungeons and town shops. The game has a high encounter rate, making exploration taxing. Thankfully, zones and dungeons often contain ways to recover, be it special tiles or inns. The rate of conflict is also key to gaining levels, as difficulty spikes throughout the game challenge your fighting prowess. The cartoonish relationship between the protagonist and Lufia is used to inject levity in a plot that is fairly mundane, save for a couple of sharp, ambitious turns that strive to motivate you though this filler-heavy RPG.





Reflections: An experience heavily reminiscent of early Dragon Quest entries, *Lufia* starts out with a clever move, letting you control powerhouse characters of legend and battle with the storyline's chief antagonists. After that, its beats are mostly predictable: visiting towns and solving their problems with dungeon crawling. Some moments, such as the sequence with Piron and bridge repair, cost maddening amounts of time for events that really do nothing to contribute to the story. The instruction manual says "The Select Button serves no purpose in this quest," but it really would have been nice if it toggled a minimap to assist with such extensive travel. Thankfully, a physical world map is included along with the manual, which itself provides a light-touch walkthrough for the first half of the game. Even with those, be prepared for work in hunting down people to talk to in order to trigger the next plot point or discern where to go next. – DG

Lufia II: Rise of the Sinistrals
Lufia (EU)

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Aug. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Neverland
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



Maxim of Elcid doesn't know the origin of his fighting prowess, but when superhuman conquerors arrive on Lufia, he must use it to save the world! A cast of unique characters joins him in his top-down quest, from childhood friend Tia to the skilled sword-mage Selan. Battles are turn-based, with the player choosing to attack, cast spells, use items, activate item powers, or defend against mythological creatures, animals, warriors, and other well-illustrated enemies. Special equipment-specific abilities are used via the IP meter, charged by enemy attacks. This adds a strategic element to equipment choices. Dynamic on-screen monsters appear in dungeons, with sprites that reflect the battles they spawn when collided with. These reduce exploration frustration when solving puzzles or scouring for treasures. Daunting dungeon puzzles can sometimes gate progress, and a first playthrough will make liberal use of the room-restoring Reset spell. Numerous special skills, including arrows, bombs, and a grappling hook, are critical tools for dungeon exploration. Random battles occur on the world map, offering an avenue to grind additional experience and gold. Also hidden throughout the game are Monster Capsules, elemental-themed beasts that can be leveled up with items and fight alongside the party as a bonus AI-driven character. Players needing a diversion from the primary plot can try casino games or delve into a lengthy side dungeon with unique rules. Character interactions add personality to the otherwise traditional story, particularly Dekar and Guy's friendly rivalry. Maxim's relationship(s) also offer appreciable depth, even when awash in slapstick, and pointed incidents of character growth and foreshadowing advance the narrative to its fated conclusions.



Reflections: As a prequel to *Lufia & The Fortress of Doom*, this game makes numerous improvements that render it instantly compelling to those who slogged through the first. Its linear structure still borrows deeply from *Dragon Quest*, particularly *Dragon Quest V*, whose monster-capture mechanic (and matrimonial moment) both make appearances here. The game also uses a *Rogue*-like design for its randomized, 99-level Ancient Cave dungeon, which offers a nice change of pace from the *Zelda*-style puzzle solving in the primary adventure. As its title alludes, the game explains the origins of the Sinistrals as well as the heroes of the prior entry's opening sequence. *Lufia II* bridges the titles together masterfully… and without asking you to supervise this time! – DG

Madden NFL '94

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Visual Concepts
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★



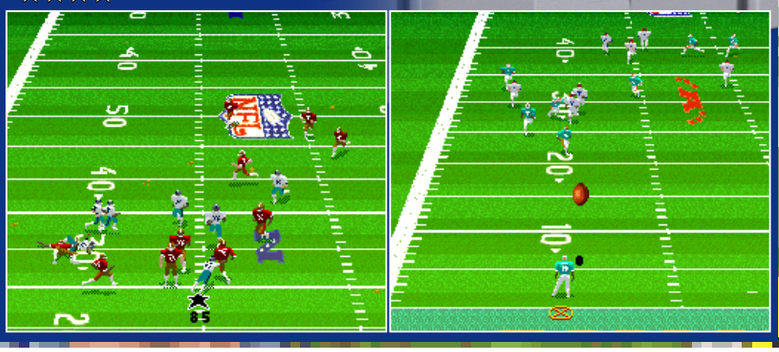
This game features two important debuts: season play and the acquisition of the NFL license. The former is a battle through a 16-game season with the goal of earning a spot in the playoffs and making it to the big game, and the latter adds authenticity with the use of team names, logos, and helmets. This is important to NFL fans, who generally want to play with their actual teams instead of ones with generic city names and colors. This title is packed with extra gameplay modes, including playoffs for each franchise's best squads and for every championship team. Play calling is streamlined, thanks to additional windows to see more plays on the screen at once and the elimination of personnel grouping selections. Presentation upgrades include expanded pregame, halftime, and postgame shows, as well as new graphics that show results after each play. The game is a strong visual performer, featuring a fast and smooth frame rate, nice Mode 7 rotation transitions after changes of possession, and field deterioration via divots that show wear and tear on the playing surface as each contest progresses. John Madden's voice is heard often, affixing "BOOM!" and "POW!" to big hits while adding brief commentary after certain plays. What's important here is that the additions and changes made enhance the underlying football game, which is still a lot of fun to play. The perennial overhead-angle view continues to make it easy to follow the action, and responsive controls make running, passing, and tackling a breeze. New players may need a few games to understand and execute plays, but series veterans will have no trouble jumping in and taking on smarter CPU opponents or their friends.



Reflections: This is the game in the Madden series that began to bridge the gap in performance between the SNES and Genesis, thanks in no small part to the development team responsible for putting this port together: Visual Concepts. After a couple of years with sketchy frame rates and generally slower gameplay, *Madden NFL '94* runs faster and smoother than its predecessors and holds its own as a very good football title on a console that isn't well known for its sports titles. Nobody really cared too much about Visual Concepts back in 1993, but that would change in a big way a few years down the line with the team's 2K sports series for the Sega Dreamcast. – PS

Madden NFL '95

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Visual Concepts
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★



This three-quarter view, 11-on-11 football simulation emphasizes big plays. Offense takes center stage here, and it's not uncommon for scoring drives to be quickly capped by a long run for a touchdown either out of the backfield or after catching a pass. Third down plays are especially deadly when playing against the computer, and the constant flow of offense versus poor defense may be off-putting to some, as games can often come down to who has the ball last. For the first time in the series, passing windows default to being off; this makes it important for players to watch their receivers downfield to see how much separation they've established from defensive backs before throwing a pass. The ability to substitute players for each formation is great for more serious fans and becomes very important for everyone when the injury bug inevitably hits a key position. Season, Playoff, and Exhibition modes are all here for maximum replay value. A battery backup saves all Season and Playoff progress without the need for passwords. The presentation is strong throughout the game, with very good graphics and sound both off and on the field. New scoreboard animations after big plays and new touchdown dances are fun to watch. The FOX Sports football theme plays through the menus and sounds great. All in all, this one's a contender but not quite a champion.



Reflections: In a strange example of Genesis doing what Super Ninten-didn't, the Genesis version of *Madden NFL '95* had a full NFL Players Association license... and the SNES version did not. This meant that the Genesis version displayed both the numbers and the names of the players in the game, while the SNES version only displayed numbers. Those of us who were NFL fans at the time didn't necessarily need to have the player names attached to the numbers, but this omission was still unfortunate. Despite the missing player names, the overall gap in performance between the SNES and Genesis versions of Madden games over the years had narrowed considerably by this time. The SNES version matched up well against the Genesis in terms of speed and animation while maintaining a notable advantage in sound quality. Playing sports games on an SNES was no longer the inferior option, and that was a pretty big deal. We were finally able to play sports games with power: Super Power. – PS

Madden NFL '96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Tiburon Entertainment
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★½



This 11-on-11 football simulation maintains the familiar three-quarter view and strong gameplay that the Madden series has been known for. On the field, action is deceptively fast; quarterbacks need to make quick decisions with the football in passing situations because defensive players don't take long to collapse the pocket. Quarterbacks now step into their throws and require extra time to deliver passes; this new wrinkle will require some adjustment for players of earlier games in the series. Injuries occur quite frequently in this game, leading to plenty of substituting as each contest progresses. Defensively, players rush to the ball and cause passes to be tipped or broken up, while turnovers happen at a decent rate. New this year is the ability to put created players through the NFL Combine and complete events in order to earn a higher position in the NFL Draft. The Combine events are decent but will require practice to excel at and earn more points toward a draft position. The FOX Sports presentation package adds Pat Summerall to the booth and Lesley Visser on the sidelines to report on injuries, along with special branding and the omnipresent *NFL on FOX* theme song. The game looks good, with well-animated sprites and a fast frame rate. The music is outstanding, but the sound effects are a bit dialed back. Overall, this is a hard-nosed game of football that will challenge all comers; the Lombardi Trophy will have to be earned in order to be won.



Reflections: What a difference a year makes. Offense rules the day in *Madden NFL '95*, yielding a ton of yards gained and a ton of points on the scoreboard. *Madden NFL '96* marks the return of defense in a big way. Novice and casual players will quickly get frustrated during play. Frequently tipped passes and well-defended wide receivers lead to difficulty for quarterbacks, and the defensive line is as good as it's always been at stuffing the run. This is closer to being a football simulation than *Madden NFL '95* but at the cost of being harder to recommend to a general audience. Even while playing on the Novice difficulty setting, the defense is seemingly on par with the 1985 Chicago Bears. Mike Singletary and William "The Refrigerator" Perry may approve of such an imbalance, but I just can't... not without an autographed "Super Bowl Shuffle" record, anyway. – PS

Madden NFL '97

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA
Developer: Tiburon Entertainment
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★⋆







It's a new season for the popular 11-on-11 football simulation! The core gameplay is tight and responsive, and smart AI is a valuable ally for automatically controlled players while also being a cunning opponent during solo games. On offense, players can let the CPU play quarterback while assuming control of a running back or wide receiver. Defensively, teams can show a blitz formation to confuse the offense before dropping into more conventional pass coverage. The game skews towards the pass on offense, though highly rated running backs can still break a few long gains every so often. Season play is here, with a chance for players to take their favorite teams to the big game. Standings are saved to the cartridge's battery, as well as record-setting performances in several categories. The ability to create players gives armchair athletes the chance to put themselves into the game, though they must first complete several events to earn rating points and have a chance to be drafted. Player signings and trades must take salary cap status into consideration. While it's appealing to improve a team by signing a key free agent or trading for a star player, a player's high salary demands can scuttle the whole transaction. Although there isn't any kind of negotiation or haggling on salary, the inclusion of the cap makes for a more realistic front office experience than in most 16-bit football titles. Visually, the game's three-quarter, top-down view makes it easy to see all of the action. The players are a bit on the small side but are animated well. Sound and music are nicely done, with John Madden himself offering a few occasional quips. All told, this is a solid football game worthy of the man's iconic name.





Reflections: This sixth installment of the Madden series for the SNES is the last one that Electronic Arts would self-publish, and it's the last one that Tiburon Entertainment would work on. The team had its sights primarily targeted on the new 32-bit PlayStation and Saturn consoles and developed *Madden NFL '97* for those machines as well as the 16-bit legacy versions. Knowing that Tiburon had such a heavy workload makes it all the more impressive to me that the team didn't just copy and paste the previous year's game and update the rosters; instead, there were just enough changes and additions to make this *Madden* its own unique experience. That deserves some credit. – PS

Madden NFL '98

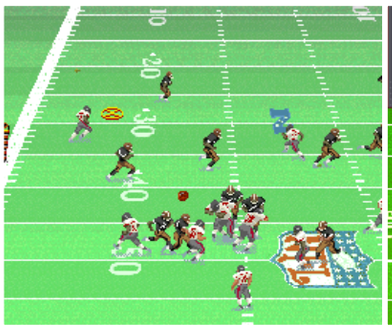
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: Tiertex Design Studios
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★⋆







This seventh and final game in the Madden series on the SNES is essentially identical to *Madden NFL '97*. There are a few notable non-gameplay additions, including updated rosters, new-look menus and music, and new Series and Super Bowl modes. The gameplay and on-field visuals remain the same. For more detail, please refer to the *Madden NFL '97* review.





Reflections: It's hard to get excited for the insignificant additions that Tiertex Design Studios brought to the table for *Madden NFL '98*. The new front-end menus and music are fine. Super Bowl mode has been done before, and licensing issues prevent using actual player names for these big game recreations. Series mode is best suited for human opponents to compete for bragging rights, but it's not a very NFL thing to add. The instruction manual also claims that there are "[n]ew 3-D rendered graphics and animations," but these aren't noticeable on the field. If you bought *Madden NFL '97*, there's no need for this game in your library, unless you absolutely must have the first season that the Oilers played in Tennessee in video game form. – PS

Magic Boy

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Blue Turtle
Ported by: Empire Software
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries
Players: 1–2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Poor Hewlett. The last thing any young wizard wants to do is accidentally unleash an army of monsters upon the world! To undo this catastrophe and prove that he's ready to become a Master Wizard, Hewlett must capture swarms of baddies across 64 levels of platforming fun. The heroic apprentice can stun birds, bears, bots, and more with his wand's projectiles before stuffing them into sacks and quickly dispatching them to the bottom of the screen. He runs, jumps, and searches for essential goodies hidden throughout colorful locales, including Sand Land, Plastic Place, and Future Zone. Grabbing delicious fruit awards points, and collecting giant letters to spell "EXTRA" provides invaluable bonus lives. Hewlett can also uncover wand upgrades to temporarily enhance his projectiles with a triple shot, vertical shot, or long shot. He isn't capable of jumping particularly high, but luckily, the young sorcerer can "wrap" through the screen in order to make platforming a bit more manageable. Cages in the status bar track how many monsters must be caught to complete each area. Hewlett's slippery captives start to escape from their coops if he takes too long to complete a level, making time management of the utmost importance. One-hit deaths can present a considerable challenge, but the password feature helps to preserve some sanity. The courageous apprentice must rid the land of danger and save the day! Or else he's gonna look *really* bad, being totally responsible for all the chaos in the first place... Poor Hewlett.





Reflections: *Magic Boy* is a vibrant game that makes for a pleasant experience overall. Capturing monsters is an inventive mechanic, and the platforming is fairly fun. The most interesting thing to note about this title is its unintentionally humorous tone that comes from the characters looking completely detached and harmless. Almost every creature appears disengaged, aimless, and lacking in any ill intention. Just by looking at them, there is a distinct sense that practically nobody knows they should be fighting. The monsters look cute and devoid of menace, so when the young wizard stuns and violently bags and cages the clueless creatures, it's almost shocking. That hideous sound that the monsters emit upon being assaulted makes it seem that they are genuinely surprised, too. Even if the comedy wasn't intentional, it's still pretty magical. – DM

Magic Sword

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







The dark lord Drokmar controls the powerful Black Orb, and the Brave One must battle through 50 tower floors to retrieve it. Armed with a sword, the beefy barbarian traverses lateral stages, hacking and slashing through ogres, winged creatures, ghouls, mages, bears, skeletons, and other nasties. Refraining from attacking recharges a magic meter that, when filled, allows the hero to fire a projectile from his blade. Besides dealing with evil foes, he faces plenty of platforming and traps. Treasure chests found along his ascent contain coins, keys, and magical items that boost defensive or offensive abilities, reveal hidden treasure chests, and more. Doors to the next floor have to be unlocked, and imprisoned allies can be rescued to assist. One at at time, the Thief, Lizardman, Cleric, Wizard, Knight, Amazon, Ninja, or Big Man will follow the Brave One and attack with their own ranged weapon, such as the Amazon's bow and arrows or the Ninja's throwing stars. Individual allies can be leveled up for more effective attacks, and likewise, the hero can level up by acquiring stronger swords and shields. However, shields can be destroyed, and annoyingly, swords can be flung away when the barbarian is struck (although they are recoverable). The action is fast-paced for the Brave One and his allies, and the variety of stages and enemies is surprisingly fresh over the course of the game. Every few floors, the heroes encounter a challenging boss that must be conquered with care since health can be drained quickly. This engaging quest has quality graphics, solid sound effects, and a robust soundtrack. The unique qualities of this arcade port should entice players to enter its tower and face the entertaining dangers that lie within.





Reflections: *Magic Sword* is a Capcom title that is unfortunately often overlooked in their legendary pantheon of games. *Black Tiger* (1987) seems to have been its prototypical predecessor, sharing commonalities such as upgrading weapons and collecting keys. Although *Black Tiger* never made it to a North American console, happily, *Magic Sword* did. I played the arcade version in a pizzeria not far from my home several times as a child, and it was an absolute blast, especially since that form supports a simultaneous axe-wielding second player (who is just as beefy as the Brave One). – PC

The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Oh where, oh where has that Pluto dog gone? It turns out that Mickey's pup is in Emperor Pete's clutches, so Disney's mascot mouse must seek his pal through six multipart stages: Treetops, Dark Forest, Fire Grotto, Pete's Peak, Snowy Valley, and Pete's Castle. Each side-scrolling level lays out lavish visuals, including sinister timbers, bubbling magma, and twinkling skies. The obstacles therein are as varied as the vistas, with new ones constantly arising to test Mickey's mettle. Dodging downdrafts, riding boulder-sized cherries, piloting a flighty magic carpet, and slipping on sleds are just a four-fingered handful of the challenges ahead, but Mickey is man (or mouse) enough to handle them. He can hop on enemies, damaging some and dazing others that he then tosses with a spin. Whirling away certain blocks reveals coins to spend in hidden shops as well as health-replenishing hearts, and three acquired costumes allow Mickey to alter his abilities at will: The turban arms him with chargeable blasts and an underwater breathing bubble; the firefighter's hose extinguishes flames, propels blocks, and creates ice platforms; and the mountaineer's gear lets Mickey scale heights with a grappling hook. The outfits make Pete's empire engaging to explore, and Mickey is often rewarded for this with treasure boxes that contain coins, extra lives, health extenders, and more. Costumes also help in battling bosses that range from a silk-shooting spider to a flame-spitting face. They can't lengthen this short game, however, but that might suit those looking for a quick change of pace.





Reflections: None of the outfits are duds. They're all useful, and the meter-driven turban and firehose can even be upgraded via pricey purchases. Though I can't decide if he's being modest or melodramatic, I like how Mickey ducks behind a curtain every time he switches clothes, emerging a changed mouse. I also enjoy how he gets his getups. Oddly enough, the magic turban comes from a magician, a seemingly kind wizard who doesn't warn that this item induces a permanently pointing finger. The firefighter's ensemble bursts from a box aptly marked "IN CASE OF FIRE BREAK GLASS," but the way Mickey obtains the mountaineer's togs is just plain Goofy. His befuddled buddy bestows them, calling them "snazzy climbin' britches" – high praise for height fashion and truly the apex of apparel appellation. – AP

Manchester United Championship Soccer
Lothar Matthäus Super Soccer (GER)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Krisalis Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







Play as some of the world's biggest teams and compete for glory in the European Cup in this isometric soccer sim. League modes and head-to-head options are also available, but the main meat of the game is in the Cup, where once the player has chosen a team, the AI randomly selects opponents. The titular team has correct player names, but the other teams have approximated ones that can be amusing at times. The game itself has tiny, crude pixel sprites which dart across the screen at a breakneck pace, making everything an effort to control. Just claiming the ball and keeping it becomes a war of attrition rather than skill. The ball doesn't stay at the players' feet, so jerking the controller in the opposite direction will see it roll away, just waiting for the computer (which is always faster than the human team) to pounce on it. If a shot on goal happens, a commentator pops up on the screen to give insight, which is a welcome touch, as the crowd noise is lackluster. A cash-in on a popular soccer team which could have been better had the AI not been ramped up on even the easiest setting.





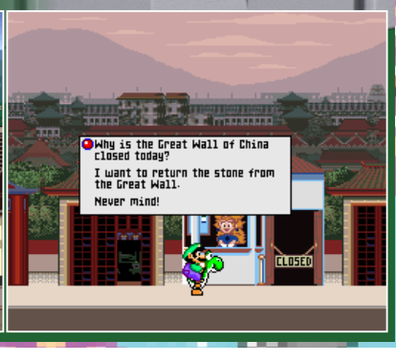
Reflections: I don't get why most poor-quality soccer games are just content in trying to ape other titles. This one tries to be a cross between *Kick Off 3* and *Sensible Soccer* but doesn't have enough ideas of its own to be original. What makes it worse is that there is another *Manchester United* game on the Amiga from 1991 that is supremely more competent than this one. I remember buying this game, thinking it was the same, and I was so disappointed. If, however, you can master the difficulty, then there is quite a lot of replay value – the roster of teams is impressive and scoring a goal is satisfying, but you'll need to score another five just to make it a draw. There are so many soccer games on the system that this one easily gets lost in the shuffle and is only really worth purchasing as a memorabilia piece for the world's most famous team. – JE

Mario is Missing!

Genre: Educational, Platformer
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Learn with Luigi while visiting 15 international cities in search of culturally significant objects stolen by Koopas. Each side-scrolling stage begins by entering Bowser's PORTALS (Passcode Operated Remote Transport And Larceny System) to reach a destination. When Luigi exits the pipe, a prickly Pokey pops up, preventing his egress unless he's riding Yoshi. You can use the Globulator's world map to summon the speedy dino, but you must first learn Luigi's location. To find out if he's in Tokyo, Buenos Aires, or somewhere else, speak to anyone you see, or check the city map for familiar landmarks, such as Paris's Eiffel Tower – these are noted with blue icons, and visiting them provides fact-filled pamphlets. The map also reveals where thieving Koopas are wandering – stomp these enemies to find the three with treasures such as the Statue of Liberty's torch or a baby elephant from the Nairobi National Park. Once collected, these can be shown to people to discover what the items are and where they belong; Luigi's computer retains this information for future reference. When you bring something to its associated landmark, a curator poses two multiple-choice questions before accepting it and allowing Luigi to take a keepsake photo. Returning all three artifacts in a city allows him to leave it triumphantly, and securing five cities initiates a laughably easy Koopaling battle. A few more laughs and some interesting knowledge arise from the game's writing, but the overall experience is a world of repetitive tedium.



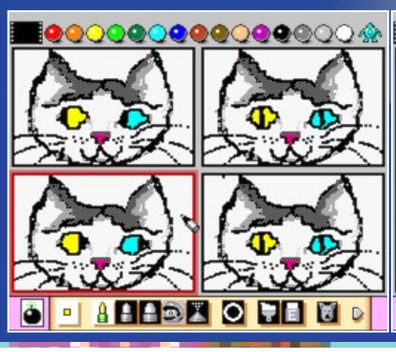


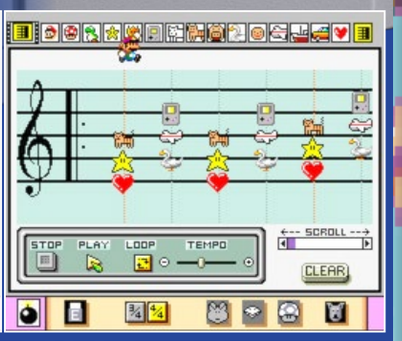
Reflections: Use the sidewalks and other marked paths if you want Luigi and Yoshi to cross the street – failing to do so results in a stern honk and a standstill, but comply, and they'll dutifully look both ways first. This detail was probably implemented to avoid imparting dangerous habits to children, but talking to strangers and showing them the valuables Luigi has, such as the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London, are totally okay things to do. In fact, how can they even be considered strangers when they're in every city? The kid, tourist, tour guide, policewoman, and scientist are practically old friends by the end of the game, but for the strongest whiff of familiarity, the curators take the toadstool – they all look like Princess Peach! Maybe they *are* her, and every time she was "kidnapped," she was actually moonlighting in a museum somewhere. Quick, Luigi! Snap a picture and show Mario! – AP

Mario Paint

Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (required)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★

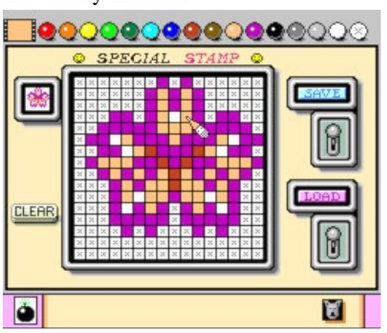






Michelangelo. Mozart. Miyazaki. *Mario*? Most definitely! That mascot is multi-talented, and here he's endorsing your artistic endeavors in drawing, music, and animation. Attach the included Super NES Mouse, and try clicking the cursor on the title screen's letters with this nifty peripheral. Selecting the mustachioed maestro himself sends you to a blank canvas with hues above for sketching; clicking Mr. Crayon at the right cycles through shades, patterns, and stamps galore, including options of your own devising. After raiding the menu below for pens, the airbrush, shape templates, etc., hold the left button, drag the cursor across the screen, *et voilà*! You're making art! If, however, you make a mistake, there's no need to fear – Undodog is here! He eliminates whatever you just did, while erasers and entertaining screen wipes enable more drastic corrections. If desired, you can take your drawing skills on the move in Animation Land by copying, pasting, and modifying up to nine looping frames of motion along a trail of your own blazing. After that, tune into composition mode, where a large music staff offers over an octave and a half of notes to arrange in your choice of time signature and tempo. Although sharps and flats are lacking, you can create chords using 15 unique "instruments." If you want to swat songwriting aside for a sec, there's *Gnat Attack*, an enjoyable bug-smashing minigame. Afterwards, even more artistic options abound, including soundtrack selections, a coloring book, and the ability to save your work to the cart *and* to a video tape. Admittedly, your creativity is not this game's only constraint (finer control in certain aspects would be appreciated), but it's the only one that really matters.





Reflections: The childlike sense of wonderment this title induces is a marvel. Clever sound effects, encouraging background music, intuitive icons, and other little details feel expertly orchestrated to engage attention and elicit expression without being intrusive or obnoxious. They sure draw me in to exploring what's possible in this 16-bit studio world – even as an adult. In fact, I recently discovered something in this game I never noticed as a kid – there are Japanese hiragana, katakana, and kanji stamps in addition to the alphabet ones! As a sometime student of the language, I find this delightful, and that's how I feel about *Mario Paint* overall – its sweet, quirky brilliance inspires my heart *and* my art. – AP

Mario's Early Years! Fun with Letters

Genre: Educational
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

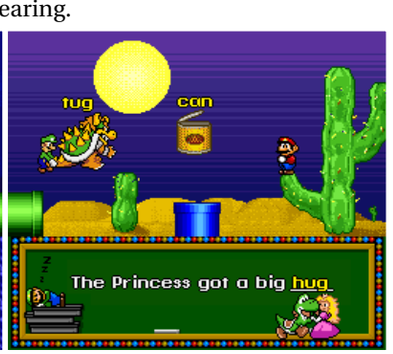






Enhance your nascent literacy on an island journey with Mario and company! You can pick from that plucky plumber, pal Yoshi, or Princess Peach prior to placing your arrow on one of an educational archipelago's seven destinations, including Sound World, First Letter World, and Sentence World. Everywhere on your itinerary is interactive, save for Alphabet World, where the familiar letter-listing tune plays as the trusty 26 are recited and illustrated. The rest can be approached in two ways: Discovery is the default mode that permits you to knock your avatar's head on pictures, syllables, and words to hear a child's voice identify said objects, associated sounds, and/or letters. Overlaid on backgrounds ranging from a library to the ocean, these clickable items include single-syllable standbys, such as "cat" or "dog," alongside a few complex choices, such as "anteater" or "octopus." You can advance to a related environment with more of the same academic offerings by selecting a green pipe. The blue pipe conveys you back to the map to try another locale, but if you're ready to put your reading skills to the gentle, nonjudgmental test, wake the sleeping Luigi to initiate Learning Mode. You'll be asked to hit words ending with certain letters, to complete sentences, and so on, but if you err, you needn't get your vowels in an uproar! There's no penalty for mistakes, the correct answer twinkles after three attempts, and success yields commendations from Bowser or other "Fun Friends." It's apparent that much love went into this game, from the Mario music remixes and children's songs to the manual that encourages patient parental participation. Though it's not meant for anyone able to read this, its earnestness is endearing.





Reflections: While absolutely appreciating this title's goals, I question a few of its word and sentence choices. Aside from calling the cat in Alphabet World "crazy" when he's clearly waiting on that ice cream stand for his two scoops of tuna ripple like anybody else, a lot of the iffy language involves Princess Peach, with some sentences seemingly open to unintentionally inappropriate interpretation. Before filling in the right answer ("cup"), there's one that reads "The Princess has a big [blank]." Another is "The Princess got a big [blank]," and although the correct response there is "hug," "can" is also an option. It's a bummer, but I'll probably never get to the bottom of who's behind these phrases. – AP

Mario's Early Years! Fun with Numbers

Genre: Educational
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆







Not all heroes wear capes, and Mario has left his in Dinosaur Land to venture with friends to the worlds of discovery and learning! Beautifully rendered water plays host to various islands in the main menu, where the player can choose to play as Mario, Yoshi, or Peach. Selecting one of the seven island worlds takes the player to a game designed for reinforcing basic math skills: Sorting, How Many, Comparing, Same and Different, Shape, Number, and Counting. In each, the player uses a cursor to select items on the top half of the screen. They are free to explore in Discovery Mode via the pipes in levels, or they can rouse Luigi from his sleep at the bottom of the screen to be challenged to follow instructions and make specific selections in Learning Mode. The further a player gets in any specific world, the more challenging the questions become, particularly in differentiation, which goes from identical sprites to matching themes. There is no punishment for failure, but sparkles indicate a correct choice after a few incorrect tries. The game is filled with voice-overs of children and others giving both instruction and praise, helping to make the individual tasks more accessible as classical children's music and rearranged tunes from *Super Mario World* play. The cursor is fast when the SNES Mouse is used and slow when the controller is used, but neither impedes gameplay. Unfortunately, the user interface is not always intuitive, the content is shallow, and the mechanisms for changing levels have inconsistencies. The result is an honest effort that could have added up to more.





Reflections: Slender Yoshi, flat Goomba, quirky Koopa Troopa, and nonplussed Princess Peach are just some of the assets that The Software Toolworks has lovingly butchered from their *Super Mario World* incarnations. Some sprites were lifted wholesale, such as Yoshi in profile, but most are recreations. Having to wake Luigi up is an added tedium, but it helps to have the Discovery and Learning modes segmented. The instruction booklet might be the game's strongest point; it explains how each world functions, the lessons children should be learning, and how to help them along the way. It even goes over how to reinforce lessons with practice away from the SNES. There is a clear, thoughtful design to how *Mario's Early Years! Fun With Numbers* approaches its subject matter, though the game itself teaches them poorly. As with many early edutainment titles, it feels like squandered potential. – DG

Mario's Early Years! Preschool Fun

Genre: Educational
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Some of your favorite Mario characters are here to help you learn the skills to succeed in preschool. The main screen shows the six different activities as their own islands; Mario, Princess Peach, and Yoshi, whom you can choose from and guide in most of the activities, are at the bottom. Use the D-pad to move the arrow cursor on the screen and B to select an area that allows interaction (shown by the cursor changing from a solid color to striped). You can optionally use the SNES Mouse instead. Counting World and Body World are the two exploration activities, and they present a single screen with objects to select for information. Counting World has the Princess in a classroom helping two children count the different materials. Body World features Mario doing things, such as touching his hair or snapping his fingers, when you click the corresponding parts of his body. Select the green pipe at the bottom to return to the island screen. The other four areas (Opposite World, Listening World, Shape World, and Color World) display a small section with platforms for your chosen character and a dozing Luigi on the right. Click him to begin a quiz activity corresponding to the subject for the area, such as matching animals to their sounds in Listening World or picking the object with the named color in Color World). There are several quizzes for each, which can be skipped by clicking the green pipe at the bottom. You can also return to the island map by picking the blue pipe. While this is a simple, easy set of activities that won't hold the interest of older children/adults, it works for its target audience.





Reflections: I'm always intrigued by education titles, especially ones that have the rights to a popular series like Mario. The opening screens and music from *Super Mario World* are fitting considering the properties being used, but upon closer inspection, I could only see the characters as well-done bootleg versions of themselves (although I suppose being on a set of islands could explain the Princess's funky tan). Even if you don't have a preschooler to sit in front of this game, it may be worth your time to see what a company other than Nintendo does with their assets. And who knows, maybe you'll learn a thing or two in the process! Did you know that *wet* is the opposite of *dry*?! – KY

Mario's Time Machine

Genre: Educational, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Tick-tock! Bowser has stolen 15 iconic items from the past to wreak havoc on history, so Mario must set time aright by returning each one to its proper era and owner. You start in Bowser's Museum, where pedestals display purloined pieces of historical importance, such as Isaac Newton's apple or Michelangelo's chisel. Grabbing one lets you open its Historical Pages, which provide its year, location, and a summary about its associated person. This summary has up to 14 blanks that must be filled in from multiple-choice lists, but how will you know the size of Joan of Arc's army or when Gandhi came back to India? Simply use Bowser's time machine, the Timulator, to dial in the appropriate year and place, initiating a Time Surfing minigame where you must gather 10 mushrooms and evade mines before entering a portal to your destination. There, you're able to ask the artifact owner's contemporaries about him or her, allowing you to learn interesting facts to complete the Historical Pages. You frequently meet other important figures, such as Ben Franklin in Thomas Jefferson's time, and you often have to grant people items gotten from others to make them reveal more information. Once the summary's done, you can deliver Queen Elizabeth I's crown or Gutenberg's type, get a password, and return to the museum to repeat the process. This game succeeds at being both educational and entertaining, and with its gently humorous writing, it's well worth a bit of your time.





Reflections: I thought of *Mad Libs* when I saw the blanks on the Historical Pages, and the potential answers are even categorized by nouns, adjectives, numbers, etc. I wish you could have some goofy fun by entering responses other than the correct ones, but this game sends you back to the future if you err thrice in a row, and you really have no chance to futz around anyway. Your playthrough is timed, and if you take too long diligently trying to absorb historical information like a good student, you'll be punished with a "bad" ending that sees Bowser escaping to Paradise. Then again, I prefer this to the "best" ending, in which the Timulator overloads and transports Bowser to the late Jurassic, where he's brutally crushed into a shifty-eyed puddle by a giant dinosaur foot. Even a baddie like Bowser doesn't deserve such harsh treatment, but I guess he was pressed for time. – AP

Mark Davis' The Fishing Master

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1996
Region: NA
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Bassmasters Classic winner Mark Davis wants to make you the next top virtual angler! Beginning with $10,000 and starting gear, pay the entrance fee for your first of six tournaments. You get a map of the lake to choose your fishing spot. After selecting a section and an area therein, you pick the exact spot to cast your line. The casting screen features a view from behind you on your boat, and pressing Right/Left chooses precisely where to aim with the "help" of the cryptic fish finder in the upper right. If you're not sure which of the dozens of lures and hooks to use, the Explanation option provides details on the best conditions (such as weather and water depth) for a particular jig. After tossing your line, an underwater side view of your hook appears at the bottom. Press X to reel the line, and as soon as you see the bass icon, press A to hook the fish. Then, press Down to reel it in. You keep the five heaviest fish that meet the length requirements for the stage, and when you are satisfied with your catch or out of time for the day, go to the weigh-in to see how your haul stacks. The top 10 anglers receive prize money and move on to the next stage. Otherwise, you have to try again until you can no longer afford the entrance fee, thus netting a game over. This title has cute graphics and great music while providing a simplistic experience compared to other SNES fishing games. Weathered electronic anglers may get frustrated over the lack of information on hooking and reeling, while those just dipping their toes into the e-sport may find it more accessible because of it.





Reflections: For a game that touts its realism, it certainly lacks information I expect. You don't see the bass approaching your hook, so it's a seek-and-find with the lure to get the bass icon. When you do finally see the image, it's a reaction test to press A fast enough to hook the fish. I can't say these are necessarily bad features, but they do create an experience that's more casual than realistic. Fortunately, there's a Free mode to practice fishing in different locations with your choice of conditions, such as weather and season, and even if you don't catch any fish, you can still enjoy the amazing music. – KY

Marko's Magic Football

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Domark Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







When an evil mastermind hatches a plan to transform the citizens of North Sterlington into sludge monsters, resident soccer enthusiast Marko sets out to thwart the sinister scheme. Armed with his trusty soccer ball that, after landing in a pool of sludge, has acquired the ability to teleport, Marko must defeat the monsters standing in his way and save his sleepy town. Exploring the side-scrolling streets, sewers, and forests of North Sterlington can be incredibly satisfying when taking advantage of Marko's impressive repertoire of soccer skills. Varying the length of time you wind up your kick completely changes its power, and approaching with a running start or while holding a directional button further alters its trajectory. There are so many possible combinations that it's not always easy to get the ball to travel exactly where you'd like. One puzzle in particular asks you to activate a switch by placing the ball into a small alcove, but because of its size, the inaccuracy of your kicks, and some surprisingly realistic physics, you'll find this task incredibly challenging. Apart from this, your humble, magical soccer ball is surprisingly effective – and fun – to use in combat. It does take a little while to materialize once you teleport it back to you, but learning to compensate for this is simply par for the course. Additionally, you can use it to launch Marko towards platforms that would otherwise lie out of reach. Again however, the controls can be slightly temperamental. While the ball is programmed to move with you as you walk, this behavior doesn't stop when you attempt to use it as a springboard, occasionally leading to your faithful companion suddenly zipping out from underneath you as you prepare to jump. While your journey is filled with wonderfully vibrant environments and nicely animated sprites, the experience tends to be marred by frustratingly average controls.





Reflections: The 1990s were a time when environmental responsibility was beginning to gain momentum. Cartoons and video games had begun to tackle issues such as conservation and sustainability in a way that was relatable to younger audiences, and even smaller titles were doing their part. *Marko's Magic Football* subtly encourages you to recycle throughout your entire adventure. Each stage is littered with collectible cans that can be deposited in recycling machines, and you're even occasionally tasked with removing barrels of toxic slime. It sounds to me like Marko's aiming to be an honorary Planeteer. – AF



Marvel Super Heroes: War of the Gems

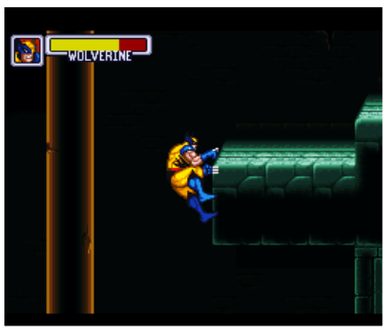
Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★⋆

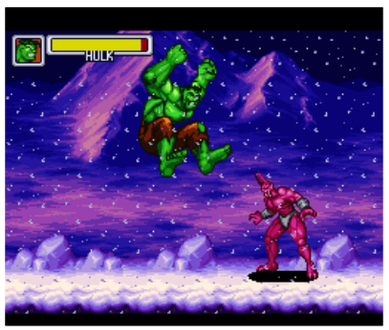






The Infinity Gems have been lost around Earth, so the mighty Avengers must retrieve them. This beat 'em up puts you through 11 levels in places ranging from the Amazon rainforest and Alaska to spaceships and extraterrestrial settings. Before each stage, you select one of five heroes. In addition, you can equip/add previously collected items, such as energy tanks or a Gem that grants an individualized benefit (e.g., enhanced speed). Beyond simple punching and kicking, the characters have a limited array of combos as well as mobility moves, such as Spider-Man's wall climb and Iron Man's double jump. The enemies are largely wicked doppelgängers of Marvel champions; you sometimes must defeat them before you can progress. At the end of a stage, you encounter a boss, who has their own life bar at the top, opposite of yours. If you die, you're sent back to the level select screen, and the Avenger you were playing is no longer available. The game has simplistic controls, utilizing only Y and B plus the D-pad, opening it up to players less familiar with the genre. On the other hand, more experienced gamers may find the limited abilities boring. The graphics are bright and colorful, and each character handles differently enough to allow varied approaches to a stage. Not only are the Avengers diverse, but also the level design, which ranges from quicksand traps to a flying auto-scroller with the Silver Surfer. The game will appeal to an assortment of players, and the password system allows anyone with the tenacity (if not the skill) to stand between Thanos and those precious Gems.





Reflections: Capcom took a formula that worked well in their *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse* (1994) and used mostly new heroes. I suppose Wolverine is too popular not to include him in both titles, although I have a hard time making a personal connection with him. The graphics are great and the controls smooth, but the game does falter in other areas. While moves are easy to pull off, attack combos feel long-winded in their execution. Conversely, being knocked down results in waiting several seconds before you regain control. Despite these points, it's entertaining to experiment with the Gems and see what extra abilities you like on each character. Who doesn't love the idea of the power to wipe a screen clean? I enjoy it myself, but using it on a review can get your editor upset… – KY

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Bits Corporation
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★







You're the Creature, wandering the land in search of meaning after being rejected by your creator. All you want is companionship, but you only find… terrible platforming levels. While the film serviceably follows the book, this adaptation only vaguely resembles the movie. The Creature's motion-captured sprites, the settings, and the gothic atmosphere work, but little else does. You can jump, dodge roll (uselessly), strike with a wooden staff, and shoot lighting (although this costs life). Attacking while pressing UP or DOWN lets you swing your staff above or crouch to hit low, but the animation delays everything slightly, and stiff controls exacerbate the vexing platforming and puzzles. In level one, you pull switches to activate moving platforms, but these are often timed, so you must reach them quickly, requiring complicated precision jumps. Meanwhile, you're pursued by enemies with attack ranges similar to yours, making damage hard to avoid. Additionally, you must find objects hidden throughout each level and combine them from your inventory menu to create items needed to progress. For example, combining wood and boat-building knowledge makes a raft. Testing players' brains is commendable, but there's little time to think. Another level is a dark crypt, adding low visibility to your troubles as you slide blocks into switches to unlock doors and use disappearing platforms. You can ignite your staff in fires, but it only illuminates a small area. There are some bosses, including a giant slug, which require a little problem solving, but they're mundane in presentation. The regular enemies are usually humans but also generic animals, such as spiders, birds, and, of course, bats. The music and graphics are good, although some of the rotoscoped enemies look flat and poorly shaded, especially near the end. There are only six levels, but they'll feel long enough.





Reflections: This was also on the Genesis, and the Sega CD got a completely different adventure game. However, I have no idea why any exist. The Kenneth Branagh film has some gothic gravitas, but the video game tropes here are too goofy to sustain that atmosphere. It's a shame, since I like the movie. In the '90s, I rented it because John Cleese has a small part as Frankenstein's teacher. He's almost unrecognizable, and it's unlike anything else he's done. Additionally, Robert De Niro's "Creature" is very different from others. The film is imperfect, but it's meritoriously closer to the book than other Franken-movies. – KN

The Mask

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Black Pearl Software
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Players harness the power of the Mask to help Stanley Ipkiss take down the mob and save his crush, Tina Carlyle, in this 2D side-scrolling action-platformer that's based on the 1994 film. From Stanley's apartment and the Edge City Jailhouse to the Coco Bongo Club and more, the stages replicate the movie's locations. Each one is filled with area-specific enemies (e.g., inmates at the jailhouse, monkeys at the Coco Bongo Club) that Stanley can take out by punching, smashing with his oversized mallet, or utilizing the Mask's horn, gun, and tornado Morph Powers. Other than morphing, the Mask also allows Stanley to run at super speeds and jump incredibly high. These special functions tend to be overpowered, but they are limited by a Morph Energy counter that depletes as players use them. If this counter reaches zero, the Mask cannot perform any special abilities, although players can replenish the counter by collecting "M" icons located throughout each stage. In between eradicating enemies, Stanley must also search for vents and other small openings that warp him to other areas. Most stages are maze-like and can only be completed by going through the correct sequence of warps, meaning players must choose carefully or risk inadvertently traveling backwards. Stanley, the enemies, and the stages look stunning and animate nicely, and the sound effects and voice work seem to be ripped straight from the film. Unfortunately, some of the platforming can be unfair, especially in Landfill Park, where tree limbs can be tough to land on. The lack of continues is also a bummer, considering the game's difficulty. Those issues aside, this is still a fun title that offers a wealth of eye-popping visuals, humorous sounds, and entertaining gameplay.





Reflections: I decided to rewatch *The Mask* the day after I reviewed the game and, oh boy, is it terrible. My seven-year-old daughter really seemed to enjoy it, though. At the time it was released, I absolutely loved it, as did a lot of preeminent film critics. Heck, it has a Certified Fresh rating of 77% on Rotten Tomatoes! What were we thinking back then? I guess in 1994 anything Jim Carrey touched was considered great. I personally love Jim, but I'm kinda scared to rewatch the Ace Ventura films now! They can't be as bad as *The Mask*, can they? – MV

Math Blaster: Episode 1

Genre: Educational, Action
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Davidson & Associates
Ported by: Spidersoft, Western Technologies
Publisher: Davidson & Associates
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Warm up those polytronic combustion regulators and recover Spot from the no-good Trash Alien! Galactic Commander sends the player, as Blasternaut, to clear trash from the surrounding sector, track the Trash Alien down, destroy its ship, and rescue Spot. This is done by playing through three game modes (a fourth, *Number Recycler*, did not make the venture from PC to the Super Nintendo version). *Trash Zapper* is a first-person shooting gallery game where the player must shoot correctly numbered refuse while fending off the Trash Alien ship. *Cave Runner* is a platformer where Blasternaut's suit number must lie between the left and right sides of each gate flown through upwards and, if not correct, changed by grabbing number-altering water droplets from the stalactites. Finally, there's *Math Blaster*, where the player must choose the correct ship entry based on the math equation shown while avoiding floating trash. Though short, each of the game's three modes balances exercise-based math and arcade-style gameplay for a surprisingly strong edutainment entry. 12 difficulty levels provide both a variable challenge scale and the inclusion of subtraction, multiplication, and division. Practice Mode offers infinite health but only in the *Trash Zapper* game. From there on, the player will have to rely upon quick reflexes and computational skills to save the day – and Spot!





Reflections: Jan Davidson's vision was to marry the engaging experience of the arcade with educational practice, and *Math Blaster* is perhaps her company's most successful creation in that vein. *Trash Zapper* provides just the right amount of frenetic gameplay, forcing you to decide between fending off the attacking Trash Alien ship, picking up recharge icons, and calculating the math on-screen to identify the correct trash to shoot. Spaced out with asteroid-shooting bonus levels, it's the star of the show. *Cave Runner* is fine if a bit taxing for those not yet comfortable with non-visualized number lines, and *Math Blaster* is the least challenging, though its gem-grabbing bonus rounds make better use of the trash lanes than the math rounds do. The star and moon in *Math Blaster*'s background function as a really cool timer, with the round ending when an eclipse occurs. Combined with responsive controls and solid audio-visual presentation, *Math Blaster: Episode 1* is a fun, if incomplete, console port of an edutainment hit. – DG

Maui Mallard in Cold Shadow
Donald in Maui Mallard (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Disney Interactive
Ported by: Eurocom
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







The theft of island idol Shabuhm Shabuhm soon spells doom, so how will you, as Maui Mallard, bring back the mojo statue? Duck, duck, choose! Choose from Maui's two modes – detective and ninja – as you jump, crouch, and battle spiders, shinobi, spirits, bosses, etc. through eight multistage, side-scrolling levels set in a haunted mansion, a MudDrake volcano, a sunken ship, and more. Detective is your default form, arming you with the ability to climb chains and fire a bug gun in several directions. Although basic ammo is always regenerating, grabbing fire and lightning bugs temporarily provides homing and triple shots, respectively; these bullet types are even combinable. You can also score tropical punch (to replenish health), zombie dust (to raise your hit points), 1-ups, and continues, but if you want to wear a gi and wield a bō, collect yin yang medallions. These permit you to become a ninja while determining the complexity of your strike patterns (reflected by your belt and blindfold's color), but this form's true strength lies in its traversal techniques: swinging from fowl-faced fulcrums and scaling shafts with your staff. Whatever your guise, don't be a sitting duck – load up on luau loot to unlock theater bonus stages for a chance to earn passwords. These, checkpoints, and persistence are crucial to overcoming spiky bungee plunges, rising lava, a spooky escort mission, and other challenges, but evocative graphics and cutscenes should make it worthwhile to take a quack at this game.





Reflections: Disney's Donald may squabble incomprehensibly, but his Maui Mallard persona comes across as a gritty 1940s investigator type – a regular private duck – in this title's manual. His case file tells tales of a dame with long gams and being paid lots of clams, and he even crams in allusions to several Bogart films. His tough guy lingo, possession of a "death wish," and feeling that "oblivion [is his] kind of place" seem to complement the surprisingly dark bent this game has at times, particularly in the Realm of the Dead, where a bloodshot eye broods behind proceedings. However, there's still some silliness, ranging from Maui's idle animations to his profile found in the manual. Not only does the latter list his pager number and blood type ("RED"), but also it shows his cartoon handful of four fingerprints – middle finger explicitly excluded. It seems this duck detective can't flip the bird. – AP

Mecarobot Golf

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Advance Communication
Publisher: Toho
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







In this golf game, players compete against a robot golfer named Eagle, who has been shunned by human pros because his robotic abilities give him an unfair advantage. Luckily for Eagle, his sponsor has given him his own 18-hole golf course called the Hyper Golf Club. Now Eagle waits there for anyone who wishes to challenge him. Upon entering the clubhouse, players must choose one of four golf bags, each with different clubs. The bags represent the game's difficulty and determine how far the player can drive the ball as well as set their handicap. After choosing a bag, three different modes of play are available – Lesson, Competition, and Driving Range. Driving Range simply allows players to practice their swing. Lesson is a round of golf with Eagle during which he'll give the player tips on each of the 18 holes. Competition pits the player against Eagle, but this time he'll offer no advice. Competition also includes "family members" play, which features Eagle and three human golfers. This is the only mode where Eagle is a selectable character. During gameplay, players are given a view of the course from behind the golfer, with information such as distance to the hole and wind direction visible on the screen. Once the desired club is selected, players can set their hook or slice and then use a two-point sliding meter to drive the ball. Like most golf games, the meter has sweet spots, and the player must attempt to stop the slider on them. Unfortunately, the course visuals are very blurry, and there's not much difference between holes. There are also some questionable ball physics, with balls going through trees and only bouncing once before stopping completely. The story is interesting, but the actual golf is lacking.





Reflections: I didn't play much golf growing up, with the exception of *Neo Turf Masters*. The one time I actually did go golfing was with my dad and our neighbor. Our neighbor's 10-year-old son also joined us, and everyone (except me) decided that it would be a good idea to let him drive the golf cart. During our trip to the second hole, he didn't see a large root growing out of the ground, and the cart ended up tipping over along with the cooler that held all of our lunches. We never made it to the third hole. – MV

MechWarrior

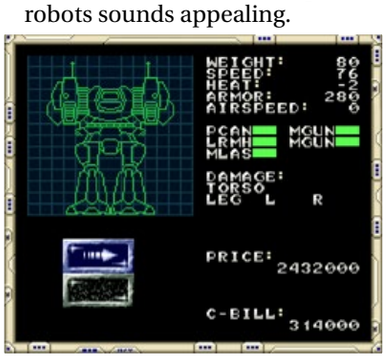
Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







In this first-person cockpit shooter, the player takes up the role of freelance MechWarrior Herras Ragen in his quest to rid the galaxy of the Dark Wing Lance cartel, who murdered his family when he was a child. The player begins with a modest robot chassis and obtains new 'Mechs, upgrades, and weapon types by spending C-Bills (currency) earned from completed objectives. Game information comes from text boxes, pushing the narrative on at the Club Zero-Zero bar, while the General HeadQuarters (G.H.Q) contract hub provides the missions that make up stages. Eight mission types, including seeking and destroying, defending bases, and retrieving items, can be selected, and while different scenarios do appear, most of them boil down to "blow up the big robots." Equipping the 'Mech per mission is essential, as is restocking and repairing at the 'Mech Complex after each sortie. However, controlling the bot is a mixed bag – using an array of lasers and missiles feels enjoyable, but the lack of a strafe button makes gameplay clunky. Enemy limbs can be manually targeted to disable weapons or movement, but the high difficulty from the start deters this strategy. The player is simply forced to kill or be killed in the earlier levels until better upgrades can be purchased. Nonetheless, this is a fun game worth a look if tinkering with giant robots sounds appealing.





Reflections: The second the music track for the bar started playing, it dawned on me that this game was made by the same people that developed *Shadowrun* (or "*Zelda* for grownups," as I like to call it). It keeps the same brooding cyberpunk aesthetic as its RPG cousin and throws in giant shooty robots and explosions. Seeing the different 'Mechs on each stage is fun, but the extreme difficulty, even on the easier missions, is a turn-off until everything clicks. Having a save function is super handy, as it's possible to encumber your mech and have it overheat as soon as the mission starts, resulting in immediate death! It's still pretty satisfying to save up money to buy an all-out war machine; it's just a shame that each stage is a bit too samey. To throw in more comparisons, this game can easily be likened to *Wing Commander* but with far less dialogue, which is unfortunate, as the character bonding in that title makes it a little more special. – JE

MechWarrior 3050

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Ported by: Tiburon Entertainment
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Players must pilot the mighty Madcat BattleMech and destroy the Inner Sphere in this top-down isometric blast 'em up. Five stages of carnage await, from swampy marshes to molten deserts to frozen wastes, each with their own objectives that update via a news ticker at the foot of the screen. Missions range from blowing up enemy radars and destroying factories to retrieval and rescue operations, but each one boils down to the mindless exploding of everything. The Madcat can swivel 360 degrees while firing an array of missiles, lasers, mines, flamethrowers, and other weapons that can be swapped out at the start of each mission, but a finite supply means seeking out scattered ammo drops. Taking hits adds to the combination damage/overheating meter; if it becomes critical, then a life is lost, but coolant can be collected to lower it. Interestingly, two players can participate simultaneously, with one in charge of controlling the legs of the 'Mech and the other responsible for the torso/weaponry. Unfortunately, what should be an enjoyable, frenetic shooter is completely let down by its insane, incessant difficulty. Enemy infantry, tanks, 'Mechs, and turrets never stop unless their spawn points are destroyed, and they can seriously beat the player to death in seconds. Add in ridiculously strict timed missions, and this potential gem of a game is turned into an unplayable nonstarter.





Reflections: What an absolute waste! This could have been just as good as *Desert Strike*, as it follows the same gameplay formula. The visuals are fantastic, and the Madcat clumps about with reckless abandon while squashing smaller foes, but when a rival 'Mech shows up, it is so easy to lose. During a later level, I had to collect parts of a bomb to blow up a wall, but I was only given around 30 seconds to reach the drop-off point. Because I acquired the last piece a long way from the wall, I couldn't complete the objective and had an instant game over. The mission isn't linear, so I grabbed pieces as I explored the stage unknowingly – for me, this is a total game-breaker. Luckily, there is a password system in place, but having to suffer through the pummeling once again just isn't my idea of fun. If the difficulty were scaled back, then this title would have been a classic. – JE

Mega Lo Mania

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Sensible Software
Ported by: SPS
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





A new world has formed, and you control one of four god-like beings who fight for sovereignty over its people. In this real-time strategy game, command a group of men as they learn new technologies and use them to overpower your opponent(s). The levels are split into nine epochs of three islands each. At the start of an epoch, you receive a pool of 100 men to use throughout that section. Leftovers are carried over to the next epoch where you receive an additional 100 men. In the stages, you have an overhead view of your starting square. An SNES mouse can be used, although the D-pad moves the cursor similarly. From the menu on the left, select commands, such as Invent and Build. Then, add men to the project by clicking on the worker icon. More men result in faster completion, as indicated by the nearby timer. Other tasks they undertake include Attack to aggress in a selected square or Defense to protect from atop your buildings. When a job is complete, the workers become available for other commands, although idle (non-assigned) people create more followers. If the action feels slow, click the figure above the menu to change the speed. The shields below that indicate how many units from each character are in the selected area. Defeating all opponent structures and units crowns you victor of the level. This strategy title has plenty to offer, from quirky speech tracks to one of the first appearances of a technology tree. On the downside, the manual is necessary because the controls are somewhat unintuitive. In addition, the 10th and final epoch simply has your reserved men duking it out with no gameplay strategy, making it anticlimactic. It's a fun game to figure out but may not be worth the time to beat.





Reflections: It's amazing to see what this introduced to the god-game genre and how a lot of ideas were used in later series, such as *Age of Empires*. There's a fine balance between building/researching and having men available to take arms. It's relatively short, especially when compared to similar games, such as *Populous*, which offers over 100 levels. The ending is disappointing and punishes you for fumbling around at the beginning (using too many men), but this can be overcome and conquered, as can your opponents. Just don't get caught up in the absolute power, or you might go from playing *Mega Lo Mania* to having megalomania. – KY

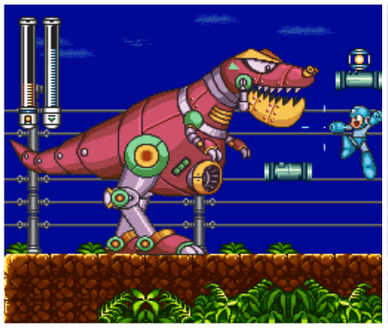
Mega Man 7

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
(PAL: Laguna Video Games)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Dr. Wily has busted out of the slammer, so slam him with your Buster! You *are* Mega Man, after all, and battling the bad doctor continues to be your duty in this 16-bit installment to the series. That maddening scientist has created eight more evil robots: Burst Man, Cloud Man, Freeze Man, Junk Man, Shade Man, Slash Man, Spring Man, and Turbo Man. When defeated in their own themed stages, they augment your trusty chargeable arm cannon with selectable, refillable weapons, such as the Slash Claw and Junk Shield. Each acquisition is especially strong against another boss, so discovering the ideal order for approaching these adversaries is useful. This process is relatively simple because only four levels are available after the opening. Surviving these and a Robot Museum incident unleashes the remaining quartet, and after them, Wily's lair looms. Hazards abound there and everywhere; blazing flames, dubious platforms, and spikes aplenty provide pointed challenges, as do the average enemies. From hard-hatted Mets and guarded Sniper Joes to freon-breathing polar bears, robo-zombies, and a mechanized *T. rex*, the onslaught would make anyone want to bolt – except you. You want to *collect* bolts – dropped (like replenishing Energy Pellets and Weapon Capsules) by foes – to spend on 1-ups and more at Eddie's Cybernetic Support Shop. Some pricey purchases are also hidden in stages, as are encounters with the enigmatic Proto Man and enhancements to your devoted robot dog, Rush. The Super Adaptor is a particularly potent pup power; it disables your slide move but engages turbo thrusters and a Rocket Buster punch that might be preferable to the regular charged Buster shot. You and Rush are also counterpointed by new characters Bass and Treble, whose motivations may not be harmonious. The game's music is, however, and since the play is familiar, you're assured a fun, well-done experience.

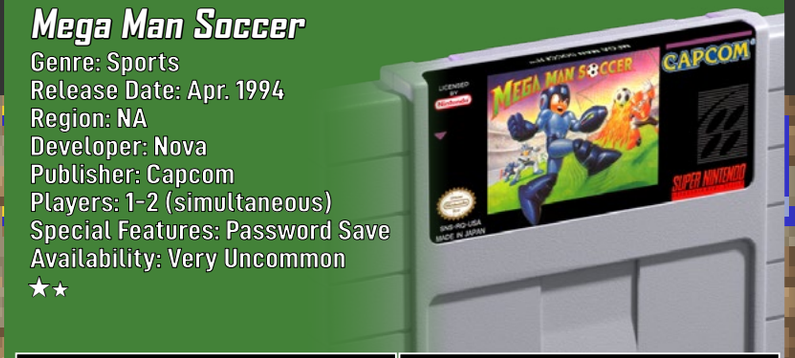




Reflections: No, I didn't miss a Beat – that airlifting avian's available too, but as mechanical animal allies go, the woofer's assistance runs deeper than the tweeter's. Not only can Rush help Mega Man reach new places, but also he's able to sniff out bolts, Energy Tanks, and even expensive accessories. Of course, he usually digs up a cache of trash, proudly offering up boots, cans, bones, and other gnarly garbage. I'm not sure why Mega Man refuses to reuse the refuse, though – he could recycle it into the Junk Shield. C'mon, Blue Bomber – go green! – AP

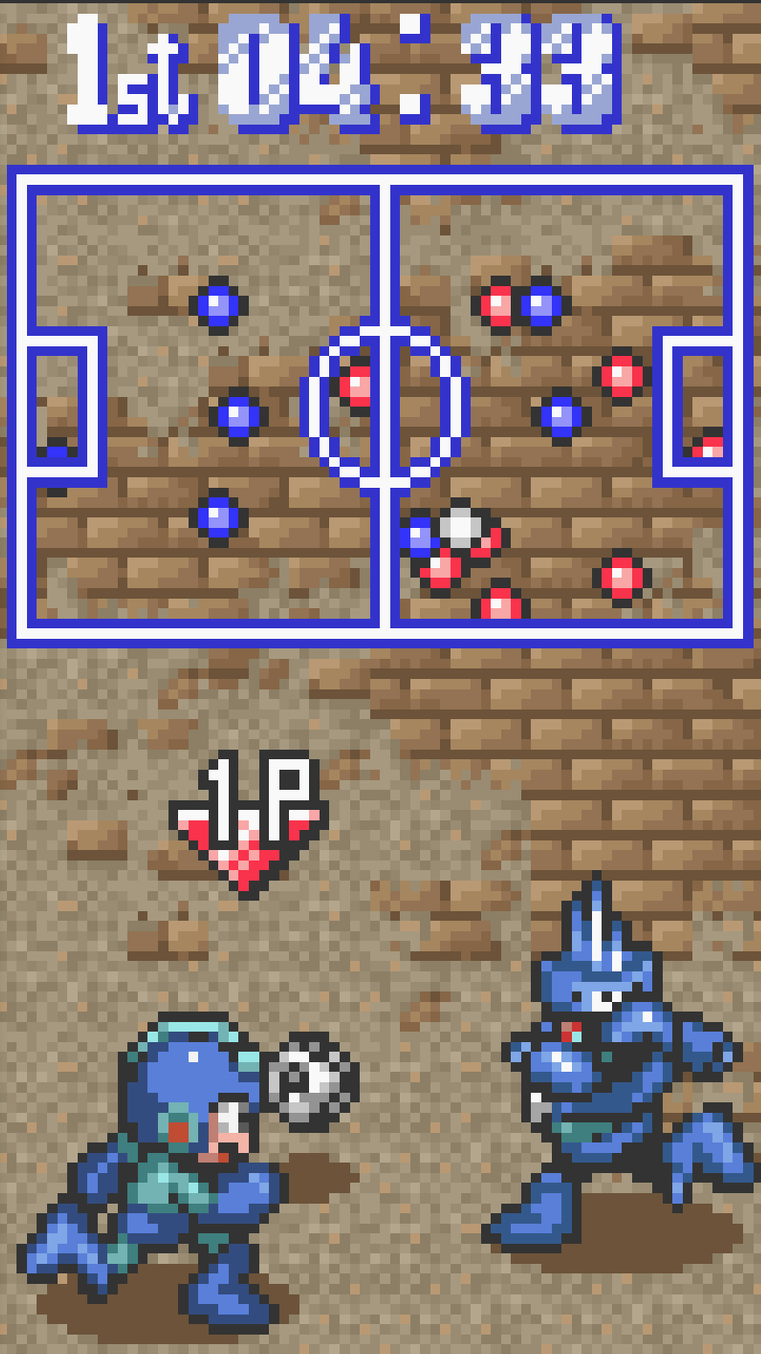
Mega Man Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Nova
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★

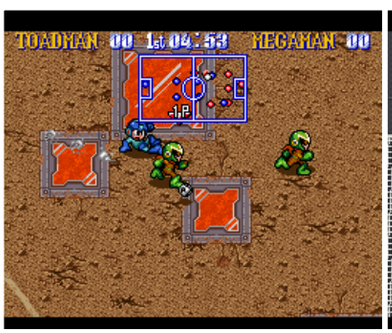








After suffering countless defeats at the hands of Mega Man, mad scientist Dr. Wily has devised his worst plan yet: replacing the players in a major soccer match with his robotic warriors to secure world domination through the beloved sport. Surely confused but taking the bait anyway, the benevolent Dr. Light sends Mega Man to challenge Wily and his minions on the pitch. Get ready to face the computer or invite a friend for some stilted competition. You can choose from several different modes, including Exhibition, Tournament, League, and Capcom Cup/Competition. Exhibition is the most enjoyable mode on offer; it lets you assemble a customized team using a variety of Robot Masters from earlier Mega Man games. Just imagine: Snake Man, Air Man, and Skull Man can join forces with Mega Man for an all-out soccer battle! Each character possesses a personalized special attack move that is essentially a powered-up shot intended to blast beyond opponents, temporarily stunning them. Study each character's stats, build your team, and select your desired formation. The controls are simple: Run with the ball, pass, and shoot. However, the simplicity doesn't curb the extreme frustration that is sure to ensue. You can only see about one-eighth of the pitch at any given time, your playable characters are mind-numbingly slow, and trying to keep the ball away from your eternally slide-tackling AI opponents is nearly impossible. When playing Capcom Cup mode, you compete as the Mega Man team, pitting you against each of the Robot Master squads. Once a team is defeated, one of their players joins your side, echoing the famous power-gathering mechanic from better Mega Man games and inevitably making you wish you were playing one of those instead. And for all of your frustration, this game has no ending (without using cheats). Honestly, you probably won't care. You'll just want it to be over with.





Reflections: This game is bad. So here's my plan. Writing four-word sentences only. It doesn't deserve more. This is my reflection. Have an Atari 2600? Play any Atari game. Preferably any sports game. It'll be MUCH better. I promise you that. I'll give an example. Try Atari's *RealSports Soccer*. A game from 1982. Easily the superior game. The controls are fluid. You can actually score. So much more fun. What happened here, Capcom? Four words for you. This game really stinks! Complete lack of quality. Worst play control ever. This is utterly unacceptable! Mega Man deserves better. – DM

Mega Man X

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom (PAL: Nintendo)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







Could a single capsule both cause and cure the woes of the world to come? Absolutely: It contains X, a robot formed to feel and think by the long-dead Dr. Light. Roused from diagnostic slumber decades after his designer's demise, X aids his discoverer, Dr. Cain, in raising Reploids derived from Light's lab notes. Tragically, Cain lacks Light's brilliance, and his creations, led by the superior Reploid Sigma, wreak havoc as Mavericks whose metal urges them to terminate mankind. In this riveting action-platformer, the convergence of past and future and the crossing of free will and a fate to fight define X, marking the spot of a sterling treasure in 16-bit gaming. Whether you're determined or destined to assume the titanium mantle of this Mega Man, gear up for an intense intersection of scintillating sounds and precision-tuned gameplay in pursuit of Sigma's destruction.

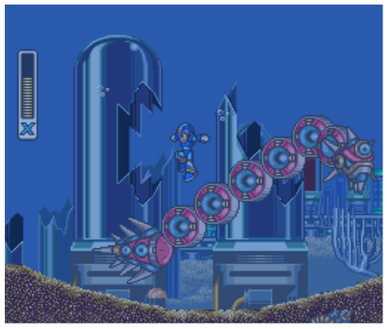




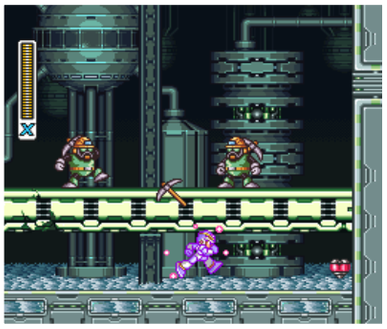
The opening stage sees you barreling down highways under hail from hateful machines, returning fire with your trusty X-Buster's chargeable blasts. Though you can also jump and sustain several strikes before your energy meter empties, you're not yet ready to vie with Vile, Sigma's evil second secured inside impenetrable armor. Nevertheless, don't feel like a nobody – Zero the head Maverick Hunter knows better, citing your potential to acquire power, and that crimson robot's correct – collecting additions to your abilities is key to your exciting quest. The most salient source of souping up stems from Sigma's eight beastly lieutenants – former Maverick Hunters themselves – that each serve as boss in their own intriguing stage. Besting one of these brutes – Armored Armadillo, Boomer Kuwanger, Chill Penguin, Flame Mammoth, Launch Octopus, Spark Mandrill, Sting Chameleon, or Storm Eagle – bestows upon you their expendable signature weapon, such as the Boomerang Cutter or Fire Wave. Because each of these arms is particularly potent against another animalistic menace, there's an optimum order of approach to uncover, but that's not all you must discern. Special items are secreted away in stages, and seeking them is truly rewarding, so be glad that you can enter and leave completed levels freely with your Escape Unit. While heart tanks that lengthen your life and reusable sub-tanks that refill it at will are practical and much appreciated, Dr. Light did not go out of this world without leaving you extremely awesome enhancements hidden in huge capsules and heralded by his own holographic visage. Improvements to your helmet, armor, and X-Buster, an Emergency Acceleration System that lets you dash, and a hard-to-get Hadouken projectile drawn from *Street Fighter II* render you far more capable of withstanding assaults from Sigma's malevolent machinations.

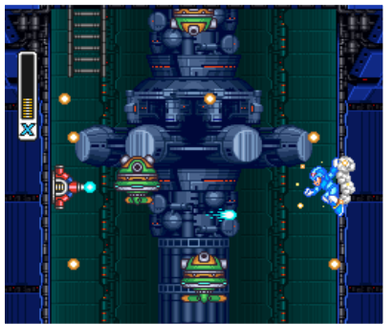
Indeed, you must steel yourself against a multitude of hazards as you traverse the diverse environments ahead, with the perennial pits, spikes, and platforms punctuated by stage-specific challenges, such as cruising on carts in the mine, scuttling a whale-shaped ship in the buoyant sea, and taking pains to shatter glass at the airport. Your path frequently rises and falls, engaging you with the crisp grip of your supremely satisfying wall jump as you fight fabricated foes on your way to and through Sigma's four levels. Submarine, insectile, and spark-shooting minibosses, an assembly line of laser-eyed scrappers, clouds of mechanical cave bats, and more mechanized miscreants are alloyed against you, but thankfully, they drop energy/weapon capsules and occasional extra lives to keep you going. However, the fantastic soundtrack does more than pickups or gridded passwords do to carry you forward in your just journey, galvanizing you against Sigma's forces with the strength of metal and rock. Soldier on, soldered soul, and experience some of the most pitch-perfect platforming and well-composed music and graphics the SNES has to offer.





Reflections: Growing up with this great game, I never quite grasped that Mega Man and Mega Man X are not the same character. I can't really blame the younger me – both bots are blue, built with Busters by Dr. Light, and borrowers of villains' abilities – but even though the differences between this tremendous title and its 8-bit forebears are more cosmetic than cosmic, I don't think that matters when the gameplay's exquisite. Impeccable pacing, matchless music, consummate controls – few games on the console can compete with the magnificence of *X*, which at least offers a change in tone – "a more hardcore environment," according to designer Keiji Inafune. X himself does seem angsty, being a bot from a different time, but he's not the only one. There's an anachronistic adversary in Armored Armadillo's level – a single bat-winged throwback to the original Mega Man series amongst more futuristic fang-bearers. Do you think they shun him, talking guano about him behind his back? I do; I believe that's the reason he almost always drops extra lives for X – he recognizes a kindred spirit from another age. Or else he's just plain batty. – AP

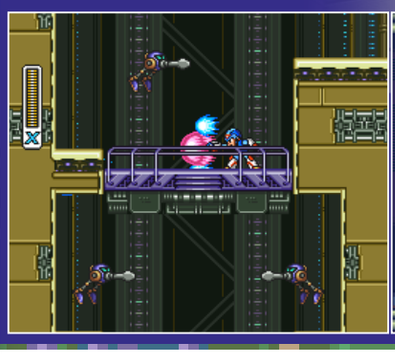


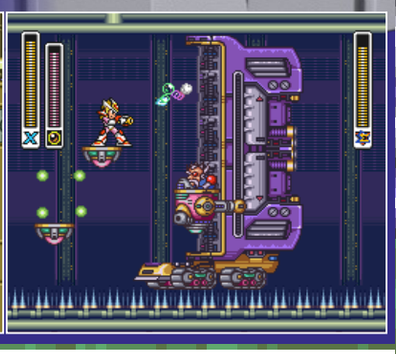


Mega Man X2

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
(PAL: Laguna Video Games)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







As noble robot X, you've not had a moment's rust in your continuing struggle against sinister Sigma's mechanized minions. Three of that routed Reploid's Mavericks, the X-Hunters, have installed eight new electronic bosses (Bubble Crab, Crystal Snail, Flame Stag, Magna Centipede, Morph Moth, Overdrive Ostrich, Wheel Gator, and Wire Sponge) in side-scrolling stages that demand your X-Buster marksmanship and platforming prowess. Defeating a master beast awards you a unique meter-limited weapon for wielding against another especially susceptible adversary. However, sussing out the best sequence in which to slay these circuited critters is not your sole concern; your fallen friend Zero is one, too. Each X-Hunter holds hostage a hunk of his husk and hides in a random stage's secret alcove. If you fail to find and fight them all, Zero gets added to Sigma's side, so search Deep-Sea Base, Weather Control, Energen Crystal, and other locales carefully. Even if you can't reconcile Zero's divisions, you might discover ability-amplifying items. Along with health-increasing heart tanks and life-saving sub-tanks, concealed capsules left by your creator, Dr. Light, exist to upgrade you. These vary in usefulness; the X-Buster's Double-Shot/universal weapon charger and the midair dash rise above the rest as you tackle memorable challenges set to slightly less memorable music. You must blast bad bots while blazing across the desert on an attack cycle, slipping past shifting spotlights, wall-jumping away from lava, and more to reach the X-Hunters' arctic base. It all makes for a super sequel, maintaining core gameplay while trying twists for interest.





Reflections: An attention to detail enhances this installment, much like the included Cx4 graphics chip that allows for nifty wireframe effects. For example, if you linger in the Dinosaur Tank, night descends, but even that doesn't get as dark as the Robot Junkyard. The scrapped remains of rogues from the first game reassemble into shambling horrors, joined by Reploids who hang by the neck until deadly (they drop to attack). It takes a bit of backbone to beat such morbid Mavericks, which is more than I can say for *being* a Maverick. Centipede, crab, moth, snail – so many villains are invertebrates! Nonetheless, just by being extant, even a sponge baddie can mop the floor with my high school's mascot – the extinct great auk. I'm sure our sports rivals were real intimidated by a sadly passed-on puffin. – AP

Mega Man X3

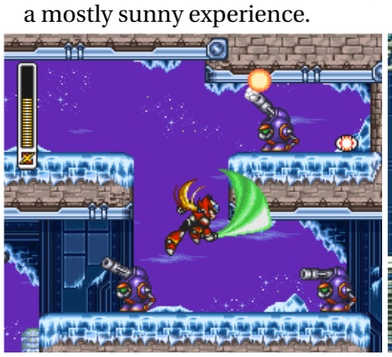
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
(PAL: Laguna Video Games)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★

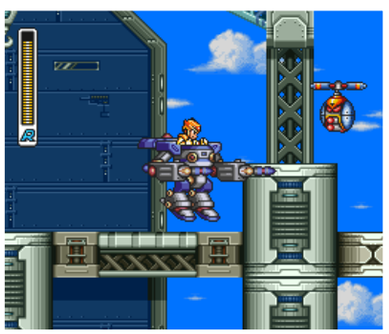






The founder of robo-utopia's a foe? Oh no! Who could've forecasted corrupt Dr. Doppler's effect on the Reploid residents of his eponymous city? Dr. Cain wasn't able, but his Maverick Hunter Headquarters weathers their assault thanks to the cumulative nimbleness of Mega Man X and his friend, Zero. While you can now summon the latter robot once per side-scrolling stage to strike like lightning, a chance of pain steals his thunder – one death disables him permanently. He also storms off before (most) boss battles, including those with this installment's octet of abominable animals: Blast Hornet, Blizzard Buffalo, Crush Crawfish, Gravity Beetle, Neon Tiger, Toxic Seahorse, Tunnel Rhino, and Volt Catfish. Aside from augmenting X's chargeable Buster with his superior Beam Saber under specific conditions, Zero adds nothing more than a breath of fresh air to what is still X's quest to collect refillable weapons by blasting baddies in their selectable stages, deciphering who's weak to the Frost Shield, Ray Splasher, and so on. The atmosphere on the way to Dr. Doppler's lab feels intermittently heavy, drenched by difficult duels with Doppler's agents, deluged by challenging yet repetitive robotic foes, and doused by droning rock tunes. Nonetheless, those climates are conducive to containing capsules (courtesy of Dr. Light) that increase X's skills. From a helmet radar that cuts through the fog of finding health upgrades, Robot Ride Armors, and more to a breezy vertical dash, these awesome advancements temper harsh hazards. One can be improved again at the expense of the rest, but holding out for a certain concealed chip condenses all extra abilities into a solid-gold package fit for facing Sigma's precipitous appearance. Although scattered flaws partly cloud this game, X's prevailing winds up being a mostly sunny experience.

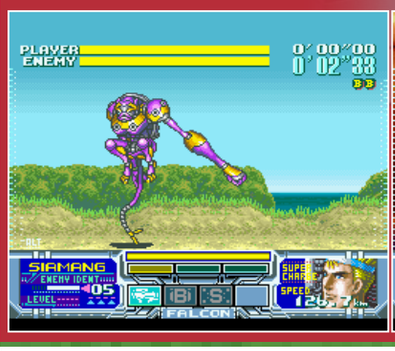


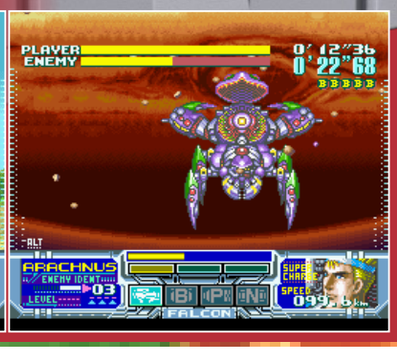


Reflections: Dr. Light must've been exceptionally bright, being able to plant capsules throughout a city established well after his death, but then again, those capsules contain upgrades similar to ones we've seen before: agile legs, helpful helmets, admirable armor, and better X-Busters. Granted, there are differences, but why'd he feel the need to hide variations on these themes? His behavior was likely a smart scientist's attempt to up the probability of X's success, but I can't help wondering if he got a little squirrely in his old age, forgetting what he buried just like those bushy-tailed rodents do with their nuts. – AP

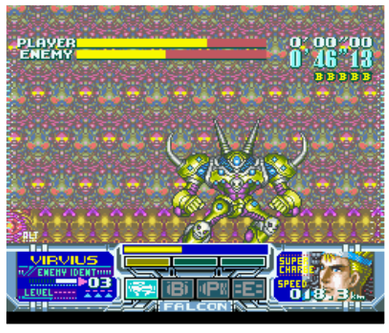
Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Super Scope (required)
Availability: Common
★★★★





Three years after being thwarted during the events of *Battle Clash*, Anubis and his Chiefs return to reclaim the Earth they once subjugated. It is up to the teamwork of pilot Mike Anderson and the player (as gunner) to take to an upgraded Standing Tank (ST) FALCON and fight back in a series of one-on-one, first-person mech battles to unravel the interstellar plot. Familiar foes from the previous game, including Guido and Carlos, make return appearances, but most of the villainous cast present brand-new challenges. Thankfully, unlimited continues and pilot advice help the player progress when the going gets tough, as does the Treble Energy Bolt, a devastating shot that reveals enemy ST weak points. Battles have a strong strategic element to them, especially in determining when to fire TURBO shots defensively, charge up for Energy Bolts, or deploy Bombs and other Special Items. Multiple endings, difficulty levels, and an unlockable second ST with its own mechanics (the TORNADO, piloted by Carol Eugene) encourage repeat trips through Battle Game, whose gameplay and story are both quite strong. After the credits, an overall ranking is awarded based on elapsed time and continues used. In addition to Battle Game, a single player can resume the Training Mode with instructor Rola or battle sets of bosses in Time Trials. For multiplayer, the Combat Game allows a second person to pilot enemy STs using a controller for one-on-one fights, or two players can alternate during Time Trials. A stylish shooter with surprising replay value and a must-own for anyone that has the Super Scope.





Reflections: *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge* is an end-to-end improvement over its prequel, full of the polish and attention to detail that great games are made of. Yuka Tsujiyoko again scores a solid soundtrack, and the sprites for the opposing STs make for attractive antagonists. I enjoy how the circumstances around the final battle play out; it's neat to challenge the player's skill and give them some agency in how the game's story concludes. Plus, instead of skimping for cost, they opted to put a battery backup in the cart. It is a welcome touch that allows players to continue the Battle Game where they left off in pursuit of 32 ranks, adding more replay value. There is even a hidden code to name the gunner, if you prefer personalization. Letting the second player steer the ST in Battle Game would have pushed this game to near-perfection. – DG

Metal Marines

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★★





Regain control of the Earth from the evil Empire in this outstanding real-time strategy battle of wits. The epic struggles take place on an isometric warzone with two opposing islands, and the victor is the first army to destroy three randomly positioned intel bases. Enemy structures are discovered by launching recon missiles – anything they pass is noted on the map. Missiles can also be used to blow up installations before sending in the hulking Metal Marines to mop up on the ground with their rifles and laser sabers. Saving money to build units such as AA guns to obliterate incoming missiles, radar to make defense missiles accurate, and turrets to fend off enemy mechs is key to halting assaults while simultaneously planning countermeasures. Supply HQs and energy plants speed up resources needed to attack but cost big money, and if they are discovered, it can be a huge drain. Are there enough resources and time to save up for an ICBM that can decimate a foe in one hit, or will the pressure hit early, costing valuable assets on a last-ditch assault? Finding out is exhilarating. The fantastically detailed, anime-inspired aesthetic and adrenaline-pumping war melodies top off this brilliant, futuristic game of rock-paper-scissors that is so underrated it demands attention.



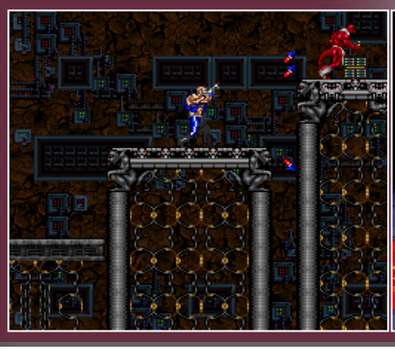


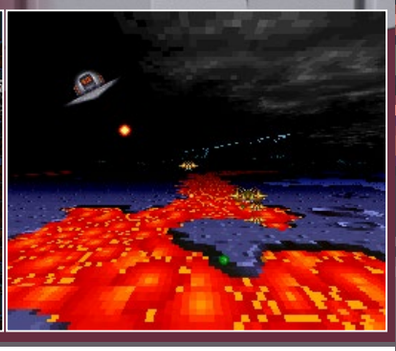
Reflections: Why nobody ever talks about this title is beyond me – it should be a mainstay classic! The rush of sending a barrage of missiles into enemy airspace makes me punch the air every time a rocket hits its target, and the nail-biting anguish when the computer gets lucky and takes out a huge chunk of defenses is palpable. It is especially nerve-racking when you start watching the money ticker in the corner, so you hastily build more defenses to replace the scorched earth left behind before the incoming attack siren goes off again. There is something alluring about this title that keeps me hooked until supreme victory or utter defeat, as there is always a unit or attack that could win a last-gasp skirmish. Add in the indignant radio comments sent from the enemy general when you hit a big target of theirs, and you're spurred on to crush them! It just balances everything so perfectly before you instinctively know that gaining the upper hand early on is crucial. Think of it as a cross between *Battleship* and *Command & Conquer*. – JE

Metal Morph

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter, Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: ORIGIN Systems
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★

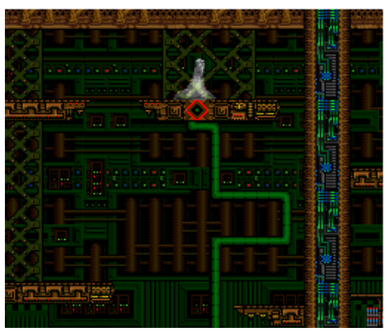






Meet the Metal Morph, Earth's augmented ambassador to the recently discovered Otherside Galaxy. Unfortunately, the would-be diplomat is soon betrayed, becoming host to some unwelcome experiments. His alien liaisons hope to decode his unique nature that allows him to shift between flesh and metal, hence the game's great gimmick – in this labyrinthine side-scroller, Metal Morph can dissolve into a pool of creeping, steel-like material, able to slip by enemies and squeeze into otherwise inaccessible areas. Eight stages are designed around this simple mechanic, driving players through complex nests of pipe and tubing to locate hidden morph pods – stolen ship parts that must be procured before finding the exit. Complicating matters are overwrought switch-based puzzles; some levels contain legions of these triggers, forcing poor souls through painful games of trial and error. Platforming presents similar frustrations, with levels requiring pixel-perfect leaps across quick conveyors. Worse still, gunplay is stymied by the hero's penchant for somersaulting with every jump, scattering his ammo everywhere but the intended direction. Enemies, despite their varied appearances, bear no such disadvantages, ably patrolling their platforms and attacking with a sniper's accuracy. A limited number of items, including heatseeker, laser, and shotgun rounds, plus extra continues and invincibility shields, help alleviate the substantial difficulty, but nothing truly soothes the tedium that pervades the entire experience. Fortunately, the scavenger hunts are interrupted by third-person shooter sequences in which Metal Morph must guide his shapeshifting ship through hordes of alien attackers, reconfiguring its design to endure such dangers. Both psychedelic and Mode 7 heavy, these hectic moments are welcome diversions that still come with their own issues, including dubious hit detection, a capricious camera, and nonsensical bosses. Indeed, whether played in two or three dimensions, the game never transmogrifies into anything good, although its moody soundtrack, double-genre structure, and unusual mechanics tease a better game hidden somewhere within.



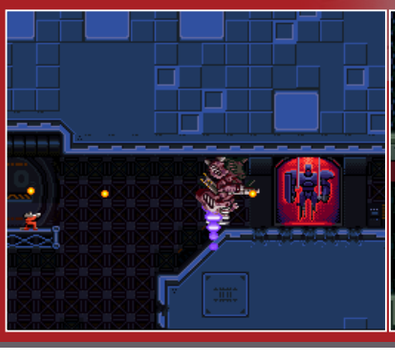


Reflections: Being a reviewer isn't always easy, especially when tasked to complete a particularly misguided title. Indeed, *Metal Morph*'s egregious switch forests, rampant backtracking, and trigger-happy minions make the experience a painful drain on one's time. My ProTip? Choose the easy setting! Or better yet, simply head to YouTube and watch gaming guru "PJ" conquer the title through his Awesome Games Done Quick 2013 stream. Let someone else suffer through this misfire. – DA

Metal Warriors

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: LucasArts
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★







In the year 2102, the United Earth Government is engaged in a brutal war with the sinister Dark Axis. Piloting massive Advanced Robotic Combat Suits (ARCS), the last of mankind's Metal Warriors are dispatched in a desperate attempt to save humanity! Play as Lieutenant Stone, bravely maneuvering your ARCS through various side-view missions. Once you locate a Combat Suit, you can exit your old mech and take control of the new one. The six Combat Suits are the Nitro, Havoc, Spider, Ballistic, Drache, and Prometheus. The ARCS are capable of shooting primary firearms, striking with melee weapons, and blocking enemy salvos with shields, but each Suit also exhibits unique offensive, defensive, and mobility attributes. Scattered power-ups include primary artillery upgrades, such as ricocheting shots, and back-mounted weapons, such as the rocket launcher. Once ejected from his mech, Lieutenant Stone is equipped with a blaster and jetpack. Traversing levels without an Armored Suit can be dangerous, but it's sometimes necessary for reaching otherwise inaccessible areas. Unfortunately, the feeble shooting and explosion sound effects detract from the otherwise awesome action. The graphics are impressive, and your adventures will have you fighting through outer space, dense jungle, smoldering city ruins, and even in split-screen battles with a friend. An exciting variety of challenges await, so put the pedal to the metal, warrior!





Reflections: As both an avid anime fan and a rabid optimist, I believe that I will have the chance to pilot a *real* giant robot someday. But in the meantime, I made the most out of the opportunity to play as a mech pilot in this game. I needed to get into the proper spirit first, so I consulted the "How To Be An Anime Mech Pilot" checklist: Dye hair blue – check. Use five tubes of styling gel to achieve enormous hair spiking – check. Practice awesome, melodramatic action poses. (i.e., look cool at ALL times) – check. Be sure that hair and clothing blow dramatically in the wind whenever saying something dire, even if it's not windy (also, everything you say should sound dire) – check. Have rapid speed lines pulse behind you every time you move quickly – check. Needless to say, by the time my training was completed and I picked up my SNES controller, I had become a bona fide mech pilot – some might even say a true "Metal Warrior." – DM

Michael Andretti's Indy Car Challenge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







In this racing simulator, players compete against 11 fictional drivers throughout a version of the 1994 Indy Car World Series. As the 16-race season progresses, drivers earn points based on where they finish at the end of each race. The driver with the most points at the conclusion of the season is crowned champion and awarded a single one-on-one race against Indy Car legend Michael Andretti. When not competing for the championship, the player can practice on any track or race against a friend in split-screen versus mode. Before races, players may change the tire pressure, downforce, and gear ratio of their vehicle to alter its balance, speed, and acceleration. Each track has its own default recommended settings, which come in handy for players who just want to get to the action. The racing itself is fast and frantic, but it's also fair. While driving, players are given a third-person view from behind their car. Critical information such as track layout, fuel, and speed is conveniently located on the top and sides of the screen. An additional on-screen prompt pops up above the car to alert players of upcoming turns. Little details such as tire marks on the track, colorful crowds, and impressive car models make each race feel lively. It would have been nice to see the vehicles take a bit of damage, though. If cars do happen to collide, they simply bounce off one another. Each track also contains a pit area, but since tires don't degrade, these are really only used for fuel. A rockin' soundtrack accompanies screeching tires and revving engines during each race. Indy Car fans who don't mind a little arcade mixed in with their simulation will fall in love with this title.





Reflections: It's always nice to see a racing game that offers the player "recommended" vehicle settings. It gives the less-knowledgeable gamer a better chance at success, which in turn, makes the game more fun. This feature is especially useful in *Michael Andretti's Indy Car Challenge* because the changes you make really do affect the car's performance. Another thing I'd like to touch on in these Reflections is Michael Andretti's magnificent hair. That was one fantastic mullet back in the day! – MV

Michael Jordan: Chaos in the Windy City

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This is an action-platforming game where basketball star Michael Jordan must save his charity basketball teammates from the clutches of Dr. Max Cranium. Jordan can run, jump, shoot basketballs, and slam dunk as he quests to acquire different keys that open doors scattered throughout each of the four multistage worlds. Doors contain extra basketballs, kidnapped ballers, Wheaties cereal and Gatorade health pickups, or even enemies that the player can dispatch with Jordan's basketball attacks. Foes consist of zombies, bats, robotic ballers, and even giant whistles; each type takes a varied amount of hits, but using flame, homing, bounce, and other acquired shots evens the odds. Balls can also be used to flick switches to operate platforms, giving access to secret areas. Randomly strewn across each stage are hoops which can be slam dunked for even more power-ups, coins that grant extra lives, or a timeout for a short period. Levels are nicely presented, as is the game as a whole, but the labyrinthine laboratories, factories, underground areas, and funfair are so generic that the journey becomes humdrum. The game soon switches from being quite fun to irksome when the levels demand intricate platform jumping that the controls simply can't handle, resulting in a shutout in its third quarter.





Reflections: So Michael Jordan uses magic basketballs to dispatch a giant basketball monster that also fires basketballs. Welcome to the 1990s, everybody! What can only be described as "marketing gone mad" weirdly has quite a playable game hiding inside it. Ignore the schlocky plot of "deranged lunatic kidnaps players because he wasn't good enough to play," and there is some fun to be had. If the game didn't become so ludicrously hard in its later stages, then this surely would have been a cult hit. It also shows some fresh humor as Jordan takes the train between worlds and proceeds to smash reporters and paparazzi alike in the face with a basketball frenzy! It stands today as a weird experiment, not unlike one of Dr. Cranium's comically silly creations... a zombie with a head that is a basketball, for example. – JE

Mickey Mania: The Timeless Adventures of Mickey Mouse

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Travellers Tales
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





Amble down memory lane with Mickey Mouse through six of the Disney-animated mascot's past cartoon triumphs. From *Steamboat Willie* (1928) to *The Prince and the Pauper* (1990), this platformer spans over 60 years of scenes set in a creepy castle (*The Mad Doctor* (1933)), antler-infested forest (*Moose Hunters* (1937)), haunted house (*Lonesome Ghosts* (1937)), and more. These levels sizzle with visuals lifted from their source materials, such as the oldest offering's monochromatic, music-spitting goat or the giant-sized feast from *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (1947); Mickey can even encounter his former selves in their respective environments. He also can duck, push switches and certain objects, swing from ropes, and hurl collected marbles at bugs, skeletons, weasel henchmen, etc. Receiving hits from such foes, hot coals, falling branches, and other hazards folds down a finger on his four-digit health glove, and while snagging stars replenishes those pinkies, damage does derive occasionally from unfair collision detection. His jump is also imperfect; holding down the button makes him hop repeatedly, rendering precision tricky. These foibles and the way health and ammo (or lack thereof) carry over between stages only detract from the game's challenges a tad – outpacing a charging moose, ascending a flaming tower, and riding runaway gurneys are just some of the interesting obstacles to overcome, so look for checkpoints and 1-ups on the way to battling Pete at the end. While not exactly manic, timeless, or even Mickey Mouse (it's too well made), this *is* an adventure, and it's worth taking.





Reflections: It's true that the "Timeless" in the title doesn't suit this game in a literal way (aside from the absence of limited seconds per level). Each stage indicates the debut year of its featured film, so they're dated by definition. There's also a continue countdown, and a clock figures prominently in the Mad Doctor's domain, but the timeliest thing is the actual timepiece on Mickey – a watch he obsessively checks while idling. Though possibly broken, it shows that time is always on the mouse's mind. It might be on yours, too, as you wait through the umpteenth loading screen watching this same analog assessment animation. Life itself seems comprised of waiting – no matter who you are, you must stand by for something at some point – and the inclusion of that truth (not to mention old cartoons still enjoyed today) may be this game's best claim to timelessness. – AP

Mickey's Ultimate Challenge

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil only)
Developer: Designer Software
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





After falling asleep reading a fairy tale, Mickey Mouse (or Minnie, if you choose) finds himself in the fantastical kingdom of Beanwick, which is wracked by mysterious earthquakes. Within its castle, he encounters several familiar citizens who need his help solving a variety of puzzles, such as a memory matching card game with Princess Daisy, a Sokoban puzzle with Donald, and a sliding tile puzzle at the very end. After helping an individual out, Mickey is gifted with an item that needs to be given to someone else who can use it. That exchange earns a magic bean. Once he's collected all five beans, Mickey can then access the final puzzle of the game. The controls are fluid, although the character walks rather slowly. Having just six puzzles total, the game is fairly short, appropriate for a younger audience playing on the easiest setting. Upping the difficulty changes each puzzle by either including more content (such as increasing the number of tiles in the final puzzle) or changing the goal (for example, a letter puzzle has Mickey selecting tiles in alphabetical order on the easiest difficulty but makes him guess an eight-letter word on the toughest one). The hardest setting is a bit tricky, even for an adult. The graphics are cute and exactly what you'd expect from a game featuring Disney properties, but the music is bland and quickly becomes boring. Despite its length, this title is worth playing through, both to see Mickey's friends in costume and for the challenge of the puzzles.





Reflections: Many children's games try to restrict the way that you play, but *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* provides quite a bit of freedom. Not only can you visit the puzzles in whatever order you like, but also you can also revisit them and play them repeatedly to your heart's content (I'm personally a big fan of the code-breaking guessing game Goofy the blacksmith has). I was genuinely surprised by just how demanding the highest difficulty is. It makes the game enjoyable for players of all ages – just choose your setting and have fun puzzling your way to the end with some classic characters. Now, would someone please tell Donald to stop staring at me as I try to push these vials of powder to the exit? – KY

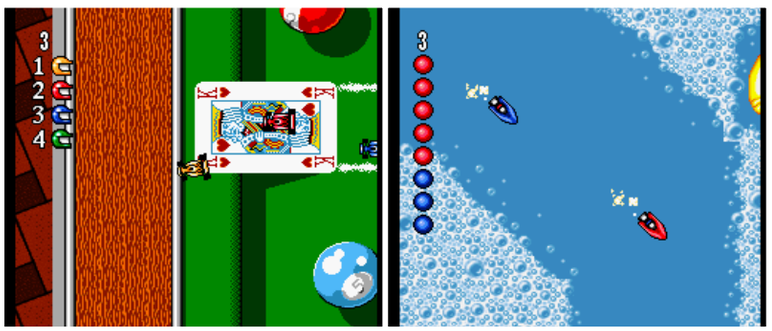
Micro Machines

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Codemasters
Ported by: Merit Studios
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆





Put the extremely small pedal to the die-cast metal in this miniature motorized top-down racing game based on the popular toy license. There are 11 vehicle types to try: Choppers, Four By Four, Powerboats, Warriors, Turbo Wheels, Tanks, Formula 1, Pro Formula 1, Sportscars, Pro Sportscars, and Rufftrux. Each handles slightly differently, with appropriate changes in the acceleration, turning radius, inertia, and max speed. Players select from 11 racers of assorted skill to play as or against. Gameplay is simple, with a single button for acceleration and two others for turning left and right. Interestingly, the controls change based on the number of players and the availability of a multitap; two people can actually share one controller while simultaneously playing. Game modes also vary based on the number of participants. For one player, there's Head to Head racing against a single competitor (with a tug-of-war meter to keep score), or there's Challenge racing, wherein the player seeks to collect every vehicle in the set by progressing through a series of levels against opponents that are slowly eliminated. Bonus Rufftrux levels are available in the latter and award extra lives if completed in the allotted time. With two or more players, it's Head to Head racing in either a first-to-four Tournament or a selectable Single Race. Unique overhead level designs featuring tabletops covered in everything from loose nails to breakfast cereal help convey the small scale of the vehicles while also providing a fun array of hazards to avoid. Unfortunately, they also result in confusing layouts; with faster vehicles, it may take practice to manage a track's boundaries. The graphics are nice enough, but their charm is offset by the lack of racing music and the grating groan of the engines. A little racer that is a little fun.



Reflections: Without a multitap, four players take on some pretty crazy controls that actually have two people sharing a controller. Given the game's simplicity, it sort of works, although you have to be cool with sharing your personal space and/or body-checking your opponent to win. There are more compelling couch multiplayer games on the Super Nintendo, but the unpredictable nature of the courses, extremely accessible gameplay, and fun theme make *Micro Machines* an easy enough title to talk partygoers into playing. If you want to master Challenge mode, eliminate harder foes first. Save easier opponents for the taxing races! – DG

Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Codemasters
Ported by: Merit Studios
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-16 (1-4 simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★





Time for another spin around the table in the small-scale overhead racing series' second entry. Character selection expands, with a combination of old faces and newcomers among the 16 racers, and some fun new themes join the classics for the range of courses players can zoom across. The roster of vehicles has also grown; Super Car, 4x4, Off Roader, Dumper Truck, Rally Car, Sportscar, Hovercraft, Convertible, Dragster, Beach Buggy, ATV, Formula 1, Chopper, Monster Truck, Bug, and Power Boat make up the myriad of miniscule motor vehicles. This version of the game offers numerous modes of play. Challenge mode returns, offering a series of three-lap races against three CPU opponents as the player tries to become Challenge Champion. Added to the single-player experience, Super League has the player vying for standings points across multiple races, with group losers being relegated out of the tournament and winners advancing to a higher group. Multiplayer replaces Challenge and Super League with multitrack Tournaments and Single Track competitions; both use status lights to determine course winners. Time Trial mode, available for single or multiplayer, allows participants to test their skills on any course and includes a ghost of the track record on subsequent races. Finally, Knockout Mode lets 16 players compete in a series of hot-seat head-to-head races in an elimination bracket, with new races for each round. Some flaws in the original remain unfixed here, most notably the audio during races, which is no thing but engine noise and tire squeals. Otherwise, it slightly improves on that same formula.



Reflections: This SNES version is missing elements found in other incarnations, including the course creator for the DOS version and the extra controller ports embedded in the the Sega Genesis cartridge (a Codemasters exclusive known as the J-Cart). Nonetheless, the Super Nintendo rendition still has a lot going for it. There are some unique course ideas, such as the upstream Power Boat race, Stream Struggle. Other courses feature dynamic hazards, including moving drill bits or active pinball flippers. There is little as hilariously frantic as four players trying to control Dragster cars zipping circles around the toilet seat course, Rim Runners, while sharing two controllers. Some courses, like Garage Games, zoom the perspective out more, which helps alleviate one of the series' big issues – identifying upcoming hazards or turns in time to react to them. – DG

Might and Magic II: Gates to Another World

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Nov 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: New World Computing
Ported by: Iguana Entertainment, Motivetime
Publisher: Elite Systems
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





The land of CRON is in need of a mighty set of heroes to save it from the unnatural, dangerous being Sheltem, so start your RPG journey by selecting characters of various classes (e.g., Paladin, Ninja), races (e.g., human, elf), alignments, and genders from a pool of adventurers you create or from a premade set. Having the manual is a must for the list of spells (and the story if you haven't played the predecessor). You begin in the town of Middlegate, but almost the entire overworld as well as the four other towns are immediately available through exploration and portals. The game is quest-driven, but you also have to do a fair amount of searching for clues strewn about the land to figure out the puzzles associated with those quests. Be sure to have pen and paper handy to write these down! The screen is split into three different panes: character info on the bottom, first-person view in the upper left, and either a minimap or a list of commands in the upper right. When you encounter enemies, you choose the action for each of your characters in turn-based battle. If you win, search the area to see what treasure you've earned. If you lose, you're sent back to the last time you saved. This is an interesting adventure with elemental lands to explore, time travel, puzzles, and a variety of side quests. The game boasts hundreds of hours of content, and if you're a completionist, that will certainly be true.





Reflections: I grew up playing The Bard's Tale series, so I felt right at home jumping into this game. If you're not familiar with older computer RPGs (also referred to as Western RPGs), you may find combat a little slow and the lack of direction daunting. With manual and notes in hand and a determination to face every direction in search of hints, you can overcome that and find yourself in a grand fantasy adventure. The music is good but repetitive, especially when you find yourself grinding levels to the battle tune. Being ported five years after the game's original release, this SNES version was upgraded with detailed graphics. While the very first *Might and Magic* saw an NES release, the second installment was cancelled in the US. The third title did make it to North America, though, so check it out! – KY

Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: New World Computing
Ported by: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Taking place after *Might and Magic II* (not released on the SNES in North America), this game sees you controlling a band of adventurers as they continue the quest to defeat Sheltem, this time across the islands of Terra. You start with a premade party but can go to an inn and create your own characters of varying races, such as orc and elf. Two new class choices, Druid and Ranger, join options from the previous game, including Paladin and Cleric. You begin in the town of Fountain Head, and by consulting Corak's Notes from the icons on the right (accessed with Y), you are informed of your first mission. While you are not directed from quest to quest and the game is mainly open world, the areas more easily accessible present a natural order. Portraits of the party members appear at the bottom with colorful gems to indicate their state of health. To the right are icons for actions such as casting spells or resting, which replenishes health and spell points. A first-person view is in the upper left, where three gargoyles indicate various things, such as when foes are near. Enemies are visible before battle officially begins, and you can cast spells or shoot projectiles at them from afar. All actions are turn-based and affect the passage of time, with shops being open at certain hours and the age of characters advancing yearly in-game. This adventure is more of the same for those familiar with the series, but it doesn't alienate newcomers. Whether you want to play in a straightforward, quest-driven manner or wander the open world, this title has much to offer.





Reflections: *Isles of Terra* follows the storyline of *Gates to Another World* and (SPOILER!) leads into the fourth entry. This helps satisfy fans who've been chasing Sheltem from the beginning while keeping the experience fresh with new classes, Corak's Notes, and more. You can use the SNES mouse, which makes menuing easier, but I found movement more complicated because the hitbox for each type of movement (turning, strafing, etc.) is rather small. On the other hand, without the mouse, menuing is a long, involved affair, especially when shuffling around equipment, which feels like "99 Bottles of Beer" in button presses. The graphics of this port are downgraded from the computer version, but the music is still nicely composed and well suited to accompany you through dozens of hours (at least!) of gameplay. – KY

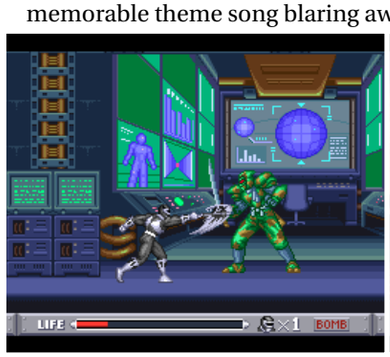
Mighty Morphin Power Rangers

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





The Power Rangers must take out Rita Repulsa's monsters in this beat 'em up based on the smash TV show. The five selectable heroes can be utilized in 2D side-scrolling stages divided into two halves each. The first half has the player controlling an unpowered teenager: Jason, Trini, Billy, Kimberly, or Zack. They each have a standing attack, a crouching attack, jumping attacks, a throw, and a special combo to obliterate the hordes of Putty Patrollers, bots, and aerial nuisances that approach from each screen side. Each teen is drawn and animated accurately to their television portrayal, with nice touches such as Billy's cowardice while attacking and Zack's hip-hop moves. Partway through each stage, the teen morphs into their Power Ranger persona. This beefs up their attack power with a unique weapon while also giving them a wider array of moves, such as a backflip, jumping throw, wall jump, and the ability to hang on and jump from overhead objects. Dinobombs are also available in Ranger mode to clear the screen of enemies. The Power Ranger sections of the game become more difficult but also incorporate different platforming elements, vertical sections, and even an underwater area to spice things up before the player faces off against the boss monster of that level. After the five initial stages, the player takes control of the giant Megazord robot to battle two monsters using standard and special-meter attacks in an interesting and challenging one-on-one fighting mode. There's some uneven difficulty here, and the gameplay is somewhat simple, but the translation of the TV show is well accomplished, from the characters, martial arts moves, weapons, and monsters to the memorable theme song blaring away.





Reflections: Beginning in 1993, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was a huge pop culture phenomenon, with a hit daily TV show, a toy line, and a live touring show. It even managed to make it to primetime on FOX for the premiere of the Season Two multiparter! A mix of martial arts, superhero action, and giant mech/monster battles, the show managed to tug at the geeky heartstrings of many by being a very entertaining children's program that adults could enjoy as well. It's almost surprising but also a huge relief that the first video game based on such a property managed to get so much right and show respect to the franchise that still lives on to this day. – PC

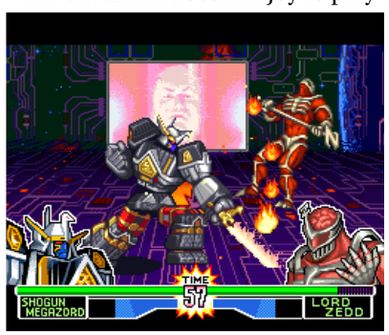
Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Fighting Edition

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★⋆





When intergalactic conqueror Lord Zedd sets his sights on Earth, the Power Rangers team up to save humanity from his villainous rule. It's morphin time! Based on the eponymous pop culture phenomenon, this one-on-one fighting game's Story Mode catapults you into the pilot's seat of one of two colossal Zords – the Thunder Megazord or the Mega Tigerzord. At the helm of these towering robots, it's up to you to fight fellow Zords and Zedd's evil minions in the best of three rounds. By default, you're challenged to defeat each opponent within 60 seconds, but if neither you nor your adversary emerges victorious in a given round, then the one with the most remaining health wins. In addition to intuitive controls that allow you to navigate the arena and pull off impressive combos, you're given the ability to alter the strength of each special attack. Below the health bar lies a continually charging power meter that introduces a time-based challenge to the conventional fighting formula. While landing an attack with an empty power bar results in an effective – albeit lackluster – strike, timing your combo to coincide with a fully charged meter devastates your enemies with an unforgiving blow. Unleashing three perfectly performed assaults also rewards you with a short stretch at full power, briefly removing the need to rely on these precisely timed attacks. Outside of Story Mode, the playable roster is expanded to offer all eight fighters from the campaign – nine including a secret character who can be unlocked with a code granted after completing your journey on the highest difficulty. Each combatant controls and reacts differently but remains well balanced; the Shogun Megazord, for example, hits hard but crawls across the arena, whereas the agile Ninja Megazord moves quickly but relies on more frequent strikes. These diverse movesets keep matches feeling fresh, making your adventure an absolute joy to play.





Reflections: Natsume truly went above and beyond to create another wonderful adaptation of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. Not only are we treated to beautifully detailed character sprites, but also the development team had the forethought to give each fighter a unique sense of weight through subtle animation changes. While lighter combatants dash around the stage with ease, their heavier counterparts move slowly, kick up plumes of dust, and shake the entire screen with every step. It's details such as these that really help to reinforce the sheer size and power of these colossal mechs. – AF

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie

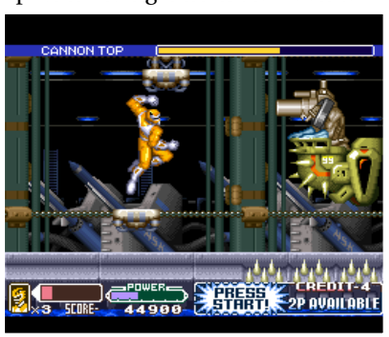
Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





The Power Rangers take on monsters, Putty Patrollers, and the evil Ivan Ooze in this beat 'em up based loosely on the film. All six teenage champions are available to choose from, with each having standing and crouching strikes, a jumping move that's either a kick or a less useful punch, and an additional regular attack executed with UP + Y. Defeating enemies such as the Putties, mechs, droids, and more yields lightning icons. When collected, these icons fill the Power meter, which can be drawn upon for each character's special attack. When maxed, the meter allows the teen to morph into a Power Ranger, replenishing their health and giving them different standard attacks, a jump punch, an uppercut, and the ability to do a backflip to avoid danger. If the Power meter is refilled again after morphing, the Ranger becomes equipped with their unique melee weapon for more efficient fighting until the meter dwindles with time or by using a super attack. The brawling gameplay here isn't too deep, but the settings themselves are noteworthy. Most of the stages take place on two planes (foreground and background), with the character(s) being able to jump between them via L/R. This keeps proceedings interesting because both planes host not only enemies but also hazards such as pits, spikes, lasers, and more that must be avoided and platforms that can be grabbed onto and jumped from. Locales such as a construction site, train, supermarket, and more are visually appealing, and a stage combining snowboarding and surfing is a pleasant surprise. The graphics are satisfying and represent the property well, and monster boss battles are nice, if tedious. The difficulty veers towards unfair, as burgers to refill health aren't numerous, but the option to team up with a Ranger friend is a bonus.





Reflections: Somewhat of a step back, this sequel isn't nearly as satisfying as the original, even with two-player mode. The fighting is hampered by a lack of effective jump kicks for most characters, and not having the weapons readily available makes morphing into a Power Ranger mean a lot less. The lack of a Zord battle is also strange, as the only appearance we see of the giant robot is at the end of the game in a cutscene. Check out the alternate Sega Genesis version if you're hankering for a more accurate portrayal of the movie in game form. – PC

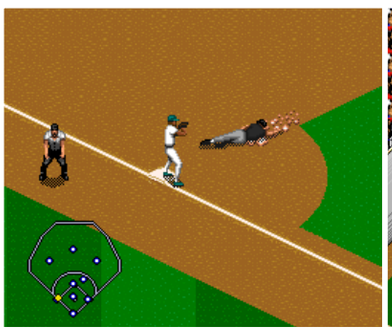
MLBPA Baseball

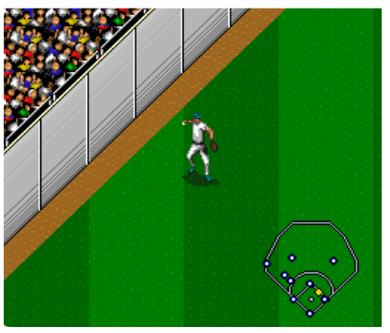
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: High Score Productions
Ported by: Visual Concepts
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





EA Sports takes a swing at America's Pastime in this baseball simulation that showcases its Major League Baseball Players Association license. With One Game, Full Season, League Playoff, and The Series modes of play, baseball fans have plenty of ways to step up to the plate and onto the pitching rubber. Season play takes place across a whole campaign of games, and players can assume the roles of whichever team (or teams) they choose. Standings are tracked, and a lengthy password system makes it possible to resume the long season after any kind of layoff. Once into a game, offense and defense can be player operated or run by the CPU. Some players may wish to have the CPU take care of fielding, as the low camera angle makes it difficult to position fielders to make plays. There's a "radar" that shows where each player is, but it's not really enough to counteract the problems that the camera angle presents on defense. Fielding may be frustrating at times, but hitting and pitching controls are easy to learn and quite responsive. The battle between the pitcher and the batter is tense, and there's some satisfaction to be had as a pitcher when opposing hitters chase bad pitches or ground into an inning-ending double play. Against the CPU, offense can be tough to come by, and its offensive skill is perhaps too advantageous. Visually, the game is impressive, with nice stadium detail, relevant stat overlays, and smooth player animations – the presentation is similar to an afternoon telecast. The sound is adequate, with alternately swelling and subsiding crowd noise and key umpire calls. It all adds up to a perfectly average baseball experience that neither excels nor disappoints in any key area.





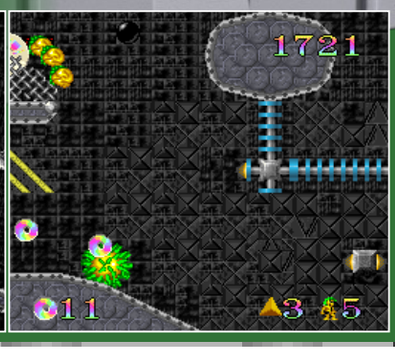
Reflections: While EA was closing in on gaining performance parity for its Madden and NHL games for the Genesis and the SNES, there were signs that the publisher still favored the Genesis. One of these signs was that *MLBPA Baseball* was the only SNES baseball game from EA. The next baseball game, *Triple Play 96*, was a Genesis exclusive – along with its sequel, *Triple Play Gold Edition*. EA also published *Coach K College Basketball* (which ran on the *NBA Live 95* engine) and *Toughman Contest* solely for Sega. It's unfortunate that the SNES was almost always second fiddle, but business is business, I guess. – PS

Mohawk & Headphone Jack

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Solid Software
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







As the buffest blob, Mohawk (or for a second player, Headphone Jack) collects CDs to return the stolen funk back to his planet. Each of the 14 stages is a gigantic course of platforms, hidden passageways, warps, and bonus areas. Mohawk sticks to every relatively horizontal surface he lands on. This means no ramming into a vertical wall to traverse it, but if it's connected to his current surface with a curve, or possibly if he jumps on an angled platform first, then he's good to go. As an added visual bonus (and mind-boggling effect), the whole level rotates to display Mohawk upright. This can cause dizzying results when the game isn't sure which way is down. Mohawk comes across enemies he might attack by curling into a spiked ball. Alternatively, he can explode into dozens of damaging pieces if he has a charge, shown in the upper left. The amount of hits Mohawk can take is represented by the yellow pyramids in the lower right, next to his life counter. If he dies, he's returned to the beginning of the level unless he's run across a yellow circle checkpoint. To exit, Mohawk must gather a certain number of CDs. His current total is shown in the lower left, and the symbol blinks if he has enough. Then, he can check the map with SELECT to find the marked exit (or boss fight in every other level). This game has a great idea at its core, with an original visual concept. Unfortunately, it suffers from marathon stages that sometimes require finding hidden areas to finish. While it introduces power-ups, such as wings to fly, and a variety of environments, such as an underwater cave, the confusing navigation and loss of orientation will have anyone's head spinning in a minute.





Reflections: I simultaneously love and hate this game. I'm attracted by its innovation and puzzle-like elements but completely thrown off by trying to plan a route on the map when the positioning constantly changes. *Why don't you tell me what you want instead of making me try to guess?!* One plus for this game is the funky music that you can crank to 11. Defeating a boss or collecting large CDs in the stages earns you new tunes. This game won't appeal to everyone, and those prone to motion sickness should perhaps avoid it altogether, but if you're up for a unique experience, this title is worth a shot! – KY

Monopoly

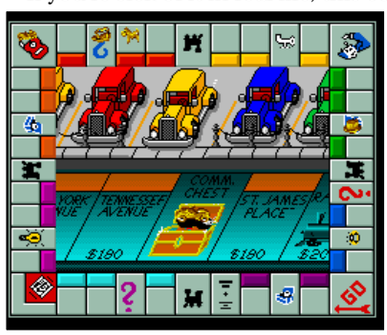
Genre: Board Game, Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Parker Brothers
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







In this literal rendition of the popular board game, compete for all the real estate and cash by rolling the dice and moving your token around the board. When you land on unowned properties, you may buy them and charge rent to players who subsequently stop there. Meanwhile, special spaces make players gain money, pay taxes, move, etc. Monopolizing properties of one color allows you to build houses and hotels, increasing rent further. If you can't afford to pay rent even after mortgaging your assets, you go bankrupt, while the last solvent player wins. However, cooperation and strategically trading properties are also necessary for success. Up to eight players can participate, and they can be either human or any of the Depression-era computer opponents. The menus allow auctions and complex trades of properties and cash, although the one-controller setup and lack of a confirmation prompt before big decisions necessitates mutual trust among players. The style is pleasant and appropriate, with incidental vintage music and animations for board pieces and spaces, but a fade-to-black effect between scenes slows things down. Community Chest and Chance cards look right and are animated in color. There are options to assign properties, buildings, and cash to players or to load a preset game with those already apportioned. These not only allow handicapping but also remedy problems of the original and add variety without altering the core gameplay. Sometimes the first laps around the board determine the winner, but starting beyond that stage reduces fortune's role and allows players to focus on strategies. You can also add a timer, switch a human to computer control, or hasten the game. These options and more make it a great alternative to the tabletop version by eliminating labor and arguments over rules. If you're sick of it in real life, this could make it fun again.





Reflections: I love the NES *Monopoly*, so I'm disappointed that the SNES version isn't as quick-paced or visually and aurally pleasing (although it's still good and superior to the cardboard version). I gave four stars to the NES version in *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library*. I stand by that slightly higher rating, partly because I'd already played this SNES version and knew the NES one demonstrates slightly more polish. – KN

Mortal Kombat

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★







This one-on-one fighting game features digitized 2D graphics of competitors battling to win the Mortal Kombat tournament. The seven warriors all move and jump with the same speed and share a basic moveset: high and low punches and kicks, crouching attacks, close quarters moves (knee, headbutt), a leg sweep, jumping punches and kicks, and a throw. While they vary slightly in look, the moves function the same and do the same damage, from the roundhouse kick to the devastating uppercut. There are thankfully two or three special moves per character, such as Rayden's lightning strike, Sonya's leg grab, and Sub Zero's deep freeze attack. Quick and somewhat rudimentary, the gameplay usually involves hitting a nicely timed special move, jump kick, or sneaky and effective leg sweep to wear down the opponent and win two out of three rounds. A button to block attacks has limited effectiveness since defending still removes health, and counterattacking opponents can prove difficult, especially if being punched continually or trapped in a corner. A ladder-style tournament mode is available where each fighter must be defeated individually before the player faces three sets of two-opponent "endurance" fights, the dangerous four-armed Goro, and finally, the shapeshifting Shang Tsung. While it's a competent port of the arcade title (albeit a little stiff in the controls), blood and most violent imagery have conspicuously been removed. Likewise, most of the bonus Fatality moves that can be performed after a match have been altered from their original, gorier versions, resulting in a disappointing experience that should be avoided by both fighting game fans and fans of the franchise.





Reflections: The popular, controversial, and violent *Mortal Kombat* arcade game arrived on home consoles and handhelds on "Mortal Monday" (September 13, 1993), heralded by a ubiquitous commercial campaign that reflected the excitement many fans had for the game. Unfortunately, the SNES version landed with a loud thud, as gamers were left with a neutered version of a title that largely gained renown for its gore. While the visuals and audio were on target, Nintendo's censorship of the fatalities and blood (changed to gray "sweat") caused an uproar. Sega capitalized on Nintendo's error and used it as a marketing ploy in differentiating their more "adult" Genesis console from the "kiddie" Super Nintendo. While the Genesis port is inferior in visuals and audio, the intact Fatalities and an easily entered "blood code" make it the more faithfully violent version. – PC

Mortal Kombat II

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







Quake in terror before the most fearsome fighting game sequel ever to splatter blood upon our Earthrealm! Ported from the arcade version, this follow-up to the groundbreaking *Mortal Kombat* builds upon the series' mythology by featuring some of the first game's characters along with colorful new ones. By Shang Tsung's request, the powerful Shao Kahn has agreed to host this second deadly competition in the Outworld, where it's believed that the Earthrealm fighters will be at a distinct disadvantage. Returning favorites such as Sub Zero, Rayden, and Johnny Cage face off against new entrants including Baraka, Kitana, and Reptile. There are 12 lethal characters to choose from in total, each offering their own bone-crunching fighting techniques. Punch, kick, throw, and slash your opponents with your basic but brutal skills, and learn character-specific special moves to dish out even more pain. These deadly projectiles and acrobatic maneuvers will leave your rivals writhing on the ground and begging for mercy. Conclude the battle with a variety of finishing moves. Each character can unleash multiple Fatalities that allow the victor to execute their foe in creatively violent ways. Burn your enemy to a crisp, knock off their head, or transform into a dragon and bite them cleanly in half! There are also environment-specific Fatalities that can be performed on certain backgrounds. Uppercut your victim into a deep abyss, a pool of bubbling acid, or a ceiling studded with massive spikes. If you prefer to be a little kinder to your opponent after you've beaten them to a bloody pulp, pull off a Friendship move to show how much you care, or transform your defeated foe into an adorable, crying infant by implementing a Babality. Jump, kick, claw, and combo your way to victory with this fluid and nuanced one-on-one fighter! There'll be plenty of brutality, broken bones, buckets of blood… and of course, bawling babies. Hope you're not too squeamish!





Reflections: *Mortal Kombat II* is storied for its smooth, addictive gameplay and its extreme depictions of violence. However, this game is also notable for its numerous Easter eggs and hidden secrets. Several characters seen in specific backgrounds are either selectable warriors from the first *Mortal Kombat* or fighters that appear later in the series. There are also three mysterious characters that you can take on after performing certain actions or achievements. Smoke, Noob Saibot, and Jade all emerge to challenge you in battle if you can manage to free them. Toasty! – DM

Mortal Kombat 3

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Didn't get enough brawling, blood, and brutal violence the first two times around? Well, it's your lucky day! This third installment of the popular fighting franchise unleashes some new ferocious features into the formula, conveniently ported to your SNES. The bloodthirsty villain Shao Kahn has once again returned, and this time he's brought along his undead wife, Sindel, to help out with the Earth invading and soul plundering. Familiar favorites including Liu Kang, Shang Tsung, and Jax are amongst the selectable kombatants in this iteration, joining brand-new fighters such as Nightwolf, Stryker, and Cyrax. Punching, kicking, jumping, and blocking will feel as fluid as ever to fans of the series, while added mechanics, such as running, bring some new dimension to the game. Players still have the ability to "finish" their opponents after a win with Fatalities, Babalities, and Friendships, but now there are even more ways to embarrass your best buddies after beating them senseless. Add insult to injury by offering Mercy, which restores a small slice of your opponent's life bar. Of course, after you've given them a sliver of hope, you can quickly dash your friend's spirits once and for all with a couple of quick blows before executing an Animality. Each character now has the ability to transform into their own fearsome, murdering animal, who will quickly maul their defeated foe. This title offers loads of variety, including five difficulty levels, packing plenty of replay value. It also introduces the Kombat Kode feature in Versus Mode. Before the battle, players can each select a combination of three consecutive icons, equaling six in total. Different secret codes can be unlocked depending on the arrangement of the images, enabling various alterations to the game. Start the round with 50 percent of your health, disable throws, fight the mysterious Noob Saibot, or even play a game of *Galaga*!





Reflections: With a kolorful kast of kharacters, klean kontrols, and a kollection of krazy moves and killer kombos, few games kan kompare to *Mortal Kombat 3*. I kan't imagine a kompany kreating a more kaptifying kartridge. It keeps many of the key komponents of the arkade kabinet. Klearly, it khould be konsidered a key kompetitor in its klass. So of kourse, there's no kause for konfusion. To kalmly konfirm with krystal klarity, *Mortal Kombat 3* is a komplete krowd-pleaser. Plus, the whole "k" thing is kinda klassy and kreative. What a kool koncept! – DM

Mountain Bike Rally (Exertainment)

Genre: Racing, Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Life Fitness
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, Exertainment LifeCycle (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★

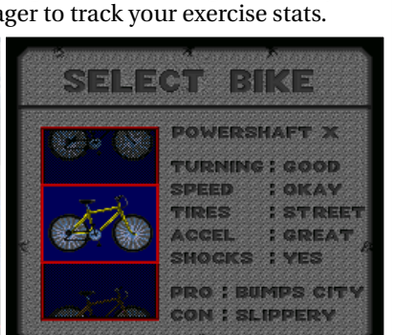






The Exertainment System LifeCycle stationary bike is a peripheral for the SNES designed to help you exercise while enjoying some truly awesome games. Get pumped by the hard rockin' intro music, and then choose from eight different racers, each with their own unique comic book attitude and aesthetic, with aggressive names such as Shadow Rider, Mountain Demon, and Bruce. Assume your desired persona, select a track, and then choose your weapon! Stats and specs are displayed for each selectable bike, including turning and speed ratings, along with terrain-specific tires. The Cougar, Over Ender, and Litestrike 2000 are just a few of the bike models to choose from. The Options screen allows you to set your skill level, steering style, and preference for wipeouts and punching. Once you start the race, you'll need to pedal furiously while steering, assaulting foes, and planting your foot in order to handle those sharper turns and corners. Try to stay on the track at all costs, and avoid obstacles like the violent, bike-hating curmudgeon. Hit jump ramps for some serious air, and ride over speed boosts to help you gain precious inches on your fellow racers. The on-screen dashboard displays your speed, lap number, and your current race position. Completing a set amount of laps or achieving certain scores can unlock additional tracks and circuits. The races take an extremely long time to finish, and the game can become monotonous very quickly. If using only a controller, the bike pedals itself while you steer. The animation is very choppy, and the game runs at an abysmal frame rate. The background art is blocky and boring, with little depth or atmosphere to help immerse you in the races. Opponents suffer from the same limited animation as your playable character, and the lack of fluidity makes control difficult at times. The music is painfully repetitive, and the small handful of sound effects are tinny and annoying. If you are using the bike, you can also access the Program Manager to track your exercise stats.





Reflections: This cartridge was included with both Life Fitness LifeCycle models so you could start sweating and having fun! However, playing on the Exertainment LifeCycle bike peripheral does provide a solid workout, and actually feeling the resistance of the uphill terrain and the speed of going downhill adds some fun dimension to the experience. This title was also released for the SNES in non-exercise format as the slightly modified *Cannondale Cup*.
– DM

Mountain Bike Rally / Speed Racer (Exertainment)

Genre: Racing, Compilation
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Life Fitness
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Exertainment LifeCycle (required)
Availability: Extremely Rare
N/R





This compilation fitness cart was developed for use exclusively with the Exertainment LifeCycle exercise bike. The extreme rarity of the game is likely due to the fact that it was only available through Life Fitness directly and because you need a LifeCycle to use it. It features modified versions of both standalone *Mountain Bike Rally* and *Speed Racer* titles. For more information on each, please see the individual review entries. Players control the action by pedaling on the bike while utilizing specialized controllers mounted on the LifeCycle handlebars. The Program Manager is also available to help track health and fitness progress/goals. – PC





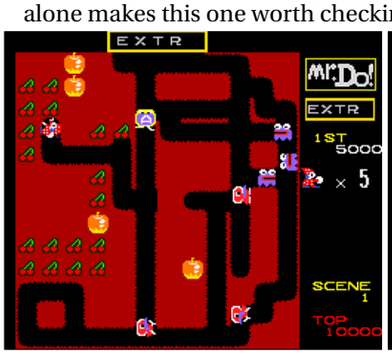
Mr. Do!

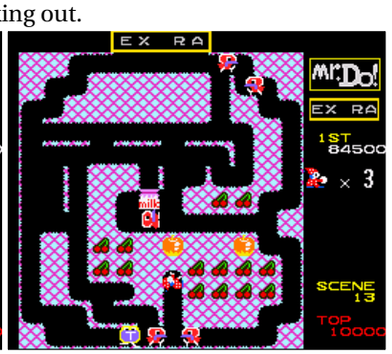
Genre: Action
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Universal
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





This port of the 1982 arcade classic has players controlling a circus clown named Mr. Do as he digs tunnels to collect cherries while avoiding creatures called creeps. Players are given a single-screen overhead view of each scene (stage). The goal is to advance to the next scene by either collecting every cherry, destroying every creep, or finding a rare diamond that randomly appears. This is easier said than done. The creeps travel along any path that Mr. Do has dug, which means players must carefully plan their routes to stay out of harm's way. Sometimes the creeps morph into different monsters that can dig tunnels of their own, which also adds to the difficulty. Fortunately, Mr. Do isn't completely helpless. If he digs a tunnel under one of the numerous apples that are scattered throughout each scene, the apple will fall and crush any creeps beneath it. Additionally, Mr. Do has a weapon called a power ball that he can throw at enemies. However, if the ball misses its target, it bounces away, and Mr. Do must retrieve it if he wishes to use it again. After every 5,000 points, an Alphamonster carrying one letter of the word EXTRA appears. If Mr. Do can hit the Alphamonster with his ball or crush him with an apple, he'll be awarded the letter. Collecting all the letters in EXTRA grants the player an extra life and ends the current scene. The sound effects are on par with the arcade game, but the colors are way off. Other than the basic two-player alternating mode, this port includes an immensely fun two-player simultaneous Battle Mode. This mode has players competing for cherries while dealing with creeps and throwing power balls at each other. Battle Mode alone makes this one worth checking out.





Reflections: *Mr. Do!*'s popularity has no end. Ports, different versions, updates, and sequels of it can be found on several platforms, including the Atari 2600, Game Boy, and even the Neo Geo! Even if you've never played a Mr. Do game, chances are you've played *Mr. Dig*, *Magic Meanies*, or one of its many clones. I personally love *Mr. Do!*'s iconic sound design. The Do-Re-Mi jingle that accompanies the collection of a batch of cherries is a classic! There is just something about those notes that made them audible over the thousands of other bleeps and bloops that filled arcades in the '80s. – MV

Mr. Nutz

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★





Bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and brave-hearted, you are Mr. Nutz, and you must crack Mr. Blizzard the Yeti's planet-freezing scheme by scurrying through six multipart side-scrolling stages set in the woods, a house, a carnival, and more. Don't scamper too speedily, however – not only are the twilit trees, rainbow-laced clouds, and ice cream igloo a delight to see, but also optional areas are squirreled away throughout the game, and it takes a SuperSquirrel like you to seek them. They can contain coins that are tallied towards a stage completion percentage (50 of them partially refill your five-sphere life meter), health items, 1-ups, and acorns to lob at enemies. Although having these projectiles is handy, running out of oak ammo is okay – you can swish your tail at adversaries, and most are susceptible to that old chestnut, the head bop. In fact, jumping on baddies can bounce you up to potentially reach otherwise inaccessible spots, so look before you leap on roving plums, bees, scarecrows, etc. These colorful foes and stage bosses that include a creepy clown and an eye-popping ogre aren't the only challenges to overcome. Among other things, you must find a key, press buttons, take a shrinking potion, swim, slip on ice, swing from chains, and navigate tiny platforms over water, spikes, and lava. The scant invincibility potions, occasional blind leaps, and overlong feel don't ease this journey, but whimsical music and beautiful graphics do, so prepare for plenty of pretty platforming – that's this game in a nutshell.



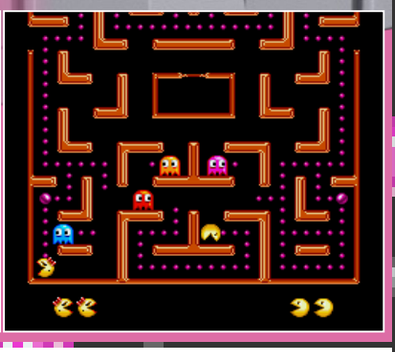


Reflections: Aw, Nutz! What a cute protagonist he is, with chubby cheeks and high-pitched squeaks! And can we talk about his tail (without getting too personal, of course)? It adds to the adorability factor by dwarfing its owner, but I can't decide if its middle line makes it look more like a skunk's or a squirt of striped toothpaste. I think I'll go with the latter, as he's more fresh than fragrant as a central character, but he's not perfectly original – for instance, there's a part where he zooms through pipes in a way reminiscent of Sonic the Hedgehog. Truthfully, that imitation didn't trouble me much. What did is that even though this game is really well made, I got fatigued about halfway through and just wanted to reach the final, abominable snow boss, all the while wondering, "Are we there Yeti? Are we there Yeti? Are we there Yeti?" – AP

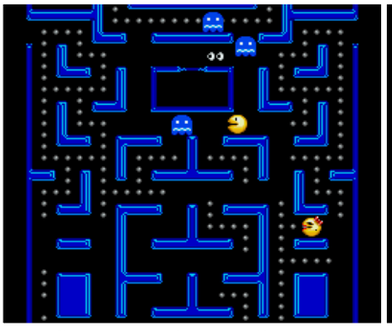
Ms. Pac-Man

Genre: Maze
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: General Computer Corporation, Midway
Ported by: Digital Eclipse Software
Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★





Get dotty with Ms. Pac-Man, the esurient sphere of maze game fame, in this incarnation of the arcade classic. As usual, you guide the peckish lass through an overhead scrolling-screen labyrinth as she consumes the petite pellets lining its aisles, moving on to the next maze when none remain. Pellets put points towards extra lives, as do apples, pears, pretzels, and other yummies that can even come from Ms. Pac-Man's perennial pursuers: ghosts Blinky, Inky, Pinky, and Sue. Although hunted by these haunters who can hound her through tunnels that take them to the maze's opposite side, the citrine heroine can use one of a stage's oversized energizers to temporarily render the revenants blue and edible. A touch then devours all but the specters' eyes, which rush to the middle to renew their AI-driven chase. Seasoning this tasty gameplay formula is a smorgasbord of options. Play alone, take turns with a friend, or eat together from the same maze – simultaneous snacking enlists Pac-Man as an opponent or ally. Four difficulties affect how quickly you and the ghosts move, while the Pac Booster provides extra acceleration permanently or at will. Most enticingly, you can start at up to the seventh level of four labyrinth types: Arcade mazes hail from the upright original, Mini ones fit on a single screen, Big levels are aptly named, and Strange stages offer bizarre bonus items and layouts. Add in a few cute interstage vignettes and you have a 36-maze buffet that always satisfies a hunger for fun.





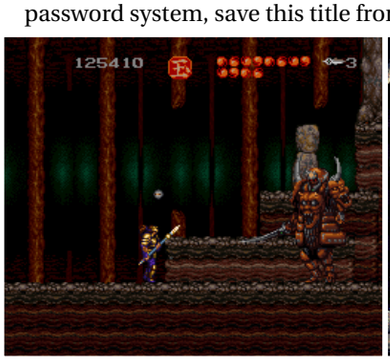
Reflections: Those pellets must be delectable for Ms. Pac-Man to risk death dining on them, but I don't know what they could taste like. While some come in candy-like hues of pink and green, others better resemble ball bearings by being gray or gold. Even if they're dragées (metallic confection decorations), I don't think I'd partake because Ms. Pac-Man is nonpareil when it comes to odd food choices. I'm not talking about the fruit frolicking in most mazes; after all, oranges have appeal, and bananas are high in point-tassium. Instead, it's the Strange comestibles rounding out the spherical lady's diet that turn my tummy. I mean, daisies? Gemstone rings? SEVERED HANDS? That last one might actually be a (still inedible) pink glove, but I'm not so sure. It wouldn't be cannibalism to her as she's not Hu-Man, so if she ever offers you something "finger-lickin' good," RUN. – AP

Musya : The Classic Japanese Tale of Horror

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Jorudan
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★




Japanese myth meets 16-bits in this well-meaning but poorly realized action-platformer set in feudal Japan. The game begins promisingly; would-be warrior Imoto survives a terrible war only to find himself destined to stop the return of an ancient, sinister god. This means descending into the "Abyss," a twisted rabbit hole of horrors wherein he must save a magical maiden and slay countless demons across seven nightmarish stages. Indeed, from ravenous skulls that chase like rats to spike-lined corridors composed of false phantom floors, enemies and traps are everywhere. To defend himself, Imoto wields a spear with four built-in moves – a tepid forward thrust, a defective downward strike, a dubious defensive crouch, and a useless twirling pike maneuver designed to deflect weaker threats. Mercifully, Imoto's inept main attack can be upgraded five levels through the use of power-ups, which are likewise reduced one notch with each frequent death. Three distant gods can also be summoned should the right item be found; Dai Kibhi Soh is the most notable, restoring Imoto's sixteen hit points to maximum, while Asyura smites all nearby enemies, and Kongooh grants temporary invincibility. More reliable, however, are the warrior's own magical abilities. He begins with one screen-clearing electrical special, but four more elemental powers can be gained by felling their respective bosses, the health-restoring "Lifespell" being the most essential. Less magical are the sinfully sloppy level designs, with their tedious progression, unbalanced opponents, and wayward collision detection banishing any enjoyment. Worse, completed stages are shamelessly recycled in later levels, perhaps to disguise what is already a thin experience. Controlling the stiff, plodding Imoto proves equally curious, with his jumping skills limited to either a bulldog hop or gazelle-like leap, neither of which suit the many platform-centric challenges. Boss designs fare better, often evoking creatures from Japanese legend, but the battles themselves are boring, rote affairs. The game's visuals, at least, are fittingly eerie and atmospheric, which, along with some passable music, unlimited continues, and a welcome password system, save this title from complete condemnation.




Reflections: *Musya* feels like the skeleton of a better game – like the failed, early prototype of some long lost *Castlevania* or *ActRaiser* sequel sabotaged by a clueless, useless team. It's a pity, too, as the compelling setting and intriguing premise could have made for an experience both haunting and worthwhile. – DA

Natsume Championship Wrestling

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★




This wrestling title lets players choose from a stable of 12 fictional male combatants to compete in single or tag team matches. Other than exhibition bouts, players can contend for the single or tag team Triple Crown Championship or enter in a single or tag team round-robin tournament. During matches, players are given a fixed view of one side of the ring. The visuals of the crowd, announcers, and wrestlers are detailed and colorful, although the ring design is a bit drab. There are a few tunes that play during matches, but they are pretty forgettable and end up blending into the crowd noise. The wrestling is fun and initially offers a hefty challenge, even on the game's default easy setting. Unlike titles that enable players to button-mash their way to victory, this game demands that they know their opponent's status before attempting moves. For example, each wrestler has a different set of light, medium, and strong attacks. Attempting a strong attack, such as a powerbomb, on an unweakened opponent will result in the opponent reversing the maneuver. This feature injects a wealth of strategy into each match. Wrestlers also have the ability to recover energy while stationary, which adds even more strategy to the gameplay. These aspects work in theory, but once players figure out the proper timing, the game becomes rather facile. At the conclusion of each match, the players will be given a breakdown of how long the match took and how it ended, as well as charming quips from the wrestlers. There are plenty of multiplayer options, including four-player tag team matches using a multitap! This is a good title for wrestling fans searching for a more technical gameplay experience.




Reflections: Firing up this game without any knowledge of how the mechanics work will not bode well for button mashers. In order to win, you really need to understand your wrestler's moveset and how the grapple system works. Unfortunately, after a handful of matches, you will probably figure out exactly when to use certain attacks. After that, it's simply a matter of getting your timing down. Once you master those two components, the CPU is a total pushover. – MV

NBA All-Star Challenge

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★





This isometric, half-court, fully licensed basketball game focuses on single-player or one-on-one play. It offers five different modes: a single one-on-one matchup, a free throw shooting event, a three-point shooting event, a HORSE event, and a one-on-one tournament. Free throw shooting is a very simple event that consists of pressing the A button when a randomly moving crosshair crosses the center of the backboard. The three-point shooting event has 25 balls – five each at five shooting stations spaced around the three-point shooting arc – to shoot into the basket by using the A button. HORSE is an event where one player shoots a basket from a selected spot on the court and the opponent must make a shot from the same spot; missing a shot after a player makes one earns a letter in HORSE, and earning all five letters spells defeat. The one-on-one events are the main attraction here, as shots, steals, and dunks are present. Winners are crowned after either scoring a certain number of points or based on who is ahead when time runs out. The big problem with the one-on-one events is that the camera perspective makes it quite difficult to get into position for rebounds. Solo players will often be frustrated when the CPU seems to almost always be in the right spot to collect rebounds. Visually, the game looks good, with well-animated sprites and digitized courts. The sound is above average, too, with solid music and clear voice samples that call violations. Overall, though, there's simply not enough here to keep players interested for more than short bursts of time. The one-on-one tournament has only eight competitors and can be completed in less than 15 minutes, and that's the deepest of the modes of play. Let this one ride the bench.



Reflections: *NBA All-Star Challenge* was one of my first Game Boy games when I got mine in early 1991, and it was, well... not good. I honestly wasn't that shocked, since I bought it on clearance from a Kay-Bee Toys store. When I saw that a version was coming to the more powerful SNES, I thought that it would be better. That was silly of me. Sure, it looks more impressive than its Game Boy predecessor, but that's where the improvement ends. It's essentially the same shallow game underneath those nice graphics, and that's a shame. As Charles Barkley might say, it's pretty "turrible." – PS

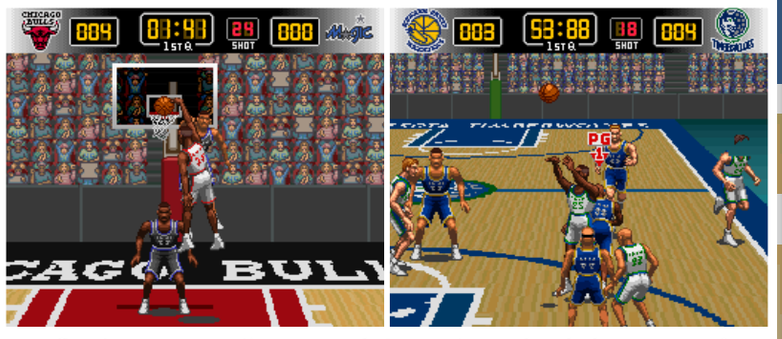
NBA Give 'N Go

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Konami delivers arcade action with an NBA touch and a unique behind-the-basket camera perspective in this five-on-five basketball game based on the arcade title *Run and Gun* (1993). While there are options to make the experience more like a simulation complete with fouls, violations, and goaltending enforcement, the game defaults to a fast, up-and-down style of hoops. Quick passes, jumpers and layups, steals and blocks, and plenty of alley-oops and dunks punctuate each matchup. Player management is minimal outside of editing lineups before games or during timeouts. It doesn't take long to learn the simple play controls. The face buttons are all players need to pull off any move on the court, including a specialized button for throwing alley-oop passes. The execution of the alley-oop is one of the most exciting plays in traditional basketball, and it happens often here. Alley-oops and dunks can be blocked, however, so players must exercise caution before driving the lane and serving up facials to the opposition. There are several modes of play to choose from, including single-game exhibitions, an abbreviated playoff tree for Arcade mode, and Season and Playoffs action. Progress in most modes is saved via password. An option to edit teams, including player trades and the ability to create a "super team" is also available. The visuals are quite good, with large player models and multiple animations for shots, dunks, and other plays. While the action is fast, some of the animation is a bit choppy, but not enough to interfere with gameplay. However, not being able to see where other players are on the court at all times may be off-putting to some. Presentation is adequate, with stats and summaries posted after every quarter. Big offensive plays sometimes earn instant replays, which are great for taunting opponents. The sound is very good, with upbeat music and an energetic announcer calling the action. Make room on your bench for this all-star player, and take it to the hoop.



Reflections: Konami's *Run and Gun* coin-op battled *NBA Jam* for my tokens at Dream Machine in Hadley, MA during the mid 1990s. The presence of alley-oops was a big deal for me, and I often would gape at the screen when I pulled them off – especially late in games. Sadly, the arcade game lacks the NBA license. *Give 'N Go* rectifies this omission, and as it's a console game, I bought it on Day One and still play it today. There's no faking the funk on this nasty dunk, even if Shaq Diesel isn't in the game. – PS

NBA Hangtime

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported By: Funcom
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional), Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★⋆







Exciting two-on-two arcade basketball returns! Participants must outscore opponents in four quarters of action on the way to defeating the 29 NBA teams from the 1996-97 season, each of which features five selectable players. Each player has individual attributes for speed, power, shooting, dunking, stealing, and blocking. All player likenesses are accurately portrayed with digitized graphics, although different player heights strangely are not. Play on the court is extremely smooth and refined, and the quickness is addictively fun. On offense, standard jump shots, layups, and dunks can be performed, along with more advanced hook shots, leaners, and fadeaways to avoid defenders, and spin moves can also be handy. Using the limited, replenishing Turbo button can result in unrealistic monster dunks, while alley-oops and double dunks between teammates can be achieved. A player who makes three consecutive baskets without the opposing team scoring is "On Fire," garnering higher percentages of made shots and even bigger dunks, while three alley-oops in a row grants "Team Fire" to both players. On defense, players can attempt to steal the ball, block a shot (with an excellent timing mechanic), or shove an opponent to the floor, while rebounding missed shots is essential to quickly going on the offensive after a stop. Besides the standard NBA players, a nice create-a-player mode is available, where appearance and individual attributes can be altered for some fun personalization. The high-quality graphics reflect the game's arcade roots well, the music is serviceable, and the play-by-play announcing audio is fine, if a little restricted in its variety. With an optional four-player experience, a great selection of NBA players, and top-notch gameplay elements, this basketball title slams it home.





Reflections: After the wildly successful *NBA Jam* and *NBA Jam Tournament Edition*, Acclaim won the rights to the NBA Jam name and released the oft-forgotten *NBA Jam Extreme* (1996), an underwhelming sequel which took the franchise into the 3D realm. Fortunately, Midway soldiered on with a true spiritual successor in *NBA Hangtime*. Although you could make the argument that the style was starting to grow a bit thin by this entry, Midway truly did perfect the series that they started, even if they could no longer name it as such. For a near-flawless arcade translation, check out the N64 version, which is fantastic for two-on-two games with friends since the N64 has four controller ports built into the system. – PC

NBA Jam

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★⋆







High-flying basketball action launches from the arcade onto the SNES. All 27 NBA teams from the 1993-94 season are here, each comprising two players with individual attributes for Speed, 3 Pointers, Dunks, and Defense. The horizontal two-on-two play on the court is quick and wildly unrealistic, with players moving swiftly and soaring in the air on offense and defense; the meter-limited Turbo function boosts speed and jumps even further. Layups, hook shots, normal jumpers and three-pointers are all possible, but the game's calling card is slam dunks. These include not only regular one-handed and reverse dunks but also mind-blowing windmill, spinning, and even somersault dunks where the player jumps out of the screen. Defensively, stealing and blocking are available, although it's overly difficult to block, especially on dunks. Shoving via the Turbo button is the best bet on defense; otherwise, the game can quickly become a dunkathon. Players hitting three shots in a row go "on fire," resulting in unlimited Turbo, increased shot proficiency, and an easier time initiating insane dunks. The controls are very smooth, and the AI is solid (both teammates can be manually directed by turning on Tag Mode). Graphically, the game gets the job done, but a lack of distinguishing player models is a shame. Having no in-game music and sparse play-by-play announcing makes games sound shallow, although it's nice to hear "He's on fire!" and "Boomshakalaka!" when hitting a monster jam. Only an arcade mode is on offer, but a bevy of options, secret codes and characters, and a four-player mode make this a fun NBA playground.





Reflections: A spiritual sequel to *Arch Rivals* (1989), *NBA Jam* was an instant classic upon its arcade release. It used its license excellently, featuring photorealistic likenesses of actual players, a first for sports games. Tim Kitzrow's iconic play-by-play was unlike anything heard before in a game, and players marveled at flaming three-point shots and slam dunks breaking the backboard. The four-player cab was a huge arcade earner, and this port was highly anticipated. Even though the digitized graphics and full play-by-play were missing on the SNES, it's still an entertaining game and one that sold in bucketloads. Conspicuous by their absences here are superstars Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal, who by this point both owned their own likenesses (Shaq was in the original arcade version). Charles Barkley would later appear in the blatant copycat *Barkley Shut up and Jam!* – PC

NBA Jam Tournament Edition

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★⋆





The two-on-two arcade basketball title returns to the SNES with this upgraded sequel. 28 NBA teams (including a Rookies team) are available, most with three players each; substitutions are permitted after quarters. Individual attributes have been expanded to eight categories to better define players, but the graphics are still inadequate at representing them visually. Shooting, shoving, stealing, and blocking remain smooth, with the Turbo button to amp up the action and players able to go "on fire" if they hit three consecutive shots before the opposing team scores. Players can now accrue "injury" points if they are knocked down, decreasing their abilities and forcing substitutions. New varieties of layups debut, as do a plethora of gravity-defying slam dunks. Refined rebounding and blocking on defense also make for a well-rounded b-ball experience, so the game is more enjoyable on both sides of the court. The somewhat sparse play-by-play commentary is a little more varied and improved, but a few classic lines from the original are missing. The standard arcade mode returns with the ability to alter the game's difficulty, timer speed, computer assistance, shot clock time, and Tag Mode. Additional options include Hot Spots that allow extra points to be scored at certain places on the floor, Juice Mode to increase the game's speed, and Power-Up Icons that grant players unlimited Turbo, boosted speed, dunks from anywhere on the court, etc. The fun continues with gameplay codes and 30+ secret characters, such as Will Smith, team mascots, Larry Bird, and all three Beastie Boys. Other niceties including a battery to save player profiles, support for one to four players, and a Practice Mode make this a superior jam experience.





Reflections: The original port didn't quite fully do the first *NBA Jam* justice, but Iguana did a fine job with this sequel, adding in far more options and modes than the arcade game had, perhaps to make up for the graphical and sound limitations faced on the home console. While the arcade game came across like a simple roster update with minor improvements, this port is a much cleaner overall experience than its predecessor, eliminating bugs and ironing out the gameplay to better represent the raucously fun arcade experience. The amount of secret characters is very impressive, with Midway developers, figures from other sports, rappers, and even three Clintons represented: Bill, Hillary, and George from Parliament Funkadelic! – PC

NBA Live 95

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hitmen Productions
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★⋆





This five-on-five basketball simulation marks the beginning of a long-running franchise. The action zips along at a quick rate of speed – it's perhaps a bit faster than purists may like, but this pace lends itself to lots of offense. Shooting is executed through a simple button press, and players can choose to control the accuracy of their own shots by releasing the button at the height of jumps or allow the computer to complete the act instead. Shooting percentages on the whole tend to be higher than average, with more than half of all shots tickling the twine. Play calling is optional when inbounding the ball; novice players can let the computer automatically choose the best plays for them. Defensively, computer-controlled players are almost too good at shadowing ball handlers at times, which leads to more blocks in a game than would normally be seen. Gameplay modes include Exhibition, Playoff, and Season modes. Season play can be customized in the number of games played. All stats and standings are tracked and can be saved via the cartridge's battery to be continued later. This includes multiple slots for user stats, which is a nice touch. Visually, the three-quarter isometric view may take a bit of getting used to for veterans of other basketball games, but it works well because it allows more of the court to be seen and is especially great for spotting the open man to pass to. Player models look good, with plenty of animations for shots, blocks, fouls, and dunks. There's nice detail for certain arenas, too. The music is hip and upbeat, and sound effects, such as repeating thuds of the basketball on the court or three-point shot calls, are clear. This is a solid effort for the first game in a new series.





Reflections: The thing about *NBA Live 95* that I'll always remember is the option to turn on slow-motion dunks. Perhaps it's a little too showy, but having time slow to a crawl as you watch your player take off from the foul line, spin 360 degrees in the air, and throw down a powerful jam is a pretty cool thing. It works even better as a way to make your friends mad, as all they can do is helplessly watch as the dunk gradually develops while you gloat. This is probably why I don't have many friends, come to think of it. – PS

NBA Live 96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hitmen Productions, EA Canada
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★





This second season of the revamped five-on-five basketball simulation shows no signs of a sophomore slump. Veteran players and fans of purer NBA basketball will appreciate the ability to call preset plays on the fly, and being able to see X-and-O animations of each play will help players understand how best to execute them. On the court, the pace can be quite fast. This may be more ideal for casual fans or fans of arcade-style basketball. It's a bit easier to have a player slash through the defense and score, but tighter defense on higher difficulty settings will require more passing to open shooters in order to put the ball through the hoop. Foul calls are inconsistent, and getting to the line to shoot free throws is more uncommon than it should be. Moreover, field goal percentages – or the percentage of shots made – tend to be too high, which is a carryover from the previous game. These flaws don't necessarily hinder the enjoyment of the experience, but they still skew the game closer to arcade than simulation, which may irk purists. Off the court, player trades and the ability to edit custom players add extra meat to the Season mode of play, and full stat and win/loss tracking are saved to the battery for continuation at a later time. Visually, the three-quarter isometric view enables wider court vision, and new player animations have been added, including tip-ins off of missed shots and powerful dunks that are pretty awesome to watch. The music has more of a rock edge to it in this game, which is a little strange, but the sound effects continue to be great. This game is a playoff contender.





Reflections: Of all the improvements that *NBA Live 96* makes over its predecessor, the ability for offensive players to create shots and not be constantly smothered by computer-controlled defenders is a big one. Defenders can't consistently predict a ball handler's movement, and more talented players are able to dribble around or fake out opponents to at least attempt shots. It's also nice to finally be able to put yourself in the game, thanks to editing custom players, even if the editing mode is sparse. As in real life, my *Live 96* self can't shoot worth a darn. That's pretty authentic. – PS

NBA Live 97

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: NuFX
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★





It's a new season with a new development team at the helm for this popular five-on-five basketball simulation series. NuFX made very few changes to the core game that was inherited from past seasons, aside from adding throwaway two-on-two or three-on-three practice modes, some presentation tweaks, and roster updates to reflect the players and teams of the 1996-97 NBA season. Fortunately, the core game that they inherited is a strong one. The experience still skews more toward the arcade side of play rather than a stricter simulation, but that serves to make it fun to play for most people. Fans of the strategy side of basketball will appreciate being able to call preset plays as well as being able to watch animations of how each play should be executed. It's also possible to manage player lineups, accounting for stamina and injuries, in order to have teammates on the floor that can score or at least keep things close until the best players are rested and come back onto the court. For those who want a pick-up-and-play basketball title, this game fits the bill well and offers plenty of rim-rattling action. Replay value is increased with Season mode and extra customization features, such as creating players and special "dream teams." Oddly, while the cartridge's battery saves rosters and season progress, stat tracking for league leaders is gone, which is a very strange omission. In terms of graphics, the game looks nice, with decent player models and tons of smooth animations, from dunks to blocks. The familiar three-quarter/isometric view returns. A variety of stats are shown during each game, and a constant scoreboard overlay always keeps players aware. Sound is once again very good, highlighted by excellent on-court sound effects. This one is a definite title contender.





Reflections: Despite the annoying omission of stat tracking and league leaders, *NBA Live 97* is the best game in the series for the SNES. The subtle improvements to the overall presentation put it over the top, including the addition of a constant in-game score overlay, which had been conspicuously absent in the previous games. Most importantly, the gameplay and on-the-court action feel great. Pulling off that killer alley-oop to Shaq or driving to the hoop after a steal and throwing down a huge dunk (in slow motion, if you want to rub it in) is as satisfying as it gets. – PS

NBA Live 98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: Tiertex Design Studios
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★







This fourth and final NBA Live installment for the SNES is, for all intents and purposes, a recycling of *NBA Live 97*. The gameplay is virtually the same, and most of the prior title's features remain intact. That said, there are a few changes that new development team Tiertex made. The first is the addition of a three-point shooting contest, similar to what is seen during the NBA's All-Star Weekend. It is very simple, and the shooting controls feel sluggish. The second is yet another retooling of the presentation. The game boasts an *NBA on TNT* style, but aside from a rotating banner and the choice of font, it's barely noticeable. Finally, the rosters and player stats have been updated to reflect the NBA 1997-98 season. Aside from these changes, the core gameplay, visuals, and sound are identical to *NBA Live 97*. For more detail, please refer to the *NBA Live 97* review.





Reflections: It's easy to imagine that EA probably didn't give Tiertex a bunch of creative slack when developing this game since the 32-bit generation was already well underway and that's where most of the development money was going. Tiertex didn't break anything because the gameplay is as solid here as it is in the earlier games of the series. As with most of EA's sports games for the 1998 year, though, *Live 98* just feels unremarkable and unnecessary. *Live 98* exists, and that's fine... but if it didn't, I think most SNES owners would have just gotten more mileage out of *Live 97*. Oh, by the way: The three-point contest is painfully slow and will elicit questions like "Why did I just waste my time on this?" You've been warned. – PS

NBA Showdown

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Electronic Arts, EA Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★







This five-on-five basketball simulation features all 27 NBA teams from the 1992-93 NBA season, along with two conference All-Star squads and two editable teams. These editable teams can be populated with players from any NBA team in order to create "dream teams." A new Season Mode gives armchair athletes the chance to pick a team and play through an entire season, either alone or with a friend, with the goals of qualifying for the NBA Playoffs and ultimately winning the Championship. Thanks to the game's battery backup, progress and statistics compiled through a season or through the Playoffs can be saved and resumed at a later time. Playoff and Exhibition modes are also available. A choice of three increasing difficulty settings makes the game accessible for players of all skill levels, and there's a nice balance between scoring and defense that makes most matchups enjoyable to play. On the court, play controls are as simple as button presses for shooting and passing, along with an extra button for dunks or marquee shot execution – it won't take long to learn how to play. The horizontal perspective is decent for shooting, but positioning for rebounds and blocks can be more challenging than it should be. Graphically, the game runs smoothly as the action scrolls horizontally left and right. Player models don't have a lot of detail, save for different jersey numbers, but a variety of monster dunks and unique special shots for specific players are pretty neat to watch. The game sports a nice broadcast-style presentation, including halftime stats and observations. Sound and music are adequate, with funky tunes that play in menus and some choice boos that rain down when an opposing player finishes a dunk. On the whole, this is an above-average NBA game, especially for its time.





Reflections: *NBA Showdown* fixes a lot of what was wrong with *Bulls vs Blazers*. The most obvious improvement is the speed of the game on the court. Players move much more smoothly and quickly here, and player animations are considerably better. CPU defenders also allow a little more room for shooting, giving players at least an opportunity to score – as long as the ball goes into the basket. Off of the court, the addition of Season mode is huge. Lastly, Michael Jordan makes his last EA game appearance until *NBA Live 2000* – six years later. – PS

NCAA Basketball
World League Basketball (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software, HAL America
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★



This five-on-five college basketball simulation takes full advantage of the scaling and rotation capabilities of the SNES. The camera hovers over a three-quarter view behind the ball handler and swings around to follow the ball on changes of possession. Meanwhile, the players on the court scale smoothly, growing larger or smaller depending on the distance from the camera. These things combine for a neat effect that stands out among other basketball titles for the console. The better news is that there's a good basketball game underneath these visual tricks. Shooting and passing are responsive on offense, while steals and blocks on the defensive side happen just enough to be exciting instead of annoying or cheap. A visual aid showing how "open" a player is to receiving a pass is quite helpful, especially for longer, downcourt passes. Dunks are here, although there aren't a lot of them. For more strategic players, the game offers seven offensive and defensive sets to choose from in order to score more frequently or to get that crucial stop late in the game. Substituting players who are either tired or in foul trouble is also important here. The biggest strike against the gameplay is that it tends to be a bit on the slow side, even during fast breaks. This doesn't make the game unplayable by any means, but longer games – particularly during Season play – can feel like they drag on a bit. Season play is the meat of the game, and taking a team through conference play and (hopefully) into the 64-team Big Dance tournament can be quite addictive. All in all, this is a college hoops game that stands tall, even against the pros, and is easy to recommend for sports video game fans. Note: This was released in Europe as *World League Basketball*, but it swapped out the U.S. college teams for international ones.



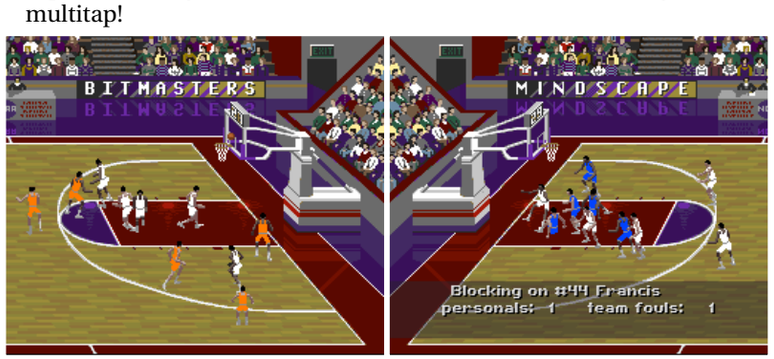
Reflections: I wasn't really much into college basketball, but I decided to pick this up in late 1992 after reading a lot about it in video game magazines at the time. I admit that it was the seemingly constant boasting about the game's liberal use of Mode 7 tech – and the scaling and rotation – which sold me. I mean... the Genesis just couldn't do that! (Well, until *Dick Vitale's "Awesome, Baby!" College Hoops* tried it in 1994.) Thankfully, the actual game was a lot of fun for me to play, and it still is. And, yes – I still use Duke as my main team. – PS

NCAA Final Four Basketball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Bitmasters
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★



This simulation college basketball game lets players guide a top Division 1 team of their choosing through a 64-team single-elimination tournament, the Final Four, and the National Championship. The option to jump into or resume a tournament is available from the onset, but for beginners, there are two practice modes – one that teaches the basics and another that lets players get acclimated with the game's free throw mechanic. Playing an exhibition game is also an option. Before starting a game, the player is presented with a somewhat confusing interface that automatically predetermines that there are two players, meaning that single players must always remember to remove the second player before starting. While in-game, players are given a scrolling horizontal view from the side of the court. Moving a player is done with the D-pad, while passing and shooting are mapped to their own dedicated buttons. There is also a button to make players "go fast;" this will likely see a lot of use because all of the players control like they're stuck in mud. The visuals are bland, consisting of blurry player models and an overly plain crowd. The horizontal view switches to behind the player during a free throw, where a moving arrow must be stopped at the correct point above the basket to score. Full of color and featuring a large player sprite, this is the only part of the game that looks decent. The constant sound of squeaking shoes accompanied by the low murmur of a disinterested crowd perfectly encapsulates the overall experience. Players can also bore three of their friends if they have a multitap!



Reflections: Unlike a lot of gamers, I absolutely love sports games, but I didn't really care for actual sports until I rented *NHL Hockey* for the Sega Genesis back in the early '90s. After trying that game, I convinced my whole neighborhood to start playing hockey. This was in South Carolina, mind you – hockey was unbeknownst to the majority of them. We lacked hockey sticks and didn't have any nearby stores that sold them, so we began to make them out of tree branches. Thankfully, a newcomer to the neighborhood (from Boston) saw us and asked what the heck we were doing. After laughing uncontrollably, he supplied us with real hockey sticks from his garage. – MV

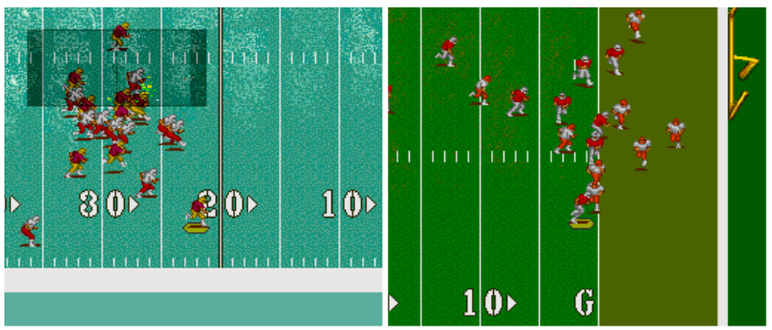
NCAA Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★





Choose your favorite college – or alma mater – and compete for the championship in this 11-versus-11 football game. While there are some simulation elements on offer, the game leans more in an arcade-style direction. Play calling is simplified, removing formations and player packages; instead, players simply scroll through more than 50 offensive and 20 defensive plays to pick the one they want to execute. Athletes don't get tired or injured, so there isn't any roster management needed. On the field, running plays tend to gain more consistent results, while passing is a somewhat random affair. Receivers often arrive at the anticipated point where passes should be caught before the ball does; sometimes they make the catch and break a big gain, while other times they just stand around as the ball falls to the ground behind them. Computer-controlled defenders are kind of dumb and often either miss tackles or get blown past as runners streak toward the end zone. When on defense, such poor play can be exceptionally frustrating. The kicking game fares the worst. The kicking meter is not at all intuitive, and it's common to miss a few extra points until players can figure it out. The computer offers little resistance in one-player games, but multiplayer games are often competitive and fun. The game's tournament mode is a bracketed, single-elimination affair; there aren't any polls or rankings to speak of, but progress can be saved to battery and resumed later. The game's horizontally scrolling perspective works well, and the camera is zoomed out enough to see all of the action. Player models are tiny, and animations aren't very detailed. The sound is on the weak side of adequate, highlighted by clear lines of speech for first downs and touchdowns. Not bad, but not great.

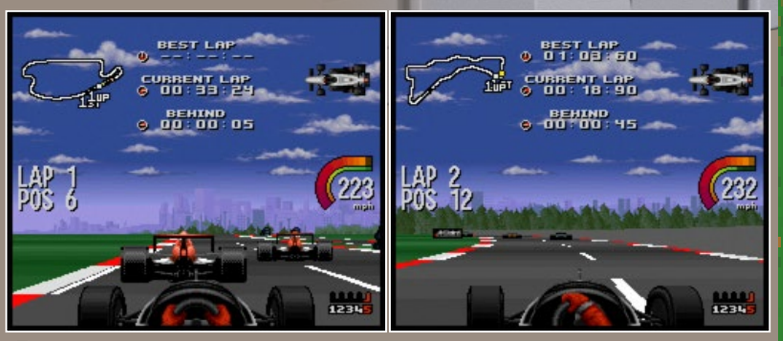


Reflections: I converted maybe 20% of the extra points that I tried while playing this game for review, and that's horrible. Thankfully, since it's possible to forego kicking the extra point and opt for a two-point conversion, I just did that. Make no mistake: you could probably kick this game cartridge farther and with more accuracy than you can kick a football here. Of course, I don't condone kicking SNES cartridges. Not for distance, anyway. Besides – there are worse games that might deserve a good kicking, such as *Capcom's MVP Football*. Again: I don't condone such acts, but I understand them. – PS

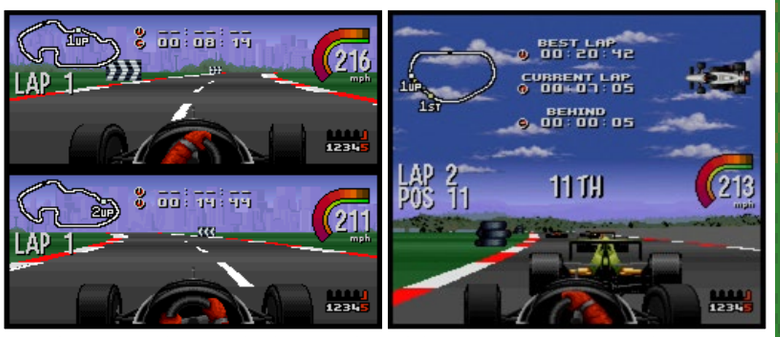
Newman/Haas IndyCar featuring Nigel Mansell

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Racing across 15 tracks (14 North American and one Australian) derived from the 1994 IndyCar season, players compete to become the number one driver in a game that banks on the appeal of British racing champion Nigel Mansell. Single race or full season modes are available, along with the options to practice or to lay down qualifying laps in order to pole higher up on the starting grid against difficult AI opponents. The driving-seat view puts players close to the action, but the cars are much too wide, which often leads to collisions that the computer-controlled vehicles recover from immediately, hampering racing enjoyment. Some of the longer tracks require pit stops to add in a bit of tactical planning, and switching the game from arcade-style to simulation in the options allows for tweaks of brakes, stagger, wings, and more for noticeable changes in speed or control. Some of the tracks have a few tricky twists and turns to learn (arrow signs on the sides of the course can help), but five of them are simply oval circuits that are just plain dull. The whole game can be played in a split-screen multiplayer fashion, however, which does allow for some fun rivalry against Mario Andretti (CPU) or a second human player. Nonetheless, there isn't enough here to warrant play for a long period of time. Stick to the plethora of other racing titles available.



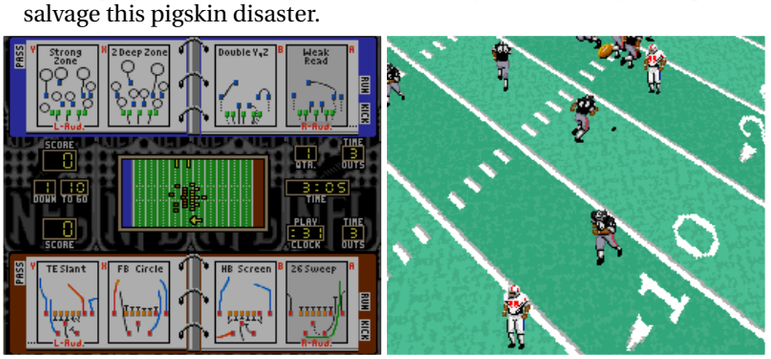
Reflections: I'm not the biggest fan of this genre, so perhaps there may be a little bias on my part, but I need some sort of hook or gimmick to keep my interest when going around and around humdrum circuits. Even though there are 15 tracks to choose from, it feels like there is a distinct lack of content present, and there is no fun for me in the straight-up circular races. The controls are simple and solid, and messing around with car parts does make a difference, but the sheer size of the vehicles on the road always causes unfair crashes and even race-ending injuries. Thankfully, the game's saving grace is that you can turn the music loop off – it's fine the first dozen times but soon makes short work of your sanity. There are easily worse racing games out there, but there are also much better ones worthy of your attention. – JE

NFL Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★



At first, this football simulation shows some promise. It has the NFL team license, a decently sized playbook for each team, plenty of clear speech samples, and pretty good music. It also uses Mode 7 scaling and rotation frequently. The action mostly takes place in a horizontal perspective, though kicking uses a vertical view. The camera swoops around often, with occasional close-ups and zooms for big plays. Unfortunately, playing the game is an awful experience. The animation is far too choppy, which limits the ability to effectively control the action on the field. This problem plagues the running game most. Defensive players close on runners very quickly, and there isn't enough time to try to dodge or shake tackles. Passing is a crapshoot; it's too difficult to ascertain when a receiver has effectively run his route and is ready to receive the pass because the camera doesn't pull far enough back to look downfield. Completed passes rely more on luck than skill, which takes the fun out of it. Defensive play fares slightly better, largely because AI players tackle extremely well. The presentation, decently-sized playbooks, and a password-driven playoff mode are positives, but they're not nearly enough to salvage this pigskin disaster.



Reflections: In August of 1993, I made a trip to a Toys"R"Us store in Auburn, Massachusetts with the purpose of buying two SNES games that I'd been reading about for months in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*: *Street Fighter II Turbo* and Konami's *NFL Football*. My excitement for *NFL Football* revolved around its liberal use of Mode 7. I must admit that I was a Mode 7 fanboy at that time, and the idea of playing a football game with heavy scaling and rotation really appealed to me. After driving home from Toys"R"Us that day, the football game was the first one I tried. It didn't take long for me to realize that a Mode 7 football game was a bad idea and that I'd thrown away $70 of my hard-earned money. After a few frustrating gameplay sessions, I wound up relegating the cartridge to a junk drawer, where it sat for years. At least *Street Fighter II Turbo* was pretty good, so it's not like I wasted all of my money that day. Silver lining, indeed. – PS

NFL Quarterback Club

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★



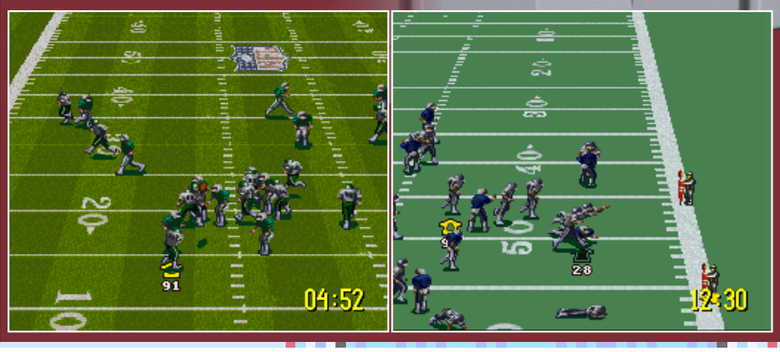
Here's a unique spin on the usual 11-on-11 football simulation. In addition to holding an NFL team license, this game boasts the NFL Quarterback Club license. This club basically united all of the NFL signal callers into one group back in the 1990s and pitted them against each other in a skills competition during the off-season. To this game's credit, it not only has most (but not all) of the NFL quarterbacks for the 1994-95 season represented, but also it contains a recreation of the skills competition – the QB Challenge. This feature has problems – notably the Speed and Mobility obstacle-course-style event – but it's still a fun set of minigames overall. Players can create custom quarterbacks and improve their stats by playing this mode. The main mode of play revolves around taking a team of the player's choosing through an NFL season. The last gameplay mode, called Simulation, presents players with an increasingly difficult set of game scenarios to overcome. The gameplay here is fine, though passing may take some getting used to. Hitting the A button brings up a set of receiver icons that match the face buttons on the controller. These icons change color from red to yellow to green, depending on how open the receiver is. The camera doesn't pull back to show receivers running routes, though, so these icons must be trusted for passing. Running is a much simpler process, and defense is made easier by strong computer AI. Visually, the game looks very good and runs smoothly. There's a nice presentation package here, too, with end-of-play animations and impressive sound samples and music. The player models may be a bit on the small side, but this doesn't affect gameplay at all. In sum, this is a solid, above-average football title that's worth some playing time.



Reflections: I remember watching NFL Quarterback Club competitions on TV, and I really enjoyed them. Some of those guys had serious guns for arms, and seeing them hit moving targets with pinpoint accuracy always amazed me. Playing this game is about as close as I could come to actually competing in one of those events. I can't throw a spiral, my accuracy is the polar opposite of "accurate," and nobody wants to watch me run. That said, games like this let me play out my "I want to be a quarterback!" fantasy as I sport my Dan Marino Starter jersey. – PS

NFL Quarterback Club 96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★



Acclaim comes to the SNES gridiron for a second season of the 11-on-11 football simulation series. This game's presentation impresses with strong visuals and sound. The camera captures the action in a familiar vantage point above the field, following the players as they pass, run, catch, block, and hit. Players are overly detailed, but the animation is smooth. The sound and music are excellent, with front-end tunes that could pass for something heard on a network telecast, authentic-sounding grunts and hits, and commentary delivered by sports video game veteran Tim Kitzrow. There are even well-done studio "shows" during pregame, halftime, and postgame. The gameplay here is tight, with easy-to-learn and responsive play controls, and its authenticity is bolstered by full NFL, NFLPA, and Quarterback Club licenses. The Practice mode allows players not only to learn the controls but also pass timing to complete more passes. Season mode is the game's highlight, as players go through 16 games and attempt to take their team to the postseason – and maybe all the way to the "Big Game." An option to skip the season and begin in the playoffs is available as well. For those looking for something a little different, the Simulation mode pits players against various scenarios that occurred in NFL seasons of yesteryear. One example gives the Buffalo Bills one more chance to get past the New York Giants and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The Simulation mode also has a custom scenario creator, which adds extra replay value as dozens of unique situations can be dreamed up. There's even an option to create players, and these players can improve in the Practice mode. All told, this is a great football package, and it earns a spot in any sports video game fan's starting SNES lineup.



Reflections: This game gives Madden a run for its money, with slick presentation, great sound, and solid visuals. Offensive gameplay, while very good, is just a notch below the standard set by Madden. It's tough to get the running game going, and receivers in the passing game struggle to get open in spite of passing icons indicating the opposite. The removal of the Quarterback Club skills challenge is also unfortunate, as it was a nice foil to Madden's NFL Combine-style events. Despite my quibbles, this title is still the best non-Madden football game on the SNES – and that's high praise. – PS

NHL '94

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: EA Canada
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★



NHL Hockey returns for another stellar year in this top-down, five-on-five simulation. The debut of the one-timer – a slap shot on goal that takes place immediately upon receiving a pass – adds a new dimension of offense. Players also have the option to manually control goaltenders for the first time instead of leaving netminding strictly to the game's AI. There's a good amount of checking and hitting here, and players will need to shoot sooner unless they want to be knocked to the ice by aggressive defenders. A Shootout mode, which pits an offensive player versus a goaltender in a one-on-one scenario, joins Playoffs, Best of Seven, and Regular Season (or Exhibition) modes of play. The sound quality is excellent, with organ ditties and swelling crowd reactions heard against sticks slapping the ice or pucks ricocheting off of the boards. Player animations and skating are quite smooth, though the game isn't as fast as it could be for taking place on the ice. Goaltenders make some ridiculous saves, which are seen rather frequently, and players engage in celebrations after goals. The lack of a Season Mode dings the replay value a bit, and the removal of fighting may put some players off, but this title is a blast to play in short bursts either alone or with up to five friends. Highly recommended.



Reflections: *NHL '94* is one of those special sports video games that has stood the test of time, along with titles such as *Tecmo Super Bowl* and *NBA Jam*. There's a website dedicated to it. There are tournaments run regularly for it. Electronic Arts put the Genesis version of the game into *NHL 06* for the PlayStation 2 as a bonus feature, and they put a special *NHL '94* mode into *NHL 14* for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Why has this game held up over the years? I cite two reasons: First, the introduction of the one-timer can't be overstated. It changed offense in future NHL games by promoting passing to an open teammate instead of rushing to the net alone. Second, the simplicity of the play controls is important. Even in the modern era of controllers with many buttons, Electronic Arts has maintained a more simplified two-button play control option, also known as *NHL '94* Controls, in its hockey games since 2013. This game is still a winner. – PS

NHL '95

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts, High Score Productions
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★



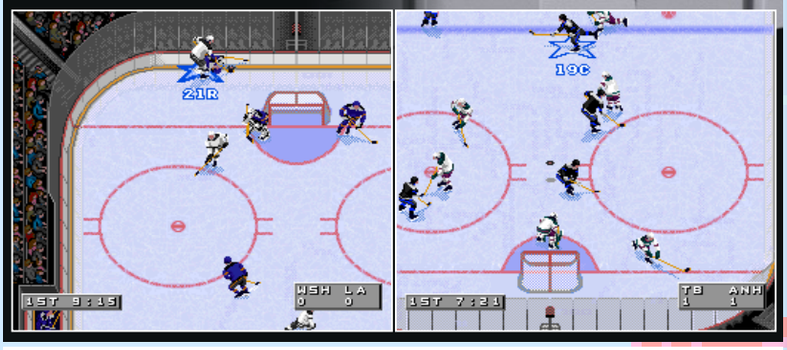
It's a new season for this top-down hockey simulation, with plenty of bells and whistles to keep rookies and veterans skating for dozens of hours. Speed is the first thing that many players will notice when they hit the ice. The game is fast, and this invites plenty of opportunities for rushes up and down the rink. It might even be a little too fast, as it can be difficult to control skaters once they get a full burst of speed. Players can adjust to this after a few games or in Practice mode, but it does take some getting used to. Season play makes its series debut, increasing the game's replay value. Limited stat tracking is also here, so it's possible to follow who the league's top scorers and goaltenders are as the season plays out. The abilities to create players and to make trades with other teams are welcome additions, and the game's battery backup removes the need for passwords. The graphics are quite good, and the sound stands out thanks to some great on-ice sound effects. All in all, this is an excellent hockey game that is worth lacing up your virtual skates for.



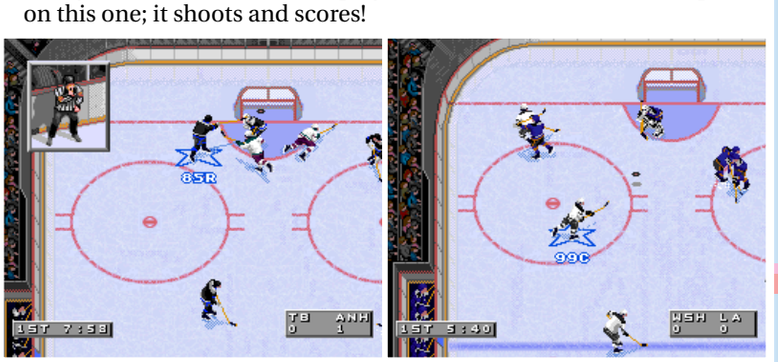
Reflections: The absence of fighting in *NHL '94* and *NHL '95* spotlighted a rather interesting time in the history of the popular series. The NHL yanked its license from Electronic Arts after the publisher shipped *NHL Hockey* in 1991, as EA failed to comply with an ultimatum from then-NHL president John Ziegler pertaining to the removal of fighting in the game. EA went on to procure a license from the NHL Players' Association for its follow-up release, *NHLPA Hockey '93*. For the 1994 sports year, however, EA decided that it was important to make peace with the league. The publisher, in order to restore positive relations and to secure a new license, removed fighting from *NHL '94*. The move worked, a new relationship was established over the next two sports years, and EA was given the green light to put fighting back into its games starting with *NHL '96*. The series has had fighting in its games ever since, and the relationship between EA and the NHL remains strong more than 20 years later. While fighting isn't something that the NHL likes or condones, it still is a highly visible part of the game. – PS

NHL '96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tiburon Entertainment
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★★



This season of the popular top-down professional hockey simulation showcases speed and scoring. Players streak up and down the ice either with the puck or in pursuit of it, and it's exciting to play or watch. It's important to be able to control the players on the ice well, and the play controls here are quite responsive. There are times when skaters will over-pursue pucks or opponents, as momentum on the slick surface will carry them past their intended targets, but this can be lessened with practice and familiarity for how the skaters move. Adjustable difficulty settings make their series debut here, which can make the game more accessible for new players or ratchet up the challenge for pros. Season mode has a clean look and new options, including the ability to simulate to a certain day of the season or end the season immediately and jump into the playoffs. Player models on the ice are slightly larger and more detailed than in years past, and they all have plenty of animations for shooting, skating, checking, and taking hits. The sound is a big star, with voice work for certain in-game events and the licensed use of 2 Unlimited's popular "Get Ready For This" anthem that plays in the menu screens. Don't pass on this one; it shoots and scores!



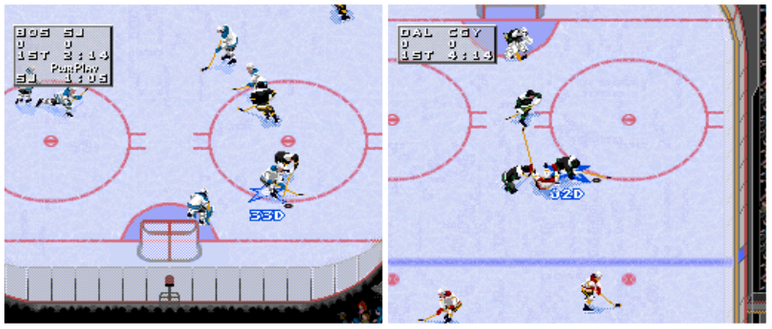
Reflections: *NHL '94* gets a lot of love from sports video game fans, but *NHL '96* skates right alongside it and even edges it out as my favorite 16-bit hockey game. The audio presentation is top notch, with crystal clear voice samples and strong sound effects. My speakers rumble with chants of *DE-FENSE!* exploding from the crowd while on the penalty kill, and "Get Ready For This" sticks in my head when I hear it (Electronic Arts would go on to use the redbook audio track for this song during some goal celebrations in *NHL '98* for the PlayStation). Presentation is only part of the package, though. Scoring is easier, adjustable difficulty levels make the game more inviting, and the play control is improved over *NHL '95*. Players on the ice are more responsive and turn a bit sharper, allowing for more control even in high-speed charges. Whether you hit the rink solo or with a friend, *NHL '96* is great fun. – PS

NHL '97

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Black Pearl Software, Ceris Software, Al Baker & Associates
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★



This season of NHL hockey is virtually the same as *NHL '96*, with one notable and important exception. Each team's roster of players and their ratings have been updated to reflect how they looked during the 1995-96 season. Also, this season marked the first for the Colorado Avalanche – formerly the Quebec Nordiques – and this change is accurately reflected in the game, along with the proper team logo. Please refer to the *NHL '96* review for more detail.



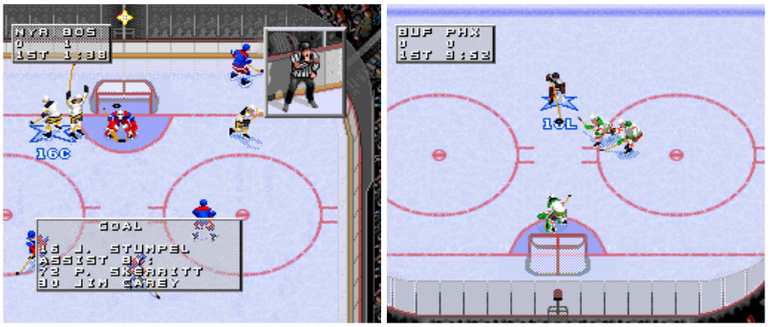
Reflections: Sports video games get a knock for "being the same thing every year," and *NHL '97* is a prime example of why this thinking happens. The game is quite good, which makes sense given that it's basically *NHL '96* with an updated roster. The problem is that, if you own *NHL '96* already, there really aren't too many reasons to add this game to your collection. There are no improvements. There aren't any additional game modes or bells and whistles to speak of. If you don't own an NHL game for your SNES, though, this one is a fine way to hit the ice and put the biscuit in the basket. – PS

NHL '98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: Electronics Arts, Al Baker & Associates
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★



This fifth and final installment of the popular top-down hockey simulation series on the SNES offers a pair of new gameplay modes which join Exhibition, Practice, and Season play. The Shoot Out mode pits a skater against the goaltender, one on one, as the skater attempts to score. This is fun to try when looking to improve scoring skills on breakaways. The Skill Challenge mode tests players in puck control, shooting power, goaltending, and shot accuracy. This mode is inspired by skills events that take place during NHL All-Star weekends and is a change of pace from traditional five-on-five play. Unfortunately, these events aren't much fun due to poor controls. The cartridge's battery backup can now save two different seasons, which is nice when multiple players are using the same game. The speed of the game may take some getting used to, as players must learn to turn or shoot before running into an opposing skater or crashing into the goaltender, but the play controls are responsive enough to do just that after a bit of practice. Passing and shooting are achieved with the press of a button, and adjustable difficulty levels and period lengths make the experience accessible for everyone. Player models aren't very detailed but animate well. The sound is excellent, with crowd chants and authentic on-ice effects. This game is a championship contender.



Reflections: *NHL '98* largely flew under the radar when it finally came out for the sunsetting SNES. Many sports video game fans had moved on to the next console generation by this time, so the extra effort that was put into this game generally went unnoticed. The additions of the Skill Challenge and Shoot Out modes are nice touches, even if the former is kind of a mess. The Shoot Out mode was ahead of its time, as shootouts would go on to become standard practice to break ties during regular season NHL games beginning in the 2005-06 season. That said, *NHL '98* is, once again, *NHL '96* – but with more bells and whistles. For SNES owners who already have *NHL '96* in their libraries, *NHL '98* would be a redundant purchase. For those who don't have a hockey game, though, this one is the way to go. Consider it a Director's Cut of *NHL '96*; it doesn't break new ground, but it's the best version to own. – PS

NHL Stanley Cup
Super Hockey (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★





With a third-person perspective built on rotating Mode 7 graphics, this hockey title features NHL teams but lacks NHL player names (although real-life player numbers and skill ratings are present). Exhibition, a best-of-seven series, and a full season mode are available. On offense, players can pass, shoot wrist shots or slap shots, and dump the puck down the ice. Player line changes are possible, with three regular lines and two each for power play and penalty killing teams. On defense, players can poke check with the stick and switch to the nearest defender, but a huge issue arises when attempting shoulder and hip checks. Random, inexplicable penalties are called far too often, halting the action and leading to excessive power plays, making body checks a useless defensive liability unless penalties are turned off. Problems persist on offense, where passing is rough and scoring goals is extremely difficult – the oversized goalies act as walls to block and swallow up most shots, resulting in too few rebounds to simulate a true offensive attack. Further frustration happens when stealing the puck from a defender in the offensive zone, as a shot cannot be attempted until the camera swings all the way back around, allowing defenders to hamper sudden opportunities. On the surface, the action is fairly smooth, the presentation solid, and the perspective is certainly interesting in attempting to capture the fast-paced spirit of hockey. However, all the shortcomings, including some frustrating teammate and opponent AI, melt potential on-ice fun. Note: This was released in Europe as *Super Hockey*, but it swapped out the NHL teams for international ones.




Reflections: Why was a young Pat dazzled enough by Mode 7 graphics to blow precious allowance money on this freezing disappointment, especially with the far superior *NHL '94* available? It was likely the season mode, but even playing as #2 on the New York Rangers (my favorite player, Brian Leetch) was not satisfying enough to last that long. It truly is ridiculous how penalties such as slashing and hooking occur via a shoulder check, yet a poke check (which in hockey can cause hooking and slashing) never results in one. Unless penalties are turned off, expect a sluggish, stop-and-go hockey experience. I counted 28 penalties in a game I played with 10-minute periods. That's nearly one penalty a minute, and keep in mind that the game clock runs faster than real time. Hey programmer, do me a favor and dial down the "random penalty" percentage in your code, OK? – PC

NHLPA Hockey '93

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★




This first hockey title released for the SNES is a five-on-five simulation that provides the ability to customize how complex the game can be. New or casual players can hit the ice with no penalties or calls (such as icing or offsides), while more serious players can activate all penalties and procedural calls. The Playoff mode is the meat of the solo experience as players attempt to take their selected teams through a 16-team bracket and bring home the EA Cup. Two people can play a Regular Season exhibition game head-to-head or cooperatively as teammates. The game takes place in a top-down perspective, and the camera follows the puck along the ice reasonably well. Passing and shooting are easy to execute with simple button presses while using the D-pad to aim. Computer-controlled opponents provide a decent challenge, and goaltenders can be tricky to solve at times. There are a few "money plays" to beat them, but aggressive defense can negate this. The sound is great, with authentic effects and upbeat organ music. Actions in the rink are animated nicely, from sprawling goaltenders making saves to skaters getting checked to the ice. The frame rate is pretty low, however, leading to a stuttered experience. It takes some persistence, but players can generally adapt to this after a few games and enjoy themselves. Overall, the game still succeeds more than it falters, and that's a net positive.




Reflections: *NHLPA Hockey '93* was my first "real" hockey game. Sure, I had played *Blades of Steel* and *Ice Hockey* on the NES before it, but this game had real NHL rules and penalty calls. Icing was a concept that I picked up quickly, although I guess that I learned it while accidentally shooting the puck the length of the ice a lot early on. Offsides, however, was more complex. I never understood what it meant and got frustrated when the whistle would blow. I took advantage of the option to turn offsides calls off, continuing to do this for the next decade. That's when the lightbulb finally went off in my head and I figured out the concept. I have this game to thank for not only increasing my interest in hockey, but also for beginning my annual tradition of buying new hockey video games. It's definitely been a fun ride. – PS

Nickelodeon GUTS

Genre: Sports, Action
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Viacom New Media
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★

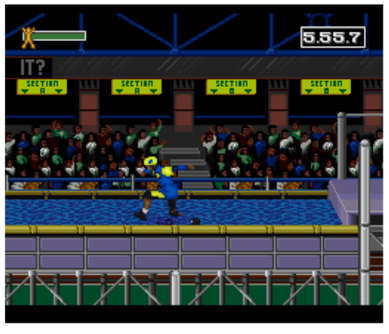






In this adaptation of the TV game show, kids compete for prizes in "extreme" sports challenges. It emulates the look and format of the show, using its imagery, events, photos, animations, and musical themes. You can play as a variety of contestants, but although their portraits look unique, in-game they are palette-swaps of the same digitized actors wearing the same athletic and safety gear and handling in the same delayed manner. Their motion-captured animations take a moment to complete, and the controls are quite under responsive. The start screen has a menu for selecting the number of players, the difficulty, and other options. After choosing one or two players, you can try a single event or show mode, which goes through the challenges plus the final Aggro Crag level. All events are timed, and there are three types: Aerial (which uses bungee cords), Gym, and Track. The Aerial levels are single screen and show one or two competitors from behind, facing a small basketball court. Here, you squat to fill a power meter and then jump forward to hit a goal above the end of the court. These are the only simultaneous two-player events; during others, opponents alternate. A third aerial level, available only as a bonus round, is a single-player, side-scrolling obstacle course where you use the bungee cord to leap up and kick balls off Velcro boards. The Gym and Track levels are also obstacle courses that play like platformers. Here, you have an energy bar which lowers when you get hurt, but this only affects your running speed. Arrow signs help you reach the end, but the controls are difficult, and jumping onto ropes demands perfect accuracy. Maybe it's realistic, since you're playing as children, but it's frustrating. The final game is the Aggro Crag, the biggest level, with more hazards (such as falling water and smoke) plus the requirement that you activate a series of buttons along the way. If you win, you get a piece of the Aggro Crag as a trophy, which is exciting to see but still not worth it.





Reflections: *GUTS* was a good show, albeit very '90s. Nickelodeon had more live-action game show programming at the time. Its "extreme" sports style made it unique, but this eventually became dated. Interestingly, one of the kids in the game is allegedly TNA Wrestling X Division Champion Kenny King. – KN

Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Proceeding in the tire treads of titular racing legend Nigel Mansell, the player seeks to become the Formula One champion against authentic competitors on circuits drawn from the 1992 Grand Prix season. The game plays out from the driver's perspective inside the racecar cockpit and offers 16 world tracks either to choose from at will or to race on sequentially in the main campaign. Changing up the tires, spoilers, and gear ratios comes in handy during different weather conditions, such as rain, and making strategic pit stops prevents the player's car from being forced into early retirement. The player can take a qualification lap to move up the grid or jump straight into each race but at the back of the pack. Handling corners and passing opponents must be done with caution, and the brakes must be utilized alongside the accelerator because the game cracks down on speed freaks. In addition to Driving Practice, a mode called Mansell's Advice lets the player shadow the Formula One World Champion's car and receive audible commands and suggested speed limits for taking bends and chicanes, providing a fun and interesting way to learn each course. Graphically, the game is pleasing, and there is a good sense of draw distance. The experience moves at a decent pace as well, and the official licensing brings authenticity to this well-rounded racer.





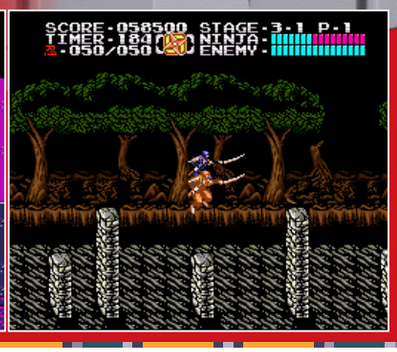
Reflections: The racing genre is not one of my preferred choices when it comes to gaming, but I have to admit this title is really good fun. I find it quite difficult to pass other drivers without bumping into them, though, as the cars on the track are quite wide. Taking them on the straights is the way to go rather than trying on a bend because the game tends to punish you and not the AI cars during a collision. Changing car parts does make a difference in the handling, so trying different combinations gives a feel as to what each component does. The Mansell's Advice bit is a great touch that race aficionados should appreciate, as it goes into a little depth about each track (albeit just scratching the surface). In the UK, there was a television advert for this game featuring British comedy legend Rik Mayall – I implore you to check it out online. He did a whole range of Nintendo adverts, and they were all gold. – JE

Ninja Gaiden Trilogy

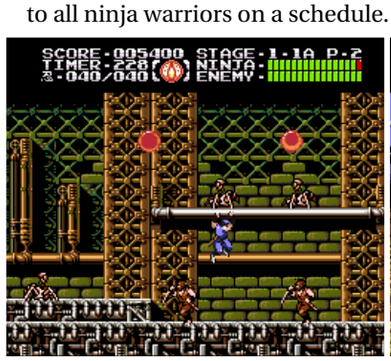
Genre: Action-Platformer, Compilation
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Dust off the powerful Dragon Sword and once again flip into action as legendary ninja Ryu Hayabusa. This game is a compilation of the NES Ninja Gaiden trilogy of side-scrolling action-platformers, now with remastered graphics and music. In *Ninja Gaiden*, the young protagonist undertakes a mission to America to confront ancient mysteries and certain danger. Ryu must use his sword and obtainable power-ups, including shurikens, flame projectiles, and the spinning "jump & slash technique," to destroy those who stand in his way. The platforming and numerous bosses present a solid challenge. In *Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos*, Ryu is tasked with rescuing his old associate, Irene Lew of the CIA. Along the way, he learns of a new menace named Ashtar. The warrior must defeat this sinister figure and destroy the mythical Dark Sword! This sequel feels similar to the original but introduces power-ups that create helpful doppelgängers of Ryu. It's now also possible for him to climb any wall easily without having to jump. *Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom* is set between the first two games, with Ryu being framed for Irene's murder. Supposed allies are exposed as deadly enemies, so it's up to the sword-wielding hero to once again save the day! In this third installment, Ryu has the ability to climb horizontally across overhead pipes, beams, and ceilings. The North American NES version of this game is extremely difficult, with more damage taken per hit and a limited number of continues. Mercifully, this is the Japanese version of *Ninja Gaiden III*, so only one unit of energy is taken when damaged, and unlimited continues ensure that Ryu has a fighting chance! This collection also includes a password feature for each game, invaluable to all ninja warriors on a schedule.





Reflections: Both famous and infamous for their flawless gameplay, amazing music, and rage-inducing difficulty, the original Ninja Gaiden threesome are true gems of the 8-bit gaming era. For this SNES collection, any attempts at graphical embellishment probably won't deter fans of the originals. However, this compilation heartlessly replaces the brilliant scores from the 8-bit versions with something that sounds like you plunged your NES into a fish tank. The music is muffled, distorted, and barely recognizable. The original soundtrack is in there somewhere underneath all that noise, but it's unforgivably mangled. No respectable Ninja Gaiden fan will like the sound of that. – DM

Ninja Warriors

Ninja Warriors: The New Generation (EU)

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Taito (PAL: Titus)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Become one of three Japanese-inspired combat androids and take on modern-day despot Banglar and his underlings in this side-scrolling beat 'em up's eight multipart stages. You can choose Ninja, a literal heavy hitter who packs nunchaku strikes and powerful punches into a plodding package; Kamaitachi, a swift, sickle-armed scrapper; or Kunoichi, a female fighter who wields kunai daggers and a katana. All are individualized with different speeds, strengths, attacks, etc., creating a fresh feel as you traverse the dystopian industrial environments. The warriors do share a few commonalities, such as access to unlimited continues, and they can pick up and pelt enemies with motorcycles, computer terminals, fuel tanks, and more – throwing metal crates often reveals health-replenishing items. Below their generous life bar, there's a self-filling Blaster meter that, once complete, allows them to execute a screen-assailing explosion or a smaller, fiery strike. Be careful – if your android is knocked down before the meter is maxed, it drops to zero. The adversaries itching to do that include army grunts, fire-breathing mutants, and laser-eyed robots. Most bosses, including the chainsaw-brandishing maniac and Banglar himself, get assistance from these minions, which is both challenging and annoying. However, enemies often harm each other or fall victim to level hazards, such as missiles, fan blades, and machine gun fire, in a way that's simultaneously realistic, helpful, and satisfying. Despite the regretful lack of a two-player option, this arcade remake is a pleasure to experience.





Reflections: Ravishing red garb, dangerous curves, luxurious blonde hair coyly covering one eye – even though her steely gaze conceals an even steelier skull, Kunoichi appears almost human. This synthetic female ninja, whose name incidentally means "female ninja," stands out from her more machine-like male counterparts. Neither Ninja nor Kamaitachi rate decorative amenities like flesh or pupils, which seems shortsighted on the part of Mulk, their creator. Wouldn't they be more effective at stealth, infiltration, and other ninja warrior-type things without shiny metallic skin and glowing red eyes to give them away? Still, real female ninjas often relied on their good looks to gain access to enemy targets, so it's just as well that Mulk put all the cosmetic consideration into Kunoichi's appearance – after all, we really don't need Kamaitachi, whose name means "sickle weasel," to have sex appeal. – AP

No Escape

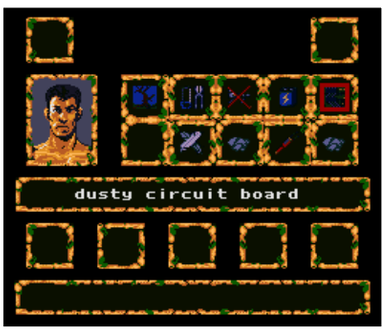
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Bits Studios
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★







After committing murder, Robbins is sent to an unconventional prison island called Absolom, which he must escape or else face certain death. At first, Robbins runs through a platforming stage, chased by the enemies on the island, the "Outsiders." After a boss fight and another stage, Robbins finally sees the main interface, represented by a map of the island. He has access to five locations, most of which are stages similar to the beginning. The exception is the Insiders' Village, where Robbins can access inventory storage in his hut or trade with other villagers. He acquires items, such as clay and batteries, by collecting container icons within the stages. Each villager provides certain kinds of advice; for example, Hawkins's tactical expertise leads toward recipes for weapons, including dynamite. In addition to these resources, Robbins finds pickups that increase his time limit for the stage (counted down at the top) as well as health and extra lives. As he travels to the exit of the stage, he may need to kick electrocuting machines to deactivate them or hit a switch that lowers a platform. He also climbs vines and enters doorways to travel to different spots. If Robbins makes it to the exit, he gains entry to another level at that location for deeper exploration. While the game has interesting mechanics, it simply doesn't come together well. Furthermore, the controls are sluggish and likely to cause several deaths. Whether or not the movie this game is based on is familiar, enjoying this title may be harder than escaping from an actual prison island.





Reflections: Based on a movie that flopped – how could this possibly be bad? I enjoy games with crafting, like the trading and combining items here. Unfortunately, due to the required experimenting and limited resources, it's easy to barter away your last charged battery with the possibility you won't acquire another valuable item to trade for it back. This, coupled with the fact that there is *no save feature*, means discovering one of the ways off the island is difficult! In the platforming parts, the movement feels slow and unresponsive. I don't know how many times I ran off a ledge because the character didn't jump when I pressed B. It was a neat idea the developers tried to put together into a game, but they should have spent the money they used for the license on further development and testing. – KY

Nobunaga's Ambition

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

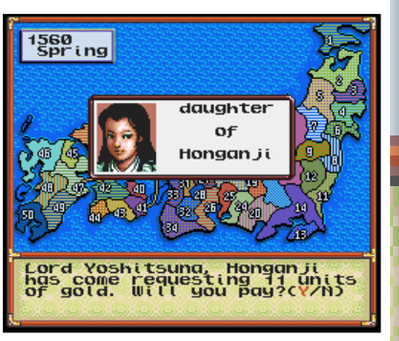






1500s Japan was comprised of separate fiefs ruled by daimyōs. To unify the land, you must conquer all, playing as Oda Nobunaga or another daimyō. The control is largely menu-based and simple, but the gameplay isn't – it involves economics, politics, and war. To start, you choose from four scenarios; one features 17 fiefs, and the others have 50. Select your home fief and daimyō, "roll" his stats (luck, intelligence, etc.), and set the difficulty and other options. Most of the game is on a map, with swords and horses denoting battles and a text box reporting news, such as plagues and uprisings. On your fief's turn, you see a menu screen with your stats and assets, such as rice, loyalty, debt, etc., although they're abstruse without the manual. Myriad commands are under drop-down menus: Military, Domestic, Diplomacy, Control, and Options. The last covers game saves and settings, and the others run the fief. Your military consumes rice and gold. You can invest gold from taxes into production infrastructure and sell rice, but the peasants can revolt if unhappy. Giving gold or rice away engenders loyalty. Diplomatic pacts can prevent war, but non-aggression isn't enough. Battle begins when you attack a fief or another invades. The battlefield is made of spaces in a brick pattern with varying terrain, and units move one space at a time on their turns. Unit icons represent their type, such as infantry or cavalry, and a number on the unit shows its manpower, which decreases according to stats when units fight. Each side has a command unit, and destroying it ends the battle. If your daimyō dies, it's game over. Besides battles, you can also employ ninja for general terrorism. The music is pleasant but repetitive, and the graphics are appropriate. Winning isn't easy, but the genre isn't about action and instant satisfaction.





Reflections: I first played this title for the NES a couple of years ago and enjoyed it, but this 16-bit version improves everything. On the NES, it had a more rudimentary appearance, so the colors and detail of the SNES help with visibility. Plus, the SNES Mouse is supported and works quite well with the PC GUI-style drop-down menus and instances where you need to move a cursor (although a controller works fine). If you have the peripheral or want to get one, this would be a great pairing. There was also a Sega Genesis release. – KN

Nobunaga's Ambition: Lord of Darkness

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







From 1467 to 1600, Japan was in an era of civil war between states – to unify the country, one must conquer all. You begin by choosing from two periods, 1555 and 1571, and selecting a mode: Multi-Play, Historical, or Demonstration (CPU only). Then choose your daimyō, difficulty (unavailable in Historical mode), and whether to skip CPU-only battles. Control is menu-based; maps and menus are appropriately simple and feature good contrast. Much of the game is on a map of Japan with a text display for news of battles, disasters, and more. Each state gets a turn via its main screen, showing state data (cryptic without the manual) such as rice, culture, commerce, etc. Commands are under drop-down menus: Develop, Military, Trade, Information, Personnel, Affairs, and Manufacture. You can mine, recruit troops, make alliances, and more, but Governance Points determine how much you can schedule. You delegate certain tasks to generals, and you have an advisor. SELECT opens the options menu for saving, sound, turning advisors on or off, etc. Armies need rice and gold, but citizens produce those, so domestic needs must also be met. Random events including riots, earthquakes, and more can affect your fortunes, while educating generals on diplomatic tea ceremonies or arranging marriages prevents war, but not indefinitely. States attack you, or you can declare war, appointing generals to lead and determining unit types. The battlefield is a map screen with grid movement for units, including infantry, cavalry, and riflemen. Environmental factors, such as mountains, weather, and night, influence the fighting, and on water, units battle with ships or more advanced warships. Adjacent enemies can attack, and numbers on the units decrease until one's obliterated. You win by neutralizing field commanders, surrender, or successfully besieging a castle. Battles are long and require patience, like the entire game. For the genre, it's complex and challenging.





Reflections: The intricate state administration makes this game better than its predecessor. Although this is the second Nobunaga's Ambition entry on the SNES, it's not the same game as *Nobunaga's Ambition II*, the previous title in the series (available on the NES). *Lord of Darkness* was released on other platforms in Japan, including Genesis, but the West only received the SNES version, and for many years it remained the last to come out here. That has changed more recently – both *NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION: Sphere of Influence* and *Nobunaga's Ambition: Taishi* are available in English. – KN

Nolan Ryan's Baseball

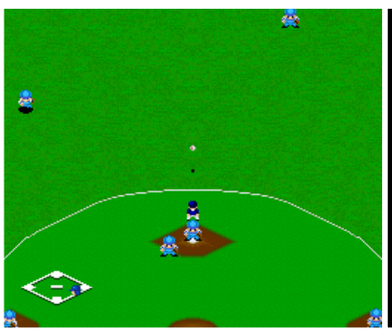
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Affect
Publisher: Romstar
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★

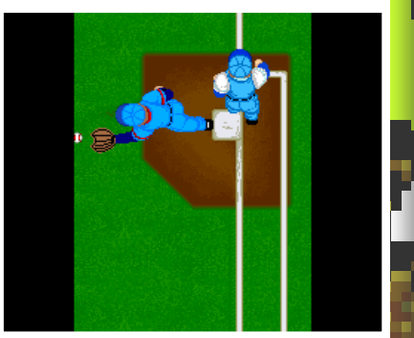






With a name like Nolan Ryan behind this title, it makes sense to guess that it might be skewed toward pitching – but that's not necessarily the case in this arcade-style baseball game. Pitching is certainly easy to execute, and being able to paint the corners by altering pitch trajectories with the D-pad can freeze hitters. Getting the right timing to hit pitches on offense is also a bit of a challenge – at first, anyway. There are two problems once a ball is put into play. First, the baseballs in this game are apparently made of iron; it's tough to get much distance on hits, and throws to bases often seem to bounce at least once before reaching their targets. The other problem is that fielding isn't tight enough. Players are too slow to react to balls in play, and this creates serious problems on defense unless pitching keeps the bat off of the ball. On the plus side, the play controls are very simple to learn, and there's considerable depth and replay value for those who enjoy the base game and its quirks. The main draw is the Pennant Mode, which lets players make their way through seasons of various lengths. An impressive amount of stat tracking is kept all season long and saved to the cartridge battery. In addition, players can be traded and their attributes can be altered; a password allows for these players to be used on other copies of the game. Visuals are competently done, with a highlight being some cutscenes for close plays on the basepaths. The pitcher/batter battle is more detailed than the fielding view, while the average sound consists of some peppy tunes and a few umpire calls. This game has its problems, but there are some upsides for the patient fan.





Reflections: One quirk with this title is that Pennant Mode games can end in a tie. The idea of a baseball game ending in a tie is weird to me. Granted, I'm not necessarily a fan of 18-inning marathons, where utility infielders wind up having to pitch because the bullpen is exhausted – but at least there's a resolution to the deadlock. Ties also complicate the pennant standings. It's possible to lose the pennant by a half-game because of a tie that the champion never had. To paraphrase Jimmy Dugan from *A League of Their Own*, "There's no tying in baseball!" – PS

Nosferatu

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Malevolent vampire Nosferatu is soon to put the bite on Erin, so Kyle must save her by braving six multipart, side-scrolling stages set in separate, sinister buildings shown on a map. Fetid dungeons, gilt chambers, and serpentine halls hold myriad trials for the young man as he searches for doors to ensuing timed areas, sometimes discovering alternate routes to boss battles against a shapeshifting ooze, a gagging ghoul, twin apes, and more. The deadly obstacles include both stationary and retracting spikes, whirring saws, crumbling platforms, crushing gates, etc. Kyle also frequently makes running leaps, clings to ledges, shoves untethered objects, and outpaces timed switches, so mastering his deliberate, slightly unresponsive movements is crucial. In particular, double tapping to run is both clunky to execute and commonly used to slide under narrow openings and avoid cadaverous jump scares. Speaking of which, a host of undead and unholy foes awaits Kyle's intrusion. His assault on gargoyles, zombies, floating eyes, and others hinges on his position, the use of dodges, dashes, and various punches and kicks, and his pocketing of up to nine red crystals to increase the fierceness of his attack combinations. Getting knocked down makes him lose a gem, but enemies and treasure chests have more. Chests also conceal blue stones to increase Kyle's life meter, green ones to replenish it, hourglasses for extra time, and occasional booby traps. Overall, this game is engaging but difficult, and although continues are unlimited, relying on them too much may drain the lifeblood from victory.





Reflections: Despite the movie-like cutscenes between levels, this game's feel owes more to *Prince of Persia* than to the films that share its name. However, it's not as indebted as Erin is to Kyle. That intrepid youth lavishly rides to her rescue on horseback, even though this is the 1990s (as evidenced by an in-game snapshot). After battling his way through the first keep, he defeats the werewolf outside and proceeds into the next building, although it looks like he could just go around most of the stops leading to Nosferatu's stronghold. No matter, right? Perishing aplenty doesn't stop our hero, and getting repeatedly impaled is how he shows he cares! A zillion continues later, Nosferatu is slain, and Kyle, who dilly-dallied dying, unwittingly receives an evil love bite from his now vampiric girlfriend. All that time and effort, and that's the fangs he gets? – AP

Obitus

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Scenario Developments
Ported by: Bullet-Proof Software
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Start an adventure to restore peace to Obitus with the four Gems of Tranquility. The perspective is split between a first-person view in maze-like locations and a third-person one in castles. In the former, you can face eight directions at intersections; along a path, you only go forwards and backwards. Items, including arrows for fighting and different keys for castle doors, are found on the ground. The object you have selected is shown in the lower right. Cycle through your inventory with L/R, and use things with B. Characters speak to you automatically after facing them for a couple of seconds. They often have multiple things to say (such as clues about nearby locations), and if they're holding an object, they eventually instigate a trade. You likely need their item, so you must figure out what they want in exchange (which you offer by dropping). Castles treat you to a bright side view where, in addition to attacking (which can now be powered up), you can also jump. The 3D feel is maintained by allowing you to move in the foreground and background of larger rooms with UP/DOWN. Throughout Obitus, keep an eye on your stamina and health. Stamina lowers over time and is replenished by sleeping. If it runs out, your health drains as well. Lose all your health, and it's game over – hopefully you have a saved game to load. This title has some neat ideas but lacks a good user interface, especially for the large inventory that you quickly acquire. It's an interesting entry for an obscure SNES game, but don't expect to get blown away.





Reflections: I love the basic ideas of this game: the mix of perspectives, the interconnectivity of locations, finding the correct items for the next area, NPCs offering obtuse clues, etc. Unfortunately, the frustration comes with their implementation. Rather than standing in the pathway, characters can be against the wall at an intersection, forcing you to do a complete turn to ensure you don't miss anyone. Even then, you can kill them (I'm gonna assume "accidentally") before you get the necessary information or items you need to continue. Great, now Evalak is taking that giant key to the grave with him! *Obitus* offers a unique experience that is tarnished by particular mechanics, but I think it's ultimately worth a try. – KY

Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen

Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release Date: May 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Quest, Imagineer, Infinity
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





The brutal Empress Endora has ruled for a quarter century, but a rebellion stirs in the Zetegenian Empire. In this strategic-level RPG, the player controls rebel forces seeking to liberate cities, defeat enemy units, discover hidden structures, recruit aid, and rise up against the Empire, be it for a sense of justice or a lust for power. Play begins by answering a series of questions to personalize the hero to the player's morality. From there, it is an overhead journey from map zone to map zone, deploying/moving armies consisting of soldiers, spellcasters, and/or beasts. When rival units collide, an isometric, automatic battle triggers, with troops on each side taking turns to deploy attacks based on formation, strategy, and class. If the player has one of 22 possible tarot cards, obtained by liberating cities, they can expend it to influence the battle, giving their unit a stat boost or damaging enemies. The player cannot linger or rely upon numbers for long, however; units must be paid to be deployed, and expenses pile up as days go by, so decisive actions must be taken to resolve maps quickly. Between map encounters, crucial icon/menu-based army management allows the player to form units around leaders, arrange battle positions, change classes, and equip items. Each unit's statistics determine their strength along with deeper elements, such as leadership ability and moral alignment, impacting both combat and in-game events. 13 endings await based on how the player has shaped the world and vice versa.





Reflections: *Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen* takes its name from two tracks on legendary rock group Queen's second album, *Queen II* (1974). Like the album, this game is a thematically rich trip through medieval fantasy. Endora's face-heel turn, prompted by the betrayal from her generals, is a brilliant yet grounded foundation for a villain and reinforces the good/evil dichotomy that goes beyond the plot itself. Alignment and reputation have a drastic impact on the ending the player receives if they can complete the game. Unfortunately, the randomness of card draws wears thin, and the sheer complexity of the game makes it very likely that, without a keen eye to details in dialogue, multiple playthroughs, or a walkthrough, the player will skip plot points or potential allies. Created by Yasumi Matsuno, who would go on to produce gems such as *Final Fantasy Tactics*, this exceptional (and exceptionally complicated) game is worth the deep dive for those willing to take it. – DG

Olympic Summer Games

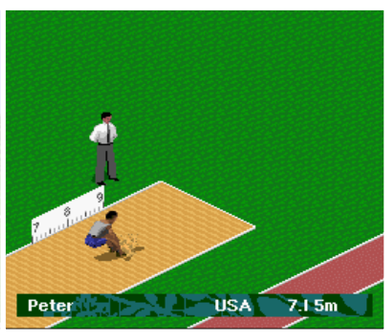
Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tiertex
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★





It's time to put those rapid button-pressing skills to the test in this arcade-style game centered around the 1996 Summer Olympics. 10 different events across track and field await players as they compete for medals and SNES glory. Competitors can enter their names and choose to represent one of 32 different countries before taking on the first event. The visuals show the action for most events from a three-quarter isometric view, with on-screen athletes who are well animated. Sound effects are rather sparse, and the music is downright awful; thankfully, it can be turned off. New players will want to practice the events and learn the play controls before taking on medal competition. These controls range from simple button-mashing for the 100-meter dash to adding D-pad commands for throwing and jumping. Unfortunately, there isn't any on-screen feedback to show a player's energy, takeoff or throwing angles, or anything else. This makes the game feel like the play controls don't work as they should, and that's because the window of time for certain inputs is exceptionally and unfairly narrow. The triple jump, for example, requires the player to press UP on the D-pad for each jump. It is very difficult to nail down the timing for the first jump, let alone the other two, leading the on-screen athlete to fall down and look foolish. Even the 100-meter dash is maddening, and those play controls are simple. The problem there is that even the most rapid button presses don't equate to track speed, which makes for constant poor finishes. Whether players elect to take on all 10 events or pick just a few to try via the Custom Game mode, this game ultimately ends up being an exercise in frustration. Boycott these Summer Games and find your Olympic action elsewhere.





Reflections: Olympic-inspired games don't have to reinvent the wheel to be fun. Button-mashing is fine, with the occasional D-pad input for certain events. *Konami's Track & Field* and *Capcom's Gold Medal Challenge '92* are great examples of this kind of game design. Then we have this title, which isn't executed well. The D-pad inputs are unintuitive and aren't consistently detected by the game. Even on the easiest setting, computer opponents dust human players on the track. It's only slightly less painful than taking a wayward discus to the face. Don't ask me how I know that. Just trust me, okay? – PS

On the Ball

Genre: Racing, Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







This unique racing game tasks players with rotating a maze to maneuver a ball to the finish line before time runs out. Using the controller's D-pad and other buttons spins the maze clockwise or counterclockwise at varying speeds, but SNES Mouse owners can rotate it by simply moving their mouse in the desired direction. Players can also control the ball by either making it jump or giving it a quick burst of speed. To make things difficult, time is deducted if the ball touches any part of the maze that is marked with a large "X," and of course, these "Xs" are always in the direct path to the finish line. Some mazes include smaller, breakable blocks that contain bonuses that add to the timer (usually off the beaten path) or penalties that subtract time. Additional obstacles, such as magnetized zones that force the ball in a direction, pinball-like bumpers, and sections that open and close, make getting to the end troublesome. Remaining time at the completion of a maze is added to the next one, but if players make it by the skin of their teeth, they're given the chance to win time via a slot machine minigame. The mazes themselves don't look like much, mainly consisting of stone-like walls, but the backgrounds are full of charming '90s-era neon doodles and vast galaxies. A funky slap bass soundtrack complements the backgrounds and helps drive the heart-pounding race to the finish line. Players who enjoy competing against their friend's time will have plenty of reason to revisit this game, but for others, it may be disappointing to know that all 30 mazes can be conquered in less than an hour.





Reflections: I'm usually not prone to motion sickness, but *On the Ball* had me feeling a little queasy. I believe it's because the maze is constantly shifting on top of a stationary background. I had to pause the game a few times to take a breather and give my eyes a chance to reset. My cat seemed to love all the movement, though. He was captivated by the TV the whole time I was playing, and when I would pause for a break, he would get agitated and stare at me, wondering why I had stopped. – MV

Operation Europe: Path to Victory

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Take command, devise a strategy, and pave the road to victory in historic encounters between the Allied and Axis powers. This title focuses on the larger economic and territorial picture of war while simultaneously emphasizing individual unit positioning and battle. Players can choose from six scenarios on the critical battles of World War II: the occupation of France, North Africa, Kursk, Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, and Berlin. Each can be played from either side's perspective using human or AI players. Preceded by a short historical background, these scenarios establish the victory conditions for each side. Players roll stats and select roles for their chosen officers, determining leadership, charm, and skill with infantry, artillery, and tanks. Afterwards, battles begin, with a tabletop-style presentation for players to take turns maneuvering regiments, attacking the enemy, requesting air support, etc., using a cursor and menu commands. Once engaged in battle, players instruct units to move and attack until time expires or one side is wiped out. Units are supplied by ammo, fuel, and food; running low influences their ability to function in battle, but they can be replenished and exchanged with resupply actions. Variables, including weather, can interfere with critical events, such as planned air actions. Ground-level engagements can be uncomfortably lengthy, so the ability to skip the tactical element and process the strategic results of the battle automatically is welcome. For all its complexities, however, the game at times feels inauthentic. Units other than armor are insufficiently lethal, and the way battalions work in tactical battles feels anachronistic to combat of the period.





Reflections: This entry reflects Koei's first foray into 20th-century warfare and its first trip to the European Front. In some ways, that shows; the arbitrary numbers for unit strength and the relative effectiveness of unit types against each other both belie the complexity of tactical-level unit management and muddy their utilization. Playing without automatic battle results sounds fun, but when doing so, be prepared for a very lengthy game. *Operation Europe* is sluggish, due particularly to the amount of time the game's AI spends determining moves and the need to frequently refresh the command directives of units. Relinquishing battle command helps but robs the player of the chance to listen to the game's best music track. Either way, do not sit down to a fresh game of *Operation Europe* and expect to play it to completion. – DG

Operation Logic Bomb

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







When a subspace research facility is overrun with interdimensional monsters, bionic soldier Agent Logan is sent in to eliminate the enemy and rescue the trapped scientists before it's too late. Taking control of Agent Logan, it's your job to clear the facility of intruders and destroy the devices allowing them to inhabit each floor. You begin your mission in this top-down run and gun shooter with only two weapons at your disposal – a long-range machine gun and a slower, shorter-ranged spread shot. While both of these make quick work of your enemies, single-handedly halting the impending invasion is going to take a slightly larger arsenal. As you explore the facility, you'll discover three more weapons, all of which can be switched between on the fly. Shots from the laser weapon can be bounced off walls, allowing you to hit targets from behind cover; the flamethrower can be used to dispatch entire groups of hostile combatants at once; and the missile launcher is able to fire projectiles that home in on an enemy target. Each of these weapons can be fired in eight directions as you move or strafe. You'll also gain the ability to use a holographic decoy as a distraction and directional mines that leave an impressive path of destruction in their wake. This diverse collection of weaponry ensures that you'll be able to approach every battle in any number of ways. You could run in, guns blazing with the flamethrower, or place a decoy to lure enemies before launching a strategic assault from afar. While the entire journey only takes around 40 minutes to complete, this versatility keeps the experience feeling fresh every time you play.





Reflections: The more I think about it, the more I realize that *Operation Logic Bomb* is a game about angles. Both Agent Logan and his interdimensional adversaries are restricted to firing along eight very specific paths. Assuming that you're able to accurately gauge the position of these paths, avoiding enemy fire can be as simple as a crafty step to the side. Combining this knowledge of angles and Agent Logan's ability to strafe allows you to pick off enemies as you duck in and out of their line of fire. Do you hear that? That's the sound of high school math teachers rejoicing. – AF

Operation Thunderbolt

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Taito
Ported by: Aisystem Tokyo
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional), Super Scope (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Kidnapped airline passengers must be rescued from terrorists in this auto-scrolling shooter ported from the arcade. In a first-person perspective, players have to blast innumerable purple-clad enemies who return fire shortly after appearing on-screen. Some soldiers shoot rockets or throw grenades or knives that can be staved off with a quick trigger finger. A gun and rocket bombs are the player's weapons of war here, with additional ammunition magazines and rockets obtainable by shooting them when they appear via killed enemies, dropped crates, or pouches that fly across the screen. Dangerous tanks, jeeps, gunboats, helicopters, and jets appear mostly in the 3D-esque forward-scrolling missions. They shoot bullets or rockets that can be destroyed before reaching the player to avoid damage. Control options include using a controller or SNES Mouse to move the cursor and fire, but the best bet is using a Super Scope to aim as swiftly as possible. Either way, the challenge is very high in the eight relatively short mission stages, with constant barrages to be fended off and ammunition that depletes quickly unless almost every magazine is collected. Power drinks and first aid kits help out, but they are scarce, and there is only one life per each of the few continues available. A necessity is the body armor that usually appears at the start of each stage. The graphics and sound effects are adequate, the story cutscenes are alright, and having no mission music adds to the intense atmosphere. Two players firing at once definitely increases the odds, but this brief arcade experience is only fun in small bursts.





Reflections: A sequel to the seminal arcade shooter *Operation Wolf*, *Operation Thunderbolt* featured two mounted Uzis that players could grasp and point. The SNES port is pretty faithful, save for the ability to shoot animals for ammo, which is strange since the NES port of *Operation Wolf* keeps that intact. There's also the new SNES option to choose from six different international soldiers, but this is mostly window dressing. The last mission aboard the plane is a little harrowing, especially when trying to take out the final terrorist using the pilot as a shield. You only have one crack at it, and if you kill the pilot, you get the bad ending. This is frustrating on the SNES, but I also remember seeing that happen to my father in the arcade after dumping in dollars worth of quarters... he wasn't exactly pleased. – PC

Oscar

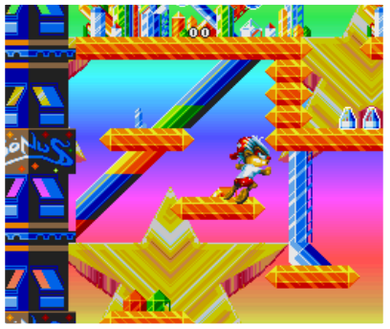
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Flair Software
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★





In this nonlinear platformer, players control a character named Oscar, who has been trapped in a movie theater. The only way for Oscar to escape is by "entering" each of the four films that the theater is showing and locating a predetermined amount of Oscar statues that are hidden in their scenes. The Prehistoric, Horror, Cartoon, and Western movies can be played in any order and are broken down into three scenes apiece. Each features enemies that correlate to their respective genre. For instance, the Horror film is crawling with spiders and ghosts, and the Western is patrolled by cowboys. Oscar can be killed in three hits, but he can also take out enemies by jumping on their heads or by striking them with an acquired yo-yo. Other power-ups can be obtained as well, such as a spring that makes Oscar jump higher and a clock that freezes foes. There's even a Game Boy that changes background colors to monochrome. Random genre-specific objects and film canisters can be collected for points that award extra lives at the end of each scene. Finding all the letters in "BONUS" rewards players with a bonus stage where they can collect items for points to earn even more lives. The graphics are a confusing mess of bright colors, making some Oscar statues hard to see. The awful controls and erratic camera movement mixed with Oscar's speed result in plenty of unfair deaths. Some scenes require the yo-yo power-up to break walls, but if it's missed, the scene becomes unbeatable, forcing players to kill themselves to respawn it. The music that accompanies the Horror film is catchy, but the rest is forgettable. The real Oscar would be ashamed.



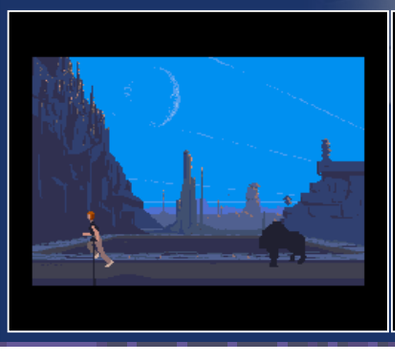


Reflections: Reading the game's synopsis without looking at the box, one would think that this is an Oscars tie-in. The character's name is Oscar and he collects Oscar "statues." But after playing the game, you'll see that Oscar isn't *The Oscar* we know and love, and the statues are not Academy Award Oscar trophies. So, who is this Oscar? Well, he kinda looks like a gray-haired, one-toothed, super ticked-off squirrel. The game's manual claims that Oscar is the "latest legend of the silver screen," but if that's the case, Hollywood must be even more worse off than we thought. – MV

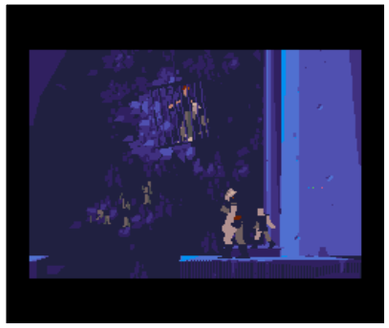
Out of This World
Another World (EU)

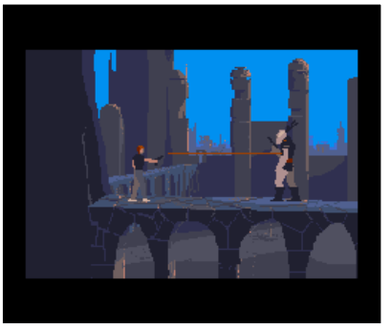
Genre: Action-Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Delphine Software
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





Nuclear scientist Lester Knight Chaykin picks the wrong stormy night to work on his particle acceleration studies. When a rogue bolt of lightning interacts with the system, it inexplicably teleports him to another world. The player must brave unforgiving side-view landscapes by running, jumping, and shooting their way through environmental puzzles and lethal aliens. Strategic gunplay makes the player choose between producing shields and firing either rapid or charged shots. While some puzzles are more obvious than others, most solutions come via trial and error, with the player having to endure numerous lovingly rendered deaths before discovering the tricks to proceed. Thankfully, invisible checkpoints do exist, and access codes allow the player to pick up progress at various intervals. A walkthrough in the instruction manual provides an idea of the sort of problem-solving the rest of the game has in store. Perhaps more importantly, however, the world itself is an exciting one to explore. Landscapes and characters have a distinct and attractive art style that draws the eye, and the fluid animations add realism to the unreal cast. It is stunningly creative at times, from its use of foreground elements to create depth to simulated reflections in glass objects. The lack of a user interface and the presence of short, seamless cinematics help immerse the player in a setting well worth getting lost in, even if the game itself is not the longest entry on the system and suffers from slowdown at inopportune moments.





Reflections: Created by French developer Éric Chahi, this ambitious Amiga title made its way to the Super Nintendo a year later. Chahi tells a terrific tale through gameplay, injecting brief yet beautiful cutscenes where needed. He describes these moments as "cinematic punctuation," a way to accomplish enough in just a moment or two to give context to all the polygonal action. This skill is paramount to the game's effectiveness. Without comprehensible dialogue or text, the story is the responsibility of the gameplay and its contextual clues to unfurl. Impressively, *Out of This World* also builds a meaningful relationship between the player's Lester and Buddy, an alien and fellow prisoner – their mutual reliance keeps it from feeling like an escort mission. Their flat polygonal sprites and the world around them channel early '80s vector graphics, while the fluid creature movements and careful diagnosis of distance for jumps remind me of Jordan Mechner's rotoscoping work on *Prince of Persia*. – DG

Out to Lunch

Pierre le Chef is... Out to Lunch (EU)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







The foodstuffs have escaped and run amok, so it is up to Pierre le Chef to travel the globe and capture them with his handy net in this cutesy platformer. On each of 48 stages split among six countries (China, Mexico, France, etc.), Pierre must catch a set amount of potatoes, cheeses, pineapples, and other edibles before locating the exit door. Failure to do so within a strict time limit costs a life. There are several collectible power-ups to assist, ranging from the essential capture net to flour bags and hot sauce which, along with simple stomps, stun the food items as they frantically avoid Pierre. Dumping several perishable prisoners in the cage on each board at once results in a bigger points bonus, but occasionally, Pierre's nemesis, Le Chef Noir, pops up to thwart him by opening the cage and releasing the captives. As the game progresses, other nasties show up, such as rotten veggies and bacteria; these can also be stunned with jumps, but one hit from them causes Pierre to lose a life. Conversely, touching a regular comestible dazes Pierre, making him drop food he's carrying. After a country's set of levels, Pierre pursues bananas, strawberries, oranges, and more in a grocery store during a Fruit Bonus stage. Overall, the premise is solid and the presentation fun, but the game is inhibited by poor, slippery controls that complicate even the easiest leaps, let alone the pixel-perfect ones required for ledges in later levels.





Reflections: This is an original idea massively let down by gameplay-hampering controls. The opening levels set in Switzerland are an especially bad choice, as who wants to play entry stages with icy floors? Early levels are supposed to be easier on the difficulty curve so that by the time you get to the later ones, you have all the tools and practice needed to succeed. Instead, the game just throws in homing enemies that are almost impossible to dodge. Add in some of the toughest jumps ever and a timer that has no room for error, and frustration sets in quickly. Don't be fooled by the sugary, kawaii-style visuals on offer – after one taste of this game, you will quickly discover that something's very fishy. – JE

Outlander

Genre: Action, Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Players drive across a post-apocalyptic American wasteland while combating enemy bikers and shotgun-wielding punks in this mix of side-scrolling action and behind-the-car driving mayhem. The car is weaponized with machine guns and later upgraded with missiles and nitro boosts, but if a goon sidles up to the vehicle, a cutaway box shows the aim of the player's trusty sawed-off shotgun to take out pesky foes. It is also fun to run them over, with bodies and bike parts flying all over the screen. If it takes too much damage or runs out of fuel, the car can be pulled over, triggering a side-scrolling section where ammo, gas, and health pickups are sourced to continue the journey forward. These sections have unwieldy controls and cheap hits from napalm-lobbing bikers that can wipe out a full health bar in seconds. Punching is also awkward as dodgy hit detection looms, whereas an enemy can just beat the player senseless, detracting from the fun. The clunky controls diminish the experience – one false move and it's game over – and considering it is absolutely massive and the passwords are scarce, this title won't go down without a real fight.





Reflections: *The Road Warrior* film meets *Road Rash* on the Sega Genesis. Just keep telling yourself that because that is exactly what this game is. If only it weren't so impossibly hard, it would get a much higher rating, but it doesn't let up from the start. Also, the car and your leather jacket-clad, shotgun-wielding wastelander share the same health bar – I was not aware that if you get punched in the face, then your car takes a beating, too! That said, there is something really alluring about pulling the vehicle over to forage for supplies on foot in that you can do it whenever you want, which adds a real sense of freedom. Do you try and push on with limited resources, hopefully hitting that next password, or take it slow and stop off for regular provisions but face the danger of getting killed faster? In the end, the decision is yours, but if we meet on the wastes, I'm not there for trouble – I'm just there for gasoline. – JE

P.T.O. II: Pacific Theater of Operations

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







The 16-bit battles rage on between the Axis and Allies in this strategy series' second sortie. Taking the role of Chief of Naval Operations, players must devise a comprehensive plan for success in one of 10 Pacific conflicts of World War II. Three of the choices, highlighted in yellow, are full campaigns, and seven are shorter scenarios. Any scenario may be played at three difficulty levels and with one or two players taking the faction of their choice (or simulated with no human players). The exception is the first, Day of Infamy. It may only be played single-player as the Japanese and unofficially functions as a tutorial, with a clear objective and forces already in position. Gameplay takes place primarily on the world map but zooms in to specific regions for conflict and offers robust full-screen menus for base and ship management. Players take turns through each of the day's two phases, Move and Plan. During these, players orchestrate strategy, including fleet commands, air strikes, intelligence, and supply management. Control consists primarily of navigating menus and making selections. Battle phases play out the results of combat with animated cutscenes as surface ships, submarines, land forces, and air assets duke it out. Foreign affairs, budgetary decisions impacting funds for new ship construction and base development, and operating goals are debated in a conference card-game format held at the end of each month, with staff pleading, passing, and proposing against a running clock. A choice of victory conditions expands each scenario's replayability. Combined with a deep, accurate roster of military hardware to choose from, there is enough quality here to appeal to strategy fans and even court some genre newcomers.





Reflections: *P.T.O. II* proves to be a decisive upgrade over its previous iteration. Gorgeous animations abound, from the ships and planes to the ocean itself (although enjoying those moments of beauty further extends game time). Clear phase delineations make for easier management, particularly in two-player mode. It even outshines its computer version by adding the ability to control battles and doing a once-over on the battle animations. While SNES Mouse support might have helped, the user interface is accessible enough that players will have the hang of it quickly. Sadly, sluggish processing returns, particularly for AI actions. That said, *P.T.O. II* does such a great job clarifying its play order, improving the player's management ability, polishing the audiovisual experience, and balancing unit effectiveness, that its flaws are easily forgiven. – DG

P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Relive the Pacific Theater's principal battles between the Allied and Japanese forces in this turn-based naval grand strategy game. One or two players can fight it out, or the computer can simulate the World War II conflicts with a zero-player setting. Gameplay primarily takes place on a map of the Pacific, where players navigate drop-down menus to manage fleets, repair assets, gather intelligence, hold military conferences to debate strategy, and more. Variable difficulty allows the player to start with different funding levels, which impacts the amount of fuel, material, or advanced tech available. Nine scenarios are on offer; the first, "Negotiations Breakdown," plays like a complete campaign, with victory requiring total elimination of the enemy or control of all 45 bases. The other eight scenarios are mission-specific and involve a key engagement in the Pacific campaign, such as the Battle of Midway or the Liberation of the Philippines. Commander statistics influence their ability to lead warships, command air assets, negotiate in conference, and continue fighting willingly. Battles themselves take place on a location-specific grid map. Battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and naval air assets all feel balanced and behave as expected. As with most strategy titles, economics are key. Securing fuel-generating locations and exhausting the opposition are as important as positioning. If the first fleet is engaged in battle, that player can choose to take manual control; all other fleets automate their tactical decisions. Optional battle animations add welcome dramatic flair to conflicts. Two save slots are available, which helps when seeking to fight the entire campaign. While not the most accessible title for strategy newcomers, this title does a fair job of simulating the war between the United States and Japan in the Pacific.





Reflections: Given the sheer scale of the conflict, the heavily zoomed-out world map is a bit of a necessity, but it does remove some of the granularity of control one might hope for when directing task forces. *P.T.O.* also does a good job of handling the inherent differences in the warships and how they interact in battle. Some tips: Take advantage of comprehensive repairs when available, give sailors shore leave when viable to improve morale, propose alliances with Neutrals to gain more Intelligence, and always keep the overall mission objectives in mind when making decisions. Best played with the instruction manual handy! – DG

Pac-Attack

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Who knew that trying to clear rows of blocks *and* fill Pac-Man with all the ghosts he can handle would be an exciting, fast-paced puzzle experience? You are given sets of three squares to arrange as they fall into your board. Mixed in with blocks are ghosts of the *Pac-Man* variety. Your goal is to arrange the ghosts into a path for Pac-Man to eat on the occasion that he is included with the blocks. He moves in a particular way, preferring to travel down when he can and carrying on in the direction he was facing if he can't proceed downwards. Pac-Man can only munch on the ghosts, so if he encounters a regular block when going horizontally, he turns to the opposite direction, which he can only do once in a given row. If Pac-Man can no longer move, he disappears, and blocks above any open spaces fall into the gaps. Then, you return to arranging the trios of squares. Creating a solid row of blocks causes the line to disappear, making more room for your maze of ghosts. Devouring them fills the meter in the lower left, which grants use of a fairy who can make several rows of ghosts disappear immediately from the board. In the single-player Normal and two-player Versus modes, you strive to keep up this action without filling your screen as the rate of falling slowly increases. The Puzzle mode, however, has you attempting to rid each of 100 boards of all ghosts with a limited number of Pac-Man visits. This is an entertaining game that will keep you occupied for hours through all three modes despite having mediocre graphics and a limited soundtrack.



Reflections: The Pac-Man universe is not exactly swimming in characters, so I was disappointed to see that not only was there no Ms. Pac-Man, but you also only encounter multiple ghosts in Versus mode. Why not simply program more variety in the sprites and let everyone join in the fun? I did appreciate that when your board reaches a height threshold, you hear a remake of the original *Pac-Man* music, but the point of the game is *not* to have that happen. This is fun and challenging, and despite all my complaining, it's not a bad experience; I just feel like Namco could have done more to capitalize on this popular franchise and do right by fans of the series. – KY

Pac-In-Time

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Kalisto
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The evil Ghost Witch has cast a spell on Pac-Man, sending him to an alternate 1975 where all of the Pac-Land inhabitants are out to get him. In this side-scrolling platformer, players control Pac-Man as he travels to the castle of the Gum Monster, where the time portal that will take him back to his own time is located. He must get through 51 visually impressive stages that consist of dense forests, snowy mountains, dangerous ruins, and more. Each contains a set number of pellets that Pac-Man must eat before a door opens, leading him to the next area. Early on, these pellets are easy to find, but as the game progresses, players will have to rely on their quick reflexes and platforming skills to locate all of them. Pac has a basic jump and a high jump, which can be performed by tapping or holding the jump button, respectively. Leaping through colorful hoops located throughout stages grants Pac special abilities that let him access areas of the map that he couldn't otherwise reach. For example, the magic rope allows him to swing to higher platforms, and the water bubble lets him breathe underwater. Fireball and sledgehammer power-ups can be used to attack enemies and change parts of the environment. Pac controls well enough, but using the magic rope to swing through small openings can get exasperating. Enemies are standard insects, animals, and obviously, ghosts. Some classic Pac-Man sound effects and music will please nostalgia seekers, but the majority of the soundtrack is boring. The difficulty can get overbearing, but thankfully, a password is given after every five stages. Overall, this is an average platformer that offers little ingenuity.



Reflections: The magic rope in this game frustrates me to no end! Most stages rely heavily on it, and using it to swing from platform to platform can be really fun. But when the game requires you to swing upwards through a small opening, it's just unforgiving. I could hear my SNES controller creaking due to the amount of pressure I was putting on the D-pad in the hope that I would swing just a millimeter higher. I've put a lot of hours into this game, and the frustration has probably added a few gray hairs to my head… but for some reason, I can't stop playing *Pac-In-Time*! – MV

Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures

Genre: Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







In the mood for a side-scrolling adventure? Pac-Man is, but that's just one of this maze game icon's whims. To see him through four goals and an optional tutorial, you must manage his mutable emotions while influencing his actions semi-indirectly. Rather than commanding Pac-Man, you control a crosshair cursor, and as the spherical hero visits his village, the metropolis, the mountains, and more, you aim a slingshot to move objects or capture his notice, causing him to react. You can also ask him to look or go in various ways, often altering his path. Timing and temperament are crucial to eliciting the desired effects; if scared or surly, Pac-Man might misbehave, but in other instances, anger is needed to proceed. Usually, a blissful disposition is best, and mood boosters range from food to fun things, such as banging on drums. He can even play his arcade game or find three cartridge pieces to unlock *Ms. Pac-Man*, but these are not the only familiar features. The Ghost Witch of Netor's four infamous phantoms – Inky, Pinky, Blinky, and Clyde – attack during hang gliding and minecart sequences, but when they appear elsewhere, a well-placed power pellet temporarily awakens Super Pac-Man's ability to eat them, sometimes making them drop ID cards for accessing the final confrontation. Other acquired items include transportation passes and goal-specific targets, such as Pac-Jr.'s guitar. All in all, contending with Pac-Man's caprices makes this quirky, colorful game frustrating yet fun to figure out.



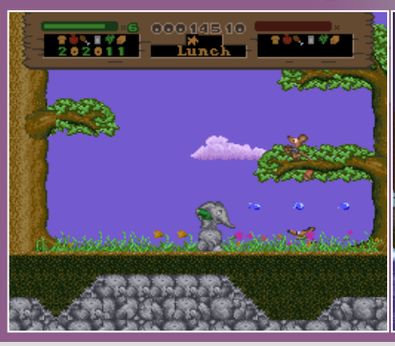


Reflections: When it comes to smarts, Pac-Man's a few pellets short of amazing, but his persistence makes up for his lack of good sense. It doesn't matter how many times he smacks his hang glider into a tree, runs off a cliff, plummets from a loose girder, or kicks a sign painter's scaffold only to be bathed in blue enamel because he never stops trying to succeed (and has unlimited continues). Pac-Man's emotions almost make him his own worst enemy, second only to the Ghost Witch's gooey Gum Monster (which, incidentally, is specifically made from the confection pre-chewed – *eww*!), but even though tempering his tantrums is tricky, he gets milk for his daughter and a flower for friend Lucy's birthday, retrieves his son's stolen guitar, and stops the wicked sorceress. Despite his shortcomings, he's able to do well – he just needs someone to believe in him and give him a shot – a *sling*shot. – AP

Packy and Marlon

Genre: Action-Platformer, Educational
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA
Developer: WaveQuest
Publisher: Raya Systems
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★







The idyllic summer getaway of Camp Wa-kee is thrown into chaos when mischievous rodents make off with a stockpile of vital diabetic supplies. With food and medical provisions strewn across the camp, diabetic elephant friends Packy and Marlon set out to recover the stolen items. Primarily aimed at educating those with juvenile diabetes, this journey sees you measuring your blood glucose, taking insulin, and maintaining a healthy, balanced diet. Jumping into your adventure as the courageous Packy – or fearless Marlon as Player Two – you begin each stage with a brief but incredibly important blood glucose check. Before being let loose on the untamed wilderness, you're also given a list of nutritious snacks to track down as well as an essential component of your medical kit to find and reclaim. Taking note of these items – especially your meal plan – becomes crucial as you explore the camp and discover the true extent of the mayhem that's been unleashed. Not only have the rodents left a path of destruction in their wake, but they've also managed to spread days' worth of food across the grounds. Collecting – and therefore eating – too much food, not enough food, or the wrong food entirely wreaks havoc on your health, and completing an area with a poor blood glucose reading forces you to restart the stage. Frustratingly, your expedition only gets worse from here. Excruciatingly mediocre controls mean that even the simplest enemy encounters are reduced to a chore. While it should be simple to defeat adversaries by using upgradeable projectiles – either water or peanuts – which are shot from your trunk, some astonishingly inaccurate hitboxes and a distinct lack of audio cues to indicate impact leave you questioning the precision of your aim. Opponents can also be bested with a jump to the head, but misjudging the angle of approach even slightly sees you falling directly into harm's way. Add in the occasional diabetes quiz and a multitude of predictable boss fights, and you're in for a shockingly below-average time.





Reflections: I have a lot of problems when it comes to WaveQuest's subpar attempt at an edutainment title, not the least of which are to do with some frustratingly inconsistent enemy behaviors. Approaching an adversary routinely results in them altering their path to lie directly above or beneath you. This makes safely navigating each stage almost impossible and endlessly infuriating. I just don't understand why their movement has to be so erRATic. – AF

The Pagemaster

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







In this game based on the movie license of the same name, Richard has to traverse three multistage worlds that come from fantasy, horror, and adventure books. The side-scrolling platform action involves jumping on enemies to dispatch them, but a number of pickups, including eyeball projectiles and shoes that help to bounce up walls, can be collected to assist in fighting or avoiding monsters, pirates, living tomes, and more. When hit, Richard drops one of his stacked items, and he loses a life when touched without power-ups. Each world also has different golden items to collect, with 100 granting an extra life; accruing these is needed because the game moves at a speedy pace, making it hard not to run into hazards. Interestingly, branching paths are hidden in some stages that open up new levels on the stage select screens, encouraging exploration without the restriction of a timer. However, grabbing clocks within levels initiates tricky sequences that are saddled with a countdown. Crossing between worlds gets a shoehorned Mode 7 section where Richard flies a book like a magic carpet in an over-the-shoulder view; these and the comparable bonus games (initiated by finding special icons) look decent but are over too quickly. There are also eight hidden library cards throughout the game that unlock a secret ending – one of a few bright sparks in an attractive yet average platformer.





Reflections: For once, here's a movie game that isn't terrible. It isn't particularly good either, but it is a serviceable platform romp. It has the whiff of *Jelly Boy* about it in that it feels very similar (and just happens to be made by the same developer), but this game isn't as cheap or difficult. Aside from the character sprite (which looks like it belongs in an NES game), the graphics are excellent and the music is decent, but the game just feels flat. There isn't enough variety aside from changing up the enemies each time a new world is reached; it's just the same thing with a different coat of paint. I love the branching paths and hidden levels, as this does bring out some longevity, but when the experience is pretty bland in terms of gameplay, it makes going the extra mile moot, especially when you have to search for the real ending. – JE

Paladin's Quest

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Copya System
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

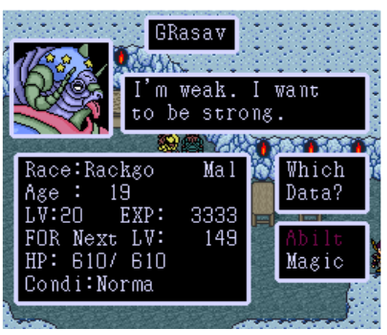






It may be sprinkled with pink, periwinkle, and other sugary hues, but Lennus is a bitter world. Severed more by hate than by the Equator Rivers, its continents of Naskuot (north) and Saskuot (south) are further ruptured by ruthless ruler Zaygos... and you. You're Chezni, a precocious spiritualist (spellcaster) duped into releasing Dal Gren's cataclysmic might. With untold deaths on your tender teenage hands, you must quell the evil in top-down towers, temples, towns, etc. Your gait relates this burden – it's painfully slow – but it's only briefly solo. From mild Wild to grizzled Mouth, an ever-changing cavalcade of intriguing characters tags along, some required (by the plot) and some hired (by you). Although most who join your four-person party gain power-raising experience in random turn-based battles, none permit equipment alterations – aside from Midia. Once rescued, this sweet spiritualist is a nigh-constant companion who, like you, is capable of readying new weapons, armor, and magic. Expanded by Books of Spirits sold at Learning Centers, your spell repertoire of fireballs, lightning bolts, storms, and so forth strengthens with use – and saps health. Magic Points are "superstitious nonsense" on Lennus, so be sure to rest in Hotels and refill medicine bottles at Tool Houses to stay alive, as fights remain fairly challenging throughout the journey. Fortunately, using the D-pad to assign attacks or run from palette-swapped foes is easy – although decrypting ridiculously abridged item names is not. Nonetheless, a rich storyline involving vengeful specters, brave Resistance operatives, ancient robots, a kindly baker, and more renders this grim adventure an engaging experience coated in candy colors.





Reflections: The revolving-door party-populating system infuses this quest with extra personality. Each character brings their own charming portrait, representative quote, and, in many cases, unique weapons unavailable elsewhere, such as the Seed sword, Tonfa, or Z eraser. Plus, despite being "mercenaries" (as the manual calls them), many aren't greedy and will come along for free... but beware; a few folks are trouble. I'm not naming names, but one can Destry your savings, another one Lillie likes pricey presents (she's worth that Dream Dress, though), and a third is anything but Chill once she stumbles upon your true purpose. And then there's a lady who, short of dying or plot demands, *just won't go away*, even when asked nicely. Try it and see what I MeanMa. – AP

Paperboy 2

Genre: Action
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tengen
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★

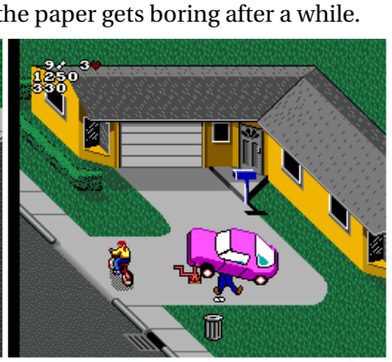






Someone must deliver *The Daily Sun* newspaper to the most dangerous routes in the neighborhood, and it falls to kids to get the job done! The player must bike the isometric streets and throw newspapers to the doorstep or mailbox of each subscriber's house while surviving suburban hazards that range from the mundane malevolence of dogs and children to the supernatural threat of ghouls and monsters. This time, players can now select to play as either Paperboy or Papergirl, and both sides of the street have houses at various points along the route. If two players are playing, Player One is assigned the left route, and Player Two the right. Points are earned by hitting enemies with papers; particularly noble acts, such as saving runaway strollers or disabling robbers, can earn the player an appearance on the front page! The player has limited papers but can acquire more by picking up flashing bundles along the way. Each route concludes with an obstacle course filled with ramps, hazards, and targets to hit with papers for points. At the end of each day, the player's boss provides the Daily Report. Successfully getting a paper to each subscriber's doorstep or mailbox returns a subscriber that's been lost in a previous day or, if all subscribers are still held, awards an extra life. On the other hand, missed subscribers become non-subscribers. Each day, the route acquires additional threats to be skillfully dodged and/or introduced face-first to the morning paper. If the player can reach the next week's route, the paper will include a four-digit password. There are three routes in all, each harder than the last. Fun, but even delivering the paper gets boring after a while.





Reflections: The idea for the original *Paperboy* came from designer Dave Ralston, a paperboy himself in his youth. It is unlikely he ran into as many Grim Reapers on his real-life route as the game would imply, but that mixture of mundane and madcap is what makes the game as memorable as it is. *Paperboy 2* preserves the premise, but the increased length, pace, and complexity do not necessarily improve the experience. The single looping track is uninspired at best, and forcing the second player to wait until the first is out of lives or reaches the end of the level only works if both players are talented enough to do so. – DG

Parodius: Non-Sense Fantasy

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★½







A giant octopus and his evil penguin friends are taking over the galaxy, so it's up to Vic Viper, Pentarou the Penguin, TwinBee, and Octopus to put a stop to him in this outrageous horizontal shooter that parodies the Gradius series. You can go it alone or fight alongside a buddy through 10 offbeat stages that include a circus, a graveyard, and even a bathhouse. The enemies and bosses are just as absurd as the stages themselves. Get ready to battle evil penguins, dodge eggplants spouting out of angry volcanoes, maneuver around the legs of a humongous Vegas showgirl, and clash with a pufferfish that fills the screen as it takes damage. In order to defeat the giant octopus and his cronies, each character has their own weapon loadout that upgrades as you collect power-ups dropped by destroyed enemies. In addition to the regular power-ups, bells (from the TwinBee series) can be collected to increase your score or add ridiculous weapons, including a megaphone that damages enemies with hilarious on-screen text phrases such as "NO SUSHI TONIGHT?" and "SHAVING IS BORING!" The tunes that accompany the stages are wacky as well. Be prepared to hear "Waltz of the Flowers" from *The Nutcracker* as you dodge bubbles that contain girls dressed in Playboy Bunny-esque outfits. Yes, it's just as crazy as you think it is! Even though the gameplay is cutesy, don't expect a cakewalk. Thankfully, there are several difficulty settings and even the option to increase the amount of lives to start off with. There is also an additional level called Lollipop for score chasers. If you're looking for a shoot 'em up that doesn't take itself seriously, look no further!





Reflections: I absolutely LOVE the Parodius series! Saying that, this was my first time playing the PAL version of this particular game, although I've previously played the Japanese one, *Parodius Da!* That game is pretty much identical except that the text from the megaphone bell power-up is in Japanese instead of English. I laughed hysterically when I saw the English phrases that they came up with for this version. "TOASTER IS OVERHEATED!" and "HUH, GARLIC BREATH!!" had me roaring and scratching my head. I would have loved to have been at the board meeting when they came up with this crazy stuff! – MV

The Peace Keepers

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





In this side-scrolling beat 'em up, six resistance fighters plan to exact revenge on the Deutschland Moldavia (DM) corporation, a company that has taken over the world by performing dangerous genetic modifications on innocents. Flynn, Echo, Al, and Prokop start the resistance, with added muscle Norton and the DM-created cyborg M-Frame joining later. Each combatant has individual attacks that revolve around their size. Powerbombs, body slams, and other wrestling maneuvers tend to deal the most damage, making grappling an integral part of the game, but weapons such as knives and grenades can also be picked up and used. Since the resistance fighters have been modified by DM, they have unnatural abilities called "Termination Skills." These screen-clearing spectacles involve bolts of lightning, tornados, and other superhero-like powers. Where the story begins and ends depends on what character the player chooses and which paths they take. Nowhere is safe – streets are filled with gangs, hospitals are overrun with mutants, and the docks are crawling with pirates. Consumables are plentiful and can be used for health as needed, and "Angry Mode" triggers brief invincibility when taking heavy damage. Multitap owners can fight up to three friends in the VS Game mode – a frantic slugfest that is similar to a Royal Rumble match. Players may be confused by the game's lack of tunes. The music is off by default, and turning it on is almost pointless – there are very few songs! However, with multiple endings, branching paths, customizable sprites, and heaps of other content packed into this cart, beat 'em up fans should find a lot to like.





Reflections: Similar to Jaleco's *Rival Turf!* and *Brawl Brothers*, *The Peace Keepers* (the final game in the Rushing Beat trilogy) had several features removed during the localization process. Attack animations were watered down, the story was completely altered, and worst of all, the soundtrack was cut to pieces and turned off by default! "What is wrong with this game?! Is this a glitch or something? Why is there no music?" Those are the questions I asked myself after repeatedly cleaning my cart with numerous Q-tips that I had dunked in gallons of rubbing alcohol. Why the music is off by default is baffling. Sure, there are only a few tunes, but that's better than nothing at all! I've had some weird experiences playing video games before, but playing a beat 'em up without music has got to top them all. – MV

PGA European Tour

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Polygames
Ported By: Halestorm
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★⋆





The PGA goes across the pond in this third-person golf simulation that features five gameplay modes, including Skins Challenge and Match Play, and five licensed European courses, such as Valderrama and Wentworth. Players can hit the links as one of 10 different European pros, or custom golfers can be created. A three-click swing system is the key to striking the ball effectively from tee to green, with precise timing needed to stop the swing meter at the desired power level and to hit the ball straight. Use of the green grid while on the putting surface is essential in order to read the breaks and line up putts properly. On-screen golfers animate nicely, and each course is converted well from its real-life counterpart to video game form. However, loading times are considerable, especially while on the green. Calling up the green grid requires a bit of waiting, and it takes five seconds to draw the grid each time it is rotated to the right or left. These delays add up, making a tournament round of 18 holes last for about 60 minutes, which seems a bit too long. All told, it's a decent golf outing that's held back by its technical flaws.





Reflections: The decision to release this port two years after the Genesis original – especially given the title's niche appeal in the United States – is odd at best. None of the courses really stand out, and the absence of well-known venues like St. Andrews and Carnoustie hurts the game's general appeal. It's nice that Halestorm managed to cut down on the loading times, but jarring blank or "Please wait" screens are seen way too often. It's also worth noting that there isn't a reverse camera angle that shows the ball's landing point and how it carries after a swing, which means that players have to wait until the golfer addresses the ball on the next shot to see where it landed. It's obvious if the ball lands in sand or water, but landing in the rough versus the fairway can only be determined via a subtle difference in sound effects. These complaints aside, *PGA European Tour* is a better effort than *PGA Tour 96*, despite offering fewer and less-familiar courses. A third attempt for Halestorm might have been the charm had the sands of time for the SNES not all but run out. – PS

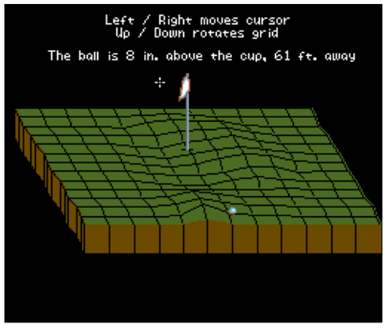
PGA Tour 96

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Polygames
Ported By: Halestorm
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Rare
★★





This golf simulation offers five modes of play on eight real-life courses that held PGA Tour events during the 1995 season. On the course, action takes place from a third-person perspective as either actual PGA golfers or created players attempt to break par and play for virtual cash and virtual glory. The meter-driven swing mechanic requires precise timing in order to set the desired power and necessary accuracy to score well; pressing buttons either too early or too late can lead to wildly veering shots and inflated stroke totals. Each course has its own minor details in the background (though the differences between some of them are fairly subtle), and golfers animate nicely. The biggest problem facing this title is that it suffers through some lengthy loading times that add excessive amounts of waiting. Pulling up the green grid view to read the break and elevation for putts is also painfully slow, as the grid must be redrawn each time the view is rotated. This slow pace unfortunately hurts the overall experience, along with the game's poor music and subpar sound effects. Serious golf fans may find a few things to like here, but most players will want to seek their birdies and eagles elsewhere.





Reflections: *PGA Tour 96* is frustrating in that it's a pretty good golf game that is ultimately weighed down by its inordinately slow pacing. Executing golf shots correctly feels great, and it's rewarding to sink a few birdies in a row to climb into tournament contention. Unfortunately, the game asks players to wait far too frequently, leading to tournament rounds lasting upwards of 60-90 minutes. There's waiting for overhead views to come up in order to see the hole layout before drives. There's waiting for the green grid to appear and fill in so that putts can be read, and even more waiting every time players want to rotate the grid for better elevation reads. There's waiting for tournament updates, and still more waiting for tournament leaderboards. This game looks like its counterpart on the Genesis, but its performance disparity cannot be ignored. If you've got to have PGA Tour action, stick with the first game from 1992. It's a flawed game of golf, but not a slog like this one. – PS

PGA Tour Golf

Genre: Sports
Release: Mar. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts
Ported By: Sterling Silver Software
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★





This game's strength lies in its PGA Tour license. Golf fans who watched tournaments and telecasts in the early 1990s will recognize the names and courses here. TPC Sawgrass, in particular, is a standout because of its link to the Tour's "fifth major" and its famous island green 17th hole. Getting into competition with Fuzzy Zoeller and Fred Couples is exciting, and the roar of the crowd when sinking that clutch birdie putt is pretty special. The game is driven by a three-click swing system for all shots. The first button press starts in motion the meter shown under the on-screen golfer. The second press sets the desired power, and the all-important third press determines the shot's accuracy. The wind's effect on the ball in flight can be unnervingly inconsistent, which makes it difficult to account for when planning shots. Reading putts is made easier by the game's use of a green grid, which shows slope and elevation. It's still tough to sink longer putts, but proper use of green grids makes seemingly impossible putts a bit more possible. There is decent replay value here, with four courses on offer and the ability to play practice rounds or four-round tournaments on each. Created players have tracked cumulative stats, including scoring and money earnings, thanks to the game's battery save. The visuals are passable, by 1992 standards. The camera follows the ball through flight, which was a novel use of Mode 7 for the time. Overall, this is a decent golf game, made better by its licensing, and it's fun to play in short bursts.





Reflections: Playing *PGA Tour Golf* and other golf video games is about as close to being a "real golfer" as I will ever get. My real-life swing is best defined as being a threat to life and property. Having admitted this, playing the game also laid the foundation for my understanding and appreciation of actual golf. This, in turn, helped me to establish an even closer bond with my paternal grandmother. We often watched PGA Tour telecasts together, late in her life, and it was nice to be able to understand and talk about the game instead of just watching in silence. This knowledge was great for when we were watching some amateur player named Tiger Woods on TV at the Masters in 1995. It turns out that he was pretty good. – PS

Phalanx

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Zoom
Ported by: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







In this bruiser of a horizontal shooter, Wink Baufield, pilot of the archetypal Phalanx, must single-handedly repel the evil invader – a grotesque, galactic parasite able to convert human invention into godless biotech concoctions. The world of Delia IV has fallen under its infectious influence, forcing Wink to fly n' fight through eight stages of hostile territory – four are among the clouds and within the ground of the poisoned planet itself, while the remainder take to space as Wink zooms to the foe's horrific homeworld. The story is rote, no doubt, but the game compensates with some pulse-pounding tunes and richly realized graphics, many of which comprise beautiful, multilayered scrolling backdrops emanating an epic sense of scale. The base mechanics also tinker with convention, granting adjustable three-speed control of the Phalanx while allowing two extra weapons to be held in reserve. This arsenal is built by collecting the appropriate weapon pod – the Laser pierces any object, the Homing shot seeks any target, the Energizer can be charged to deadly proportions, and the Ricochet fires a kinetic salvo of bullet hell fury. What's more, every cannon can be upgraded three levels, leaving the screen often lost in unbridled chaos. Conversely, each weapon can be sacrificed as a desperate but unique screen-clearing finisher, thereby freeing a slot for a different pod. But even with these luxuries, a three-hit life bar, secondary weapons, and 1-ups scored at generous intervals, the game is almost comical in its brutal difficulty. Indeed, even on the default "easy" setting, would-be survivors will spend hours memorizing initially unfair enemy patterns and appearances, while the fourth and hardest difficulty, coined "funny" for those with ironic sensibilities, will prove nearly impossible. But no matter; the varied stages, gruesome boss encounters, stellar presentation, and general lack of that notorious SNES slowdown all make this a shooter to consider.



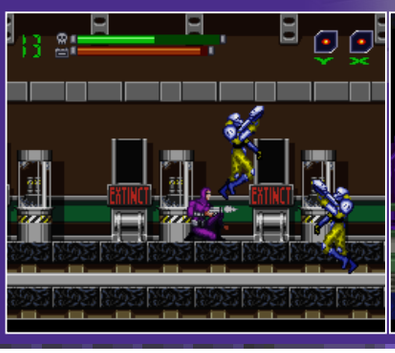


Reflections: As with most SNES shoot 'em ups, *Phalanx* was largely overlooked, recalled only for its esoteric box art of an old man playing a banjo. Nevertheless, its gameplay tells a different story by featuring interesting mechanics that would appear in later shooters. Square Soft's *Einhänder*, for instance, allows for similar on-the-fly speed adjustment, while Taito's *G-Darius* lets players sacrifice firepower for a sudden, enemy-obliterating detonation. A pity, then, that *Phalanx*'s 2009 WiiWare remake was left stranded in Japan. – DA

Phantom 2040

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Viacom New Media
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

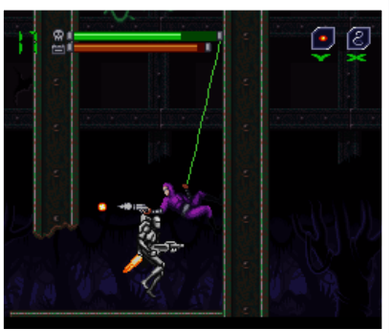






Rebecca Madison of Maximum, Inc. wants to take over Metropia (and beyond). For the sake of his hometown, a future incarnation of New York City, Phantom follows a trail of illicit actions to get to the bottom of recent terrorist attacks that ultimately threaten humanity at large. This game has seven chapters, which cover distinct parts of the story. The exact content depends on Phantom's actions. For example, after saving a panther, there are two options for what to do with it, each of which opens a new area for him to explore. This title includes many such crossroads, sometimes with simple choices, such as whether Phantom proceeds left or right. Not only do they affect the storyline, but his actions also give you one of 20 endings, with only a handful considered "good." It's not all a decision tree, however, as Phantom also runs and guns his way through an army of Maximum's robotic biots, which attempt to deplete his health bar in the upper left, costing him a life. In his arsenal are a wide array of weapons, most of which he collects. Defeated enemies drop pickups to replenish either health or ammo. In addition, there are other types of objects throughout stages, including extra lives and aid kits that completely refill either bar when used. Also essential to Phantom's survival is his inductance rope, which grapples to surfaces for climbing walls or swinging from the bottom of platforms. The controls take some time to master but never feel unfair. The story is nothing new but is enjoyable in its cutscene presentation (which can be disabled in the main menu). The graphics and music are well suited to each other and to the story, bringing together a title that should appeal to someone looking for some futuristic action.





Reflections: I am not familiar with either the comic strip or the cartoon this game is based on, but after playing *Phantom 2040*, I will certainly check them out! Story is an important part of a game's experience to me, so it's refreshing to see such an emphasis on it in a non-RPG. Sometimes having multiple endings in a game only manifests in superficial differences, such as a cutscene variation, but here you could be playing completely different parts of a stage based on what you chose. In this way, the developers created an experience that rewards you for replaying. Fan of the series or not, anyone can appreciate that. – KY

Pieces

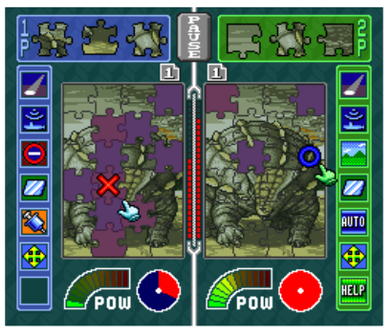
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Prism Kikaku
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional), SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





What do a scooter-riding hog, a snarky sprite, and a slack-jawed nerd have in common? They're all competitors racing to finish three 24-tile jigsaw puzzles before you do in the topmost of this game's three modes: 1P VS COM. Select this option and start with the first, third, or sixth of eight increasingly challenging opponents. A split screen provides you each with vertical playfields that briefly display the target puzzle image before becoming tangles of jigsaw outlines. Using the serviceable controller or superior SNES Mouse, move your cursor to pick up and put down pieces from a small group at the top. Intentionally or mistakenly rejected tiles can be reselected later, while pieces assembled correctly and quickly increase your Power Meter, yielding useful items. However, your opponent also accrues tile-removing Sweepers, autonomous Helpers, and more, so winning can be tricky. Tired of battling arrogant bots and self-centered sirens? Face a human friend in 1P VS 2P, deciding on handicaps and how many rounds to play. The last mode, ALL PLAY, offers solo or simultaneous multiplayer puzzle solving, bonus pieces, "Compare and Contrast" minigames, cumulative scores, the chance to steal pieces from others, difficulty settings that add time limits and/or "fake" tiles, and eight full-screen puzzles ranging from 36 to 60 tiles in each of eight image genres, including Animals, Sports, and Fighter Planes. Pleasant music throughout all three modes fills in the final bit of an ultimately repetitive yet enjoyable experience. Puzzle solvers assemble!





Reflections: Though ALL PLAY often shows a petite picture of the completed puzzle on the screen's bottom right, it's too pixelated to be of much use. The playfields' jigsaw outlines are more helpful, but aside from the corners and edges, there are only two tile shapes, making swaths of sky and other backgrounds difficult to manage – before being awarded with blue Os indicating success, I saw a lot of red Xs marking errors. I also saw many images, some of which have versions that repeat throughout the game. To my delight, several feature felines: lions, tigers, a regular cat, a cartoon cat, and Willy from *Rockin' Kats* (an NES game also by Atlus). However, I could've done without a few of the pictures from the ??? category: unattractive abstracts, creepy tessellated faces, and the *pièce de résistance*, a sinister clown who looked like he wanted a *piece of me*. – AP

Pilotwings

Genre: Action, Simulation
Release Date: Aug.1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





Suit up and join the Flight Club! Each "lesson" level in this aviation simulation-lite features one of four instructors – Tony, Shirley, Lance, and Big Al – assigning an assortment of piloting curricula on a unique map. Gameplay perspective is in third-person, giving the player total 360-degree freedom to move around in the sky. Light Plane challenges entail a combination of taking off, landing, and flying through rings. Skydiving challenges require falling through target rings and safely landing on a target circle. Rocketbelt challenges also require landing on a target circle but tilt the target rings sideways. Hang Glider challenges swap fuel for altitude and air currents but also involve passing through targets and landing safely on a specified area. Each challenge nets up to 100 points divided among factors ranging from completion time to landing accuracy, and a combined score target is necessary to obtain the license and move on to the next instructor's lesson. There are eight lessons in total, with the later four Expert missions taking place at night. Between each set of four lessons, a secret helicopter mission has the player take to the skies in an attack chopper, avoiding anti-aircraft fire, destroying their guns, and rescuing hostages. These helicopter levels play quite differently from the lesson levels but are a fun reward and a change of pace from the lighter fare that precedes them. Solid pacing and a peaceful atmosphere make this an easy game to get lost in for a few hours.





Reflections: Though often overlooked in the shadow of its fellow release titles or mistaken for a Mode 7 tech demo, *Pilotwings* is an entry worthy of exploration. It succeeds in doing to flight simulators what Nintendo has done to so many other sports or hobbies – finding a critical balance between arcade and simulation. Drifting inertia from the Rocketbelt can be tricky to master, as can the distance to lead landings on the Hang Glider, but a little practice and liberal use of the camera functions go a long way in impressing the instructors and scoring a perfect 100. Pausing also helps, as it gives an overhead map view and your current position – particularly important when trying to find remaining targets. Infinite license retries make it an easy decision to go for the challenging bonus landings! They net you some fun bonus stages – Skydiving gets you a penguin pool jump, Hang Glider a chicken man flying off the coast, and Rocketbelt a trampoline challenge with wings. Shame no passwords take you to these! – DG

Pinball Dreams

Genre: Pinball
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Digital Illusions CE
Ported by: Spidersoft
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

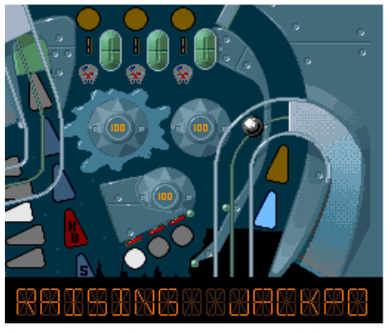






Rockets, railways, radios, and restless dead! This title recreates the feel of classic solid-state pinball machines with four original tables for up to eight players to enjoy. *Ignition*, a target-heavy table, is themed around fueling up a spaceship and launching it. *Steel Wheel,* with a precarious center ramp and looping left ramp, is about building a profitable passenger train. *Beat Box* is flush with pathways and progressive awards, and it focuses on becoming an internationally famous musician. *Nightmare*, the horror-themed table and toughest of the lot, features a wicked ball launcher and some interesting mystery spin results, including a catch-up mechanic. In addition to using the flippers, the player can nudge the table, though repeatedly doing so will tilt it. Colorful table art and memorable music mesh to create unique concepts; combined with the scoring systems and layouts, the result is a cohesive whole that could easily pass for a port of a real-world table. Variance in play style and theme contributes to replay value, as no two tables really feel alike. Menu options allow toggling between two control schemes and enabling/disabling sound and/or music. While well-crafted, the game is not without its flaws; the zoomed-in perspective causes jarringly rapid scrolling, and the physics of the ball leave something to be desired. These noticeable problems deter from an otherwise quality quartet of silverball simulators.





Reflections: Famous for the Battlefield series, Swedish studio Digital Illusions CE (or DICE) originally came out of the Amiga demoscene (a subgroup of programmers, artists, and musicians creating technically complex standalone audiovisual demos) in the early '90s. This makes it unsurprising that their first title, *Pinball Dreams*, is so appealing to the eyes and ears. While the SNES does its best reproducing Olof Gustafsson's music, its smaller native resolution pushes the player's view closer to the table. This forces a faster scrolling that can be disorienting on its own; the problem is compounded by the slightly-too-small ball's high velocity and curious physics, with it sometimes reacting oddly to the flippers and often feeling more rubber than metal. Great table design does its best to redeem these pronounced shortcomings. As a fan of Williams System 11 tables, it's cool to see *Pinball Dreams* channel the same look with its score displays. While no match for real-world tables *Taxi*, *Banzai Run*, or *Black Knight 2000*, I'll rarely turn down a round or two of *Steel Wheel* or *Nightmare*. – DG

Pinball Fantasies

Genre: Pinball
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Digital Illusions CE
Ported by: Spidersoft
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-8
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★

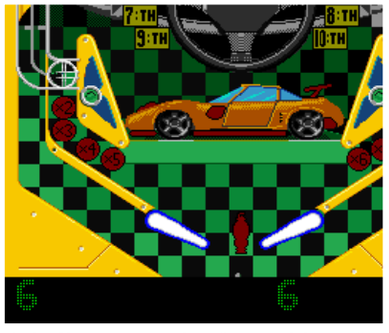






Digital Illusions' second pinball title and the last to make it to the Super Nintendo, this follow-up to *Pinball Dreams* features four new tables with unique themes and mechanics for up to eight players to explore. *Partyland* recreates a friendly theme park's variety with assorted ramps and targets while also providing a free retry if the ball drains too quickly. *Speed Devils*, themed around racing, has an enclosed loop area for pit stops and "off-road" bumpers along the left edge of the table. *Billion Dollar Gameshow* features multiple skill-shot ramps and a prize wheel front and center. *Stones 'N' Bones*, the ghoulish finale, has a progressive reward tower that must be unlocked to enter. An options menu alongside the four tables includes the abilities to toggle sound, toggle music, play with three or five balls per credit, select a high or low table angle (effectively hard or easy difficulty, respectively), and choose from one of two control schemes. Table layouts and themes remain strong overall, but inadequate attention to the physics and behavior of the ball again frustrates those players attempting to master tables and the complex scoring systems they employ. Pair that with the need to pan horizontally and the ball's tendency to outpace the camera, and what results is a pinball title caught between the vision of its designers and the reality of its execution.



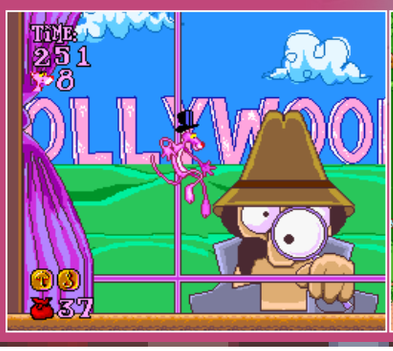


Reflections: As the follow-up to *Pinball Dreams*, the four tables of *Pinball Fantasies* show the same sort of evolution from before to after as their real-world brethren. The score readouts have advanced to reflect animated dot-matrix display (DMD) technology, ramps come in transparent acrylic, layouts utilize additional flippers, tables offer an extra-ball match after the last ball drains, and the tables, on average, have more mechanics to learn and master. Sadly, the biggest flaws in *Pinball Dreams* are still present in *Pinball Fantasies*. Altering the table slope to be low does help slow the scrolling but contributes to the ball's floaty and unpredictable physics quirks. Keeping the table at the default setting of high slope adds a little weight to the ball that helps it feel more realistic, but it accelerates the whole experience, making ball tracking difficult and disorienting. The gulf in overall quality between the SNES port and the source material is even wider than before, and that pronounced gap makes these tables harder to enjoy than their *Pinball Dreams* predecessors. – DG

Pink Goes to Hollywood

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Manley & Associates
Publisher: TecMagik Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Control the classic cartoon cougar as he cavorts through side-scrolling cinema scenes and upstages his nemesis, Inspector Clouseau. He begins on the oversized set of *Honey, I Shrunk the Pink*, which acts as a hub for reaching other levels. By barging into a bottled pirate ship, stepping into a medieval storybook, kicking a cowboy boot, and so on, he enters beautifully creative worlds, many bearing titles infused with the hero's signature hue. Some stages, such as *Refrigerator* and *Polterpink*, hide other levels inside. As the jaunty jaguar journeys into dino-dominated *Jungle Pink* or swims through *Pink Lemonade*, he attires himself in appropriate headgear that affords an extra hit. Pith helmets, ski caps, goggles, and more are crucial to the cat's maximum of nine lives. Massive wishbones, Frankenstein's monsters, sharks, lightning bolts, and Clouseau's various incarnations are all out to flatten the feline, but he has several means of clawing back. Hopping on heads is handy but hazardous, and he can mist enemies with his bug sprayer. Collecting TRICK icons lets him use sledgehammers, dogs, bowling balls, and other temporary attack items. He'll also find five types of Tokens that, when popped into Toll Gates, create bridges, stairs, floating umbrellas, and other ways of traversing tricky spots. This game is packed with personality, right down to the multiple renditions of Henry Mancini's iconic "The Pink Panther Theme." However, slippery controls and extremely problematic hit detection drain the color from the experience.





Reflections: The bonus stages in this game are all known by one title: *Safe Area*. This moniker is simultaneously literal (there are actual safes) and ironic (those safes can kill). Allow me to set the scene: It's nighttime on a posh city sidewalk, and the cotton candy cat-about-town looks dashing in his top hat. Lacking an elegant walking stick, he'll playfully swing his tail if allowed to stand idle. However, don't let him. There are other things on the pavement more smashing than our pastel protagonist – dropped anvils that clink, grand pianos that sink, and safes pushed to the brink all to harm hapless Pink. It hardly seems like a place for power-ups, but by dodging portentous dark shadows, the plucky panther can avoid falling objects and secure TRICK icons and 1-ups from the toppled vaults. Even death alley can sometimes be easy street – if your outlook is rosy. – AP

Pinocchio (Disney's)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Virgin Studios London
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Help puppet Pinocchio keep his nose clean (and short!) in this well-polished side-scroller that follows the Disney animated film in nine levels. To become a real boy, Pinocchio must merit the Badges of Truth, Bravery, and Unselfishness from the Blue Fairy while heading for school, performing in Stromboli's show, exploring Pleasure Island, and plumbing oceanic depths. The challenges during his quest are varied: He mimics marionette dance moves, leaps from balloons, careens on a rollercoaster, and tangles with the whip-wielding Coachman. Charlatans Honest John and Gideon also appear to misguide him, bad boy Lampwick flings firecrackers, Jiminy Cricket takes over for a stage of swatting moths, and the mission to save Geppetto from inside giant whale Monstro sprawls across the final four levels. There, Pinocchio gathers clams to prevent floating upside down, hitches rides on tuna tails, splinters crates into kindling, and helps Geppetto paddle past Monstro's maw. If all that sounds difficult, don't worry your little wooden head! Except for the last level's extended crouching and leaping sequence, this game is easy, with ample opportunities to replenish Pinocchio's health using wands and to accrue 1-ups and continues by grabbing hats and books. Pinocchio himself is sturdy, and multihued papers from the first stage power him up; in particular, the red sheet allows him to attack by spinning. Combined with storybook scenes and movie songs, the experience is delightful but brief. It requires little commitment to complete, so you've got no strings to hold you down!





Reflections: *(Singing)*. Hi-diddle-dee-dee! This game quite faithfully involves near all of the film's full plot. Most of it's there, but something's not! Hi-diddle-dee-day... I can't keep this up. It's true, however – for all this title's accuracy to the source material, a few unsavory details are missing from Pleasure Island. While Pinocchio does sprout donkey ears, we don't see how he makes a jackass of himself – by smoking stogies and shooting pool! It probably wouldn't have looked too child-friendly in the '90s to showcase tobacco and booze as the 1940 film does, but playing billiards could've given this title a little whistle. Seeing more of Figaro the cat and Cleo the goldfish would've also provided a lift, but it's too late to wish upon a star for that. Still, this game promotes positive values, and you really should always let your conscience be your guide – even if it's a 16-bit cricket. – AP

The Pirates of Dark Water

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sunsoft
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★



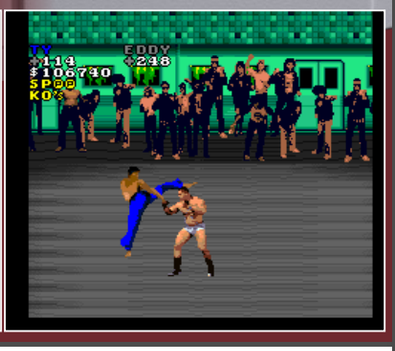

Condensing the high adventure of the cartoon show to its barest elements, this rather boilerplate brawler is set in the dying world of Mer, a once idyllic paradise now being consumed by the poisonous Dark Water. But all is not lost – should Prince Ren find and combine the mystical Treasures of Rule, the plague's foul tide can be reversed and the planet saved. It won't be easy; evil pirate Bloth and his seemingly endless sea of minions also want the treasures, making each of the game's eight side-scrolling stages a rather grueling "slug the thug" affair. Evening the odds are Ren's companions – while the prince himself is a serviceable fighter, ecomancer Tula offers superior speed and buccaneer Ioz greater strength, making them appealing alternatives for both single and cooperative play. Indeed, the combat system is this game's greatest treasure, allowing players to intuitively block enemy attacks, perform screen-clearing desperation moves, and hurl opponents into each other for some satisfying domino-style collisions. Boss fights are likewise inspired, including one surprise battle against a winged beast that plays out like a rudimentary space shooter. Colorful backdrops embolden these golden moments, lending everything an important sense of otherworldly scope. Yet, undermining these high points are the otherwise mediocre, interchangeable levels. From mountaintops to pirate hideouts, the stages play almost identically, with the same baddies reappearing every few feet, albeit in stronger forms. An occasional trap or platforming segment might break the monotony for an instant, but the title's overall repetitive nature soon reduces everything into a long-winded slog. The cheap tactics employed by certain enemies, many of which can attack off-screen without warning, wither the enjoyment factor even further, as does the absence of additional weapons and power-ups beyond the occasional steak or minga melon offered to restore health. Ultimately, the experience never totally transcends its cut-and-paste foundation.




Reflections: Anyone who fondly remembers the 1990s cartoon will likely be disappointed by this generic by-product of the 16-bit age – the urgent, imaginative spirit of the show was apparently lost on the developers, who gave us this rather mundane punching simulator instead. Even the ending is bittersweet – those hoping for a conclusive finale to the unfinished TV series won't find one here either, thus making the entire "adventure" an epic fool's errand. – DA

Pit-Fighter

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Tengen
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★

This underground fighting game ported from the arcade allows for one-on-one or two-on-two matches, the latter with a pair of players teaming up. Gameplay takes place in an open rectangular field surrounded by rowdy onlookers. There are 10 rounds of action against a handful of different enemies, with players moving on if they can grind down their opponents' hit points while surviving. The three selectable fighters are powerful pro wrestler Buzz, quick karate master Kato, and agile kickboxer Ty. Each has distinct punching and kicking attacks, ground attacks, a jump kick, a throw, and the ability to block, duck, and roll. The gameplay is dreadful with choppy, spammy strikes and no flow whatsoever. Enemies can charge, attack, and stay on a combatant, draining all of a player's energy in seconds. Obtaining a playable character's Super Power after a victory can help, but that use is offered for just a limited time when activated. Players' health does not replenish after a single fight (only every few fights), and with no continues, most will see the Game Over screen early and often. Extremely skilled and hardened gamers may progress far, but even that will involve some luck. The underwhelming digitized graphics do not impress, the sound effects are wimpy, and the single music track is atrocious. With horrible gameplay, an unfair experience, and no game options, seeking out a real underground fight might be a better idea than suffering through this.




Reflections: *Pit-Fighter* (1990) was a hit in arcades when released. It was one of the first games to use digitized graphics with real-life actors. The action in the game was over the top with its violence but somewhat endearing. It featured one to three players, crowd onlookers fighting, lots of weapons, and power pills to enlarge and power up fighters. None of those arcade attributes show up in the horrible SNES port, and three enemy characters are absent to boot. Other ports released on home consoles and handhelds at the time are superior. The Atari Lynx version is much closer to the arcade, and even the 8-bit Sega Master System version with non-digitized graphics isn't this bad. As an earlier SNES release, this title did not do Nintendo any favors in showing off the power of their new console. It's surprising that it was even allowed for release at all in this state since it's not just poor, it's the closest experience you'll find in the library to a broken game. – PC

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Activision, Redline Games
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★




In the depths of Central America, Pitfall Harry and his son, Harry Jr., seek out the lost treasures of Uaxactun. When the evil Zakelua captures father, it's up to son to ready his trusty sling and rescue him! Harry Jr. must shoot, whip, and jump his way through 11 treacherous levels of jungles, falls, mines, and ruins that weave in multiple directions. Collecting enough of the valuable treasure in an area earns a continue. Sling ammunition, boomerangs, and powerful, grenade-like exploding stones of Pacal are also scattered throughout each area and are critical to eliminating pesky monkeys, skeletons, and other baddies at a safe distance. These projectiles are particularly helpful in defeating the end-of-level bosses, whose patterns are rarely friendly to melee combat. The life meter in the corner takes the shape of a hungry croc in pursuit of Harry Jr. – the closer he is to being eaten, the less life he has remaining. He should keep a keen eye out for peppers, hearts, extra lives, and especially hourglasses, which temporarily freeze and render enemies inert, providing a critical respite and a chance to rush through the hazardous environment. Idol checkpoints positioned throughout the levels help both preserve progress and direct Harry Jr., as the fairly open stage layouts require exploration and travel in all four directions, which can be disorienting. Even with the assistance of the idols, it is not always clear where to go next. Furthermore, the controls are a bit delayed, and enemy respawns are aggressive. Despite these shortcomings, it is an ambitious, charming platformer.




Reflections: Seeing Pitfall Harry's silhouette snagged in the introduction is apropos; even if this game deviates from David Crane's original masterworks *Pitfall!* and *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*, it absolutely chases the shadows of its legendary predecessors. Despite all its faults... I love this game! Harry Jr. is well animated, as are the hazards. While the level design is questionable, it feels like a natural evolution of the original open-world collectathon. There are familiar foes in the early going, such as snakes and sand pits, but the farther I get, the more impressed I am with the sheer variance of movement types and sprite animations. Plus, hidden in the Lost City of Copan level is a strange warp that allows you to try the original *Pitfall!* Be sure to "stick" with this long enough to see the ending, even if the reward for collecting the letters "PITFALL" along the way is underwhelming. – DG

Plok

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Plok's flags have been stolen, so it is up to him to get them back and rid the land of the nasty Fleas in this kooky platformer. Plok throws his limbs as his main attack; these return back to him like boomerangs, but targets that can cause parts of stages to move will place his arms and legs on hangers, forcing Plok to find them later on as the level progresses. This mechanic introduces an element of strategy, as he can't attack without an appendage. Plok can also do a somersault to reach higher ledges and avoid a whole range of weird enemies, including silly Shprouts and seed-spitting Budd Lite flowers. Collecting clams unlocks 1-ups, which are plentiful in supply; Plok's health bar is similarly generous, and he can earn "Plokontinues" as well. Dotted about the stages are present boxes which contain power-up costumes to transform him into a boxer, a gun-toting hunter, a flamethrowing warrior, and more. These come in handy when the game requires the removal of a set number of Fleas on a stage; once they have been eradicated, the player must find a flagpole to complete the level. This is a good, solid platformer with excellent controls and creative settings that make for a fun time.




Reflections: What on earth is a Plok? He looks like he could have been a dreaded claymation character before the designers came to their senses. Between the lovely graphics and excellent Tim Follin soundtrack is a fun game that stumbles on itself for being quite incoherent in that it doesn't really know what it is – one minute, it's a traditional platformer, but in the next, Plok has become a buzzsaw for no reason other than he's now a buzzsaw. I suppose that in a sea of dodgy platformers, you have to try and get noticed, but too much has been thrown with not enough sticking (arms and legs notwithstanding). That said, the game plays wonderfully, the level design keeps the player engaged with its different styles, and finding that one elusive flea never becomes too much of an irritant. – JE

Pocky & Rocky

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Pick Pocky the shrine maiden or Rocky the raccoon (*tanuki*) and cast off Black Mantle's evil influence in six top-down stages of goblin-shooting action. The two heroes can slide, defend with short-range weapons (Pocky's *gohei* stick and Rocky's tail), and charge a special move. Both are armed with rapid-fire projectiles – the former flings *o-fuda* (paper amulets), and the latter lobs leaves. Blasting certain baddies or baskets reveals weapon enhancement orbs; grabbing up to three blue ones widens your barrage, while red orbs convert it into flames (you can't use both upgrade types at once). Attacks from Japanese folklore figures (e.g., umbrella monsters and *kappa*), pirates, zombies, and other foes reduce your weapon's level and your heart meter, but consuming tea or dumplings replenishes health. Shield-creating *omamori* charms, bombs, rideable "mad dogs," and rarely, one of the item-bestowing Seven Gods of Fortune also assist; such helpers and fine skills are needed to handle the enemy onslaught while navigating challenging environments. As you explore a Shinto shrine, bamboo grove, eerie cemetery, and more, your path often narrows or gets clogged with obstacles. You also ride an auto-scrolling raft, squeak through shifting stone walls, and dodge spiky spheres, so being able to travel and shoot in eight directions is crucial. This game is equal parts charming and challenging, and while it's extra delightful for Japanese culture fans, you don't need to be one to enjoy it.





Reflections: Cute cutscenes reveal an interesting story behind Pocky and Rocky's quest. They seek to free Rocky's fellow Nopino Goblins from a craziness curse cast by the Gorgonzola Goblins, who in turn have been bewitched by Black Mantle. With the exception of that cloaked creep and maybe some other bosses, it seems that nobody in this game is really bad – they're just brainwashed. Of course, being under mind control doesn't account for the Gorgonzola fortress having icky experimental labs and dungeons, but nobody's perfect – not even our heroes. Their methods of completing their task are questionable. It's not that they're shooting at innocent goblins who have no idea what they're doing; it's *what* they're shooting at them: reams of paper and piles of leaves. How many poor, defenseless trees had to suffer for their ammo caches, and who's going to rake up all that litter? Pocky, Rocky, we need to talkie. – AP

Pocky & Rocky 2

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Moon Princess Luna has been kidnapped, so Pocky the shrine maiden must brave top-down forests, rivers, snow, lava, etc. to rescue her from the spurned Dynagon. Initially able to withstand only two hits, Pocky can obtain armor and bunny ears for extra protection. She attacks in eight directions with upgradeable, rapid-fire *o-fuda* amulets, and she both strikes enemies and deflects projectiles by swinging her *gohei* stick. As she defeats Japanese folkloric foes such as *kappa*, triangle-crowned ghosts, and more, coins may drop, allowing Pocky to purchase boss battle tips, extra lives, weapon/armor upgrades, and keys to open chests and certain doors. Whether locked or not, doors may lead to gift givers, colorful commentators, or additions to Pocky's ever-growing array of companions. With the exception of two vertically auto-scrolling levels in which she rides a "mad dog" or Gordon the dragon, Pocky begins each stage with a choice of three partners: Rocky the raccoon (*tanuki*), Little Ninja, or Bomber Bob. As she befriends Tengy, Scarecrow, Digger, and Ottobot, she can switch to these with an icon. Each pal attacks with his/her own weapons, such as Rocky's leaves or Ottobot's missiles. Furthermore, Pocky can use magic to become her buddy temporarily, accessing skills such as Little Ninja's lock picking or Bob's boulder lifting. Finally, the shrine maiden can hurl her companion into enemies, creating a massive "bomber" attack against bosses such as Foxy the *kitsune*. Whether controlled by AI or a second player, Pocky's pals are a great complement to her already enjoyable quest.





Reflections: Although this is yet another game about saving a princess, it's neat that the brave champion doing the saving is also a woman. On the other hand, Rocky's role is reduced in this release – as far as I can see, his standout feature is his bomber attack: a *really nutty* giant tanuki statue, if you catch my drift. I found myself neglecting him and choosing Bomber Bob or Little Ninja instead because their special abilities are so helpful, but they, unlike Rocky, don't rate a spot in the game's title. That seems unfair! If only they had been given names ending in -cky, like Becky in the Game Boy Advance game, they could've shared his place in the limelight. Then again, keeping the title short and sweet was probably for the best because all my attempts to come up with rhyming monikers were schlocky. – AP

Pop'n TwinBee

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Palcom Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★







TwinBee and WinBee must defeat good-turned-evil scientist Dr. Mardock in this top-down vertical shoot 'em up. Players punch and shoot flowers, grapes, squirrels, and other adorable enemies out of the air while defeating ground units with bombs. The colorful visuals and hilarious enemy sprites may make many label this title a "cute 'em up," but players shouldn't be fooled by the game's charm; it can get difficult. Thankfully, there's help that comes in the form of bells. Collecting standard bronze bells awards points, but shooting them changes their color, ultimately transforming them into power-ups. The bell's color upon retrieval determines the type of power-up it contains. For instance, shooting a bell until it turns pink enables players to get a shield. Shooting the bell again may turn it green, which adds up to four extra ships to fight alongside TwinBee and WinBee (the formation in which these assistants fly and fire is chosen from several options before play begins). The bells inject tons of strategy by having players contemplate if they should stop firing at the enemy to collect a wanted power-up or continue to fire and risk hitting the bell again. Sometimes regular power-ups aren't enough, however. When things get hairy, players can unleash a limited, screen-clearing Chibi attack. Going it alone is fun, but bringing a friend along adds a wealth of benefits. TwinBee and WinBee can take a decent amount of damage, but once their health bar is depleted, players must use one of their few continues to start the level over again. Playing with a friend lets TwinBee and WinBee share health with the press of a button. Additionally, multiplayer games allow a powerful throw attack to be utilized. Although childlike in appearance, this is one fun and challenging shoot 'em up.





Reflections: Oh man, I love the so-called "cute em' up" genre! There is something exhilarating about shooting at hundreds of fluffy pandas instead of dodging laser blasts from alien spaceships. *Pop'n TwinBee* is the sixth title in the iconic TwinBee series, which is a franchise that landed in Japanese arcades in 1985. Although the original *TwinBee* wasn't the first cute em' up, (some would give that title to Namco's *King & Balloon*) it's definitely a staple in the genre. Solo *Pop'n TwinBee* is a fun time, but playing alongside a friend is where this title really shines. The ability to throw your buddy at the enemy is hilarious and oh-so satisfying. – MV

Pop'n TwinBee: Rainbow Bell Adventures

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Take control of the loveable TwinBee, WinBee, and GwinBee in this side-scrolling action-platformer that may surprise gamers who were expecting another shoot 'em up. Instead of battling foes in the sky, the trio are punching and jumping on enemies at ground level. But these aren't your basic punches and jumps – by holding down the corresponding button, you can power up each ability. This results in punches that break through walls and jumps that launch you over pits full of spikes. Stages start off simplistic but quickly turn into thought-provoking mazes. Pausing the game at any time brings up a map, alerting you to your location and the location of the stage's goal (exit). Gameplay consists of using powered-up abilities both to defeat enemies and to maneuver around (and through) obstacles to find those exits. Other than slightly different charge-up times, the main difference between each selectable character is their weapon: TwinBee wields a hammer, WinBee a whip, and GwinBee a throwable rattle. The colorful bells that the series is known for make a return and offer the same types of perks, such as shields and extra ships, but special golden bells arm the trio with their unique weapons. A few projectiles, such as baseballs and missiles, can also be found throughout stages. One thing that didn't get lost in the transition from shoot 'em up to platformer is the series' charm. Stages and enemies are once again cute and full of color. The main game can be played by two participants simultaneously, although this can be confusing since the camera awkwardly follows only one player. Battle mode is more suited for multiplayer and lets friends beat each other to a pulp. Don't let the genre change sway you; this is a great addition to the series!





Reflections: Wow, this one really surprised me. While researching this title before I started to review it, I quickly glanced over the synopsis: "*Rainbow Bell Adventures* is a side-scrolling platform game." Wait, did I click on the wrong link? This is a TwinBee game, correct? How are they going to make TwinBee a platformer?! I begrudgingly started playing, and my stubbornness quickly washed away. Then I began to get mad. Why did we not get this and *Pop'n TwinBee* on the SNES in the US?! We were robbed of an amazing platformer and an even more amazing shoot 'em up! – MV

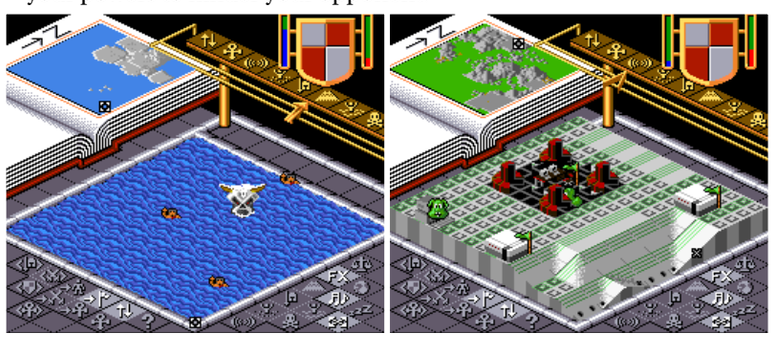
Populous

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bullfrog Productions
Ported by: Infinity
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





The ultimate struggle of Good versus Evil manifests in the form of a real-time strategy game that pits you against another entity as you give your people all they need to flourish and fight. There are three modes of play: Tutorial, Conquest, and Custom, although the meat of the experience is in Conquest. Before dropping into a world, you are shown the aggression and growth rate of your foe and what abilities each of you have available. You start in Genesis, the first of 989 isometric worlds, with your people in blue and your enemies in red. Each group begins creating medieval structures on flat ground – the more space you make available, the bigger the buildings your followers construct. There are six nature-related god powers, shown in the lower right, that range from earthquakes to Armageddon (which turns the level into a battle royale). The availability of these powers depends on the world's options, and your ability to cast them relies on your "Manna Bar" in the upper right. Each follower increases that "Manna" pool. Once you defeat the last enemy person, you're declared victorious, and the game sends you into the next world it determines will be a challenge. This depends on how easily you won over your adversary, so you will not necessarily play all 989 levels. Each world provides a new level of play from your opponent as well as one of 10 different landscapes, including Snow & Ice and Rock & Lava. While having so many levels may seem daunting, passwords derived from the current world's name allow you to continue at another time. This fun strategy game forces you to find a smart balance between flattening land for population growth and using your powers to hinder your opponent.



Reflections: This title is great at creating an atmosphere. In the background, you'll hear the wind blowing, bits of music, and a heartbeat that increases in rate as your people die. However, the game is not as responsive as you'd expect from the SNES, often suffering a delay between controller input and on-screen effect. There's also a lot to the experience that is not easily understood from diving right in, so the manual is necessary, especially since it shows many of the controller shortcuts for the commands. I did quite enjoy playing this (as well as the PAL-exclusive sequel) and would recommend it to strategy building game fans. – KY

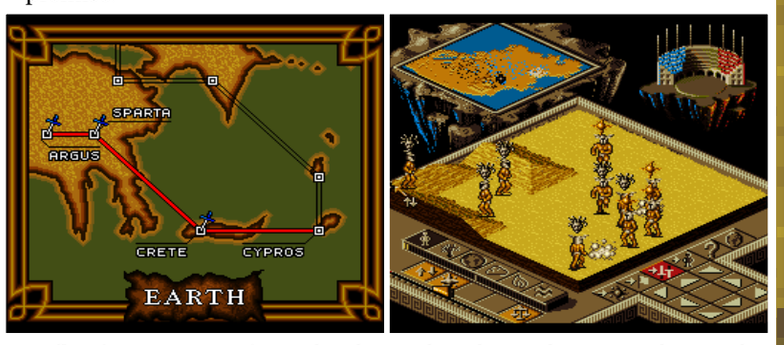
Populous II: Trials of the Olympian Gods

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Bullfrog Productions
Ported by: Infinity
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Take the role of an illegitimate son of Zeus and win your place on Mount Olympus by going head-to-head in 48 rounds of real-time strategy against bonafide gods such as Ares, Gaia, and eventually, Zeus himself. Each level begins by showing which abilities you have access to and what actions are allowed, such as building mountains in your opponent's territory. Next, you're presented with a unique isometric layout of land and a small distribution of people. Your followers are indicated in blue, while your enemy is in red. Your people mainly move around on their own, building structures on flat land. Your job is to use your god powers to assist them in their expansion, primarily by leveling the ground for more and larger buildings. The powers are listed at the bottom left of the screen across six categories. Within each section, there are five different powers. The pointer below them indicates which ones you have the resources to manifest – the more followers you have, the more powers you can use. In the lower right is the menu for options (such as whether your people should focus on expanding or fighting) and info on a specific settlement or unit. The upper left displays a minimap, and the upper right shows a colosseum which gives a quick, visual comparison of the population of both sides. Once you've beaten a god, they'll grant you points you can assign to a category of powers, effectively leveling them up. This allows you to customize your strengths and strategies. While the UI takes some getting used to and the manual is necessary to understanding what the powers do, you'll soon find yourself in the midst of an enjoyable strategy game with a fun Greek mythology premise.



Reflections: You won't need to have played *Populous* to understand what's going on in this title, but you will need patience to learn the controls, especially with what passes for "music" during the levels: a muffled heartbeat meant to indicate the health of your population number. This is definitely an auditory downgrade from the previous game. That aside, this is a good game that constantly forces you to change your strategy based on what powers you have available and the initial layout of the level. It's a wonder that the US got a port of the first Populous game but never this sequel. Those decisions always befuddle me. – KY

Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Phoenix Interactive Entertainment, Dark Technologies
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







Arranging a restful trip has become a real nightmare for Porky Pig, so this classic Looney Tunes character must wallow through six side-scrolling stages of bad dreams. These include the Haunted Woods, Dry Gulch Town, Atlantis, the Abandoned Mines, the Alps, and the Castle. Each level has multiple checkpoints and imaginative backgrounds, such as dilapidated Old West buildings, a sunken city, and topiaries/statues of Porky's cartoon contemporaries. Interestingly, if he loses all lives and uses one of his unlimited continues, the dream level will likely recur with visual differences, ranging from nightfall to rain to Christmas lights and more. The stages provide many challenges, including riding an auto-scrolling ski lift, puzzling through an interconnected series of doors, floating using potions or bubbles, swinging on chains, discovering hidden areas, and so on. They're also populated with enemies and bosses that might be familiar to Looney Tunes fans, such as Daffy Duck, shotgun-wielding moose heads, Yosemite Sam, and leprechauns proffering possessed green shoes. Porky can defeat most adversaries by hopping on them, replenish his life meter with hearts, and collect 100 cupcakes for an extra life. As the game's protagonist, however, this pig is a bit of a bore. His slow saunter through the stages is dull, and his ability to toss apples after finding a fruit basket is nearly useless. Combined with overly easy boss battles and mostly bland music, this otherwise nicely presented game can sometimes be more of a snooze than a sleeper.





Reflections: What's amazing about the Warner Brothers characters is their incredible comedic staying power. I really enjoyed watching some old Porky Pig cartoons before playing this title, but I realized I was laughing at Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck more than I was at Porky himself. Don't get me wrong; Porky's an admirable, memorable character, but he's frequently the one funny things happen *to*, rather than the instigator. He sure has out-there nightmares in this game, though – particularly when he enters a Salvador Dalí-esque dreamscape in the middle of the Alps. The eyeballs, dice, carrots, disembodied jawbones, and partially peeled bananas make me wonder: what did he eat before bed? What would Sigmund Freud say about this imagery? Hmm... Maybe I don't want to know the answers to those questions! Time to cut short this line of thinking with a cleverly placed catchphrase – that's all, folks! – AP

Power Drive

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Rage Software
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★

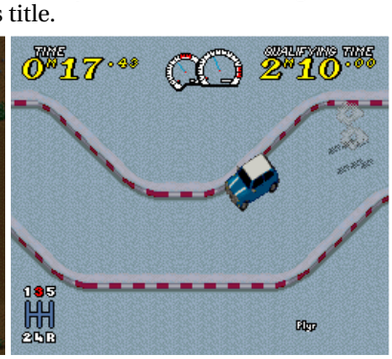






This top-down rally racing game has drivers competing in different events set on fictional courses from around the globe. To begin, players must choose between a Mini Cooper or a Fiat Cinquecento Turbo, but other real-life car models become available to purchase as the game progresses. Most events are basic head-to-head races, but some require the racer to finish a course in a set amount of time or perform certain tasks on an obstacle course. As drivers successfully complete events, they are awarded varying amounts of cash depending on their performance. Money earned can be used to purchase different vehicles or to repair any damage that the player's current car has accrued. If the player decides to forgo repairs, the car may not perform as it should, meaning the steering might slip or the headlights might flicker. This adds tons of depth to the gameplay, as it requires the player to be cautious while driving. Since courses are based around the world, various environments have to be managed. For example, Kenya's courses are dry and sandy, while Sweden's are full of icy roads. The different weather effects make the visuals pop and give the game a lifelike feel. Some events take place at night, adding even more variety to the visuals, and the soundtrack also makes this title stand out, featuring different tunes to accompany each regional shift. During races, the player is given a close-up view from above their car and must rely on on-screen prompts to alert them of upcoming turns. This works well enough, but the obstacle courses can get a bit confusing since they seem to expect the player to know where to go. Nonetheless, rally enthusiasts looking for a realistic experience will enjoy this title.





Reflections: It's amazing how many good games didn't make it out of PAL regions and over to North American gamers (and vice versa). Younger me would have sunk hours into this had I been able to. The little details throughout the experience really catch my attention. I absolutely love seeing the headlights flicker when I hit something with the front of my vehicle. The weather effects grab my notice, too – not just for the visuals, but also for the way they constantly cause me to adjust my driving style. Anyone who missed out on *Power Drive* should give it a play. – MV

Power Instinct

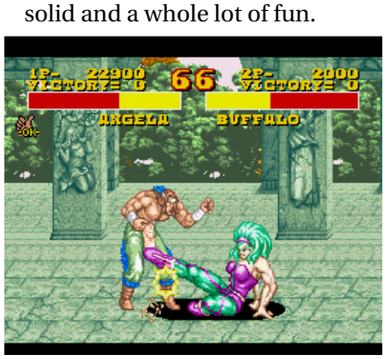
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Atlus
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







In this port of the one-on-one arcade 2D fighting game, players choose between eight characters and enter a tournament where the winner claims leadership of the wealthy Gōketsuji Clan. Before jumping into the competition, players can hone their skills in the practice or two-player V.S. modes. There is also Life Attack mode, where the goal is to use a single life bar while defeating eight, 16, or more fighters. Each character has a stage that represents their background. For instance, White Buffalo's stage is a Native American village complete with teepees, and heavy metal rocker Angela's is a crowded city street inhabited by leather-wearing punks. These battle areas start off small, but breakable barriers on the outer edges give fighters more room once destroyed. Every stage also features music in keeping with its theme, and some even contain background characters that interact with the music. Fans of the genre should feel right at home with the controls. Fighters each have high and low punches and kicks, and they can execute a handful of special moves when these attacks are mixed with certain D-pad inputs. In addition, they all have a double-jump ability and can perform special grapple maneuvers when opponents are in close quarters. What sets this fighting game apart from others is the outrageous humor and charming characters, such as Otane, an elderly lady who uses her dentures as a projectile weapon and snaps her sweatpants to her waist after a victory. Some players may find it disappointing that the final boss is simply a palette swap of Otane, and winning the tournament results in a lackluster "Congratulations" screen. However, the actual fighting is what's most important, and it's solid and a whole lot of fun.





Reflections: It's hard not to compare *Power Instinct* to *Street Fighter II*, as the two games are pretty much identical. Saying that, I think I'd have to choose *Power Instinct* over *Street Fighter II* if I had to entertain myself with only one fighting game while stranded on a deserted island. Some may think I'm crazy for saying so, but let me explain. Atlus has a knack for creating interesting characters, and that's what I look for the most in a fighting game. Sure, Chun-Li is a sight to behold, but she's got nothin' on my denture-wielding girl, Otane! – MV

Power Moves

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: System Vision
Publisher: Kaneko
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Who wouldn't want to be a master martial artist? Lead protagonist Joe certainly does in this one-on-one fighter that sees him circling the globe, seeking tutelage from the world's greatest champions. Should the aspiring star manage to defeat each in combat, he'll then be ready to face Ranker, the most powerful warrior of them all. This is the running schtick for the game's single-player experience, in which only Joe is available from the roster of eight characters (not including the formidable Ranker). True to his namesake, Joe is unmistakably average at the start, his strength, speed, and other abilities slowly improving with every win. This emphasis on gaining experience could have been the game's redeeming wrinkle, but because players have no control over how these buffs are applied post-battle, the feature feels largely arbitrary. Likewise, the fighting system is both thin and limited – no matter how powerful Joe becomes, he's still restricted to the same paltry moveset stuck in the three-button control scheme. This reduces matches to bland exchanges of simple-minded brawling, blocking, and evasion, although the characters' unique special attacks do add a speck of depth. Indeed, in V.S., the game's two-player (and only other) mode, a modicum of fun can be had experimenting with the now selectable roster's special maneuvers. The energetic Nick, for instance, can fling knives and execute a breakdancing flurry of spinning kicks, the savage Baraki can hurl himself across the screen in a physics-defying somersault, and muscleman Vagnad can perform something akin to a spinning, fist-flying lariat. All this happens across two planes of action, meaning that characters can move up or down to readjust attacks or avoid incoming blows. Unfortunately, these virtues cannot compensate for the game's other failings, including the nonexistent combo system, bland locales, forgettable music, and charmless, generic cast. Perhaps ironically, while there's a password system to record "career" progression, most players will tire of the game long before ever needing the feature.





Reflections: *Power Moves* comes from a time when the fighting genre was still being defined, which might explain why it sometimes feels more like a brawler than a serious fighter. Sadly, it succeeds on neither account, with bland gameplay that made it both a middling weekend rental years ago and a largely disposable curiosity today. With uninspired tripe like this, it's not surprising that publisher Kaneko would eventually abandon its American branch altogether. – DA

Power Piggs of the Dark Age

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: May 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★




This tongue-in-cheek platformer stars the Power Piggs in their quest to stop the evil Wizzard of Wolff from claiming the medieval Kingdom of Pigg. The player takes control of Bruno, who has a sword that slices and dices a plethora of bizarre wolves in people's clothing, such as axe-wielding knights, archers, and damsels with fireball attacks. A butt bounce can be deployed to break open item crates containing donut projectile weapons or ones that refill Bruno's generous health meter. Coins collected throughout the cartoonishly colorful but long levels earn much-needed 1-ups, and there are also checkpoints along the way. However, the game gives zero tolerance towards the player in the difficulty stakes. The hit detection is way off, and Bruno's sword strikes feel like they don't even register at times. Bosses are huge, screen-filling sprites that include a wooden wolf head in the forest, a dragon-snake creature in the ruins, and the hulking Wizzard himself atop his castle. They all have patterns to learn that can be a chore to master. This game is a mixed bag that has charm aplenty plus a funky soundtrack but is massively let down by the stodgy controls and harsh difficulty.



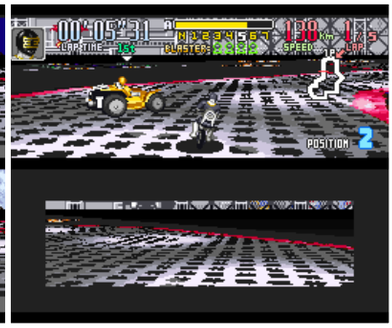

Reflections: This is such an odd title! It initially made me think that it may have had a TV show spin-off or an action figure range, especially after seeing the title screen. There, three different piggs (that spelling is game correct) with unique characteristics and weapons stand ready for battle: Lotta the archer, Bruno the swordsman, and Gilbert the inventor. However, the game only lets you choose Bruno. Perhaps this limitation was due to a development botch or a lack of money, but the game still looks fantastic, with the enemies all exuding charm and the characters having an introduction with a backstory. The trio, for reasons unexplained, runs a Medieval donut shop (hence the power-ups and health bar), and some of the stages are based in that shop. Unfortunately, the game mechanics are generally poor. Try having fun with those annoying "blow-holes" that blast you into the air, leaving you open to attack, and just wait until you meet the impossible-to-avoid jesters! It seems like nothing can save this game's bacon. – JE

Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★




It must get pretty old bouncing your fists off rubber-suited bad guys all day. The truth is that even superheroes need a change of pace, so the Power Rangers are taking the fight to the racetrack! This third-person racer is based on the 1996 TV series, which is the fourth season of the popular Power Rangers franchise in North America. Play as one of the fearless Zeo Rangers, an enemy Cog Soldier, or the sinister King Mondo as you hurtle through 16 challenging courses. Each character pilots a specific vehicle, ranging from jet cycles to dune buggies. Choose your favorite based on their stats for speed, grip, and acceleration, and then select Auto or Manual shifting. On the track, you can brutally ram into your opponents or sneakily zap them with your Blaster, but conserve that ammo, as you only get five shots per race (unless you're the Cog Soldier). Avoiding oil slicks and aiming for ramps and "speed energizers" will improve your lap times. There are a multitude of modes to help you battle boredom as you battle your opponents. Take on the computer or challenge a friend to see who will win those inevitable post-race bragging rights. If simply lapping around the track becomes tiresome, try Bumper Chase Mode, which tasks competitors with knocking each other off the track within 99 seconds, or give Blaster Master Mode a shot if peppering your pal with unlimited ammo seems like fun. The music quality is above average, and the title screen track is a nice rendition of the TV show theme, but graphically, this title is merely serviceable. The frame rate for racing is fairly smooth, yet the character animation is less fluid, and the environments feel dull. The settings, like the game as a whole, can aptly be described as nothing you haven't seen before.

Reflections: Go Go Power Rangers! Go back to the fighting genre from whence you came! I miss the goofy fighting poses and those rubbery bad guys jiggling around as they get pummeled with devastating flying kicks! While this game is fun for a few minutes, it isn't nearly as entertaining or satisfyingly silly as the show it's based on. The Power Rangers should just ride their jet cycles to the fight and then proceed to defeat the bad guys the old fashioned way – with flashy punches! If they're still looking for a change of pace, may I suggest taking up a weekend hobby? Power Rangers Badminton, maybe? – DM

PowerMonger

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: May 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Bullfrog Productions
Ported by: Sprytes
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

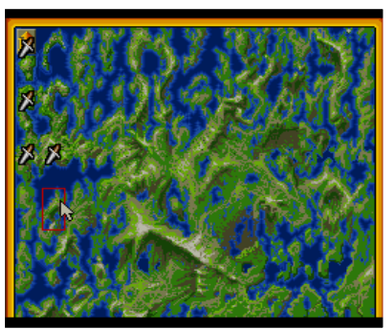






As an ambitious warlord, you must build a large army, take over the land, and force other commanders into submission in this real-time strategy game. You start out in the upper left corner of a 195-territory map with the goal of getting to and conquering the lower right section. The way there is up to you, having numerous paths to the end. When beginning in an area, you have control of a general and a small village. The main part of the screen displays the immediate area of your chosen commander. Above his image, colorful bars show his food, army size, and health. On the left is a large array of commands, including gathering food, attacking, and inventing. You need the manual to decipher the icons, as many of them look similar. To issue a command, select the level of aggression, an order, and then indicate on the main screen the target unit or structure. After completing your orders, the general and his army set up camp and heal until directed again. Once you've figured out the controls, it's up to you to determine what strategy works in order to take control of all the enemy generals and conquer a majority of the population (indicated by the scales in the lower right). You can be a savage, killing every enemy in sight, or take the diplomatic route and offer the generals a chance to yield. Once you are done in the sector, select Retire from the options menu to claim victory or admit defeat. You then return to the main map to select the next territory of your campaign. Are you mighty enough to work your way to the final area?





Reflections: This was released between the first two Populous games (only the first of which was in North America on the SNES), and Bullfrog Productions used the same game engine to create it. When they ported it from the Amiga, the sprites took the biggest hit, coming out like tiny, pixelated versions of themselves. This is in stark contrast to the title, victory, and defeat screens, which are beautifully detailed. The graphics notwithstanding, the controls are fluid, and I really did enjoy having to handle all the aspects of managing the generals. While *PowerMonger* isn't much to look at (most of the time), it is another entertaining and challenging strategy title with mouse compatibility for the SNES! – KY

Prehistorik Man

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







In this 2D action-platformer, players control a caveman named Sam, who has been tasked with replenishing his village's stolen food supply before the winter season arrives. Each stage requires players to search out and collect different types of food and jewels while bashing dinosaurs and other dangerous animals with Sam's club or obliterating them with his mighty shout. Stages are of the typical platformer variety, meaning players will be traversing water, fire, and ice environments. Thankfully, the village chief has provided Sam with guides that offer hints as well as craft useful items to reach inaccessible areas. The sports wheel, pogo stick, and hang glider inject enjoyable gameplay shifts that require the player to learn new abilities. Other than food and jewels, players can also collect bones which can be used as currency at the in-game shop to purchase tips, save the game, or even skip levels. A special area is awarded to those who can locate all of the letters in the word B-O-N-U-S, which are scattered throughout stages. At the end of every level, the village chief praises or berates Sam depending on the percentage of items he has found. The visuals in this game are gorgeous. The music is ultimately forgettable, however, and the reoccurring jump sound effect can get obnoxious. Sam controls well enough, but landing on platforms can be tricky due to him taking an extra step or two when his feet touch the ground. Although some stages can be overly difficult, well-placed checkpoints provide players with much-needed relief. This is a challenging platformer that constantly finds ways to surprise the player.





Reflections: I really enjoy games that keep the player engaged by adding new mechanics throughout the campaign. *Prehistorik Man* constantly kept me on my toes. Whenever I got comfortable, thinking I had experienced everything on offer, I was handed a brand new prop to play around with. Similar to the gameplay shifts, the visuals kept surprising me as well. I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me during the Dark Forest stage. The tree shade transitions from light to dim are truly a sight to behold and had me smiling from ear to ear. This is a real gem that should not be missed. – MV

Primal Rage

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Bitmasters
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Seven super-sized, long-dormant Draconian gods, awoken when a meteor collides with Earth, battle for worshippers and domination of the newly formed Urth! This one-on-one fighting title pits the decently balanced behemoths against each other in the best of three timed rounds, with the winner able to perform a "finishing move" at the conclusion. Two attack types (quick and fierce) and two attack heights can be chained together to form combos. Besides punches, bites, kicks, tail whips, jumping/crouching strikes, etc., each dinosaur or primate has their own special moves, such as reptile Sauron's Earthquake Stomp or giant ape Chaos's Fart of Fury, executed by button and D-pad combinations. Combatants have two meters: the Life Blood Bar and the Brain Stem Bar. Depleting the brain with frequent hits stuns opponents, while emptying the heart causes it to explode, defeating them. Small human worshippers roam the side-view battlefields and can be eaten to recover some health. Three game modes are available: a one-player arcade mode against each enemy, a training mode, and a versus mode. A unique refueling mode and final battle for the arcade mode are only accessible if playing on level seven difficulty or higher. Sadly, the game's execution does not live up to its attitude. Stilted button combinations, limited gameplay modes, mediocre audio, and heavily compressed sprite work conspire to spoil this child's fever dream of a fighter.





Reflections: There was never a lot to *Primal Rage*; its mechanical underpinnings are shallow, and the story is convoluted. Still, all the trappings of a mid-'90s digitized brawler are here, from gory finishing moves to combo counters. What is missing, however, is the sheer beauty of the arcade original, formed in the stop-motion animation labs set up by Atari. Inspired by movie legend Ray Harryhausen, the development team had sculptor Dan Platt (who worked on movies such as *Hook* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) produce beautiful rubber models of the game's seven Draconians that could then be captured in stills and imported as sprites. Given the level of effort involved, a shallow roster is understandable, particularly when one has the chance to see how impressive the arcade game looks. Sadly, the Super Nintendo port is so compressed as to lose its resemblance to that effort, and what's left is a pedestrian performance by pixelated prehistoric pugilists that plays as poorly as it appears. – DG

Prince of Persia

Genre: Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Brøderbund Software
Ported by: Arsys Software
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Jaffar has overthrown the regency and will execute the princess within two hours unless she marries him. You, her lover, must infiltrate the palace to save her and Persia. Unique among ports of this title, eight exclusive levels and some bosses were added. Thankfully, you're given two hours to finish instead of the usual one. At the start, you have options that include customizing controls, continuing with a password, training, and beginning a game. Thanks to smooth character animations, you move realistically slow, and the controls are deliberately delayed. Fortunately, the gameplay matches this. You go between static screens showing a room of the dungeon. Each screen is like a miniature puzzle where you carefully navigate traps such as spikes, guillotines, pitfalls, and more. Tiptoeing helps avoid spikes and falling from ledges. Your jump is a forward leap unless you hold up, resulting in a hop (which can reveal loose tile traps). Long jumps require extra space, and timing takes practice. Falling over one story damages or kills you, most traps are fatal, and guards attack you (although they're sparse). After you get your sword, you'll automatically assume battle stance when approaching an enemy, shuffling side to side. You must parry and strike at the right moments to stab your foe. There are potions that restore health, teleport you, or increase your health capacity, but some potions harm you or even invert the screen. Memorization plus trial and error are key, but it's not unfair. You have infinite lives, but the timer doesn't reset when you respawn. The password system helps, though, since you can press select to get a new password or abort your game to restart. The music is appropriate and effective, and the graphics represent the original while improving on it substantially. It's perhaps the prince of Princes.





Reflections: The original *Prince of Persia* was on the Apple II, which means this '90s game began on '70s hardware! There were umpteen ports, and I owned the NES cart as a kid. I've played it on DOS and Genesis also. Despite their topical differences, they're the same at heart. I don't know why or how the SNES version received new content while others, even the Sega CD, didn't, nor if creator Jordan Mechner was involved. Regardless, I think they're fine. In a way, the addition of boss fights here is an early indication of the direction the series would ultimately take. – KN

Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame

Genre: Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Brøderbund Software
Ported by: Titus
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★



The evil Jaffar has returned to Persia, stolen your identity, and enchanted the royal court into forgetting you. Can you break the spell and reclaim your principality? While the first game's SNES port was possibly better than the original, this one's the opposite, having poor controls and lacking some cutscenes and a level. For unknown reasons, the game runs faster than the PC version, making it harder to time jumps and fight. The puzzle-like gameplay and level design should require you to move realistically slow and make precise moves to avoid deadly traps and find the exit. The character animations already delay the controls, so the accelerated speed fundamentally flaws everything. Your inevitable mistakes add up: You have infinite lives, but not infinite time because you have 90 minutes to finish the game, and death doesn't reset the timer. The levels are in caves, temples, and dungeons with varied decor and different enemies, such as guards, flying heads, snakes, and skeletons. Combat is much more frequent this time, although it's not the main focus. Fighting is somewhat easier than before, although the speed increase doesn't help, particularly when blocking. To swordfight, you draw your weapon with Y, block with UP, and strike with Y. Falls and traps hurt you also, although most are fatal. You can find potion bottles to refill health, increase health capacity, or even float temporarily, but some potions are harmful. A few new visual details were added to backgrounds, but the overall appearance is lackluster for a late SNES release and inferior to the original. The music and sound are bland but appropriate. Some levels require more thought than finding an exit, although these surprises are better experienced on another platform.



Reflections: Titus made *Superman 64* and other poor games. They only ported this and fumbled anyway. I tried the DOS version, and it's slower and easier to control. It's hard, but dying doesn't feel cheap. What happened? Some speculate that the SNES NA version is a maladjusted PAL version, but I disagree, since both seem too fast. The speed might've been deliberate... or not? The game's buggy, and you'll sometimes fall through platforms (although I conveniently glitched through a gate once). There are speedruns on YouTube that exploit these heavily. Furthermore, Titus impudently displays their fox mascot through the credits, which clashes with the tone and makes it look like they're taking credit for something they only tainted. – KN

Pro Quarterback

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★



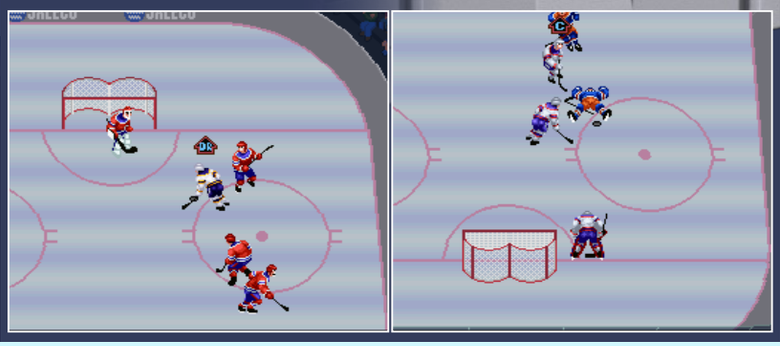
This football title differs from many of the others on the SNES in that it's a nine-versus-nine experience instead of the usual 11-versus-11. It's an arcade-style game with simplified play calling and no penalties to speak of. Since there aren't any formations to pick from, players simply have to choose one of the plays on the screen before the action resumes. In the stadium, the visuals are unimpressive, led by jerky animation and a rather pixelated field of play. Sometimes players celebrate after a big success, but these sequences are uncommon and don't add much character to the game. The poor animation makes passing a bit of a crapshoot; there are times when receivers somehow catch a seemingly wayward pass, while at other times, receivers let close passes fall to their feet. The running game is also affected by the poor animation, as defensive players seem to teleport into the backfield before a running back can break outside or up the middle. On defense, computer-controlled players seem to make plays more consistently. This helps, since it's difficult to decipher who's being controlled on the field, save for a tiny arrow above the player's head. Even the kicking game is affected by the animation, since the meter moves at the same number of frames per second. There isn't any kind of season or playoff mode here, so players are left with exhibition games to try. There is a co-op mode available for two people to take on the SNES at the same time, but that's the extent of any major features. All told, this is a bare-bones game with technical problems and no real depth that can't be recommended under any circumstance – even as a curiosity.



Reflections: This is the third Quarterback game. The first, a 1987 arcade title, used an analog lever to direct and throw passes. It was unique. It was fun. The second was *John Elway's Quarterback*, which was covered in a certain NES guidebook. It was based on the coin-op, though it was missing some features. It wasn't quite as fun, but it was playable and had its moments when competing against a buddy. Then came this game. Sweet, fancy Moses. It's like a sliding scale, going from Joe Montana to John Elway to Ryan Leaf (or JaMarcus Russell). That's a mighty steep drop, but like Leaf and Russell, this game is a bust. – PS

Pro Sport Hockey

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Jaleco, TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★



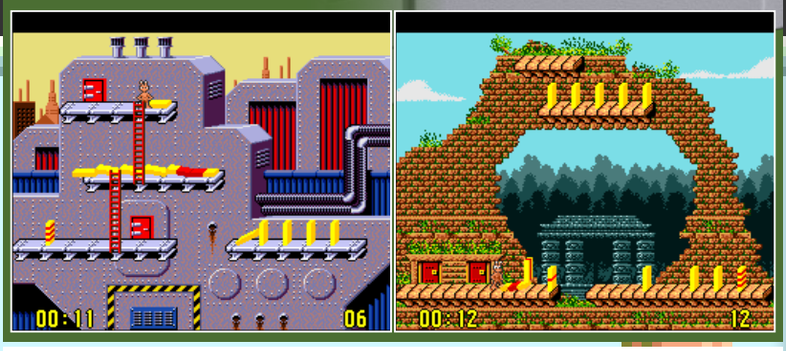
This five-on-five hockey simulation from Jaleco shows some promise before the puck drops. There are several modes of play to choose from, ranging from shootout and exhibition modes to full season and playoff action. The inclusion of the NHLPA license means that actual NHL players – and their tendencies – are here to build authenticity. The music is pretty good, too, right from the intro sequence and into the different menu screens. In season and playoff modes, player stats are tracked in a variety of categories and saved to battery. On the ice, having minor, major, and game misconduct penalties called is a nod to actual hockey. The player models are fairly large, likely because of how the camera is closer to the action than in most similar games, and their animations for skating, shooting, and taking hits are quite good. These are all positive things, but the poor play controls and overall gameplay on the ice overtake those positives very quickly. Passing is inconsistent at best, as the puck too often finds its way onto a stick of the opposition. Using the trigger buttons to set a passing target would be fine as an option, but it's a requirement here and winds up being frustrating. Shooting is difficult because the defense is quite good and quickly smothers the player with the puck. It's a bit more like "real hockey" in that regard, but novice or even intermediate players will struggle with this almost immediately. Another problem is the zoom level of the camera; it's a bit too close to the vertically oriented rink, making it hard to see where other players are on the ice to set up plays. All told, there are some good ideas here, but the flaws put this game into the SNES penalty box to stay.



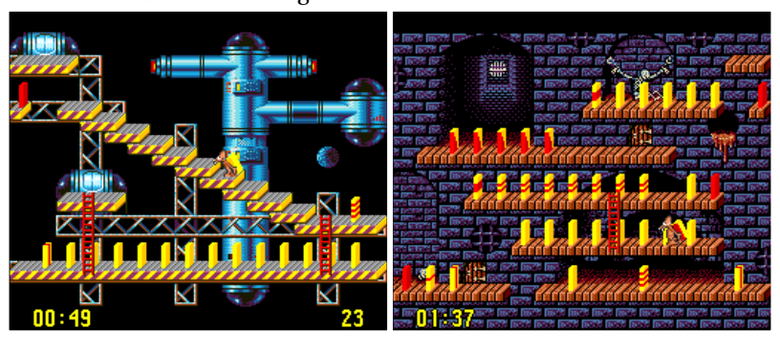
Reflections: This title is just like having a breakaway against a goaltender only to have the puck slide off of your stick before taking the shot and then falling flat on your hindquarters. It could've been a good game: The bells and whistles are nice; the graphics are decent. The setup was all there... but TOSE and Jaleco just didn't put the biscuit into the basket here. Why is passing so terrible? Why is the game action silent? Why can't I shoot? This just isn't a fun hockey game, even as an oddity, and it draws a game misconduct penalty for being disappointing. – PS

Push-Over

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Red Rat Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★



G.I. Ant has brains and brawn, and he'll need them both to complete the hefty puzzling task of exploring the Treasure Caves guarded by Domino Domain. In each single-screen stage, Ant must find a way to topple all the dominoes. There are many kinds of domino pieces, each of which behaves differently based on its coloring; pressing START displays a key for all the types Ant encounters. For example, the standard piece is plain yellow, while a bridger (which can create a pathway across a gap) is yellow with a thin red horizontal stripe in the center. Ant can pick up and rearrange the dominoes in the level, even as he goes up or down ladders/steps or off of ledges. In fact, he must shuffle them around in order to get the correct layout because despite his strength, he can only make a single push to knock down all the pieces, ending with the trigger domino. Fighting against him across all 100 stages is the clock, which counts down how long he has to correctly topple the dominoes and go through the exit door that opens afterward. Fortunately, if Ant completes a stage outside of the limit, he can still advance by using some of the tokens he earns from ending a stage within the allotted time. With slowly increasing level complexity as well as a gentle introduction to all 10 domino types, the challenge builds nicely, and the tokens help temper any frustration arising from solving the stages under the clock. This game is an entertaining puzzle experience that will stretch the mind of even someone with Ant's genius abilities.



Reflections: This game had me at the first mention of dominoes. Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated with the endless possibilities in creative designs for domino toppling, so I was excited to get a small piece of that action in video game form. While the game pushes you with increasingly complex levels, it also helps you out by providing some resources, such as the tokens and passwords after every stage. All the levels are split across nine sections that each have their own background music and design elements, such as the space station area. This helps keep the game interesting without introducing unnecessary elements. If you're a fan of logic puzzles and, well, superhuman soldier ants, this game is for you! – KY

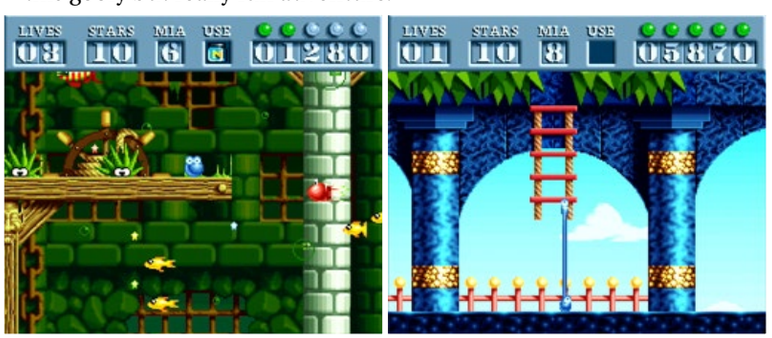
Putty Squad

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: System 3 Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





The wizard Scatterflash has used his beastly minions to attack and ensnare the putty people, so it is up to one particular pliable personage, Putty, to be a bouncy blue hero by punching, stretching, and expanding to save his supple chums scattered throughout each side-scrolling stage before moving on to the next. The game has a pleasing aesthetic quality with its fun and vibrant visuals, and the controls are never at fault when traversing difficult sections. To aid in Putty's quest, items are strewn across Cloud Castle, the Wizard's Frozen Garden, the Depths of Despair, and other colorful worlds to assist him; these can be collected by sinking into the ground to absorb them for use at a later point. For example, he can set Nitro bombs to create explosions, or he can use cat food to summon Dweezil (a well-placed punch then turns that feline into a convenient springboard). Food pickups restore Putty's elasticity meter, which acts as a health bar and also allows him to inflate and float to higher areas. In addition, he can call upon a rocket-like "power pod" that will carry him around the stage to help in finding elusive comrades. Stars can be gathered to power up his punch, providing effects ranging from a bigger hit radius to missile attacks; these come in handy against a plethora of frogs, shotgun-wielding carrots, GI Pups, and mystics in this goofy but really fun adventure.



Reflections: More enjoyable than its predecessor, *Super Putty*, this game's focus is on platforming and exploration to find the putties rather than on going back and forth over and over to rescue robots as in the first title. The stages are bigger, and there is more time to take stock of everything, although the later levels become a barrage of enemies that take some good platforming skills to overcome. A two-player split-screen mode is a welcome addition to the experience, as players can either work together in tackling sections or split up to cover more land in search of the putties. Any platformer that doesn't have a timer is always welcome in my book, as such games are designed to be explored and not rushed through. Plus, there are secrets to be found in abundance that offer up extra items and health goodies, so it isn't too much of a stretch to stick with that silly Putty. – JE

Q*bert 3

Genre: Action
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Realtime Associates, Ironwind Software
Publisher: NTVIC
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Gottlieb's icon makes a third jump onto a Nintendo platform, following the NES and Game Boy editions. The familiar gameplay remains: As Q*Bert, the player must make a series of carefully planned yet fast-paced jumps across an isometric array of cubes atop trippy animated backgrounds. Cubes start as one color and must be changed to another to complete the stage. All the while, enemies traverse the layout, from familiar foes (including the sideswiping Ugg, Wrong-Way, and the relentless Coily) to fresh antagonists, such as following frogs and patrolling derby hats. As the player advances through levels, cubes begin taking multiple landings to change to the completion color. Even more challenging, they eventually cycle back to the original color if jumped on again, adding yet another wrinkle. Despite the unique themes, clever layouts, and new foes, the strategy remains largely unchanged. For the best score, hop on the discs to avoid Coily, snag a Freeze Ball when it spawns, stop Sam and Slick before they undo cube progress, and grab the fruit when it appears, as an extra life awaits at 5,000 points and at every 15,000 thereafter. If the player gets lost, pausing provides a map of the layout and what remains incomplete. Kudos for the brilliantly-named X*bert mode, a challenge that awaits players capable of getting through the basic game's full 20 levels, though having the patience to get that far is quite the isometric leap.



Reflections: The options menu provides stereo/mono, music on/off, four different control mappings, and the ability to turn the backgrounds off, a feature that might surprise you until you have had the opportunity to play enough *Q*Bert 3* to realize how distracting they can be to the experience. You can also view the credits by pressing L and R there, and some names immediately pop out: Jeff Lee, David Warhol, Joe McDermott, and "The Fat Man" George Sanger. Lee is the original Gottlieb artist that created Q*Bert, returning to help with art assets. Warhol, producing, is a former Blue Sky Ranger. As for McDermott and Sanger, it's always good to see Team Fat pop up in the credits, as George's compositions rarely disappoint. The music in *Q*Bert 3* is eclectic but matches up with the game's look and feel quite well. – DG

R-Type III: The Third Lightning

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★







This third entry in the popular horizontal shooter series has players once again piloting a powerful fighter ship while battling the evil forces of the BYDO Empire. The R-9 fighters from the previous titles have now been upgraded to the R-90, a ship that's capable of equipping three different Forces (Round, Shadow, and Cyclone). The player must choose the Force that suits them best before starting the game. This decision can be a difficult one since each has dramatically different shot types that change as the R-90 acquires Laser Units from destroyed Power Armors. Power Armor drops can also increase the R-90's speed, equip tracking missiles, and even add small Bit orbs that surround the ship and protect it from enemy fire. Similar to previous entries in the series, the Force Unit can detach from the fighter and continue to attack the enemy until the player calls it back. The Cyclone Force Unit has the added ability of transforming into a shield when detached. Reattaching the Force Unit to the back of the R-90 allows players to fire upon enemies that are coming from the rear. As if the R-90 weren't powerful enough, two selectable charge shots (Super Power Beam and Hyper Drive Beam) decimate almost anything they touch. Graphically, this installment has none of the slowdown of the previous titles, and the visuals will please even the pickiest of pixel snobs. The hard-hitting music can be considered among the best on the console. Some shooter pros may believe this R-90 is overpowered, but the Advanced Mission that's available after completing the main game should accommodate those die-hards. This is one amazing title with lots of replayability.





Reflections: A stellar shooter, *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* was ported to the Game Boy Advance, offered on the Wii's Virtual Console, and even re-published in physical form (along with *Super R-Type*) by Retro-Bit in 2018. Interestingly, *R-Type III* was censored for audiences outside of Japan. In the original version, the level two boss attacks with large, sperm-like creatures. These were modified to look like eyeballs, which I personally prefer due to their grotesqueness. The game's soundtrack, composed by Ikuko Mimori, is simply amazing! Video game content on YouTube made me realize that listening to 8 and 16-bit chiptune music outside of the game was something that people do, so my iPhone is filled with SNES soundtracks, including *R-Type III*'s. – MV

Race Drivin'

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Imagineering
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★







In this arcade port and sequel to *Hard Drivin'*, the goal is, of course, to win races, but the novelty of this game is its polygonal graphics. It's impressive to see the SNES attempting a 3D polygon environment without additional hardware, but at about five frames per second, it's not *that* impressive. Music is minimal, and none plays while driving. The cockpit on the top and bottom of the screen is enormous, leaving one-third in the center for gameplay. This HUD shows pertinent info, such as gears, time, and score, but all the other gauges and your animated steering wheel waste space. There's a rearview mirror, but it only shows cars, not the actual rear view. Backgrounds are simple and scroll with you but briefly vanish when you drive into a loop or large curve. This and the low frame rate create feelings of disorientation; it's hard to tell where you are or prepare for obstacles. You have three tracks – Autocross, Stunt, and Super Stunt – which include some fun elements, such as ramps, curves, cows, and impossible vertical loops. When you crash, there's an overhead instant replay, which can be entertaining. You're returned to the road afterwards, but you lose when you run out of fuel (shown as "time"). If you spin out off-road, you have 10 seconds to drive back, but too much time is lost. There are four cars to control, and all are difficult to keep on the road since the directional buttons are too sensitive. However, the shoulder buttons can also conveniently steer the car. There's a score list to put your name on, but you can't save it. Making it far at all is a feat but for the wrong reasons.





Reflections: I actually saw an arcade cabinet of the original *Hard Drivin'* in person as a kid, and it was amazing. I had never seen anything like it. Looking back, it was fairly good, having not only 3D polygons but also a smooth frame rate and controls that functioned. Its ports and sequels, however, do not. This sequel was released for the Genesis (which is better than the SNES version), 8-bit computers, and even the Game Boy. Most are low-FPS messes. Back then, people were so desperate for 3D that they'd buy anything. Today, it would be impossible to sell a console game this abysmal, but that's what makes it interesting. – KN

Radical Rex

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Activision
(PAL: Laser Beam Entertainment)
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★




The wizard Sethron decides it's time for humans to rule the land and rhymes his way to placing a hex on the dinosaurs. Fortunately, Rex was napping and missed the effects of the spell, so now it's up to him to take Sethron down for all dino-kind. To aid him in getting through the hordes of charmed dinosaurs, frogs, and other creatures, he has his mighty roar and fire breath; their power bars are shown in the upper right. Also at his disposal are a strong kick and his awaiting skateboard in his journey through 10 prehistoric stages. Rex's skateboard is introduced in the first stage but not present in all. While this takes away from the tubular fun the board gives, it does allow for more varied level designs that include things such as swimming underwater, jumping across crumbling platforms, and rolling along the spine of a large skeleton. There are several checkpoints within each stage, represented by torches he must light. These are needed, as the levels are rather long. Once Rex catches up to and defeats Sethron in the fifth stage, he finds out his lady, Rexanne, has been kidnapped, so he must travel backward through the previous levels, now with slightly different layouts and minibosses, for a final showdown with the wizard. Owing to the unique level structures and length, Rex may find himself lost at points, but the difficulty curve throughout is smooth and leads to a great experience with one radical dinosaur.



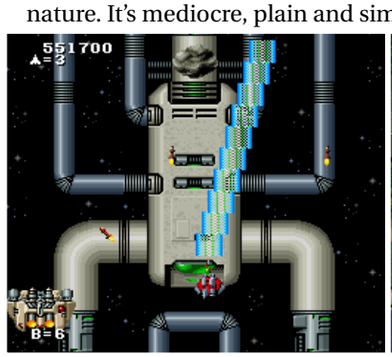

Reflections: Like, oh my god. Gotta give this game a nod. From the opening screen with a rapper guy to Rex's goofy legs as he climbs his way up high. Each stage is unique and has its own cool theme, power-ups to collect to give cute Rex a powered scream. Inside a dino's body, the third stage was totally bodacious. Gushing about this righteous game has got me going so loquacious. Stage five you're underwater, stealing air straight from a fish. Thought I was at the final boss – "Give me a longer game!" Got my wish. A sort of reverse S*uper Ghouls 'n Ghosts* back through the stages to the start. Different layouts, more difficulty, to kill Sethron, get Rexanne's heart. To wrap things up, from the intro rapper of the opposite sex, "He's so rad, he's so rad, he's my real cool Radical Rex." – KY

Raiden Trad

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Seibu Kaihatsu
Ported by: Micronics
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★




The popular arcade game *Raiden* gets a poor man's port with this slapdash vertical shooter in which the Raiden, an experimental "supersonic fighter bomb," must single-handedly thwart an alien invasion. Eight stages of hostile territory await, ranging from war-torn cities and sinister seas to a final reckoning within the depths of space itself. Those wanting a wingman will appreciate the game's cooperative mode, but most won't need one; this is one shooter in which the player has the advantage thanks to an egregiously overpowered upgrade system. Indeed, the ship's two means of weaponry, the pray-and-spray wide shot and high-caliber laser, can be upgraded eight times by collecting their respective red and blue power-ups. But yikes! At maximum level, the wide shot unleashes a bullet hell blitzkrieg of screen-clearing fury, while the laser becomes a deadly light show that nothing can withstand. The homing and nuclear missile add-ons invert the challenge even further, effectively eliminating any tank or plane that somehow survives the initial barrage, and should the enemy threat still be too much, bombs can be dropped at desperate moments to scorch-earth the screen clean. Only the bland, barely animated bosses provide any true resistance, firing speedy projectiles the oddly pokey Raiden can't easily avoid. Level design is similarly listless, with each stage playing much like the last, although decent graphics and a surprisingly competent soundtrack help to redeem these proceedings slightly. A useful difficulty option also adds a mite of spice to the otherwise staid gameplay – players can toggle the challenge two levels higher or lower than the default, increase the ship and bomb count to five, and for those wanting sore thumbs, switch off the autofire. Yet, no number of options or tolerable tunes can obscure this game's true nature. It's mediocre, plain and simple.




Reflections: Being a big fan of the original arcade game, I happened upon the SNES version years ago at a now defunct Walden Software store. It was only 20 dollars! I promptly bought it and raced home, only to discover moments later that it was a horrendous conversion. The missiles don't upgrade? Bosses can be defeated before they barely appear on-screen? Bombs now kill everything, requiring no aiming or thought? My receipt already thrown away, I sold the game to FuncoLand the next day for 12 dollars. I was satisfied. – DA

Rampart

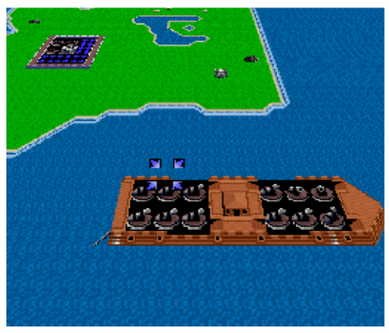
Genre: Action, Strategy
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Bitmasters
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Man the cannons! This overhead medieval action-strategy title has you defending a walled castle with cannons against enemy ships attacking with their own. After selecting a home castle, timed rounds begin where you must obliterate ships at sea by aiming via cursor. The ships fire back to destroy your castle walls. When the battle ends, a timed minigame ensues where you must rebuild razed walls with randomly assigned geometric pieces that can be rotated and placed. If at least one castle isn't walled completely, the game ends, and a continue must be used to try again. More cannons are often awarded to you, and the level is cleared with the destruction of all ships. Enemies increase in number as the game progresses; some use cannonballs that create flames that must be built around, and others drop off pesky ground units that move like ants on land to demolish walls and castles. Besides the standard arcade mode, Super mode makes proceedings more complicated with much larger maps and an isometric view, which is more gimmicky than helpful. Super cannons can be earned as well as propaganda that turns an enemy ship into an ally to fire on the others. Challenging boss battles in the form of larger ships and even a sea monster are in store. A very fun two-player mode has friends/foes attacking each others' castles and rebuilding in rounds where the amount of destruction and controlled territory/castles decides the victor. While it's intrinsically simple, it's quite challenging, and the different gameplay elements tie together nicely for a satisfying experience.





Reflections: *Rampart* started out as an intriguing arcade title from Atari Games with trackball controls and up to three players battling (which is a blast if you ever get the chance to try). It requires not just puzzle skills but also strategic thinking for deciding how to build efficiently or when to abandon semi-walled castles to begin around a new one (but with less cannons). Leading enemy ships at sea with your cannonballs feels a bit like leading city-destroying ICBMs with your cursor in the classic *Missile Command*... not surprising as it's also an Atari title. The NES port of the game is almost exactly the same experience as the arcade, only with two players, but this SNES version decided to add on the Super mode. While I applaud the effort in including more content, it seems to overcomplicate the base gameplay in my eyes. – PC

Ranma ½: Hard Battle
Ranma ½ (EU)

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: NCS
Publisher: DTMC
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This is a one-on-one 2D fighting game based on the popular anime series that sees 10 characters, including male Ranma, female Ranma, Akane, and Ryoga, all competing under the questionable guidance of Principal Kuno in the single-player story game. The two-player versus mode and the Team Challenge (a set of five consecutive matches) not only allow another person to participate, but also they add in both versions of Pantyhose as additional characters (these become selectable in the single-player game after winning it). Each fighter has a life bar that turns red as they sustain damage, and their general movesets consist of normal and power attacks, a jump, and a block. They also have their own unique special moves, such as Genma's blitz of strikes or Gosunkugi's voodoo doll attacks. However, most of these are done with the same control methods, and some combatants have only two moves while others have four or five, unbalancing certain matchups (which go for two to three rounds before a winner is declared). Everything looks the part, but the fighters are all rather slow and clumsy to manage, hampering some of the trickier specials, and unresponsive controls keep it firmly in the shadows of more accomplished fighting games. There is some fun to be had as the characters all have their own personal stories told by cutscenes, but this title should be for die-hard fans of the show only.





Reflections: I never was into the *Ranma ½* anime back when it was on Cartoon Network; perhaps if I were, I may have enjoyed this more. Instead, after trying out all the characters, I just went for the creepiest-looking one for kicks, and his single-player story is pretty entertaining, to be honest. Obviously, it involves one of the female characters because Japan wackiness! If the game moved at a faster rate, then I may have gotten more fun out of it, but the controls don't even use all of the buttons. Considering some of the attacks can be hard to nail, just assigning them to a spare button would have made the whole thing more enjoyable. Still, if you grab another controller and a friend, you can jump in at the deep end and have Ranma's dad, Genma (who just happens to be a panda) duke it out with a fat casino entrepreneur who looks like a playing card... and who doesn't want to see that? – JE

Rap Jam: Volume One

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: 64WD Creation
Publisher: Motown Software
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Coolio, Queen Latifah, Onyx, and several other '90s rappers literally drop the mic to pick up a basketball in this subpar "no rules" arcade sports game. Players are greeted with two modes to try – Championship and Challenge. Challenge mode is an exhibition match where players can play games with any set of rappers they choose. Championship mode (one-on-one, two-on-two, or three-on-three) tasks players with building a team of rappers (or other random fictional characters) to take on opposing teams of rappers on five different outdoor courts set in Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New York. Beating the teams in these cities rewards the player(s) with cash and other prizes, such as starring in a rap video and creating their own shoe line, although there are no actual cutscenes showing these rewards. In-game, players get a horizontal view of the court and can pass, shoot, and fake a shot while on offense. Attempting a shot close to the hoop will automatically perform a layup or dunk, while taking shots further away requires the player to hold down the shot button to fill an accuracy meter. Playing defense primarily involves pushing and shoving opponents, but thanks to slippery controls and poor hit detection, this rarely works. The Championship mode starts off fair but gets increasingly frustrating due to cheap CPU tactics. During the final games, the CPU characters do nothing but huddle around the hoop that they're defending while shoving the player and picking all of their shots out of the air. Visually, everything is bland. Players all look similar to one another and nothing like their real-life counterparts. There's also no music during games, resulting in an eerie silence. A game full of rappers that features no music?! Blasphemy!





Reflections: The premise of this game is brilliant – Take a bunch of '90s rappers and throw them all together in an *NBA Jam* clone. Something went terribly wrong in the development process, though, because this is one of the worst basketball games that I've ever played. Maybe all the funding went into obtaining the rapper's likenesses and not the actual gameplay? What I question the most is the game's lack of music. They have all of these rappers and couldn't use any of their tunes? What's the point? Well, maybe they'll redeem themselves with *Rap Jam: Volume Two*. On second thought, maybe not. – MV

Realm

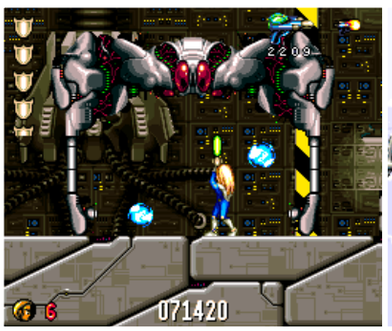
Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Flair Software
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Readily Eradicate Alien Life, Man – it's not what the game's name stands for, but it is what you do in this side-scrolling run and gun shooter set in 5069 AD. As cyborg BIOMECH, you have angry brows, flowing locks, and the abilities to jump, crouch, and shoot in eight directions while running or holding a position. You're initially equipped with a simple yet inexhaustible blaster, but while exploring a stormy forest, a subterranean cave, a fortified seaport, and an airborne battle station's outer and inner workings, you discover capsules containing homing beams, plasma boomerangs, triple shots, and more. Your inventory can hold two weapons total, and because all fire rapidly when the attack button is held, acquired arms can expend their finite ammunition. Fortunately, citrine crystal clusters abound throughout your quest, and hitting them unleashes spheres that increase the number of rounds in your currently selected weapon. The yellow minerals also provide occasional extra lives and shields that replenish your health meter, enabling you to continue battling bats, robots, soldiers, and other quickly respawning foes. Of particular note are the bosses found during or at the end of stages; these include a living statue, an airship fought while falling, a dragon-summoning magician, etc. You also contend with switch-controlled platforms, traps, a few auto-scrolling vehicle rides, and other obstacles while listening to engaging music. Though it has a brief title, a thin plot, and a short length, this game is long on difficulty, so be prepared for a challenge.





Reflections: I appreciate the visual details here, such as the way sunlight dapples the forest before the rain starts in the first stage or how flashes from firing his weapon illuminate BIOMECH. His long, blonde hair even flutters as he walks, but it never gets in his face or falls out of place as he fights mutants, gargoyles, and skeletons – what's his secret to controlling his coif? He can't be shampooing or conditioning in the traditional manner – we all know how well many electronics fare in a bath, and BIOMECH's no different. The rising waters in the second stage do him in, so how does he do his 'do? It simply must be one of his cyborg powers for it not to tousle when he tussles. I would choose super strength or speed to aid in the war against encroaching aliens, but perhaps BIOMECH only wants to win by a hair. – AP

Redline F-1 Racer

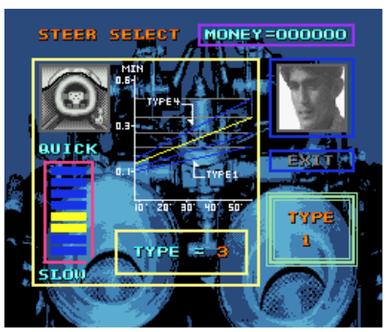
Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving (EU)

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Genki Co.
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment (PAL: Altron)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Settle in behind the wheel of a Formula One car and zip through 18 tracks from around the globe in this speedy racing simulator. There are four play types to choose from: single race, race against a friend, season mode, or going head-to-head against Japanese Formula One star Aguri Suzuki. Before each race, players have the option to check the weather and view track details to determine what sorts of vehicle modifications are needed. Brake softness, tire tread, gasoline type, and several other factors are to be considered before pulling up to the starting line. This is a simulation game through and through, so players who wish to jump right into a race without making the proper adjustments will find themselves coughing up the dust of their opponents. Planning during the race must be on point as well, with regular pit stops being required to keep the car in tip-top shape. In addition to battling the other drivers, players will contend with the horrid camera angle that is placed directly behind the Formula One car, blocking any view of the track ahead. Road sign indicators pop up on the screen to alert players of upcoming turns, but they come at such a fast pace that it's nearly impossible to react accordingly. Extremely touchy controls make hairpin turns frustrating, even though AI-controlled vehicles seem to whirl through them with ease. Graphically, the cars look nice, but they come off sounding like struggling lawn mowers. Even though there are an impressive 18 tracks, there isn't enough visually to set them apart from one another. Race fans may be excited by all the modifications they can tinker with, but they'll be severely disappointed once the light turns green.





Reflections: I was really bummed out by this title's lack of proper collision detection. The cars laughably pass right through each other! If you're really determined, you can manage to take out an opponent by hitting them at just the right angle from behind. It's difficult, but if done properly, you'll cause your opponent to lose control and veer off course. It takes some practice to pull off, but it's well worth it, as it will get you ahead a few positions. This may sound like a cheap tactic, but considering the awful camera angle, you're going to need all the help you can get. – MV

Relief Pitcher

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Atari Games
Ported By: Tengen
Publisher: Left Field Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Get out of tight spots in this entertaining but flawed baseball title ported from the arcade. Unlike other baseball titles, this one focuses on relief pitching and batting in specific late-inning situations. You can select a single nine-inning game, but the calling card is the arcade mode consisting of a 12-game "season." Each season game usually picks up in the middle of a later inning with the score tied or close and often with runners on base. The game takes place entirely behind the perspective of the catcher, with the focus largely being on the batting/pitching battle. Only four teams with different attributes are available, but each has a stadium based upon its real-life counterpart: Boston Bashers (Fenway Park), Chicago Strokers (Wrigley Field), Houston Dusters (Astrodome), and Los Angeles Speeders (Dodger Stadium). You select your pitcher's throwing arm, overhand or sidearm delivery, and along with the standard Fastball and Curveball, one special pitch: Screwball, Rising Fastball, Knuckleball, or Sinker. On the field, the accuracy and speed of pitches are chosen with a visual wheel à la golfing games. In the batter's box, you can attempt a normal swing, power swing, or bunt either up, down, or level. Batting sometimes feels too random and far too many balls are hit to the opposite field. Defensively, you cannot control your fielders' movements aside from determining what base to throw or run to when you have the ball. This becomes an issue when AI fielders make bad or questionable decisions. Base-running gameplay is also a bit weak, with stealing being too easy and no ability to perform pickoff attempts. Graphics and sounds are solid, although there is little music. Where the game shines is the outstanding presentation, with excellent audio play-by-play announcing from Jack Buck. While limited features and underwhelming gameplay may disappoint, the great presentation and unique angle are worth giving it a swing.





Reflections: Baseball/physics note: While a "rising fastball" may somewhat exist in your backyard Wiffle ball game, it's not a real pitch. This Atari Games title stands out for attempting something different from other sports games. Throwing you into stressful situations truly puts you into the shoes of a relief pitcher, where every ball thrown can drastically change the game. I cannot say enough about the great announcing, which for the time was unheard of for its abundance and variety. With any console port, this is usually the first feature to get gutted (see *NBA Jam*), but here the audio commentary remains faithfully intact. – PC

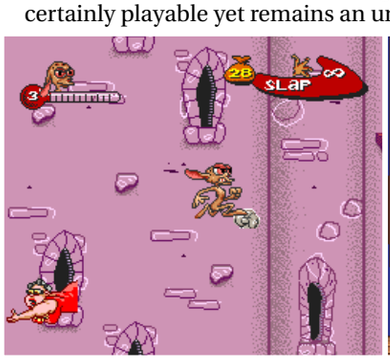
The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckaroo$!

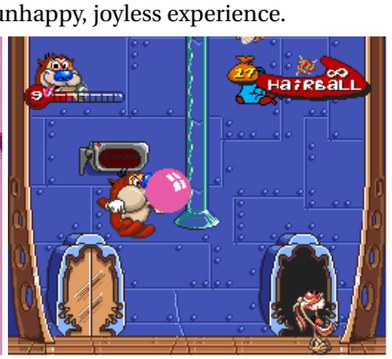
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Ren and Stimpy, that wacky dog and cat duo from the 1990s gross-out cartoon, resume their nonsensical shenanigans in this turgid platformer. Not surprisingly, the story is stupid: Stimpy, being the brilliant idiot that he is, has invented the Gametron 5000 Moneymaker, a video game machine that pays out cash for simply being played. Wishing to be rich, the two toons get started on a game starring themselves, collecting money throughout its 12 obnoxious stages. These levels alternate between three clichéd themes derived from the show's episodes – a poor Robin Hood parody from "Robin Hoek," a screwball take on the American Old West from "Out West," and a sci-fi yarn based loosely on "Space Madness." Only Ren is playable for the Robin Hood romp, using his bow to fire expendable melons, chickens, and plungers at the evil Sheriff's henchmen. Conversely, the Western segments are open to both buddies, the characters swappable by snatching Wanted signs. Although they control the same, the duo boasts different abilities – Ren always packs his bow and a basic, close-up slap attack, while Stimpy flings horseshoes, tosses rancid socks, and, by default, hurls long-range hairballs. The space stages switch things up again, this time focusing on the feline as he guides a delirious Ren through a perilous starship. Here, Stimpy uses a separate stash of tools, from mousetraps that jettison his friend over obstacles to boxes of kitty litter that keep him hobbling in the desired direction. In theory, this added variety should be fun, but the engine proves unsuited for such exacting gameplay. Indeed, the title fumbles even on the more mundane stages, wrecked by lousy hit detection, repetitive levels, and an awkward control scheme in which X dashes and B jumps. Worse, instead of fixing these issues directly, the designers simply compensated by adding unlimited continues, a password system, and an overabundance of life-restoring items. The result? A game that is certainly playable yet remains an unhappy, joyless experience.





Reflections: I don't envy the developers who had to create something functional from such an outlandish franchise. One can imagine a better game being made today, thanks to a market that now supports diversified genres, high production values, and content which doesn't have to remain within the constraints of a PG (or E) rating. Nevertheless, it's the team's devout flouting of the most cardinal rules of game design – tight mechanics, good control, and gameplay that rewards, not punishes – that sends *Buckeroo$!* to its doom. – DA

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Fire Dogs

Genre: Action, Platformer
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Posing as dalmatians, Stimpson J. Cat and Ren Hoek sneak into the fire station, where they'll have to work hard Monday through Friday to keep up the deception. In the first part of each day, Stimpy races against the clock, gathering a list of objects from the firehouse, including a jacket, a trampoline, and a beaver. A burly firefighter pounds away one of Stimpy's lives if he's not in his dalmatian paint, found within the level and washed away by sprinklers. Other dangers include a fire bucket that causes damage and a smoke cloud that slows him down. When he's collected all the missing items, he must return them to the firetruck to trigger the next section. In the second part of the day, Stimpy and Ren are dropped off in the city to protect valuables falling from (presumably burning) buildings, which are indicated on the minimap at the top. The goal is to fill the catch meter in the upper right, underneath Stimpy's lives counter. Occasionally, a dangerous object, such as a bowling ball or piano, can crush the duo, taking away their health in the upper left. Unlike the fire station, where Stimpy is sent back to the beginning upon death, the pair are instead revived at the building for another try. If all lives are lost, it's game over, although a password is provided for continuing later. This game offers a visual style faithful to the cartoon it's based on, but unfortunately, variation within the sections is non-existent. The time limits (especially in the fire station) are rather strict and require memorization from previous playthroughs to complete. The base of the gameplay is an interesting idea, but without any additions or new environments, it falls flatter than a cat under a 16-ton weight.





Reflections: I loved watching *The Ren & Stimpy Show* as a child, enjoying its outrageousness. A rental-exclusive title, this entry is based on the episode "Fire Dogs." I think the developers had a good start with the game but didn't take it far enough, resulting in an experience that becomes both boring and frustrating. I do appreciate the show references, such as the sacks of Gritty Kitty Litter and the boxes of Powdered Toast Man Cereal, the latter of which provides a speed boost. You even hear "The Log Song" in the password screen! Unfortunately, these bits of fan service do little to bring up this poor game that will neither have you feeling happy happy nor experiencing joy joy. – KY

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp

Genre: Action
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Ren and Stimpy set out to win a free time machine which they must later defend from the greedy Muddy Mudskipper. The artwork represents the show well, and so do the music and sound clips. Unfortunately, these don't compensate for the clunky controls, difficulty, and thin story. All the action is loud and chaotic, and the gameplay has no satisfying flow. Even the password system is needlessly complicated. Levels have the progression and jumping of a platformer, but you move in multiple directions on a flat plane. You can play as Ren or Stimpy, who both jump, crawl, tiptoe, and run. Ren does a slap attack and Stimpy spits hairballs. With two players, Ren can carry Stimpy and use him to body slam enemies, but friendly fire is an issue. Coins dropped by foes give you money, which is functionally your score, and there are helpful items, such as weapons, rubber nipples, beavers, and more. However, some items are traps, such as the Happy Helmet that disables you or slug coins that subtract money. Finding a "Log" on the ground leads to bonus arcade minigames. Enemies are uniquely designed and include walruses, mosquitoes, apes, lobsters, and more. Bosses appear at the end of each stage and tend to be larger, stronger animals or humans (often palette-swapped and recycled, too). Muddy Mudskipper himself is hidden throughout the levels, and you must hit him until he runs away – a percentage at the bottom of the screen shows his total damage. Between levels, there are time machine flight sequences (with awkward inverted controls) where you avoid or shoot obstacles, collect food for fuel, and fly through open paths. There are just four time periods, each feeling eons long, and there are multiple endings available, but who would feel motivated to play this again?





Reflections: My childhood home didn't have cable, making Nickelodeon and *The Ren & Stimpy Show* a special treat. I'm not surprised I'm still talking about it, since even back then I knew it was incredible. Other shows tried to copy it, and it even returned for a modern revival series, but the original run can't be matched. This video game captures its art style well but nothing else. *Time Warp* isn't just awful; it's tragic, having such a gulf between its presentation and gameplay. There are some original ideas, but the cruel difficulty ruins what could've been an interesting game. – KN

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots!

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







This one-player platformer features four multistage episodes derived from the anarchic cartoon series and immediately captures the spirit of the show with gorgeous-looking sprites amidst the badly drawn backdrops. Whether Ren is pretending to be a mouse to con a homeowner or Stimpy is being a mad scientist in a lab, the game provides decent lip service to its source material. The first stages, however, are so brutally difficult that it makes the rest of the game inaccessible. A five-hit health bar is there until death, but the poor collision detection and bad enemy placement are aggravating, especially when the player has to be in close range to attack. Stage two has the player inside a giant mouth dodging smells, rotten teeth, and open nerves; if a nerve is touched, instant death occurs, causing the whole level to restart. Limited continues are available, but the chore of having to replay an area sets in frustration. Health can be obtained via first aid kits, dollars, or food, but the timer is so strict that stopping to collect them can be deadly, which forces mistakes through rushing. Making it to the end of a level results in difficult battles with bosses such as a tongue-riding beaver, an army drill sergeant, and an alien. The visuals are excellent, but the extreme difficulty feels as if it were done intentionally to cover up a game thin on content.





Reflections: That mouth stage is the worst! Just thinking about it gets me annoyed, as I really want to love this game, but it's so unfair. Too long in places and too short in others, the pacing is all over the place. Seeing familiar characters such as Powdered Toast Man and Log is always humorous, and having Billy West involved on voices adds to the authenticity of the package, but the game is just bad. There's no joy in repeating a whole level again with zero checkpoints, and although the stages are character specific, it would have been cool to have a two-player option in some capacity. Instant deaths and insanely strict level timers are a Gaming 101 faux pas – it's a shame because the game could have been fun. Check out the episode "Space Madness", as it sums up how I feel about this title. Come to think of it, has there ever been a fair Nickelodeon game? – JE

Revolution X

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Rage Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★



In this first-person rail shooter, one or two players must defeat the evil New Order Nation (NON) and save the band Aerosmith. Players aim with an on-screen cursor to fire unlimited machine gun ammo at NON shocktroopers, soldiers, ninjas, tribesmen, and armored vehicles. The default weapon is a little weak, so players have to rely on launching the secondary CD weapon to assist. The digitized character graphics translate well to the SNES, but the gameplay itself varies from quick and steady to choppy, as the game experiences bad slowdown when too much is happening on the screen. The action is very challenging, and taking hits is a given. Objects such as grenades, rockets, and throwing axes can be shot before reaching the player, but there are often too many to counter. Health is easily lost, especially in the difficult and lengthy boss battles, but thankfully, plenty of continues are available. The six level environments, including an Amazon jungle, Los Angeles club, and Middle East desert, are designed nicely, and in some spots the player can even shoot markers to choose a direction to proceed in, which creates replayability by offering different sections. Many stage elements are destructible to reveal pickups – additional CDs, Super Guns, shields, energy shakes, and more – while bikini-clad blonde hostages can be rescued during missions. A highlight is definitely the audio, as the sound effects, audio vocals, and sample Aerosmith music tracks are impressive. This competent port can be fun, even though the slowdown and cutting of some arcade sections is a shame.



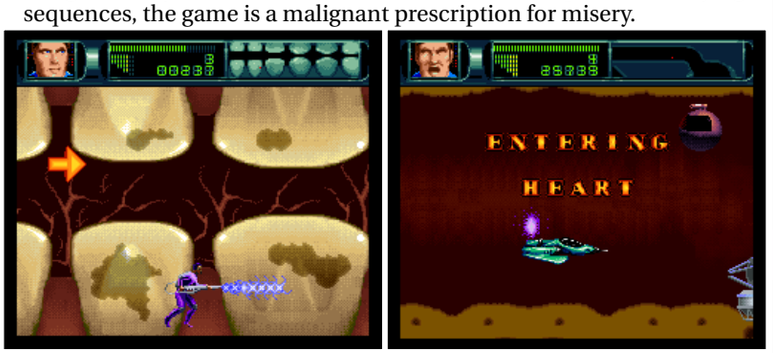
Reflections: *Revolution X* was a popular arcade game that I sunk plenty of quarters into during Jersey Shore summers in the '90s. Even if you're not the biggest fan of Aerosmith, it provides highly polished and frenetic light gun fun, much in the same vein as *Terminator 2: The Arcade Game* (1991), also developed by Midway, who even offered an arcade conversion kit for that earlier cabinet. One of my favorite sections (sadly omitted from the SNES port) is where you fire a single shot at a cat walking on top of a fence for bonus points; it meows if hit and accelerates in the opposite direction until it gets away. If you recognize the actress playing Helga, the head of NON (you won't due to the costume), it is Kerri Hoskins, who also portrayed Sonya Blade in *Mortal Kombat 3*. She pulled double duty here by also portraying the bikini hostages. – PC

Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon

Genre: Action, Educational
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Raya Systems
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★



Oh, the irony! Jake Westboro, proud employee of Blackburn Tobacco Company, is now dying from the same sinister product – *cigarettes* – he peddles to the masses. His only hope lies in the miniaturization technology of Rex Ronan, an "experimental surgeon" who enters Jakes's body in bite-sized form, fighting his diseases mano a mano. The going won't be easy in this mostly side-scrolling, action/edutainment mishmash; along with eliminating those nasty tar, phlegm, and plaque deposits, Rex must also contend with Blackburn Tobacco's line of deadly "Microbots" – murderous machines intent on seeing both patient and doctor dead. It's a legion without end; these man-made pathogens are a constant pox on the doctor's good efforts as he slips through Jake's trachea, clogged arteries, and finally, into his nicotine-ravaged brain. Fortunately, Rex has the perfect tool for such meticulous surgery; his "laser scalpel" can incinerate any corruptive substance in Jake's failing body, including those ubiquitous bots. Special color-coded molecules offer additional help, granting extra lives, added health, weapon upgrades, time extensions, and most interestingly, a long-range blaster that exchanges cleaning efficiency for greater firepower. Rex can also whip out fancy kicks and occasionally detonate a screen-clearing smart bomb by correctly answering tobacco-related questions. Ostensibly, this Q&A element serves as the game's halfhearted educational component, but it can be switched off completely in the options menu. Either way, the game is barely playable, with laggy, unmanageable controls, poorly realized level designs, and hit detection so obtuse, Rex is usually better off just running for his life to the end of each dysfunctional stage. Moreover, the music is repetitive, the graphics are subpar, the action is both meandering and listless, and even the gameplay's main conceit – clearing toxins from the patient's body – is a goal rarely enforced. Outside of a few passable, pseudo-3D flying sequences, the game is a malignant prescription for misery.



Reflections: Do public service announcements make good games? If *Rex Ronan* is any indication, then definitely not, although I give developer Sculptured Software an ounce of grudging respect for at least trying to create something more exciting than the point-and-click, text-heavy drek the genre often offers. No doubt, there's a flicker of potential beneath the game's jaundiced exterior, with the microsurgery idea not an altogether bad one. But tricking kids into buying a clearly unfinished game? Apparently, those devious tobacco companies aren't alone in their duplicity. – DA

Riddick Bowe Boxing

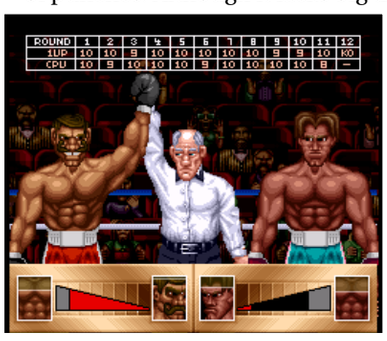
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Extreme Entertainment Group
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







This boxing game allows players to create their own fighter (or choose from a stable of premade ones) and rise through the ranks to eventually go toe-to-toe with world heavyweight champion Riddick Bowe. There are two types of play – single-player Career Mode or exhibition matches for one or two participants. Before beginning their career, players can customize their boxer by changing their face, hair, and the color of their gloves and trunks. This creation process also lets them determine their boxer's power, speed, and stamina with a set amount of distribution points. While boxing, the view of the action is from the side. Boxers can throw high or low jabs and hooks and uppercuts as well as block high or low. Each boxer's health bar and head/body condition are featured at the bottom of the screen, while the current round and the round's remaining time are at the top right and left corners, respectively. Above the contenders is a bird's-eye view of the ring, which shows players their fighter's location and helps when trying to avoid the corners. The boxing is very sim-like, and the majority of fights will go the full 12 rounds. As the player climbs the ranks, they'll be able to increase their boxer's stats by training (jumping rope, lifting weights, etc.) in between fights. Unfortunately, the player has no part in the training process and simply chooses what they want their boxer to work on. Although the boxing is somewhat realistic, the visuals are colorful and cartoony. Other than Bowe, all of the fighters are fictional, and several look alike. However, the crowd makes each match feel lifelike because they react accordingly, especially when a boxer lands a flurry of punches. Although it lacks big thrills, this is a solid boxing title.





Reflections: Boxing games are real hit or miss with me. Some are just too hard and force the player to grind their butt off to have any chance at winning. *Riddick Bowe Boxing* does require some of that, but the matches are actually fun, so I don't mind. I love that I can create my own boxer, and I really think that's why I enjoy it so much. This sounds so corny, but making my own character helps me form a bond with them. This is especially true for sports games, and it's a great feeling when a created character wins a championship. – MV

Rise of the Phoenix

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Battling it out for ancient China and emperorship, you control either Liu Bang or Xiang Yu as you deploy armies, influence people's loyalty, and defeat enemy units. There are four strategy scenarios, each on the same map with different army configurations to emulate the establishment of the Han dynasty. You choose the difficulty, whether or not to see enemy battles, and the number of players. In game, each round covers a month over two turns. For the first half-turn, you move each of your squads with their generals, although not moving a unit raises the soldiers' spirit, which can affect battle performance. If a unit moves adjacent to a hostile one, you can attack. Turn-based battle takes place on a geographical depiction of the area, including waterways, where you position units, carry out attacks, and send your generals to duels. If the attacked squad retreats to a nearby controlled town, the fight becomes a city battle at its gates. You have different types of actions, such as attacking with catapults or building defenses, but instead of dueling, you can send a general to attempt a diplomatic offering of an opportunity to surrender or declare peace. If a side flees or 15 days pass, the battle ends. The second round of actions allows units in a claimed city they're occupying to carry out tasks (enlisting soldiers, building defenses, throwing a feast, etc.). The unit with your leader can also try to ally with new generals. A scenario ends when one side has abolished the other, claiming temporary victory over China. With good music, stats and units to track, aspects of diplomacy, as well as the ability to rope in a second player to control your opponent, this title is a worthy strategy experience.





Reflections: Koei had a thing for Chinese history, and *Rise of the Phoenix* is surprisingly different from the Romance series despite covering a similar period of time. While I find moving individual units to be tedious, I enjoy the bits concerning management of all the cities, having to worry about gold and food as well as loyalty. Is it worth sending a unit to win back a distant town if it means losing ground on the front line? While hardcore Koei aficionados may find that this title lacks the population micromanagement seen in their other games, I feel that it's a pleasant balance of action and government that is accessible to less experienced fans of the genre. – KY

Rise of the Robots

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Mirage Technologies
Ported by: Data Design Interactive
Publisher: Acclaim
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★





Oh no! Rogue robots are threatening the world! That's essentially the plot behind this flashy but otherwise flimsy fighter – the Supervisor, an advanced, amorphous android gone mad, is now building its own mechanized military to subjugate mankind. Enter Cyborg ECO35-2, the lone machine lethal enough to scrap the villain's sinister plans… literally. Cyborg is not just the best choice, he's the only choice in a meager single-player campaign that sports six other opponents. There's Loader, the bipedal forklift who strikes with its long, lopsided limbs; Builder (also known as Ape), the gorilla-like golem who pounds with prejudice; Crusher, the scuttling insectoid armed with nasty, lashing pincers; Military, an agile attacker almost human in its behavior; and Sentry, a hulking giant twice Cyborg's size. The Supervisor naturally concludes this freaky parade with a shattering, shapeshifting finale. Yet, for all their distinction, the robots are identically stupid, falling victim to the same repetitive moves and strategies in almost comical fashion. Indeed, "strategies" is a term used loosely, as Cyborg's own moveset is limited to a small collection of kicks and punches that, despite having light, medium, and hard designations, are indistinguishable on-screen. Special moves add a wrinkle of depth, but they're few in number, tricky to land consistently, and aren't even available unless activated beforehand in the scant options menu. The tacked-on two-player mode is another failure; only the second entrant has access to the other fighters, leaving Player One saddled with Cyborg for the selectable three, five, or seven-round battles. Artistically, the game makes a better impression, boasting attractive pre-rendered sprites and several FMV scenes impressive for the period. The music, despite "contributions" by Queen guitarist Brian May, is less remarkable, being neither grating nor particularly memorable. This, of course, describes the entire experience – although playable, this is one fighter best rock-and-socked to the curb.





Reflections: The backstory behind *Rise of the Robot*'s jumbled development is far more interesting than the game itself. Did you know that most of Brian May's musical score was cut from the final release? That the game was supposed to boast a level of sophisticated AI programming far surpassing games like *Street Fighter II*? That a barely improved version was made for British arcades? The best stories, it seems, are born from the worst ones. – DA

Rival Turf!

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★





In this side-scrolling beat 'em up, friends Jack Flak and Oozie Nelson fight Big Al and the Street Kings in hopes of rescuing Jack's kidnapped girlfriend. Players traverse bland environments such as city streets and dilapidated warehouses while using their fists on generic street thugs and poorly dressed ninjas. If plain ol' fists aren't getting the job done, weapons such as baseball bats and bricks can be picked up and used. Each character has their own distinct moveset that complements their fighting style. For example, Flak is the faster of the two and uses sliding and flying kicks, and the tougher Nelson can body slam and clothesline foes. Enemies can also be grappled when approached at an angle, giving players the choice to either throw them across the screen or perform devastating wrestling maneuvers such as pile drivers and backdrops. If things start to get hairy, Flak and Nelson each have their own dedicated special move that can clear enemies from all sides, but this can only be used a limited number of times. As with most beat 'em ups, breaking crates and barrels reveals health in the form of hot dogs and other consumables. Overall, the game is fairly difficult, but an "Angry Mode" can be turned on to grant brief invincibility when taking heavy damage. Unfortunately, the experience suffers from poor hit detection that makes every encounter feel like a chore, and the choppy animations of the wrestling maneuvers dampen the excitement of pulling them off. Dull enemies, forgettable music, and uninspired stages will have players wishing they had made a pot of coffee before pressing the start button.





Reflections: I'm a big fan of the beat 'em up genre, but the hilariously terrible box art for *Rival Turf!* has always kept me away from this title. It features two male model teenangers who are attempting to look like gang members – instead, they look like they've just danced off the set of Michael Jackson's "Beat It" video. The unimaginative nature of the box art has woven its way into the game. Every single character and environment is eerily similar to those found in Capcom's Final Fight series. Speaking of *Final Fight*, likewise in this game you can also strangely replenish health by eating sushi from a rusty barrel. – MV

Road Riot 4WD

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Equilibrium
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★







Have you ever heard that a game is so bad that you can't even believe the rumors? Well, this SNES title is the embodiment of those legendary horror stories, so brace yourself and prepare to be aghast. In this port of Atari's 1991 arcade racer, you stuff yourself behind the wheel of a red dune buggy and engage in a series of races against three opponents. Take on the computer, or invite one of your least favorite friends to join the competition in a blue buggy, choosing from three difficulty levels and starting out on the Beginner Track before progressing to the World Circuit. There are 11 courses in all, and you can enter each race in the order of your choosing. You have the opportunity to compete in faraway and exotic locales such as Africa, Antarctica, Saudi Arabia, and Ohio. Each track is represented by a poorly drawn "host" character on the "Select-O-Matic" screen. The choppy racing action is presented in a typical third-person perspective but with a split-screen format that is imposed on you even in single-player mode. Simply press down the gas, stay on the track, and pepper your foes with "missiles" that look like tennis balls. Scoring hits supposedly slows down your enemies, but you won't be able to tell due to the game's comically low frame rate. Just keep firing anyway, though, or you may fall asleep out of sheer boredom. If you happen to doze off, you'll likely collide with a rock or tree and briefly explode into a smoldering fireball. The graphics are shockingly crude and blocky, and there is no music playing during the actual races. Speaking of this game's audio, try starting up a race and then closing your eyes as you play – this sounds like an Atari VCS game! The music and sound effects are that harsh, grating, and primitive. This game must actually be trying to be bad. The legends are true.





Reflections: I think the best way to convince a prospective player to stay away from *Road Riot 4WD* is to list a bunch of synonyms for the word "bad." May these adjectives serve as a reminder to steer clear of this sloppy, underdeveloped game. Here goes: inferior, shabby, poor, paltry, second-rate, lousy, wretched, spoiled, unfit, horrendous, low-grade, substandard, shoddy, sorry, awful, good-for-nothing, undesirable, atrocious, dreadful, and terrible. And my absolute favorite word to describe *Road Riot 4WD*? Painful. Ouch. – DM

Road Runner's Death Valley Rally

Looney Tunes: Road Runner (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: ICOM Simulations
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★







This game is an action-platformer in which you take control of the world-famous cartoon speedster. Clear each level using the hasty hero's stealth and wits while avoiding his relentlessly hungry nemesis, Wile E. Coyote. Road Runner must stay one step ahead of the clever canine in the desert, on a circus train, and even in space! The game consists of five stages, each featuring three levels of intense racing and platforming action. Sprint through the checkered flag at the end of each of these sections, and watch as the Coyote's plans go awry. In the fourth and final level of each stage, Road Runner must confront and outwit his old rival in classic boss-fight fashion by pecking at the Coyote's calamitous contraptions. Charge up for an extra shot of velocity by using the Turbo Speed Meter, and replenish this speed boost by pecking mounds of birdseed. But don't dawdle too long, as that wily Wile E. is never far behind! As he races through each stage, Road Runner can find an assortment of flags that award a specific amount of points depending on the color. Every 50,000 points earns the speedy bird an extra life, while grabbing 20 flags grants a continue. Other collectible items include shields that offer temporary invincibility and clocks that briefly freeze enemies. Watch out for scampering scorpions, springy snakes, and other harmful and distracting foes that could give your sneaky and eternally starving enemy a chance to catch up! Can you make it to the end and add insult to Wile E. Coyote's many, many injuries? Beep! Beep!





Reflections: *Road Runner's Death Valley Rally* (*Gamus Medicoreness*): Based on the classic Looney Tunes characters initially brought to life by Chuck Jones and Michael Maltese, this game is thoughtfully crafted and lovingly inventive. The problem is mixing the meticulous platforming mechanics with the blindingly fast speed elements, which this title exhibits in equal parts. It's utterly gratifying to blast off as the Road Runner and feel that rush of raw velocity, but collecting flags only slows down the action. Having to skid to a halt to knock out enemies also brings the adventure to a crawl, along with all the fun. In the end, this title merely plummets down that gaming ravine of missed opportunities and lands with a violent splat about 10 feet from the river. Poor Coyote, and poor us. Could've been *Gamus Swiftus Above Averageus* if it would've just let us keep running! – DM

RoboCop 3

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Become the future of law enforcement once more to take down the evil OCP corporation in this side-scrolling action game that loosely follows the movie. To fight goons, Robo has a host of power-ups he can utilize, including a spread gun, rocket launcher, and even his flamethrower attachment. It does feel like he's being punished, though, as the three-way shot uses three bullets and ammo is scarce. Hoodlums constantly run into battle and also appear in open windows in an attempt to halt the hero. Knowing which weapon to use is paramount to proceeding, as the difficulty is brutal! To change the pace, Robo dons his jetpack for a couple of vertical bullet hell shooter stages. These do the experience no favors but keep in with the license, aside from tanks and hoverbikes that aren't in the movie. The game looks decent, and even RoboCop's famous foot stomping sound adds to the presentation, but the aforementioned difficulty is too much. Die and it is back to the start of the stage with zero checkpoints. Add in an extremely unfair timer, relentless enemies, and (most unforgivably) power-ups that can be shot at by accident, and you'll wish Clarence had put Murphy down in the original film.





Reflections: What could have been a classic is let down and marred by another Ocean shovelware cash-in. The movie was not particularly memorable, so there was carte blanche to really make the game something special. Alas, the difficulty alone renders it too inaccessible to all but battle-hardened gamers. Why most bad guys can kill RoboCop in four bullets yet it takes four bullets to kill a foe makes zero sense, and don't get me started about rats that can kill him, too! The whole thing just smacks of laziness – why pick up the letter "E" for energy when our metal hero has been chomping down on baby food in previous games? If you rip out the protagonist, the ED-209's brief appearance, and some dodgy-looking Japanese ninjas that resemble a misshapen Bruce Campbell, then there would be zero reference to the '80s pop culture icon at all. You could have slapped in a dinosaur as the lead and called it "Shooty Bang Dino" instead. – JE

RoboCop Versus The Terminator

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Officer RoboCop battles an army of Terminator robots in an attempt to stop Skynet from eliminating mankind. Armed with a machine pistol, he starts on the streets of Delta City, mostly taking out cyberpunks, before facing Terminators, orbs, spider droids, and dog droids in the post-apocalyptic future. The stages are designed to be traversed both horizontally and vertically, with lots of pits, ooze, and electricity to jump, ladders and elevators to use, and horizontal poles/bars to grab onto and hand-walk across. The controls are smooth, with RoboCop able to aim in seven main directions while walking and jumping; he can fire in an additional direction (straight down) while hand-walking on bars and climbing ladders. Most enemies endure quite a beating before the weak default pistol can destroy them, but thankfully, crucial weapon upgrades are available, including the laser gun, missile launcher, seeker missile launcher, gatling gun, plasma rifle, and combo plasma rifle and grenade launcher. These are not only necessary for survival; fighting the Terminator horde is also a real slog without the most powerful combo weapon, which can result in restlessness quicker than expected. There are boosters to restore the life bar, but they don't come often enough, and dying sends RoboCop all the way back to the stage's start. The graphics are detailed, with the futuristic stages and Skynet bases looking appropriately gloomy, but the music is average. There isn't a huge variety in the enemies that are encountered, and not enough boss fights occur to keep matters totally engaging. A single Mode 7 vehicle stage is a small respite from the near monotony.





Reflections: Based on the 1992 Dark Horse Comics miniseries crossover, the game's plot has RoboCop being tricked by Skynet in the future into plugging into their system in the present and thus being responsible for Skynet's very creation and the eventual destruction of most of humanity. He then has to destroy Skynet before it wipes out the few humans that remain. Thanks for nothing, RoboCop. The SNES game boasts the distinction of having a hard plastic box instead of the typical cardboard one that the rest of the library has. The Sega Genesis version of this title is an entirely different game developed by Virgin Games, featuring much more interesting visuals, nicer weapons, and a large amount of blood and gore. A considerably tamer version for the NES was completed but never released. – PC

Robotrek

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Quintet, Ancient
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







You are a brilliant boy inventor with a bent for building bots to battle the Hackers, a comically criminal troop intent on taking potent Tetron stones to conquer the cosmos – and beyond. After relocating to the town of Rococo, fabricate the first of three ferrous friends with your Invention Machine, name your creation, formulate its unique color, and distribute Program Points to stats such as Speed and Power. You can then travel the World Map, and as you access and enter intriguing top-down destinations there, you may encounter visible foes, such as spiders, ape tacklers, and cheeky pixies. Touching one starts both a turn-based battle and a dwindling timer; beating the clock along with the enemies grants extra experience points (Megs). You can do a lot in combat, including moving or replacing your current robot; selecting healing items and customizable special attacks; striking on-screen capsules for random bonuses; and using the L, R, and X buttons as shortcuts for wielding swords, axes, rocket fists, and more. Most equipment is fashioned and improved with Invention Machines, either by utilizing info from "Inventor's Friend" books or by combining scrap and other items. Don't be jealous of your androids' bountiful outfitting options; there are also clever tools solely for you, including a Transceiver for saving progress, a Cyber-Jack for entering computers, and even a Change gadget for becoming a mouse! These creative accessories see you through an equally creative journey, complete with memorable characters such as plucky Mint, thorny Rose, and noble Napoleon. The plot takes interesting, unexpected turns but can be a bit hard to follow due to translation errors. Despite those bugs, however, this trek is absolutely worth taking – especially with the friends you *make* along the way.





Reflections: I've experimented with several subjects, but it's tough to decide on a Reflections topic for this title. Do I Dolittle and discuss the awesome Relay device for talking with animals? Should I celebrate Akihabara, a character name that's also a Tokyo region renown for nerd culture? Or must I let this part go to pot by describing how toilets flow throughout the story? I don't know what to... *zzzt!* Hey, a light bulb went on over my head! I don't need to reinvent the wheel (or risk revealing spoilers)! I just need to say that this is truly a fun game, filled with options to edit and details that delight. I'm a genius! – AP

Rock n' Roll Racing

Genre: Racing, Action
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Silicon & Synapse
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★½







The stage is set – the green flag drops in this all-out isometric action racer where the player is tasked to choose a character and drive throughout the galaxy to become the number one speedster. Six worlds with environments ranging from New Mojave's deserts to NHO's snowy plains keep the visuals fresh as the player jostles for position in order to get more money to upgrade and buy new cars. Missiles, mines, and boosters can be purchased, but these are also available to the three AI racers in each single-player bout, so knowing when to use them becomes pivotal in scraping pole position as the projectiles fly in the later stages. Weapons are replenished after each lap, but upgrading car armor to increase vehicle hit points and shocks to improve cornering ability/assist dodging oncoming laser fire is essential. Tracks have bumps and jumps which can result in falling off the road, causing precious race time to be squandered, and a bevy of oil slicks and mine traps also hinder driving across the courses. Accruing enough points during a season of races allows the player to qualify for promotion to the higher league on each world and then move on to the next planet, where the difficulty increases. Fast action and racing thrills topped off with renditions of famous rock songs, such as "Bad to the Bone" and "Born to be Wild," complete an irresistible package.





Reflections: This game is easily up there with *Super Mario Kart* as one of the finest racers on the system. The high-octane action never lets up and moves at a great pace – it's genuinely thrilling to hold first position at the death of a race. You can get enough season points to get promoted to the higher leagues early on, but my advice would be to finish the season out, as you win more cash for upgrades. Some of the later tracks can become a bit confusing with their twists and turns, but keeping an eye on the map in the upper left corner helps. The presentation is top notch throughout, and the controls are impeccable. My only nitpick is that the soundtrack grates after a while, so shut that off, leaving on the commentator (played by race announcer Larry Huffman) to describe the action perfectly, and turn some heavy hair rock up to 11 instead. Then grab a buddy and have some two-player split-screen carnage! – JE

The Rocketeer

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: May 1992
Region: NA
Developer: NovaLogic
Publisher: Information Global Service
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







This action title puts players in the role of the Rocketeer (Cliff Secord) during pivotal moments from the 1991 Disney film. The experience is best described as an underwhelming hodgepodge of different game genres. To begin, players must pilot an airplane while racing other planes around an airfield. Even though this airfield is 3D in scope, the view of the race is displayed from the side, which makes navigating the plane insanely difficult. If players manage to win two races, they'll be thrust into an inexplicable third-person gunfight inside a hangar. During this seemingly never-ending sequence (plus a second one after another race), the player must guide the Rocketeer left and right in the foreground while firing upon numerous waves of enemies as they pop up in the background. This is the first time in the game that players can try the Rocketeer's jetpack, but the ability is ultimately a letdown since its main use is to collect first aid kits that appear at the top of the screen. The third gameplay type is of the horizontal-shooter variety and requires players to control both the Rocketeer and a Locust aircraft at different intervals. Although this segment of the game is slightly enjoyable, it tends to go on forever. The final sequence is a bare-bones 2D beat 'em up that has players fighting enemies while atop a zeppelin. In between each of the previously mentioned sequences, players are treated to comic panels that move the story along, which is a nice nod to the '80s comic that introduced the hero. While the music and sound effects are serviceable, they are completely forgettable. On the other hand, the visuals can be stunning at times. Nonetheless, this is a boring game with a major identity crisis.





Reflections: I wasn't a big fan of *The Rocketeer* when it was released in theaters back in 1991. My dislike for the film didn't stop me from renting the NES version of the game, though. That one is actually fun, and I enjoy it immensely. I was expecting the SNES version to be more of the same but with improved sound and visuals. But this… this is horrible. It took me a few hours just to win the airplane race, and that can be considered the first level of the game! I'm glad this review is over. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going back to my NES version. – MV

Rocko's Modern Life: Spunky's Dangerous Day

Genre: Action-Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Viacom New Media
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Jump into the shoes of Nickelodeon's anthropomorphic wallaby, Rocko, as he races to protect his devoted companion Spunky the dog from the dangers of O-Town. Carefully guide your oblivious partner towards the golden hydrants hidden within bird-infested beaches, perilous junkyards, unfriendly neighborhoods, and the mysterious depths of Laundryland. Safely chaperoning Spunky through each of this side-scroller's 16 maze-like stages can be an incredibly challenging affair. Your dopey pup needs to be catapulted between platforms, ferried across pools, and shielded from a number of mischievous creatures hoping to ruin your day. Enemies can be defeated with a punch, a kick, or an energetic tail whip, but astoundingly floaty movement means that you'll be spending a large portion of your time fighting the controls rather than your in-game adversaries. You'll often find yourself skidding comically past small switches or falling off sizeable platforms simply because you're unable to stop your slippery movement in time. While launching yourself towards danger merely causes the inconvenience of brief immobilization, this split second is more than enough time for Spunky to casually stroll his way into mortal peril. It's possible to redirect your companion's movement by quickly scooping him from the ground, but he'll repeatedly injure himself by fearlessly walking through obstacles if left to his own devices. Many stages also ask you to utilize groups of counterweights to transport your unintentionally courageous canine between multiple floors. Although reaching these platforms isn't difficult, a distinct lack of barriers means that you'll commonly find yourself watching helplessly as Spunky trudges nonchalantly off the edge. These tedious sections are made even more exhausting when previously defeated enemies decide to respawn. Considering the fantastic source material, it's disappointing to see this clumsy adventure fall flat so spectacularly.





Reflections: I was pleasantly surprised when I started act one of this glorified escort mission and discovered that pausing the game allowed me to fly the camera around the map. This invaluable addition made it simple to plan a route through the treacherous landscape ahead, and although it didn't improve the unresponsive controls, it made the tedious journey more tolerable. Fast forward to act two, and I was horrified to find that this vital feature had been replaced with a tiny and utterly useless minimap. This is simply one more reason to leave this completely unsatisfying game sitting on the shelf. – AF

Rocky Rodent

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil only)
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

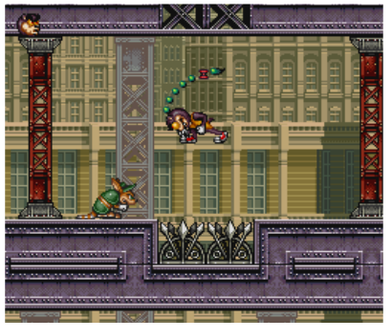






Rocky is driven by his insatiable hunger. Food? Yes. Free food? Definitely. This is how Rocky ends up agreeing to save a woman from the mobster Don Garcia. Anything is worth a free all-you-can-eat meal, and Rocky will run, jump, and rock fabulous hair in 17 levels of platforming through six different areas of the city, from the streets to an apartment building and beyond. Each area in the game is distinct with its own visual style, enemies, and hazards; the hot sauce factory, for instance, has pools of "lava," while the clocktower sports spinning gears. Rocky's hairdo plays a central role by acting as a weapon and method for moving around the level. He can acquire four different styles from items throughout the stages: a large red spike, a sharp boomerang mohawk, a green ponytail, and bouncy coil hair. Rocky loses his hair if he is hit and loses a life if he has no hair. Running out of lives means he'll have to use one of his four continues. As the game progresses, Rocky will find that many choices in his route are dictated by the hairdo he is sporting. It is satisfying to move through a level quickly and use Rocky's hair skillfully, but the need to slow down to attack or open doors impedes that satisfaction. With colorful, detailed sprites and backgrounds and goofy sound effects, this game has a great look to it and should keep any platformer fan entertained.

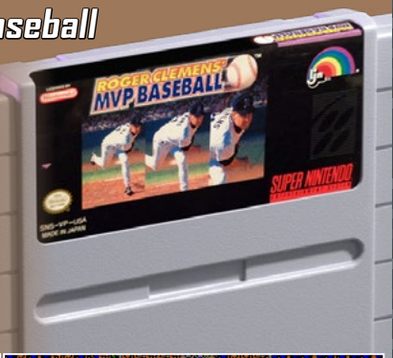




Reflections: I can get behind an anti-hero protagonist, but Rocky Rodent is a one-dimensional character who left me confused. I know it's just a platformer, but between the stages, there are cutscenes that continue to carry out this bizarre story. This is one case where I would have preferred no story at all. Using the various hairdos is fun, and I relished discovering what new abilities each one gave. Towards the end of the game, you even get an enemy-attacking bird like Beat from the Mega Man series. The last boss battles are long affairs, and the game doesn't give a good indication that it's the final confrontation, causing the ending to feel anticlimactic. Still, the journey there is fun and quirky, so let the magic of Rocky's hairdo guide you through this punktastic, food-filled adventure. – KY

Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★

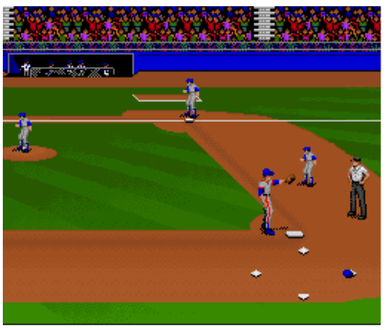






This baseball simulation attempts to stand out from its competition in two major ways. First, it bears the name of one of the most popular power pitchers of the time in Roger Clemens. Second, it approaches fielding and defense from a different viewing perspective – from behind the fielders instead of a top-down view from the batter's perspective. Focusing on the first distinguishing factor, pitching here is pretty average considering that a pitcher's name is attached to the game. It's effective but not the focus, and while there are strikeout opportunities to be had, they aren't common. Pitching often leads to contact, and that's where the new fielding perspective comes into play. It's a neat concept, but it doesn't work well. As soon as the bat hits the ball, the perspective snaps to the fielding view, which doesn't give players long enough to react. It's tough to judge the trajectory of batted balls, and many are sinking line drives that fielders can't seem to reach. As a result, especially for new players, giving up lots of hits and runs is common and puts pressure on the offense to turn games into slugfests. It's too bad that the fielding idea is so flawed, because this is otherwise a decent baseball game. The visuals are nice, with fairly detailed player models and stadiums. The sound is okay, too, although the repetitive music becomes grating before long (it can thankfully be turned off). Season play is here for added replay value, though using password saves means no real stat tracking outside of wins and losses. For those who are willing to put in the time to adjust to the fielding, this one might be worth a few innings. Otherwise, let this game ride the bench.





Reflections: Much like Game Six of the 1986 World Series proved, good defense is as important as pitching and hitting; without all three, losing games is always a possibility. While the pitching and hitting are okay in this game, the fielding is suspect and leads to too many runs being given up. I'll grant that the concept of making plays from the fielder's perspective is a neat one, but it ultimately wasn't executed well. Defense from the fielder's perspective was attempted again two years later in *Tecmo Super Baseball* – but even the mighty Tecmo couldn't quite pull off the concept as well as was intended. – PS

It's *never* over, Roger! You hear me?! – PC

Romance of the Three Kingdoms II

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: May 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-12
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Continuing the adventure in the volatile period of the Three Kingdoms in China, this strategy game offers six scenarios to play as your choice of ruler, preset or customized. The map is predetermined, with a certain ruler controlling each of the 41 provinces in each scenario, shown by way of color-coding. To start, you see the current map of China as each ruler takes their turn for the month. When yours comes around, you're given detailed information about each of your provinces, including the population, food supply, and the level of trust your people have in you. The number of actions you can take depends on how many generals you have, which you gain by recruiting, capturing on the battlefield, or converting from another ruler. Commands range from assisting with crops or collecting taxes to seeking allies or going to war. In battle, you are shown a map of the territory, placing your general with their troops, although the defenders are centered around their castle. Each general takes a single action per day, mainly moving or attacking. Attackers win by defeating the local commander, defeating all the generals, surviving longer than the opponent's rice supply, or taking control of the castle. The victor takes (or keeps) control of the province, and the loser retreats elsewhere if they can. To win the whole scenario, seize power within all the provinces. While the main method of capturing territories is through battle, there are many other gameplay aspects that align this title to the simulation genre in addition to war strategy. All the data to consider may overwhelm newcomers, but with a handle on how the game works, it's a fun time of historical strategizing ahead of you.





Reflections: When I first encountered Koei games from this era, the experience was intense, and I felt overloaded with information. Over time, I've come to appreciate the way they balance traditional war strategy and management of other factors (in this case, governing provinces and exercising diplomacy). While the game offers three difficulties, it's also influenced by which ruler you choose, as their starting characteristics differ. Enough features were added to this sequel to keep the experience fresh without straying too far from the original. Even though the music and graphics are nothing impressive, the gameplay is worth the effort to master and may just teach you a thing or two about Chinese history (but probably not). – KY

Romance of the Three Kingdoms III: Dragon of Destiny

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





Continuing the strategy saga of ancient China, you control a ruler intent on uniting the land and taking the emperorship. There are six scenarios to play set between 189 and 235 A.D. Each one presents a different incarnation of the same 46-city map. You play as a preset character or create a custom one. Up to eight people can pass the controller around (fewer in later scenarios) as different rulers. Once started, every ruler gets a turn every month, giving commands, such as development or military actions, for each officer to carry out in controlled towns. The position of your officer affects what actions they can perform, and their stats, such as charm and war, influence the outcome. Your ultimate goal is to gain control of every city through increasing the economy, building up and training your troops, and expanding your territory. When you eventually find yourself in combat, the gameplay goes from a map view of menus to a top-down view of the city being invaded or the battlefield where the armies meet. Place your selection of generals on the appropriate side and begin a turn-based play of moving/attacking. There are three rounds per day, and if the battle continues past a certain number of days, the action pauses until the following month. If you're the attacking side, an extended fight can strain your resources as the soldiers need to be fed. Another month of turns also means you can send reinforcements with fresh supplies and troops. This title presents a fun strategy experience that improves on the previous entry with brighter graphics, specialized generals, and an option to play a more random fictional mode. You don't need to have played any of the predecessors to understand this game, but if you have, you'll see familiar faces who are as happy to fight alongside you as face you in battle.





Reflections: This has got to be my favorite Romance of the Three Kingdoms entry on the SNES. It has the best graphics and great control of the officers. Not only is the visual presentation generally more colorful, but also the developers shifted from using different hues for representing each ruler to crest-like symbols that are vastly easier to recognize and remember. Unfortunately, the music is still a disappointment and, at times, becomes annoying with its repetitiveness. I don't usually recommend this, but turn the music off, and put on your own soundtrack for seizing control of ancient China. – KY

Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV: Wall of Fire

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: July 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Common
★★★★







The final series installment on the SNES, this game tosses you back into the strategy world of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* novel, playing out events in China from the late 2nd to 3rd centuries. You have a choice of six scenarios with different political states of the 43 cities. Of the rulers available for each scenario, you can select up to eight, whether you're passing the controller around or playing as some of your own opponents. A round of turns on an overhead map takes place over a month, the rulers each giving commands to their officers within their cities. Your focus in town is building your army while developing resources, including gold, farming, and technology. Also important are the loyalty and support of your people, both officers and the general population, who may otherwise rebel or revolt. Additionally, there are many diplomacy options, whether you want to ally with neighbors or ask foreign tribes to attack them. When you inevitably find yourself in armed combat, the exact location is decided by the defender, from an outer battlefield (which becomes naval warfare when near a large river) to city walls or within the city itself. Each turn of battle takes one day, and if it continues past 30, the fight pauses until the following month, although feeding your soldiers becomes a bigger issue then. Take control of all the cities to become the victor of the scenario, earning yourself the emperorship after winning the sixth one. This entry has much improved music and menuing as well as new weapons, such as automatic crossbows and catapults. This is a game that veterans of the series can jump right into, while novices will have plenty of strategy fun learning and mastering it.





Reflections: I honestly wasn't expecting much from *Wall of Fire*. I enjoyed the third game and thought there wasn't much to improve. I'm glad to be wrong! For graphics, the map looks messy with its blurry appearance, and some of the backgrounds are rather drab, but the diversity of the officers' portraits as well as the clean cutscenes balance things out. Also, surprise! The music is great! It's the perfect accompaniment while commanding your officers and balancing diplomacy and battle. My biggest annoyance is the long, boring lull every month waiting for opponents to take their turns. Other than that, this game does a fantastic job of making you feel like an ancient Chinese mastermind, so as the back of the box says, "Prepare to be romanced!" – KY

RPM Racing

Radical Psycho Machine Racing (Alt.)

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Silicon & Synapse
Publisher: Interplay
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

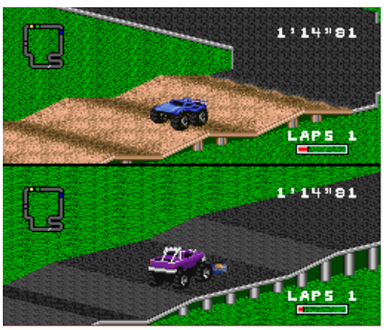






Load up on mines and get behind the wheel! One or two players race on split-screen isometric tracks for cash prizes used to pay entrance fees for races, advance to higher level circuits, or acquire vehicle upgrades and consumable nitro, mines, and oil. There are a whopping 128 tracks across 24 circuits, consisting of dirt, ice, and asphalt segments. This variety is not matched graphically, however, as the same visual style is used on every course, with only the layouts changing. Each road type handles differently and can be inclined to create jumps or slopes that drastically impact a race and dictate proper nitro strategy. There are also intersection loops that the other drivers don't always take the most efficient route on. This can trivialize some tracks, so finding a course that pays well and features an inefficient route can be a great way to replenish funds and save up for future circuits. Later tracks cost increasingly more to enter into and are taxing, but they yield higher cash awards for finishing in the top two. Losing excessively forces players to retreat to lower circuits to rebuild their income. The goal is to reach the final circuit and possess $30,000,000 for retirement. A robust track editor allows for the piecemeal creation of up to six custom courses, controlling the track's incline, road materials, and gravity rating along with the number of laps to complete it. Even with only four vehicles per race, the game runs fairly slowly, and the controls lack responsiveness. Thankfully, automatic battery saves allow players to work their way up to the top of the racing world methodically.



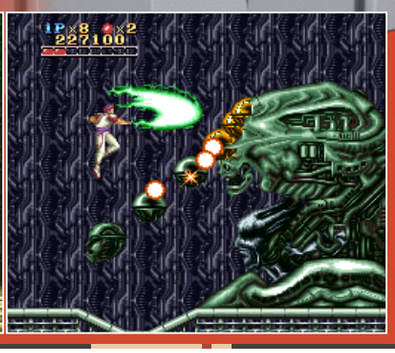


Reflections: *RPM Racing* is one of those titles where there's plenty to like and dislike. The game runs in Mode 5, which might have been a convenience of the interlace feature and real estate for the horizontal split-screen effect, explaining why it's on even when playing single-player. Unfortunately, the game doesn't get much use out of the added resolution beyond the aspect ratio, and while neither the tracks nor the vehicles look bad, there's a forgettable sort of banality to the visuals. That's not to say there weren't some serious talents developing *Radical Psycho Machine Racing*. Prolific composer George "The Fat Man" Sanger delivers a rocking tune for the menu theme, and the programming team is star studded with Interplay veteran Rebecca "Burger" Heineman and Blizzard founders Allen Adham and Mike Morhaime. Unfortunately, the credits shine brighter than the game itself. – DG

Run Saber

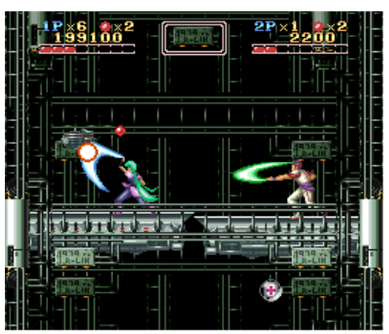
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hori Electric
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





In 2998, Dr. Bruford irradiates Earth, hoping to cure its pollution. The radiation mutates him, and he tries to take over the world instead. Now cyborg warriors Allen and Sheena must stop him in this arcade-style game. You can choose to play as either character; they control identically, except that Allen slashes his saber forwards, and Sheena slashes upwards. Each can crouch, jump, and more. X unleashes a screen-clearing special move which consumes hyper bombs. Jumping and pressing UP does an offensive somersault, jumping and pressing DOWN kicks downwards, and the shoulder buttons perform a slide attack. Plus, pressing SELECT after pausing changes your character's colors (purely cosmetic). The level designs require you to scale walls and ceilings and flip onto platforms from underneath. Screens scroll sideways, up, down, and even diagonally, so pitfalls and pathways are sometimes hard to differentiate as a result, but a helpful red arrow at the top of screen guides you to the end. When you need to use continues, the game pauses so you're not interrupted, and a second player can even join a single-player game already in progress. Enemies drop saber upgrades, hyper bombs, and health, while extra lives appear along your way. Being mutants and cyborgs, the enemies are bizarre. They're themed for each stage and include Chinese statues, slime monsters, flying harpy-bats, and more. Bosses, such as a jet plane that mutates in midair while you ride it, a hawk creature, and a giant corpse bride, are creative. Each level has more than one, and the visuals of the stages change after they're defeated. Energetic music complements the action, and the sound effects satisfy. The option menu offers variable difficulties, the ability to start with up to five lives, and button customization. Unfortunately, with just five stages, it's only fun while it lasts.





Reflections: Although I enjoyed playing this game, the similarities between it and *Strider* are prominent. The lightsabers, the large, multidirectionally scrolling stages, the futuristic setting, the climbing, etc. are all from *Strider*. But to *Run Saber*'s credit, *Strider* wasn't released on the SNES and lacks multiplayer, making *Run Saber* a great alternative in more than one regard. However, it's the story and dialogue that I remember best about the NES *Strider*, and this doppelgänger has nothing that compares, with hardly any cutscenes and a scant story. Still, fans of *Strider* should check this one out with a friend. – KN

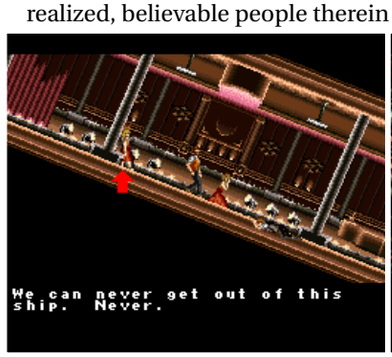
S.O.S.

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★





Wave goodbye to the *Lady Crithania* – this 1921 cruise ship has capsized in the North Sea, so you, as harried architect Capris Wisher, dedicated counselor Redwin Gardner, perceptive doctor Jeffrey Howell, or blunt navigation officer Luke Heinz, must survive and escape in this side-scrolling adventure. After the ship flips upside down, your chosen character arises in an individualized location, such as the bridge, and has one hour to scour the liner's labyrinthine layout. Wall maps provide scant guidance, but even the one Luke carries doesn't reveal dead ends or the ship's crucial inner workings. As you walk, leap, swim, and climb through the foundering vessel, it shudders and tilts, periodically changing what routes you can take and sapping precious seconds from time better spent recovering fellow passengers. Though "every man for himself" is a possible strategy, the quality of the ending (each character has several) hinges on the people you rescue. This is the most intriguing and frustrating aspect of the game. You communicate with many compelling figures, including a nearly inconsolable widow, a musician who longs only for his violin, and Capris's needy sister, but their interesting dialogue makes minutes ebb away, and having them follow your arrow markers without them getting lost or dying takes unfathomable effort due to iffy pathfinding. Add in time-sinking falls, fires, and debris, and your troubles turn titanic. Nevertheless, the richly detailed ship and well-realized, believable people therein keep the experience afloat.



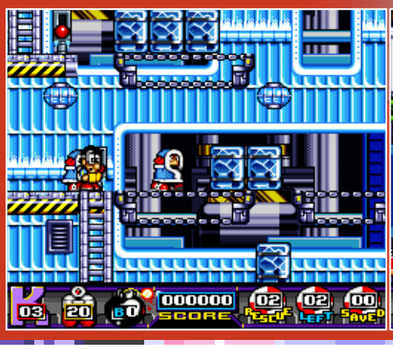


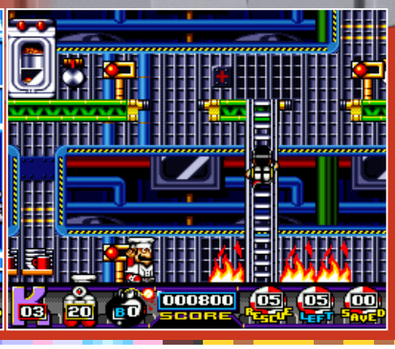
Reflections: Even if the game's flaws were caulked, I'd hesitate to call it fun – the corpses littering the upended ship's "floors" like flotsam, the flickering and failing lights, the unshakable feelings of doom and desperation, and the fact that even the best endings still result in 2,300 deaths tend to bar a buoyant attitude. All is not lost at sea, however. From this title springs forth an incredibly moving study of human nature that causes an unexpectedly powerful emotional investment to surface in a mere hour's time. The precise portrayals of the passengers run a realistic range of reactions dredged up by disaster, from despair to determination and from hatred to hope. Anger, madness, loyalty, ignobility, virtue, foolishness, and redemption pour forth from these women, children, and men, and in those flowing waters, you might see yourself reflected, feeling deeply the cry to Save Our Souls. – AP

S.O.S. Sink or Swim

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Zeppelin Games
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Rare
★★★★

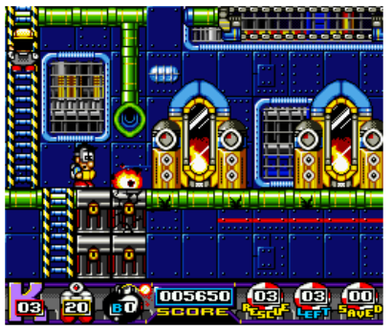






The *SS Lucifer* is sinking, and it's Kevin's job to save the passengers and crew in 100 levels of action-packed puzzling through different areas of the ship, including the kitchen and outer hull. Each stage presents a layout of platforms full of hazards, such as crushers and fire. There are a certain number of rescuees that appear and a minimum that must survive (all listed on the lower right). The passengers enter the level through a tube and blindly move in a specific way, so Kevin must guide them safely to the exit hatch. While he has no direct control over the people, he can alter their path by moving barriers with conveyor belts (activated by pressing Y at their levers) and magnetic cranes (operated using a lever and the D-Pad to manipulate the magnet head). If something is blocking the way, he can drop a bomb to destroy it. Other ways he helps out include climbing the ceiling to seal steam jets and dropping flotation devices for rising water levels. The hazards also harm Kevin, taking away one of his lives (shown on the lower left). When he runs out, it's game overboard, and he needs one of the passwords given before every fifth level to continue. This game has enjoyable music and sound effects that fit well with its cartoon graphics. The difficulty curve is great and introduces new puzzle aspects slowly, allowing time to master them. Unfortunately, Kevin has limited abilities that eventually feel repetitive. The main challenge is figuring out what to do on the fly without the benefit of a stage layout preview. If playing some levels a few times over isn't a daunting prospect, this title offers an entertaining experience on the puzzling high seas.





Reflections: There is something satisfying about saving mindless, vulnerable creatures, and the theme for *Sink or Swim* works for this genre fantastically! The various level areas make sense given the storyline and are not just random-fire stages. I do wish the developers offered a way to survive the level ahead of time or maybe even a map. I find the fact that this game is set on a cruise ship hilarious, so it's full steam ahead from me! When you've lived out your duty as the hero of this lady of the sea, why not relax on the *SS Beelzebub*, due to set sail soon. No way anything bad is happening on that one! – KY

Sailor Moon

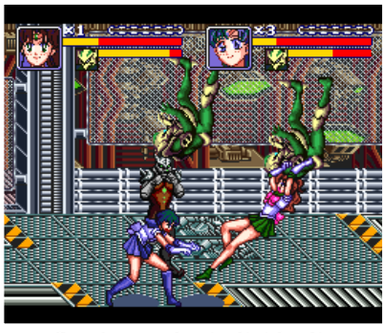
Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: PAL (France)
Developer: Angel
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★

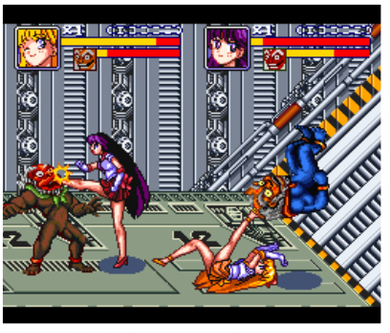






Don the dumpling hair of justice and punish the evil Queen Beryl and her minions in the name of the Moon! Or, if the eponymous champion of the iconic anime is not your favorite character in this side-scrolling beat 'em up, choose from her allies: Sailor Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, or Venus. Each heroine handles differently, with unique strike patterns, attack ranges, leaping moves, throws, etc. For instance, Sailor Jupiter pummels with punches, while Venus whips from afar with her chain. Holding the attack button fixes your fighter in place and allows her to launch a projectile, such as Mercury's Shabon Spray or Mars's Fire Soul. Each guardian can also unleash a special surrounding attack at her health's expense. Fortunately, your warrior starts with three lives and up to five continues, and she can find life-replenishing foods and items. She'll need them to withstand five colorful levels, some with engaging hazards, such as the amusement park's panda trains and the factory's conveyor belts. Sadly, there's little variety in enemy types, but palette swaps help to alleviate the sameness. Furthermore, boss battles showcase important villains from the anime, including Queen Beryl herself and Zoisite posing as Sailor Moon. Although the characters move a tad slowly and the hit detection seems a bit unfair at times, this game is fun and filled with familiar music, imagery, and voice samples. It's a delight for the devotee, and if you're a newcomer, it might just make a Moonie out of you.





Reflections: The individualization of each Sailor extends even into their idle animations, and it's interesting how their respective natures are conveyed by a few frames. Both Jupiter and Mars are classic toe-tappers, but the former's foot-stomp is one of nonchalance. Conversely, Mars glares directly at us as if to say, "You there – Pocky breath! Move it!" Moon's fretful fists reveal her nervous excitement: "Did Mars say there would be Pocky?!" Mercury's pose with her hands clasped in front should look characteristically demure, except that her fidgeting makes her seem less ladylike and more in need of a ladies' room. Still, it's Venus that gets the bum deal. Literally. Why is she rubbing her backside? Perhaps she's struggling with a reality of spandex crime-fighting that we all suspected but dared not air: a colossal wedgie. – AP

Samurai Shodown

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: SNK
Ported by: Takara
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







As the world plunges into darkness, warriors from across the globe, driven by the strength of their convictions, battle to stop Amakusa and the dark force he serves. One or two players choose from 12 characters for an experience that leverages traditional 2D fighting game patterns: best-of-three bouts, life meters, and unique button combinations for special attacks that feel natural and are smoothly executable. Unlike traditional fighters, however, all characters are equipped with melee weapons, such as Haohmaru's katana or Charlotte's epee. Combatants can lock blades in a button-mashing contest and even have their weapons knocked away, impairing both defensive and offensive capabilities until recovered. Differing backgrounds capture locations of fights nicely, with some particularly scenic vistas, such as snowy Hokkaido and opulent Versailles. During battles, health items and bombs are occasionally thrown from the level backdrops by a passing "Courier Man," and a referee raises flags to indicate when players have scored hits. As players take damage, their Rage Gauge increases; this causes sprites to palette-shift and attacks to deal more damage. 1P VS COM mode has one player attempt to fight their way to Amakusa, with plot-revealing cutscenes every few matches. After cutscenes, the player gets bonus rounds in which they must dispatch straw target dummies for extra points. 1P VS 2P mode lets two players duel arcade-style. Count Down mode challenges players to battle through the game's roster of fighters in three minutes or less. Options include eight difficulty settings, three clock speeds, and remappable controls. Overall, the sounds of swords clashing and slow-motion moments give this game a tangible element that not all titles in this genre manage.





Reflections: There's something satisfying – and diversifying – about fighting games offering weapons in lieu of purely hand-to-hand combat. It's also one of a handful of Super Nintendo games that support Dolby Digital Surround sound for those rocking top-tier '90s audio solutions. As with other SNES SNK fighters, *Samurai Shodown* was forced to pull the camera back, with smaller sprites for combatants and no dynamic zooming. This can leave many attacks feeling short ranged and levels somewhat large. This version has also been censored to minimize gore, fatalities, and strong language. Note: Amakusa is playable in VS mode with the use of a startup code, but his attacks are so much deadlier that he's best when left to less-skilled players. – DG

Saturday Night Slam Masters

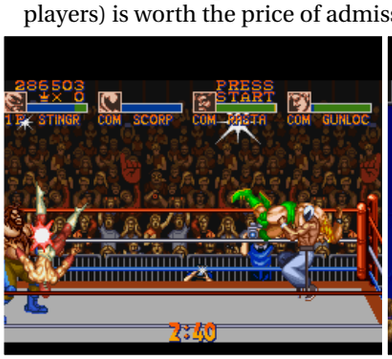
Genre: Fighting, Wrestling
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Capcom's delightful wrestling/fighting hybrid slams its way from the arcade onto the Super NES. Play modes include one-on-one Single Match and two-on-two "Team" Battle Royale. Eight colorful competitors, such as the beastly King Rasta Mon and kabuki-themed Great Oni, are available for Single Match, while "Team" mode adds one-on-one bosses Jumbo Flapjack and The Scorpion to the selectable roster. Action in the ring is quick and damage done swiftly during Single Match; a wrestler can drain his opponent's energy and pin him for a three-count in under a minute. The wrestlers have unique strikes, jumping/running/top-rope attacks, and front/back grapple moves. Each has a special strike attack, such as Gunloc's Sonic Fist, and a Super Slam, such as Mike Haggar's Spinning Piledriver. The graphics and animation are gorgeous, with the dizzying array of moves fun to behold. Striking is mostly fine, but the lockup system is a disappointment, relying solely on the singular attack button to initiate it before a button combination can be used to execute a throw/move. Locking up seems sporadic and unreliable, especially for wrestlers with a weak grapple. Players can escape one by button mashing, but the CPU gets out quickly, making the Super Slam inputs difficult to accomplish. Character balance also comes up short; some definitely have a leg up, whereas the small, quick El Stingray may be fun to use but is at a disadvantage. Despite these flaws, there is polish, with different rings, outside ring action, and a rocking soundtrack. The frantic and impressive "Team" Battle Royale (for up to four human players) is worth the price of admission by itself.





Reflections: By melding a true wrestling game with a fighting game, Capcom created a unique title that I plunked many an arcade quarter into. It expanded and connected the lore of two existing Capcom game series: Final Fight and Street Fighter. *Final Fight*'s Mike Haggar is portrayed as the former mayor of Metro City (in the Japanese version, he is running for mayor), while *Street Fighter II*'s Zangief is mentioned by fellow Russian Biff Slamkovich. Gunloc also apparently feuded with *Final Fight*'s Cody over Haggar's daughter, Jessica! A more traditional fighting game sequel, *Ring of Destruction: Slam Masters II*, added extra attack buttons and relegated fighting to a single plane. It was never ported to a North American console. I certainly would've been disappointed by the sequel eliminating what made the original special. – PC

Scooby-Doo Mystery

Genre: Adventure, Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Argonaut Software, Sunsoft
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Scooby-Doo, where are you? You've got four mysteries to solve in this side-scrolling adventure, so stay by your classic cartoon pal Shaggy. Together, you walk, run, jump, and hunt for/sniff out clues and other items through the *Red Ryan*'s wreck, frightful fairgrounds, ghoulish swamp country, and batty Bradshaw Manor. Each sprawling site is purportedly haunted, and not only do the Evil Clown, Count Bagosi, and other villains threaten you, but also steep falls, spikes, rats, jack o' lanterns, and other eerie adversaries and hazards raise your Frightometer, costing a life if it maxes out. Though you and Shaggy discover weapons, such as a mallet or rotten melons, these can be unwieldy and ineffectual. Fortunately, you two don't face foes alone; the rest of your gang is nearby, and you can find them (and your way) with Shaggy's maps. All your friends provide guidance, but each also tends to assist in a particular way. Daphne puts Scooby Snacks into your inventory to munch if you need to lower the Frightometer. When you bring things to Velma, she reveals what they are, sussing out plots from any clues she receives. Freddy aids in using items to open new places to explore and in inventing traps to ensnare villains. You even play some sandwich-balancing and monster-bopping minigames with Shaggy. Though your pace through each mystery is a little slow and clunky, each new story, environment, and clue is fun, so Scooby-Doo, be ready for your act – don't hold back!





Reflections: Scooby and Shaggy are frequently bandied about as a couple of cowards, but I beg to differ. Even though they don't *want* to traipse into terrible places and uncover creepy crimes, they still do. They always go with the gang and are often integral to the success of their sleuthing, especially in this title, where they unearth evidence ranging from corroded shipwreck treasure and a soil analysis kit to clown shoes and fake vampire fangs. Those wanting to pooh-pooh the pair's participation, claiming they're only there for the snacks, fail to consider that that's why any of us do brave things – for what we love. Whether it be people, principles, or the promise of food, who are we to judge what inspires acts of courage? Besides, it stands to reason that victuals can increase valor because the way to a man's (or a dog's) heart is through his stomach. – AP

seaQuest DSV

Genre: Simulation, Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Malibu Games
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







The technologically advanced vessel *seaQuest* is yours to command in this underwater simulation/shooter based on the television series. You control the large submarine in an isometric view of the ocean; it changes depth levels with X and A and shoots with Y and B. SELECT pulls up the bridge for access to other aspects of the ship, such as its docking bay of smaller vessels and its navigation unit that provides a map of locations of interest within the sector. The overarching focus of the *seaQuest* is to destroy enemies in the surrounding waters. As you explore the sector, you can also stop in spots indicated on the navigation screen to mine for resources. Both these acts earn you money for purchasing submarine weaponry and replacing the smaller vessels when they inevitably get destroyed during missions. The missions have a variety of goals that include defeating enemies in addition to a primary focus, such as collecting plutonium or sealing a leaking oiler. The objectives mainly utilize the smaller vessels held within *seaQuest* and are in a close-up side-view of an environment. You have six craft at your disposal, each with their own abilities. For example, *Crab* can mine and dock with other ships, and *Stinger* can travel and fire in any direction. You even control lovable dolphin Darwin, who is speedy but weaponless. This helps to create an open experience where you complete assignments with your choice of vessels. If *seaQuest* is destroyed or time runs out during a mission, it's game over, and you'll need a password to try again. This title presents a high learning curve that may deter anyone with only casual interest, but fans of simulation titles or the TV series will enjoy it!





Reflections: I was excited to see that a game was made from the show *seaQuest DSV* but disappointed that it didn't include the characters (except Darwin). The difficulty is awfully high, with limited resources, ammo, and ships. It's easy to needlessly make purchases that don't have an impact on your mission, and the experience would have still been challenging and entertaining without the money aspect. On the plus side, the music and graphics are great, although it is rather dark overall. I just wish some of the main characters had been included! Then I could stare into the dreamy, pixelated eyes of Lucas Wolenczak… uh, I mean to add a personal element! – KY

Secret of Evermore

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Square Soft
Publisher: Square Soft
(PAL: Nintendo)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Doggone! And boy gone, too, in this nifty tale of a pup and his master whisked off to Evermore by a derelict device. To escape the top-down experimental realm and return to the B-movie matinees of Podunk, USA, the kid and canine both must scout and fight through four foe-fraught lands devised by fellow townsfolk: Elizabeth's Prehistoria, Horace's Antiqua, Camellia's Gothica, and Professor Ruffleberg's Omnitopia. From the primordial Bugmuck and the Great Pyramid to a colossal chessboard and outer space, the colorful locales are engagingly changeable. However, the mighty mutt is even more so, morphing forms to suit the setting as he trails the intrepid lad. Although the pooch can lead the pack (and must in order to solve certain puzzles), it's often prudent to let the CPU wag the dog after adjusting his inclination for striking or sniffing. The latter action helps the boy uncover components crucial to alchemy – Evermore's equivalent of spellcasting. Instead of magic points, the amount of ash, wax, roots, and other ingredients on hand determines how many times Heal, Revealer, Crush, and more formulas can be unleashed. Leveling these up takes some scrounging – or some scratch to purchase supplies from alchemists, who also offer novel recipes and the chance to alter which nine the kid can whip from Ring Commands. These rotating menus also permit the use of items (such as Call Beads to invoke assistance from Podunk pals) and the equipping of swords, spears, and other arms wielded with the B button. Acquiring weapon experience enables the power meter to be overfilled for devastating blows on soaring skulls, sneaky satyrs, skittering spiders, etc. Such attack charging, a few too many mazes, elaborate trading sequences, and imprecise sniffing do require patience, but the fun characters and impressive story of this American-developed action-RPG are woof the time.





Reflections: I know I'm not the only one who occasionally yelps at the screen while playing games, as if spirited speech will inspire sprites to obey. But I had a really good reason at the start of this one – baddies were beating up my pup! "Hey, leave my dog alone!" I barked at enemies crowding my canine companion, whom I had named Hero after my real-life pet. Of course, Hero eventually became far stronger than my kid character, and as he changed from wolf to greyhound to pink poodle to robot, my words transformed, too. They became: "Good boy, Hero! Good boy!" – AP

Secret of Mana

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square Soft
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★







The precious power of Mana has gone to Seed – eight of them, in fact – as vile villains seek to reap an ancient weapon. To stem the sowing of destruction, you must cultivate three champions – an amnesiac sprite, a determined damsel, and a boy banished for brandishing the Mana Sword – and seal said Seeds with the latter's mythic blade. You needn't embark on this treat of a top-down quest alone, though; a bud (or two) can join as members of the heroic trio. If your friends leave, the AI's an okay ally, only occasionally snagging the characters it's controlling as it attempts to follow your lead through castles, caves and other locales. Besides, you still tend to almost everything the boy, the girl, and the sprite do, thanks to icon-based Ring Commands. These appealing circular menus let you set AI attack behaviors, use restorative items, swap around eight unique weapons (wielded with the B button), cast spells with enlisted elementals, etc. As you branch out from Gaia's Navel to Gold City and beyond, charging your strikes to battle bugs, beasts, and other baddies reused in other hues, you earn levels... and so does your current weapon (once reforged with acquired orbs)... and so can each magic type (depending on the number of Seeds you've sealed). The arms' and elementals' levels are not shared amongst characters, which means logging in repeated loads of grinding to augment the stone-crushing axe, chasm-crossing whip, fiery Salamando, celestial Luna, and more. If this doesn't stump you, some of the story might, but seeing everything from a sandship to Santa Claus, traveling via cannon and dragon, and buying candy from a cat are all strangely delightful. Crowned by colorful graphics and competent music, this superb tale of the Mana Tree and Seeds is one to root for.





Reflections: The follow-up to *Final Fantasy Adventure (Seiken Densetsu)*, this title was intended for the Super NES CD-ROM System. Of course, that peripheral died on the vine, so *Secret of Mana* suffered severe pruning to pack it into a cart, losing alternate paths, endings, etc. Its charm never withered, however, and it garnered a 2018 remake and a spot on the Super NES Classic Edition. It also earned a place in my heart for Neko, the purrsistent purrple merchant who simply loves "meow-ntain climbing." Even when I'm up a tree, if I see a cute cat, I'm feline fine! – AP

Sensible Soccer: European Champions

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1992
Region: PAL
Developer: Sensible Software
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







This soccer game offers a lot of options for managing everything from a local, friendly match to a national team making a run towards the big world tournament. After selecting the style of game or competition that you want to play, you decide which teams are player or computer-controlled. Of course, having multiple teams selected can result in needing a second person at the other controller for a head-to-head match. On the pitch (of which there are several types), your team's tiny sprites appear top-down in a vertical view of an overly large, green field. Despite the small scale of the players, their different jerseys, skin tones, and hair colors lend variety to their appearance. Gameplay is smooth, with several moves available to you whether you're headbutting the ball from your goal or going for a slide tackle. As always, you can simply lob the leather sphere in the vague direction of your teammates, which is, unfortunately, an accurate account of how you kick upfield, as there is no indication of where teammates or opponents are when off-screen. In the main options menu, there is a choice of difficulties, allowing anyone to become accustomed to the wide array of modes for getting a soccer fix. While there are no options to play through a satisfying global tournament, there should be more than enough to keep even a staunch electronic soccer enthusiast occupied.





Reflections: Hmmm… this game seems awfully familiar. Perhaps it's because it's nearly identical to the later NA release *Championship Soccer '94*? Perhaps it's because another PAL-exclusive, *Sensible Soccer: International Edition*, is eerily similar? For the curious reader, all three games play exactly the same, including sprites, moves, and options. The main difference among the three is the teams available to play. *European Champions* exclusively has European teams. *International Edition* and *Championship Soccer '94* have representatives from across the globe, this time reflecting the teams that qualified for the actual 1994 World Cup, although the player names differ. If it's still confusing, don't worry. I've spent more hours than I'd like to admit researching this, and I still don't feel like I have all the answers. Please, take me back to the simpler days of *Pelé's Soccer* on the 2600… – KY

Shadowrun

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Data East
(PAL: Laser Beam Entertainment)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Waking up in the morgue, brain-burnt amnesiac Jake Armitage must piece together the mystery of his life and the circumstances of his would-be assassination, all while surviving the hazards of Seattle in 2050. Set in FASA's distinctive cyberpunk-meets-magic world, the game features a mixture of fantasy and science-fiction themes. It also blends gameplay styles; top-down puzzle-like segments simulate decking into the Matrix and various mainframes, while both exploration and combat take place in a shared isometric point-and-fire presentation that keeps the player immersed in the setting. Character conversations are critical, as these dialogue-menu discussions reveal plot points, unlock additional keywords to use, and can result in acquiring items or discovering potential allies. The player earns Karma for their actions, which can be used to improve statistics, skills such as Jake's firearm accuracy or group leadership, and spells such as Freeze, Invisibility, and the always-valuable Heal. The game's currency, nuyen, can be spent acquiring firearms and armor, cyberware, and other equipment. True to the game's name, it can also be spent hiring additional shadowrunners, who provide extra firepower and supplement skills the player has invested less in. The player needs to be thorough in order not to miss important clues, and the early phases of the game require frequent trips to bed in order to heal up. Additionally, while it is great that the combat system is integrated with the basic movement and investigation, targeting is not particularly elegant, requiring D-pad movement of the cursor over enemies that may assail the player from off-screen. These are small criticisms, however, of an otherwise expansive and engaging experience that occupies a unique niche all its own on the system.

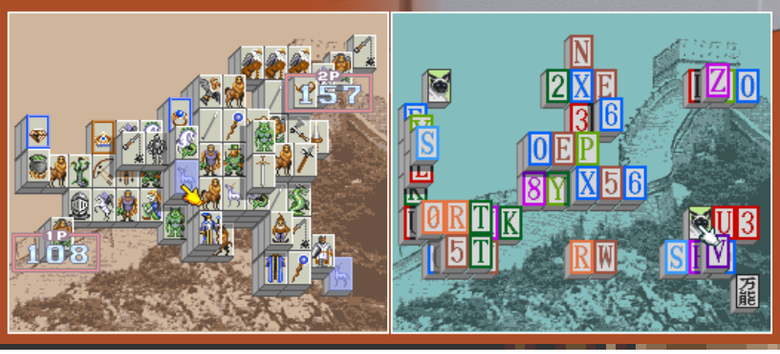




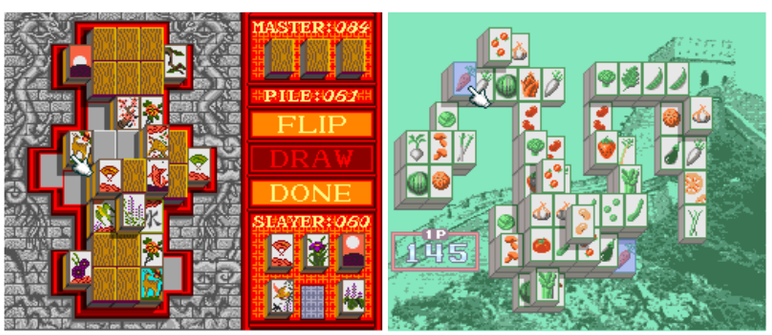
Reflections: *Shadowrun* takes care to introduce most of the elements of the setting defined in its pen-and-paper precursor, all the way down to little details like the language of casual conversation. While they're not all used, and the game revolves all but exclusively around Jake, it really does a bang-up job presenting its dystopian vision of tomorrow. The first act of the game – piecing the clues of Jake's situation together from scraps – is particularly well executed. The game slows down a bit in the Caryards, where a combination of Karma grinding in a designated room and arena battles are needed to escape. Scrap together some nuyen, buy Wired Reflexes and a Defiance T-250, and enjoy. Cheers, chummer! – DG

Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Activision
Ported by: Genki
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



Pair up Ps, peas, peonies, and other peers aplenty in this tile-taking title touting two main types of play and tons of options. The first half of its moniker makes it clear that it's a sequel (to a PC offering), but the city name also signifies mahjong solitaire. This game asks you to discover doubles amongst 12 dozen tiles layered in your selection of 13 arrays, most of which are inspired by the Chinese zodiac. Clicking couples away with a cursor is complicated by a requirement – both potential partners must have their surfaces and at least one vertical edge unobstructed – but the images on each slab can also increase the challenge. There are 11 tile themes to try, including mahjong, sports, and fantasy, and while spotting duplicates is as simple as ABC with the alphabet set, you might gamble your eyesight away on the playing card patterns. Your ears, however, are in greater danger due to the atrocious soundtrack, rife with repetitious tunes that loop as seamlessly as Frankenstein's monster. These can be muted, but give the entertainingly awkward effects and animations a chance before banning them, too. The drop-down menus additionally let you detect or retract moves, shuffle unwinnable situations, start a timer, invoke a wild tile, and invite a second player for this game or the one addressed by the latter half of the title's title. There, companions and/or computers assume adversarial positions as the Dragon Slayer, who empties a specialized display by pulling pairs when possible, and the Dragon Master, who loads it tile by tile. Not only is this experience tricky for either party, but also it initiates each round of the single-player Tournament. Despite its flawed presentation, the entire game's engaging play will likely win you over eventually. It's only a matter of tile.



Reflections: The Super NES Mouse wasn't missed during my *Shanghai II* playthrough, and neither was the music – I had strange in-game noises to occupy me instead. Now, not every match elicits more than a click, and many sounds are simply percussive, but almost as many cues are mews! All felines, from lions and lynxes to little bitty kitties, emit the same meow, which would have been my favorite effect if not for the aces. Pocketing a pair of those produces a preposterously perfunctory exclamation of "We're number one!" – the last word even gets cut off. That makes it "number wuh" in my book! – AP

Shaq Fu

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Delphine Software
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★



Shaquille O'Neal is both a basketball star and the founder of Shaqido, a science-defying martial art especially useful in battling power-hungry mummies. Yes, that's the plot of this absurdist fighter – the Tall One must travel to the mystical "Second World" and rescue a kidnapped youngster from the sinister Sett Ra, a mummy-man with tyrannical plans. Naturally, the villain has loyal fighters that must first be stopped: Catgirl Kaori, dark witch Voodoo, swordsman Rajah, ghoulish Mephis, and insidious Beast. Although meager in number, the cast compensates with wild designs and clever maneuvers, from Beast's nearly unavoidable "Sonic Roar" to Voodoo's devious sneak attacks. An overworld map dictates Shaq's path for the story's single-player campaign, forcing him into the jungles, temples, infernos, and other abodes of his egotistical foes. These confrontations are punctuated by wonderfully ludicrous banter that adds an appreciated, if unintended, B-movie flavor to the groan-worthy story. Conversely, the visuals are genuinely impressive, using lush backdrops to bring life to the surreal surroundings. Character sprites, although tiny, are rendered with similar care and sport smooth, almost cinematic animation. Dropping the ball, however, is the game's flimsy fighting system, which rarely exceeds the level of a sloppy brawler. Fighters have "fast" and "power" kicks and punches along with a "move boost" that enables throws and reactionary dashes. Force fields can be generated to block projectiles and, should an extreme amount of damage be taken, characters will enter a temporary "Fury" mode for heightened attack ability. However, no number of duct-taped mechanics can save a system already hindered by animations so elaborate and arenas so oversized that battles become little more than languid affairs of blundering jumps and erratic button mashing. With no cheesy plot to enrich the experience, the game's vanilla Duel and Tournament multiplayer modes prove even less entertaining. Final verdict? While worse games exist, this is still one oddball of an airball.



Reflections: Like *E.T.* for the Atari 2600, *Shaq Fu* has grown to represent everything bad about licensed games and the sometimes crass, apathetic nature of the industry. And yet, drek like *Street Combat* proves worse games have been conceived. Indeed, Delphine Software clearly tried, only realizing postmortem that its rotoscoping skills did not lend well to the fighting genre. Those seeking a (vaguely) improved Shaq experience should try the 2018 reboot, *Shaq Fu: A Legend Reborn*. – DA

Shien's Revenge

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Almanic
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Aska has been kidnapped by monsters who have issued forth from the mysterious Time Gate, and the heroic Shien will stop at nothing to get her back! In this unusual first-person rail shooter, the courageous ninja must fight through six auto-scrolling levels (plus a boss rush), showering his enemies with endless waves of deadly shurikens and slashing with his lethal kunai dagger. Shien is propelled through the Time Gate to battle demons, evil ninjas, dragons, dark knights, gun-wielding infantry, and even armored tanks! The young warrior must make his way through various locations and time periods, including 500 BC Greece, 13th century Mongolia, and 20th century France. Shien strikes down enemies while also deftly blocking his opponents' attacks and projectiles in order to stay alive. Screen-clearing scrolls, rapid fire, and other power-ups can be collected by eliminating baddies. A set of burning candles cleverly represents Shien's life meter. When all the flames are extinguished, it's game over. Cutscenes progress the story in between stages, and the bosses and settings are all distinctive, colorful, and fun. Influential manga artist Go Nagai designed the characters in this game, and the graphics are generally impressive and memorable – the scaling of the bosses is especially striking. This title also supports the SNES Mouse peripheral. While certainly notable for its difficulty (there's a training mode to help), this game should also be recognized for its creativity and unique approach, given its genre. A first-person rail shooter that doesn't involve the use of guns?! Ninjas everywhere are applauding from the shadows.





Reflections: I'm being stalked by a group of deadly ninja assassins, so I need to write quickly! They think I'm going to give this game a negative review, but I honestly really enjoyed playing it. Although difficult, this is a fun and innovative title. A number of interesting touches help set *Shien's Revenge* apart from other games in the genre. Instead of attacking with guns, our hero peppers his foes with deadly shurikens and he even has a dagger at his disposal for close-quarter combat. Enemies and environments are vibrant and varied, as the time travel element allows for some inventive settings and unexpected foe encounters. I need to stay alert, as I fear my assailers are getting close! So to sum it up, this is a unique and challenging gameplay experience. Whew! I think I made it! … Wait, what was tha- – DM

Side Pocket

Genre: Billiards
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Data East
Ported by: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Data East
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Tour from the smoky pool halls of Los Angeles to the sophisticated clubs of New York as you compete for the coveted title of world champion! Get ready to bring your skills to the table as you stylishly rack, break, and sink every billiard ball in sight. Jumping into a one-player pocket game will see you hitting the road and traveling between five of the biggest and best pool bars in North America. Starting in Los Angeles, you're tasked with swiftly pocketing all balls on the overhead table, but you'll quickly discover that your journey won't be quite as easy as it sounds. In order to progress in your campaign to become a pool shark of legend, you'll need to reach a predetermined score with a limited number of shots as well as complete a challenge round in each city after the first. Sinking balls in succession, in numerical order, or masterfully achieving a combination of both will reward you with invaluable bonuses that are vital to the continuation of your career. Occasionally, you'll be presented with the opportunity to pocket balls into bonus zones that, if done successfully, will boost your score, grant you a trick shot after the match, or potentially even increase your remaining number of shots. Despite beginning your tour with an impressive reserve of 16 cue balls, something as simple as missing consecutive pockets will quickly deplete your supply. While it's possible to fine-tune the behaviour of the cue ball by altering its spin and velocity, it's still incredibly easy to miscalculate the final trajectory of the shot. With a challenging single-player campaign, two multiplayer events, and a dedicated trick shot mode, this atmospheric pool simulator manages to find the perfect balance between rewarding complexity and accessible arcade fun.





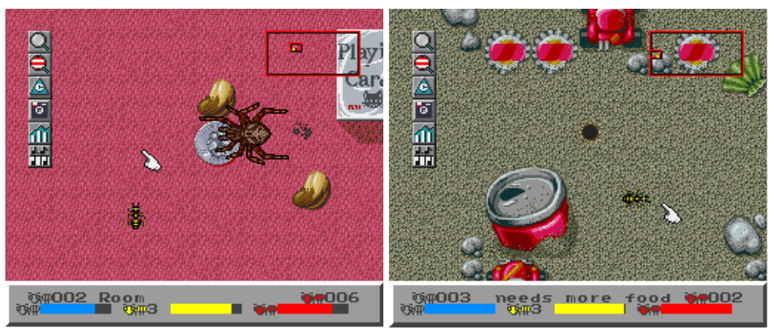
Reflections: Regardless of your skill level when it comes to virtual billiards, there's something undeniably satisfying about playing rounds in *Side Pocket*. Because you're given so much control over the cue ball, you can find yourself pulling off nearly impossible shots by applying just the right amount of spin (also known as "English"). If you're anything like me, you probably didn't intend for those specific balls to go into those specific pockets… but that hardly matters, right? – AF

SimAnt: The Electronic Ant Colony

Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Maxis
Ported by: Tomcat System
Publisher: Maxis
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★



Players are tasked with building up an ant colony to survive the harsh ecosystem of a suburban home's backyard in this ambitious simulation game. Starting with just one ant, players explore chunks of the yard while bringing back food for the queen to keep her happy and reproducing. As the colony grows and follows the player's orders, the goal shifts from basic survival to developing an army to face the evil red ants. As the red ant army is defeated, players take control of the yard section by section, with the final goal being to infest the house and force out the occupants. The red ant army isn't the only danger players need to worry about – spiders, cats, and even lawn mowers can turn any thriving colony into a mound of carcassses. Since this is a simulation game, plenty of choices must be made to keep the ants on top of their hill. Easy-to-navigate menus allow players to decide on several functions, such as how often ants should be foraging and what types of ants the queen should be producing. A second mode called "Scenario Game" takes players on a yearlong journey of an ant's life.This mode offers different weather systems, environments, and specific goals that must be met in order to claim ant supremacy. Visually, everything is enhanced and larger than life. Colorful outdoor environments are filled with massive, beautifully detailed sprites of various buglife, and the indoor areas are littered with crayons, thumbtacks, and several other items that anyone could find strewn about a messy home. The upbeat music accompanies a navigation system that is intuitive and extremely easy to use. Insect and simulation fans alike should give this title a go.



Reflections: I'm a really big fan of The Sims franchise, so I was excited to toss this in my SNES. Even though these two games are totally different, *SimAnt* definitely contains a lot of The Sims humor. The house featured in *SimAnt* is occupied by an interesting family. Thumbtacks, paperclips, quarters, and chunks of food are smashed into the carpet. I mean, these people are really dirty! Obviously, there are plenty of bugs crawling around this pigsty, with the majority of them being roaches. They don't seem to care, though! Hundreds of roaches, no problem! A handful of ants?! Pack your bags; it's time to move! – MV

SimCity

Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Aug. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Maxis
Ported by: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







The ultimate city simulator makes its console debut as a launch title for the Super Nintendo! Using a simple palette of choices and a cursor, the player paints their overhead view of the landscape with a variety of infrastructure: roads and rails, zones (residential, commercial, or industrial), power plants and transmission lines, stadiums and parklands, police and fire stations, airports and seaports, and gifts earned during play. The player has to balance spending on infrastructure and citizen demands with budgetary and geographic constraints, all while accounting for pollution, crime, housing values, employment, traffic, natural disasters, and the occasional visit from Bowser.

There are three game modes to choose from. Practice mode provides the player with the specific goal of amassing a population of 30,000 on a predefined island Landform; mascot Dr. Wright pops in from time to time with suggestions to help new mayors get comfortable with the tools of the trade and the troubles to arise. Start New City allows the player to begin a city from scratch in the year 1900 on one of 1,000 selectable Landforms, with the goal of reaching 500,000 citizens. Select Scenario offers the player the challenge of taking on one of six premade situations (an additional two scenarios are unlockable), ranging from traffic and crime problems to a nuclear meltdown and a monster attack; the player has a finite time frame to turn things around. Dr. Wright's heavily emoted advice steers the player in decision making for traffic, crime, pollution, and other civic concerns.





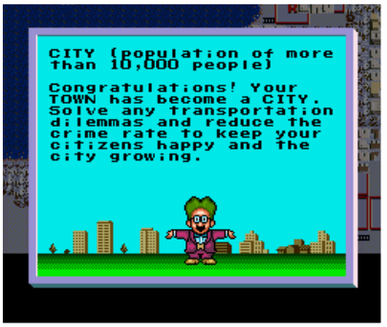
Options abound, from controlling game speed to automating various game functions, toggling music on/off, triggering natural disasters, and saving and loading. Detailed information screens provide graphs and charts to help inform decisions. Annual budgets, resolved at the end of December, show the costs and funding levels for public services and the income generated from the tax rate or special income. The comprehensive menu system also offers a history of the last 10 key milestones, statistics for zoning percentages and service building counts, popular opinion and key issue polls, advice from Dr. Wright, and more. The seasonal shifts, reward buildings for reaching milestones, designer Will Wright's namesake advisor, Bowser as the monster, a Mario statue for reaching megalopolis status, and the sheer quality of the graphical uplift are all noteworthy. The music, composed by Soyo Oka, meshes beautifully with each city's size, creating a pleasant backdrop that can loop for hours without feeling grating. Even the View Gift, a functionless addition, gives the player a fun little Mode 7 view of their city as seen from the mayor's lovely wood desk. This is an ideal entry in the legendary franchise, a tremendous choice for a launch title, and one of the Super Nintendo's elite offerings.





Reflections: Forged from the landscape editor Will Wright used in the creation of *Raid on Bungeling Bay*, this legendary urban planning simulator left a huge impact upon the industry, and its ripples continue to be felt to this day. The SNES port might be its finest incarnation. Though it arrived too soon for SNES Mouse support, there's still so much to love about *SimCity*. For a title of its complexity, whose incarnations on various computers were quite utilitarian, Nintendo made sure that its arrival on home consoles came with maximum polish. The game wasn't the only thing in the box given the white-glove treatment, however! The massive instruction manual, nearly 100 pages long, details not only the controls and the basic functions of being a mayor of a simulated city, but also it provides case studies of cities that made mistakes ("The Wright Files"), gives step-by-step guides for using each tool at the player's disposal, blows up the icons and explains each one thoroughly, gives Q&A boxes to answer basic questions players might have, names sections of the manual after messages that appear in-game (such as "More Residential Zones Are Needed"), and even keeps a consistent layout with the screenshots so the player can, if desired, follow an exact build plan on the Practice island map to get the hang of the game without the stress of being responsible for specific zoning placements. With the gift list, glossary, zone charts, Landform maps, and even skyline footer artwork that grows over time, *SimCity* might have one of the finest instruction manuals ever produced. Despite being a civic planner, it's worth noting that *SimCity* is in some ways a "god game," as players certainly have more omnipotence than most mayors, both in the eminent domain and sudden-flood contexts. Still, the greatest joys come from successful design. It's always cool to see two max-quality residential or commercial zones merge to become a Top zone, and earning Mario's statue is a supremely satisfying achievement. One final and surely unrelated note: there are few things burned into my brain as brightly as the Game Genie code for free purchases in *SimCity* (C28A-AD61). – DG

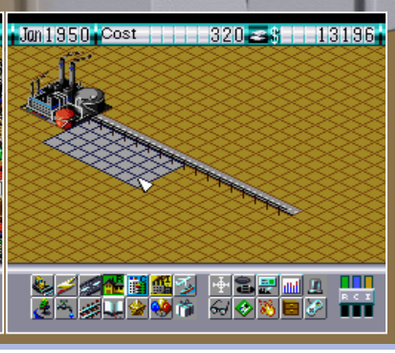




SimCity 2000

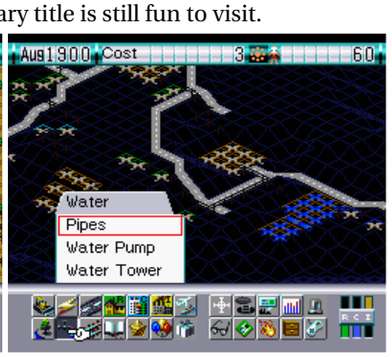
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Maxis
Ported by: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Welcome back, Mayor! Will Wright's "ultimate" sequel to the original city simulator provides enhancements while maintaining the core premise of mayoring a city. The player constructs, manages, and expands a virtual city by laying out roads, zones, and civic buildings with a simple cursor and button interface. Flat, top-down maps have been replaced with isometric terrain of varying elevation, allowing for hills, waterfalls, and other natural features. The residential, commercial, and industrial zone paradigm remains but is expanded with flexible sizes and a choice of light or dense zoning. An underground layer is also added, giving the player the ability to construct water infrastructure and subway systems. Prize buildings are awarded based on population counts. Natural disasters may occur or can be triggered by players looking to wreak havoc or challenge their management skills. Numerous charts and graphs are also available to monitor progress, discover the source of civic problems, view neighbors, and tweak expenditures. Three game modes are selectable from the main menu. Scenario permits the player to engage in one of five pre-built cities with unique problems to solve, while Free Map allows the player to start fresh from one of six maps and four time periods that impact the methods of power generation and available structures. Finally, Tutorial Map gives a guided tour of the game's basics. Though held back by performance and presentation issues, this limited recreation of a legendary title is still fun to visit.





Reflections: *SimCity 2000* was a computer smash when it was released in 1993. The greater diversity of buildings, flexible zoning, and detailed demographics were just some of the many quality-of-life improvements made over its predecessor. Sadly, where the migration of *SimCity* to the SNES was notably better, the same cannot be said here. The map editor is replaced with six premade maps. The limited resolution makes buildings look coarse, even when zoomed in. Slow loading times abound, from scrolling the screen to transitioning views and menus. The lack of SNES Mouse support, while understandable for the earlier *SimCity*, is tragic in this late 1996 release, particularly when the controls are so cumbersome. The game offers only one save slot, forcing players to decide between a Free Map and working on Scenarios. Speed settings are missing, with only a pause feature in their place. If I were a SimCitizen, I would riot… if that had not also been removed from this edition, that is. – DG

SimEarth: The Living Planet

Genre: Simulation, Educational
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Maxis
Ported by: Tomcat System
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★





In this simulation title, you wield incredible godlike powers to mold planets into worlds that are able to support life, allowing it to flourish and evolve through slow and careful nurturing and manipulation. An adorable cartoon mascot of the Earth named Gaia makes appearances to guide you and cheer you on as you exert your extensive influence on developing planets, exercising control in many ways. Alter and evolve the world's Biomes, Lifeforms, Civilizations, and Events. Position and modify rock, deserts, forests, swamps, and other terrain. Raise Sea Life and Land Life such as amoebas, fish, reptiles, and mammals, and encourage them to evolve. Leverage Terraformers such as ice meteors to rapidly change the planet's topography and native lifeforms, and command storms, tidal waves, volcanoes, earthquakes, and even nuclear weapons to attempt to dramatically vary your world as you build it. There are several game modes to choose from. Random World allows you to select a difficulty level and then attempt to shape a planet into Earth, developing and evolving it into the modern age. The First Scenario mode challenges you to complete a string of scenarios involving the manipulation of Mars, Venus, an ice planet, and more. Daisy World puts James Lovelock's Gaia Theory into play on a floral planet. You have almost complete autonomy in this game, with the opportunity to move at your own pace. However, there is precious little in-game instruction, and things can become very confusing. Patience is required because trial and error is central to the experience.



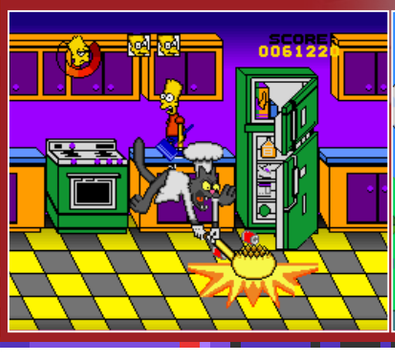


Reflections: I imagine the original ads for this title went something like this: *"Do you enjoy watching grass grow? Are you the type of person who can stare blankly at a wall for hours and be thoroughly entertained? Are you fiercely opposed to any kind of excitement or adventure whatsoever? Well then, SimEarth is YOUR kind of video game! This planet-building simulation allows you to move pieces around a virtual world and then just wait while absolutely nothing happens for whole minutes at a time. Thrill as that amoeba slowly evolves into algae… or maybe just takes 15 minutes to die for no apparent reason! Hold your breath in anticipation as you examine that barren patch of desert and wait for it to rain! If you like "boring" then you're gonna LOVE our game! SimEarth: we're putting the Zs in video gameZZZZZZZZ."* – DM

The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Bart Simpson, that iconic troublemaker from the eternal cartoon show, returns for another nonsensical adventure, this time scrambling after eight pages of truant homework hidden within the sadistic depths of his brain. To achieve a passing grade, the sleeping student must overcome his inner demons across six genre-bending dreamscapes. The first is "Windy World," a twisted version of Bart's neighborhood in which three-eyed fish, amorous Grandmas, and legions of Lisa Fairies run amok. Essentially, it's a hub world linking the five other areas, requiring Bart to locate drifting notebook pages that lead to the adjoining realms. Don't be fooled; surviving this gamut of harebrained dangers is no easy A, and worse, players must return here repeatedly. Moreover, Bart is no warrior, sporting a stiff jump and the dubious ability to spew watermelon seeds. Undeniably, Bart's existence is tenuous, and healing ain't easy – to avoid a permanent game over, the brat must trap free-floating Zs within bubbles puffed from snatched packs of gum. Later stages hold their own annoyances, the most notorious being a puzzle-oriented Indiana Jones parody that sees Bart hopscotching across booby-trapped stones and whipping devils as giant Maggie statues spit pacifiers from the background. The "Bartzilla" sequence is similarly crude, whereby the underachiever's giant alter ego stomps through a city, spitting fire and casting lasers while battered by tanks and planes. This could have been a cathartic spree, but the actual result is a maddening, inscrutable gauntlet for survival. Other stages involve swimming after militant germs within the psychedelic depths of Bart's bloodstream, battling Itchy and Scratchy inside the Simpson home, and flying over Springfield à la "Bartman," shooting down missiles and Simpsons characters alike with his underpowered slingshot. Indeed, outside of some quality visuals, the game goes almost meta in its missed ambitions, soundly mimicking the desperate star. Alas, as Bart himself once said (episode 14, "Bart Gets an "F""), "No, you don't understand. [...] This is as good as I can do, and I still failed."





Reflections: ¡Ay, caramba! Has there ever been a good Bart Simpson title? Indeed, the boy's scholastic mediocrity is almost eerie in how it transcends the show, first pervading, then undermining, his every digital role. *The Simpsons* arcade game beats this curse through its playable ensemble cast, but Bart's solo excursions seem to revel in their D-minus sensibilities. *Bart's Nightmare* is no different, luring fans into a whimsical Simpsons wonderland that quickly devolves into a forsaken Kamp Krusty. Avoid. – DA

Sküljagger: Revolt of the Westicans

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Facing a horde of Sküljagger's domineering pirates, you are Storm Jaxon, a lone Westican sailor armed with a magic sword and… bubble gum. The sword helps you kill enemies, including pirates, ninjas, and bats. You die in one hit, so as a defense, there are red and green gems to collect. The green ones allow you to take a hit and give an extra life after acquiring 25. The red gems enable you to shoot a projectile with the sword as well as provide protection. Each instance of damage reduces your gems (reds before greens). If you die but have an extra life (displayed in the upper left), you respawn at the last blue continue gem you collected. While the sword is your main weapon, there are also fruits to collect, each of which gives you a different bubble gum power. For instance, the cherries let you blow a bubble for flight, and the orange allows you to spit explosives. Your goal in each level is to get to the giant blue gem within the time limit shown in the upper right. There are seven chapters that take place in areas such as a jungle and a lighthouse, and they consist of three levels plus a boss fight. Hidden throughout the stages are secret areas for additional gems. While the game has an interesting premise and pirates are always an entertaining theme, it suffers from awkward platforming mechanics as well as the difficulty of using the bubble gum. These issues take away from an average title and make it unnecessarily troublesome.





Reflections: The "Bubble Gum Practice" option in the menu gave me concerns from the beginning. I haven't played yet, and the game is telling me I need to practice this more than I could in the first few stages. The platforming is questionable, with ladders being tough to grab and clipping through platforms altogether. And there's nothing like repeatedly respawning on an enemy until your lives are all gone! The game gives you a continue, and there are passwords upon completing a chapter, but the last one is after chapter four, requiring you to beat the final three in one go. I appreciate the unique fruit aspect, but the challenge of utilizing it works against the entire experience. Then again, how much of a match are pirates and bubble gum anyway? – KY

Skyblazer

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ukiyotei Company
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★⋆







Sky is charged with saving the sorceress Arianna and stopping the evil Ashura, Lord of War, and Raglan, Lord of Darkness, in this excellent platformer. The hero can punch and kick as his main attacks and can also wall-climb to traverse platforms. As the game progresses, he unlocks a plethora of special abilities ranging from Star Fire to Heal to even turning into a Fiery Phoenix to halt the hordes of the underworld. The game focuses on platform sections connected via an overworld map, but side-scrolling shooter stages and Mode 7 flying sections offer a change of pace. In temples, forests, ice palaces, and more, gems are collected for extra lives; these are plentiful in supply. Potions restore Sky's life gauge and power meter; the latter decreases when special moves are used. Although these potent skills can be swapped at will, at times it feels like there are too many to choose from. Stages are nonlinear and can be replayed, so stocking up on lives from a gem-filled board can really help in a pinch against tough, screen-filling nasties that include giant rolling eyeballs, tower-twisting dragons, and the final fight with Raglan himself. The absolute definition of a hidden gem that has excellent presentation and is only let down by some minor control nitpicks, this is an essential title that deserves attention.





Reflections: No one ever talks about this game, and it is an absolute shame as I genuinely prefer it to *Mega Man X*; I feel it has more to offer in terms of variety. Selecting skills with the shoulder buttons rather than pausing the game keeps the action moving at a brisk pace, but half of the powers seem unneeded – using the same few tried and tested ones will see you through. Saying that, the stages that unlock many of these unnecessary abilities can be avoided entirely if you so choose. What can't be avoided, though, is that Sky has a tendency to stick to walls with reckless abandon at times, which does become frustrating. The fantasy canon characters are weird and wonderful, but the plot is pretty weak in that the evil dude wants to awaken a bigger evil dude. Yet when a game is this good, the story doesn't really matter, does it? Go buy it now and wonder why you've never heard of it before. – JE

SmartBall

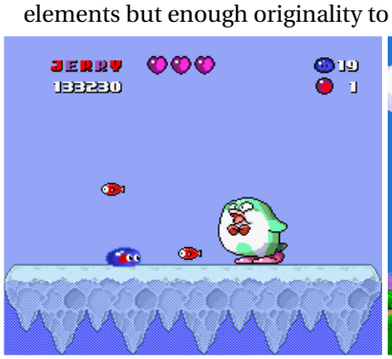
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Game Freak, System Sacom
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★







An evil wizard transformed Prince Jerry into slime and stole the princess! Jerry must ooze across land, sea, and beyond to restore order in this platformer that features clever jelly mechanics. You can walk and jump, and holding X or Y lets you run, jump farther, and stick to walls and ceilings. DOWN attacks by squashing outwards, UP headbutts enemies from below, and if you jump on foes, you can ride piggyback until you crush down on them. While climbing, you can only headbutt, however. Flower buds throughout the game hold weapons, energy, and special items. Red balls can be thrown or stored inside Jerry's jelly, and iron balls are reusable but slow you down. You begin with three heart hit points (only two filled), but there are hidden capacity upgrades and other secrets, such as 1-ups and collectible letter signposts spelling "JERRY." Rare items, such as the beanstalk seed or the power-up that increases your jump, can open secret areas, but they never replenish, even after death. This makes for a tough challenge, and the memorization demand is arguably unfair. Level designs progressively test your abilities, requiring you to scale ceilings and walls to avoid spikes and pitfalls and reach exits. The visuals are bright and colorful, but stages are commonplace in theme: grassland, desert, water, snow, etc. A circularly scrolling lunar stage stands out the most. Enemies, including birds, fish, mice, rocks, and goofy humanoids, are cute and/or creative. Most of the sound is pleasant and appropriate, and some songs are particularly nice. There are eight worlds with two levels and a boss each. Bosses are unique and usually involve learning patterns. In between levels, you can move forwards or backwards to previous stages on a scrolling filmstrip. It's a fun, challenging platformer with many familiar elements but enough originality to stay interesting.

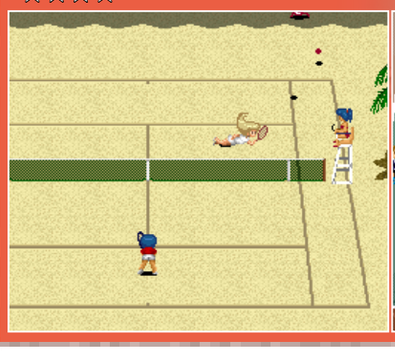


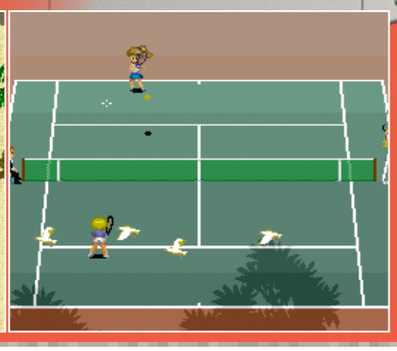


Reflections: In Japan, this game is *Jerry Boy*, playing on the Japanese accent ("Jerry," "Jelly"). In America, it was renamed *SmartBall*, and Jerry was redrawn for the box (badly). Almost all story elements were excised, including cutscenes, towns, dialogue, etc. I do remember seeing ads for the game in magazines, but I didn't think anything of it. If the original art and story had been preserved, it could've stood out. A sequel was completed but never released (yet its prototype was found). Also, Game Freak later made *Pokémon*, and some enemies share that style. – KN

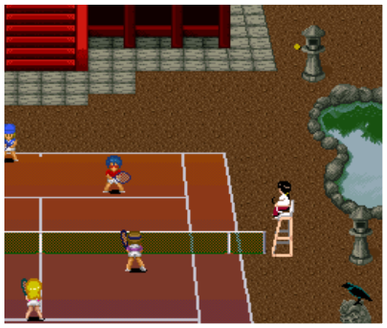
Smash Tennis

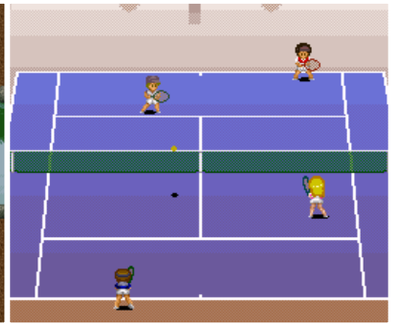
Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





In this charming tennis game, players choose from 20 fictional male and female athletes to compete in five singles or doubles tournaments from around the globe. The player or players that manage to win each of the five tournaments will earn the title "Grand Slam Champion(s)." Gameplay is extremely simple, which makes this an incredibly approachable title. Matches can be played in one, three, or five set increments. While on the court, players are in control of serving and returning the ball while moving their athlete around with the D-pad. The accessibility of the game revolves around the straightforward shot controls. There are soft or hard serves and soft (lob) or regular returns. Players can aim shots by pressing the D-pad to the desired location prior to the swing. The athlete's positioning matched with the timing of the swing determines the path the ball takes. The game's charm derives from the cute characters and the variety of courts featured. Sure, there are basic grass, asphalt, and clay courts, which all the tournaments take place on, but exhibition matches can be played in more outrageous environments with interactive props and gimmicks. The Lodge court, for instance, starts off foggy, but by mid-game, the sun chases the fog away and casts shadows. While competing atop the Mountain court, players may accidentally strike a mountain climber, causing him to lose his grip. There's also a Resort, a Japanese Shrine, and a Beach court; each features individual sound effects and a host of fun visuals to take in. This is the perfect party game, as a multitap allows up to four players to get in on the action. There's no need to explain a convoluted control scheme. Simply jump in and have fun!





Reflections: Chocolate and peanut butter. Bacon and eggs. Video games and tennis. Some things in life go together perfectly. The game of tennis actually played an integral role in the history of video games. In 1958, the very first video game ever made was created by a physicist named William Higinbotham. Do you know what game I'm talking about? No, not *Pong*, but close. *Tennis for Two* is what many consider to be the very first video game. Some may argue that the tic-tac-toe game *Bertie The Brain* was the first, but *Tennis for Two* was the first with interactive moving graphics. – MV

The Smurfs

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





The evil Gargamel has kidnapped some of the Smurfs, so you must Smurf to the rescue! Many elements from the cartoon and comic are present, with detailed backgrounds, excellent sprite animations, and proper Peyo character designs. You play as different Smurfs chosen for you by Papa Smurf. Each has unique abilities: Hefty Smurf carries objects, Jokey Smurf throws bombs, Brainy Smurf has a candle, and Greedy Smurf throws cakes. Only two have projectile attacks, but otherwise all control the same and can jump on enemies. Holding the run button makes you move faster and jump farther, which is usually required. Each act (stage) requires you to find an exit, although some are more complex than others. After a few acts there are bosses, including a monster plant, snake, dragon, etc. Some enemies appear hostile, such as Gargamel's cat, Azrael, and the "BUZZ" flies that transform you into an evil "Angry Smurf" (instant death), while others don't – strangely, you sometimes have to knock out happy bunnies. The environments fit the Smurfs' world but are still tropes: forests, water, snow (featuring a Mode 7 downhill sled ride), fire, and so on. The minecart level aggravatingly requires precise reflexes and memorization to avoid crashing. Extra lives are common, and you'll need them; for a children's game, it's punishingly tough. There's a password system and difficulty settings in the options menu, but even "easy" isn't easy. You begin with three hearts which can be increased to four if you find berries to replenish your health. Additionally, it's sometimes unclear where platform edges lie, and hazards, such as slippery water or ice, can be hard to avoid. Still, it's a quality game, and if you love challenging platformers, you could enjoy this. New and classic Smurf fans might also appreciate its pre-Hollywood style.





Reflections: As a child, I watched the cartoon casually; I remember their Christmas special best and still have a Smurfette Christmas ornament from childhood. The Smurfs were becoming less popular in the US by the '90s, so it's understandable that this game wasn't released here on the SNES. It was on many platforms, including the NES, Game Box, Sega Master System, Genesis, and Sega CD (with animated sequences and redbook audio). Even in this millennium it was on Game Boy Advance as *The Revenge of The Smurfs*. Now that the new Smurfs movies have reignited interest, perhaps people might rediscover these games. – KN

The Smurfs Travel the World
The Smurfs 2 (alt.)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Virtual Studio
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Inquisitive Smurf and Smurfette accidentally broke the magic crystal and warped themselves to distant lands! Now they must collect the crystal's pieces to return home. You can choose to play as either character, although both control identically and are able to jump, run, and kick. Holding the run button increases your jump distance, which is essential. You traverse South America, Australia, China, and other continents, covering swamps, jungles, deserts, oceans, and more. Most levels scroll in multiple directions, but a few move sideways, and there are a couple auto-scrolling levels, such as when you outrun a cat. Combat isn't emphasized, and bosses are few. Instead, it's a scavenger hunt, and you can't move on until you find all the crystal shards; a number at the top of the screen shows how many are left. The search becomes more challenging with each level. Often they're in plain sight, occasionally they're hidden inside other objects, and sometimes they appear when you defeat specific enemies. Keys are also hidden throughout the levels, and for every three you find you're awarded a bonus round. Some levels have gimmicks, such as a surfing sequence or a cave where you need shrinking potions to enter tiny spaces. For unclear reasons, the worldwide animal kingdom hates Smurfs; seals, dragonflies, apes, fish, and others threaten you, although you can dispatch most by jumping on them. Your kick is more useful for moving objects than attacking. Besides animals, there are awkward historical ethnic stereotypes, such as spear-wielding bushmen and American natives, who are presumably related to Smurfs since they're the same size (although they're brown). They do not move much and generally stay in one spot. Visually the game is excellent, with beautiful backgrounds, although most sprites lack personality, and the music is mediocre. Fortunately, it's not difficult. Smurf fans might also smurf the lack of smurfiness, but it's not a terrible game.





Reflections: This is a sequel to *The Smurfs*, and the title screen calls it *The Smurfs 2* (or equivalents like *Les Schtroumpfs 2* or *Los Pitufos 2*), although *The Smurfs Travel the World* is what appears on the box. It wasn't released in North America, and The Smurfs' waning popularity in the '90s was likely why. The brown not-Smurfs in native dress throughout the game probably didn't help either. By the way, "Inquisitive Smurf" only exists in this game, although he might actually be "Nosey Smurf" from the cartoons. – KN

Snow White in Happily Ever After (Filmation Presents)

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Imagitec Design
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







Snow White gets jumpy in this platformer based loosely on the 1990 animated film. So… who knew? The vanquished witch of poisoned apple fame has an angry brother, the shapeshifting Lord Maliss, who now intends to undo Snow and the Prince's happy ending. Players must choose between the two heroes; selecting Snow White means having to save the Prince from Maliss's clutches, while the reverse is true for those opting to play as "Shadow Man," the Prince's accursed alter ego. Not that this really matters – whether man or maiden, both souls control exactly the same, although Snow White's sprite is so hideously rendered, playing as the Prince is actually preferred. Fortunately, the levels are much prettier, bounding players across cloud-crowded skylines, crystalline hideaways, haunted mountaintops, and eventually to the villain's stronghold itself, where the game's lone boss awaits. The music is likewise bright and serves the fairy tale vibe well, but the sound effects are repetitive and often downright ill-conceived, with birds and caterpillars emitting the same eerie, human-like grunts when attacked. Indeed, the enemies often feel as interchangeable as the heroes themselves, with the bats of one stage essentially reskinned versions of the evil cherubs and owls seen in others. Gameplay moves fast, maybe too fast, with eight sprawling, nonlinear levels that force the player to search high and low for enough coins to open their respective exits. But that's just the beginning of this collectathon; fruit is strewn everywhere for point bonuses, hearts can be found to replenish life, warp zones can be entered to quickly zip between areas of a stage, bricks can be busted to reveal new secrets, and a variety of apples can be gathered and thrown at those aforementioned foes. This scattered, fever-dream approach is undermined by some fidgety controls, making for a game probably more challenging than intended, yet thanks to the generous, adjustable difficulty and stage select option, those who persevere will surely see the famous couple united again.





Reflections: Interestingly, *Happily Ever After* also received an unreleased NES adaptation. Developed by SOFEL, it differs drastically from the SNES version by placing a greater emphasis on narrative structure and adventure, thus producing a work far more faithful to the source material. Alas, this should have been the princess game we all played. – DA

Soldiers of Fortune
The Chaos Engine (EU)

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Bitmap Brothers
Publisher: Spectrum Holobyte
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Baron Fortesque's Chaos Engine has gone wildly out of control, spurring on six guns for hire to restore order in this frantically paced top-down run and gun shooter. The game is played in a co-op style using a choice of two main characters – the Brigand, Gentleman, Navvie, Mercenary, Scientist, or Thug – and the AI controls one of them if there isn't another human operator. Each warrior has his own unique weapon, items, and attributes, which can all be upgraded using loot dropped by defeated steampunk foes ranging from golems, frogs, and insects to all sorts of mechanized enemies. Each of the four worlds is littered with mazes and hidden secrets that offer shields and health; these can be unlocked with keys scattered throughout. Every stage requires a certain number of electrical nodes to be activated in order to progress. This is no easy task because even the simplest of foes can kill a character regardless of his health status, but at least checkpoints are in decent supply. Later stages become obtuse with warps and backtracking, but luckily, the AI-controlled partner is up to the task, and his intelligence can even be leveled up. A surprisingly deep shooter that is more fun with two players but suffers from being unfair at times – especially with cheap enemy spawn points.





Reflections: *The Chaos Engine* is such a better name than the title given to the NA release. This game was essentially the UK *Contra* of its time and, alongside *Alien Breed*, was synonymous with the Amiga in the '90s. The key to playing it is to never rush in, as enemies will funnel down pathways to get to you, so you can simply blast them as they line up. A certain amount of speed is needed, though, because as helpful as the AI player is, it sure loves picking up all the gold before you can! Oh, did I not mention that gold isn't shared, and you'll have to level the AI up with gritted teeth as his jerk character becomes better than yours? Still, it is fun trying out the different mercs and seeing which weapons suit your playstyle, so a degree of longevity is there. Just don't expect an easy ride, as all it takes is one of those blasted frog monsters to hurl across the screen and ruin your hard work in a heartbeat. – JE

Sonic Blast Man

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: ITL
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Invading aliens. Rampaging crustaceans. Mad scientists and their ungodly concoctions… it seems Earth is always in crisis. Fortunately, there's Sonic Blast Man, a superpowered volunteer ready and eager to fight man's battles. For five repetitive stages, he'll stride slowly to the right as thug, robot, and alien alike walk into his flailing fists. Indeed, the game is more premise than plot – little else is ever told about this strange savior from another world. Instead, it's all about those heroic moves; by unleashing a flurry of punches against a hapless foe, the player can execute a stunning finisher by adding a mere tap of the control pad. Pressing UP, for example, triggers an uppercut that casts the target airborne, while a forward push initiates a winding punch that launches the enemy into adjacent attackers. In fact, crowd control is the game's operative strategy, with survival often relying on the player flinging one foe into another. And that's just for starters: the hero can perform a leaping "flip kick," a spinning, omnidirectional Screw Bomb that leaves him vulnerable, and a Dynamite Punch that rattles the screen, damaging everything. The latter can be replenished by grabbing Super Glove icons uncovered by smashing crates, barrels, and random enemies. Life-restoring apples, hamburgers, and chickens are procured the same way, while money bags grant points and the Sonic Helmet adds an extra life. Flamboyant fisticuffs aside, the levels themselves are mundane, predictable affairs despite being set in such diverse locales as a mechanical castle and an alien space station. Regular bouts of slowdown, iffy hit detection, and an uneven challenge do the title no favors, either, yet the acceptable soundtrack, substantial boss encounters, and adjustable difficulty make the action more tolerable. In truth, the title's best moments come from the five ridiculous bonus stages spread between the standard levels; these acts of strength, such as pummeling an 18-wheeler as it rushes toward a helpless child, are so fantastically absurd, they help redeem the entire package.





Reflections: *Sonic Blast Man* was first devised as a "punching simulator" arcade game in which wannabe heroes are given three chances to resolve an impending crisis, be it the child and the 18-wheeler or another insane objective. To succeed, players must smack a mechanical punch pad as hard as possible, the sum of their blows determining the outcome. These challenges would later resurface as the bonus stages found in the SNES edition. – DA

Sonic Blast Man II

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: ITL
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★

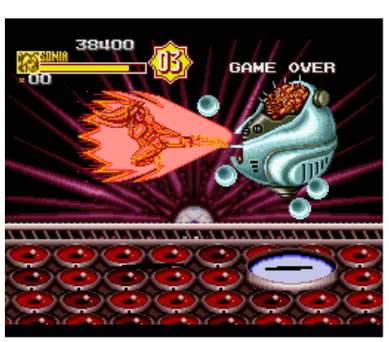






Sonic Blast Man returns to battle Yafu, an intergalactic dictator prepared to scrub the world of everything human. Unlike the first game, which peppers its challenges with some lighthearted shenanigans, this follow-up plays it straighter, even opening with the destruction of an entire city. Indeed, with evil this great, the once unstoppable savior is now joined by the spicy Sonia, a superheroine specializing in speed, and Captain Choyear, a lumbering dude who favors brute strength. This means cooperative play is finally a reality. The greatest change, however, lies in the game's revamped fighting system; where the original focuses largely on crowd control, the sequel is more methodical, requiring players to deduce which approach best wastes the awaiting alien. The trick is stringing each hero's light and heavy strikes with other abilities, thereby producing a variety of new maneuvers. Sonia, for example, can combine a double-tapped dash and a heavy attack to perform a dive-bombing dropkick. Similarly, opponents can be tossed or outright hurled depending on the combination used. Defensive options are less extensive, relegated to an evasive roll and two kinds of expendable finishers unique to each character. Unfortunately, full mastery of these techniques is more suggestion than necessity, as players can prevail on the normal difficulty using only basic tactics, especially in co-op mode. More disappointing are the game's five unremarkable levels, trite "march to the right" gameplay, and boilerplate locales ranging from generic industrial settings to another showdown on a mothership. The villains are no better; despite exploiting the full range of bad guy clichés (snipers, brutes, and ninja-types, to name a few), only the bosses make much of an impression. Likewise, the items are forgettable, existing only to provide increased points, health, and extra finishers. Even the amusing bonus stages of the original have been tragically excised here, a telling sign of the game's greatest weakness – it lacks a personality, holds no soul, and thus exists as another decent 16-bit brawler and nothing more.





Reflections: Life, energy, and personality – these are the principles that guide the design of any successful brawler. Indeed, *TMNT: Turtles in Time* remains a beloved classic for these very reasons – it boasts expressive, likable heroes (life, personality), a bevy of diverse, fast-paced levels filled with surprises (energy), and smart enemies that act in a dynamic, believable fashion (life, energy). Sadly, *Sonic Blast Man II* fails on all counts, feeling oddly stunted by comparison. – DA

Soul Blazer

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Quintet
Publisher: Enix (NA, Europe), Ubi Soft (Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Overcome with greed, King Magridd has sold out all life to Deathtoll, and as the Master's hero, you must rescue the innocent souls in this top-down action-RPG. The game is split into seven sections, including the quiet village of Grass Valley and the underwater mermaid town of St. Elles. You begin each section from the Master's shrine, where you can heal and save as well as travel to town or other checkpoints you've unlocked. In real-time action, you slash through enemies spawning from Monster Lairs, which turn green once defeated. They can then be activated to open access to a new area, materialize an object (such as a chest or spirit), or revive a soul. Interact with these liberated souls for information, items, or passage to a previously blocked area. Your main equipment, which you upgrade throughout your adventure, consists of a sword and armor. In addition, near the beginning, you gain the use of magic at the cost of GEMs, which defeated enemies drop. At the end of every section, you battle a boss to earn one of six stones needed to access the seventh section, the World of Evil. This game is a fun experience with a good blend of puzzle and action elements as well as secrets and sidequests galore. It (mostly) allows you to play with your choice of magic and melee attacks and has a nice difficulty curve. Unfortunately, there is little variation in gameplay, the final sections using the same formula as the first. Despite this, it's a well-made title with fluid controls and varied graphics that present unique environments that many people will enjoy.



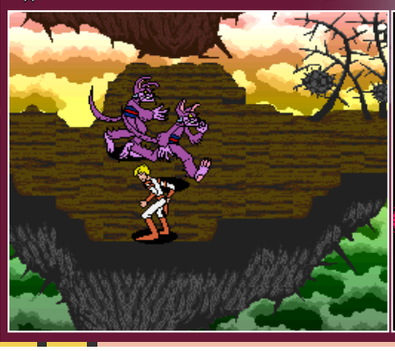


Reflections: This was Quintet's second SNES release, and a familiarity with their first, *ActRaiser*, shows abundant similarities ranging from small details, such as copied sound effects, to larger ideas, such as the overarching theme of "good versus evil." As far as RPGs go, *Soul Blazer* is fairly simplistic, focusing mainly on destroying enemies to access more areas. I enjoyed the gameplay for what it was and even started taking notes about the released souls to ensure I spoke to every single one when I returned to town. The backgrounds, enemies, and souls are different for each section, which helps break the monotony of the action. Despite the one-note aspect of the gameplay, there's still much to be explored and discovered, especially if you're willing to backtrack to past sections for the full experience as the Master's Soul Blazer. – KY

Space Ace

Genre: Action
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Oxford Digital Enterprises, Blue Turtle
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment (PAL: Empire Interactive)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★

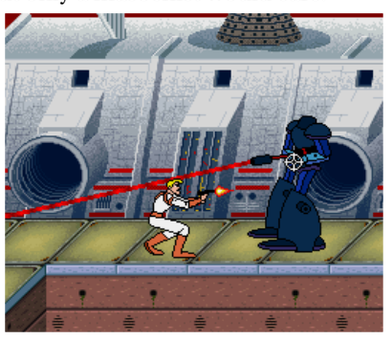






Hunky hero Dexter must save Kimmy and the world from Borf, despite being transformed into a tween by Borf's Infanto Ray! Though its gameplay differs from its LaserDisc arcade forbear, this port is visually faithful, having its scenes, music, and designs. Dexter and other characters, including foes such as the robots, sea creatures, and Dexter's evil twin, look right, and small, blocky animations play upon death or level completion. Like the original, it's mostly memorization and avoidance, except without fun. In platforming levels, the screen auto-scrolls slowly, stopping at points where obstacles and enemies emerge. Dexter moves and leaps sluggishly and has no attack, plus the levels' three-quarter perspective makes it easy to misjudge jumps. Sometimes the word "ENERGIZE" flashes on the screen, and by pressing L, you can choose to briefly become adult Dexter, taking an alternate path where you shoot enemies by targeting them with a cursor. However, after Dexter reverts, play usually goes back to the young Dexter path you were on, so these sequences only increase your score (and torture). Glowing disc power-ups periodically appear on the ground; red discs enable a "Time Warp" feature to practice any level you've already reached, and white ones grant extra lives. If the screen blurs when you walk in certain spots, you can find more power-ups; two other disc colors enhance adult Dexter's weapons. Between levels, you must fly the Starpak spaceship through a maddening maze to find portals to the others, navigating narrow pathways and shooting green balls in your way. Touching walls damages your ship's shields, and some walls can kill instantly. Besides the scrolling and maze levels, there are other genres, such as space shooters and driving, but they're consistently wretched. Levels conclude with a score tally which affects the game's ending, but only a masochist would care.





Reflections: I've known of *Space Ace* since the 1990s, reading about the arcade and its FMV ports in gaming magazines. Even a decade after the original came out, the idea of video-based games was amazing, and home consoles still couldn't match the arcade resolution (except maybe the LaserActive!). But that goodwill didn't extend to the SNES port. I can actually remember screenshots from the *Game Players* magazine review and the reviewer's distaste, even though I haven't reread it in years. This game was terrible then, it's terrible now, and it's the *worst* I've reviewed for either of Mr. Contri's books so far. – KN

Space Football: One on One

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Argonaut Software, B.I.T.S.
Publisher: Triffix Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







This futuristic football game pits two players piloting RetroGrav hovercrafts against one another as they try to direct a piece of equipment called a hoverball into a goal. There are 12 athletes to choose from that, depending on what type of RetroGrav they drive, fall into slow, medium, and high speed categories. The rules of the game are simple: Take possession of the hoverball and bring it to the opponent's goal area to score a point. The athlete with the most points after 500 time units elapse is the winner. Sounds easy, right? Well, the playfield is covered in ramps, spincycles, magnetic fields, and other dastardly mechanisms that affect how the RetroGrav functions. To add to the challenge, the hoverball can only be held for a few seconds. After that, the RetroGrav loses control of the ball, forcing it back into play. Each RetroGrav is outfitted with a gun that is used to shoot the hoverball out of an opponent's possession. This makes for some really tense situations around the goal area. This same gun can also be used to propel the hoverball forward, but only when in possession. The RetroGrav navigates with ease and is similar to controlling a car in most driving games. There are forward and reverse buttons, and the D-pad is used to steer, with the shoulder buttons dedicated to hard turns. Helpfully, the RetroGrav's HUD points to the direction of the hoverball and displays a red dot if the opponent possesses it. Additionally, pressing up on the D-pad tracks the hoverball. Featuring blurry Mode 7 graphics, the visuals are less than stellar. The gameplay is fun, but the opponent AI is terrible. Players planning on firing this up should bring a friend for some split-screen action.





Reflections: Have you ever played a game that gave you the immediate feeling that you would dislike it, but after a few playthroughs, you actually began to have fun with it? Well, that was me with *Space Football: One on One*. Seeing those ugly Mode 7 graphics burned my retinas, but once I won a few games, my eye pain went away, and I started enjoying myself. The same can be said for a friend that I talked into playing along with me. He hated it at first, but before he knew it, he was boasting about his three-game winning streak. – MV

Space Invaders

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★







The quintessential arcade shooter invades the Super Nintendo nearly 20 years later in an extremely faithful port. Four versions of the game are offered: the upright cabinet from 1978 that reflected the display onto a lunar backdrop, the black and white edition found on the 1979 cocktail table, the same with cellophane bands of color, and the color-display version of the cocktail table from 1980. In each, the gameplay remains identical: The player must eliminate waves of aliens that strafe and descend on a single screen before they can reach the surface. Four destructible bunkers provide cover from enemy fire but obstruct the player as well. As invaders are shot, the remaining ones move more quickly, increasing the challenge. Careful management of the shape of the invasion formation is key, as removing edge columns slows the overall progression of the ships, while picking off the closer rows keeps them at bay. Occasionally, bonus-point saucers sail along the top of the screen. The options menu allows adjusting player lives, stereo/mono, and the "extend" 1-up score threshold. Finally, VS Game Mode is added. Two players compete on a vertically split screen, with settings for difficulty and ship stock. The objective is to either clear one's own screen or overwhelm the opponent's. Invaders sometimes take on a color; shooting them has unique effects. Yellow invaders shift that player's formation down a row, blue ones shift the opponent's formation down a row, red invaders shift both formations down a row, green ones eliminate the remainder of their row, and pink is random. Additionally, hitting the saucer causes the formations to trade players! The compressed real estate and emergent strategy of VS Game Mode is novel, but it's only a glimmer of what this release could've tried.





Reflections: *Space Invaders* is one of video gaming's storied titles, and the legacy it left behind is enormous. Credit where it's due – this game recreates those classic editions flawlessly. The familiar four-note tune fosters the same sense of dread in me, especially when trying to pick off that lone speedster at the end of each wave. It's a splendid port. Unfortunately, save for the two-player mode, that's all it is. The interesting ideas explored in VS Game Mode could have made for a fun variant of the single-player version. Could more have been made of this? A game of *Space Invaders*' repute certainly deserves it. – DG

Space Megaforce
Super Aleste (EU)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Toho
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★★







The year is 2048. An interstellar force has launched an unprovoked attack on Earth, so it's up to you – piloting the pride of the military's space-fighter fleet – to destroy the alien invaders and save the human race. Your top-down, vertically scrolling mission takes you from the skies over the lush Amazon rainforest to the vast expanse of open space; no matter the battlefield, you can expect to encounter enemy resistance at every turn. To combat this, your ship has been outfitted with the ability to equip eight different weapons – Multiple Shot, Laser, Circle, Multi-Direction Shot, Missile, Power Shot, Sprite, and Scatter – all of which have two different firing modes. While you only have access to one of these weapons at a time, you're able to switch between them by destroying supply ships and liberating their precious cargo. Furthermore, these supply ships occasionally drop orange and green power chips that not only increase the level of your weapons but also simultaneously improve the power of your shield. Being hit by enemy projectiles lowers the power of both of these, and taking fire once your level reaches zero results in the destruction of your ship. Generally speaking, each stage is designed to complement a specific weapon, so avoiding mission failure can be as easy as switching to a new one. If you find that you're being overwhelmed by enemy fighters, for example, you can utilize the Circle to form a protective barrier, or if you simply want to devastate everything in your path, the Power Shot can unleash an unstoppable energy beam. Between its stunning visuals, impressive arsenal of weaponry, and challenging gameplay, this fast-paced shooter is easily one of the best on the SNES.





Reflections: The Aleste series is second to none when it comes to top-down shooters, and *Space Megaforce* is no exception. Other shooters of the time just can't seem to replicate the sense of speed that the Aleste games accomplish so naturally. I still get a thrill from darting through pockets of enemy fire and emerging completely unscathed. Impressively, *Space Megaforce* also manages to populate the screen with dozens of opponents, power-ups and set pieces without causing confusion. Every area is filled with constant movement, yet it never feels congested. I'm sure that an incredible amount of design work went into perfecting the enemy distribution, ship speed, and sprite sizing, but Compile made this delicate balancing act seem absolutely effortless. – AF

Spanky's Quest

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: July 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Spanky is a monkey in the middle of wicked witch Morticia's plot to plunge Mopoland into darkness. Trapped in her six towers, he faces 10 side-scrolling stages and a boss fight in each of the first five; the last presents boss rematches before the final confrontation. Aside from Morticia, her cruel crow that chases Spanky if he lingers too long in a level, and some cheeky chestnuts, the foes he faces are fractious fruits. To battle pirouetting apples, puckering lemons, and bosses such Pippi Peach, Spanky tosses a magic ball upwards in a tight arc. At first, it appears as a tiny bubble that dazes enemies, picks up objects, and uncovers hidden bonus areas and items, but by bouncing it on his head, Spanky makes it grow and change color. Each hue corresponds to a different attack into which the orb can be converted: Blue's a single baseball, green is a stream of soccer balls, yellow's a volleyball that splits into four, and orange is a basketball barrage. Juggling and aiming the magic spheres take practice, especially in some stages' close, enemy-dense quarters. Spanky also contends with one-touch deaths, cannons, smashing weights, moving platforms, bottomless levels, locked doors that require keys, and more. To help him, he finds various hats that let him float downwards, take an extra hit, bounce the ball more easily, etc. With these power-ups, varied obstacles, cute opponents, and colorful backgrounds, the game remains entertaining throughout its sizable number of levels. Have fun monkeying around!





Reflections: Even though they try to kill Spanky, the fruits in this title are notable for being jam-packed with bushels of personality. For example, Sluggo, head of the newsprint cityscape stages, is a punk pineapple with neon spikes, sharp shades, and a snarky smirk, while Vito, hanging around the top of the fifth tower, is a muscat father who offers his offspring as an offensive – what a grape dad he is. These bosses and others stand out due to their stature and status, but the regular enemies, such as the preening Strawbees and the sliced Kiwiwi fruit birds, are still interesting. It's particularly adorable (and deadly) when googly-eyed Orangeys man the levers to traps. However, pummeling produce might call on the (p)reserves – extra fruits that pop from metal containers lining certain levels. In other words, if Spanky gets fresh with Miss Applee, he might get canned. – AP

Sparkster

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★

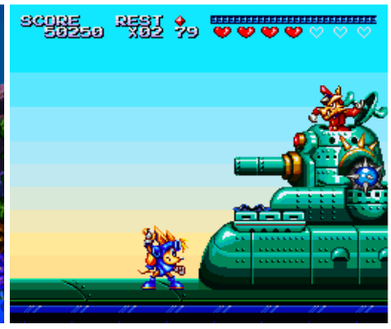






The leader of the Rocket Knights makes his Super Nintendo debut! As Sparkster, the player must run, jump, hang, dash, duck, and slice their way through a number of complex four-directional levels to catch Axel Gear, rescue Princess Flora, and thwart Generalissimo Lioness. Sparkster's notable feature is his jet pack; holding the attack button allows the player to charge the Rocket Energy Gauge, and releasing said button sends Sparkster sailing, sword out, in the direction held on the D-pad. This skill is critical to both battling baddies and traversing treacherous terrain. A lethal spin attack can be employed at full gauge by not holding a direction upon release, and an added short-dash feature with the shoulder buttons proves very useful at spanning gaps and making defensive maneuvers. Gorgeous visuals are found throughout, from reflections and motions in water to the dynamic expressions of Sparkster and his foes alike. The sound is equally impressive, particularly the audio samples. Level design is varied, featuring battles across natural landscapes, harrowing fortresses, and mazes made of musical instruments. The Setup menu has three difficulty options, remappable controls, and a toggle for stereo/mono sound. Two additional difficulty settings are available, Very Hard and Crazy Hard, after beating the prior difficulty. A fun, interactive Password screen allows the player to pick up their progress later by attacking spaces to input apples, bananas, and crystals. In the era of animal mascot platformers, Sparkster soars above his peers.





Reflections: *Rocket Knight Adventures*, the first in this game's series, marks the first time Konami debuted an IP on the rival Sega Genesis. *Sparkster* and *Rocket Knight Adventures* share a number of story beats, such as the pedal-powered airship, robot battle with Axel, and venture into space, even as the antagonists shift from pigs to wolves and some names get changed around. Like its predecessor, *Sparkster* sometimes presents level design best tackled with methodical running and jumping that may feel antithetical to the speed-burst mechanic. When it's done well (cornering jumps, jumping bosses, striking foes at diagonals) it feels like a potent tool. Just as often, though, it puts the pack-propelled opossum into perilous positions. *Sparkster* loses a couple marks late; the boxing robots battle is far more frustrating in this incarnation, and the final confrontation lacks the clever execution of its Genesis counterpart. *Sparkster* is great but ends up feeling like an imperfect remake of an almost perfect platformer. – DG

Spawn: The Video Game (Todd McFarlane's)

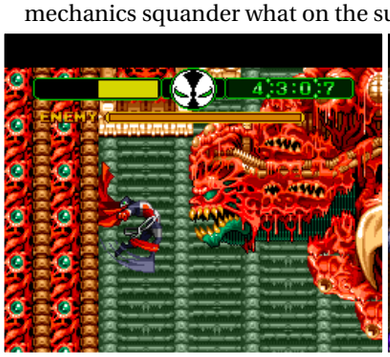
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ukiyotei Company
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment, Sony Electronic Publishing
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★







Demonic antihero Spawn sets out to rescue 13 children while taking out thugs and Malebolgia's army of hellish fiends in this action-platformer. His main method of fighting consists of a wide variety of punches and kicks executable while standing, crouching, running, or jumping. Light punching/kicking attacks usually stun enemies, while heavy ones knock foes down. There are no default attack combos, so strong hits are often necessary to keep enemies at bay and create space, resulting in staccato-like action which can drag. Baddies tend to crowd Spawn from both sides, and though a blocking function helps, he gets pushed back. He has both a standard health bar and Life Points, the latter of which start at a count of 9,999. Every life lost depletes Life Points, as does using Spawn's eight magical powers. These are mostly attacks, such as the Burning Fist and Fire Storm, but Heal Yourself restores the health meter. In theory, these powers sound fine, but the complicated button combinations and stiff controls make accessing them unreliable, especially in the heat of battle. The extreme difficulty, not just in the normal brawling but also in the unfair and overlong boss battles, confounds the issue. Stage areas with platforming sections needing lots of wall jumping and cape floating are nice, but the controls aren't as tight as they should be to accomodate. The graphics and animation are very good and represent the source material well, the varied environments are interesting, and the gothic music and presentation are solid. However, the rough and frustrating gameplay mechanics squander what on the surface should be a better game.





Reflections: *Spawn*, created by former Marvel Comics and Spider-Man artist Todd McFarlane, was first published by the newly minted Image Comics in 1992. Image Comics, with *Spawn* leading the way, rocked the comic book industry. Spawn became the independent comic book hero of the 1990s, with a popular toy line, multiple video games, a live-action feature film, and an award-winning HBO animated series. He remains a favored character to this day, and you can see why – the dark story and the visually interesting array of characters, seen not only in the protagonist but also in the villains, endure thanks in large part to McFarlane's talents. A lot of care went into the SNES translation of Spawn, but I feel that focusing on the gameplay and what's actually "fun" was glossed over in lieu of packing in more of the comic book experience. – PC

Spectre

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Peninsula Gameworks
Ported by: Synergistic Software
Publisher: Cybersoft (PAL: GameTek)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

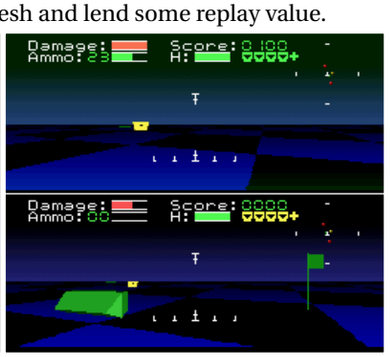






Traverse the Cyber-Net, blasting through levels of digital countermeasures! In a first-person perspective, the player pilots a vehicle through an abstract polygonal plane, eliminating or avoiding hazardous programs while seeking out flags. Capturing all four flags in a level advances the player to the next, where greater challenges await. The player's craft can jump, randomly warp, or fire one of two attack types. Cannon shots use less ammo but deal less damage, while grenades use far more but dispatch most foes in a single shot. There are three preconfigured craft to choose from, or the player can design their own, customizing ratings for shields, speed, and ammo. The heads-up display shows the score, level, potential bonus for completing the level early, player's tank damage, remaining lives, remaining ammo, Hyperspace power for jumping or warping, and a helpful minimap indicating the location of flags and enemies nearby. Strategy emerges from deciding when to run or fight, managing ammo, making sound use of restorative upload points, and efficiently looping the terrain to acquire the flags. Extra lives are awarded every 500 points. There are four different two-player modes: Arena is a free-for-all deathmatch to 1000 points, Flag Rally is a competitive race to grab 10 consecutive flags without dying, Base Raid is a two-versus-two capture the flag contest with one human and one AI player per team, and Allied Assault mode allows two players to work cooperatively to play through the game while sharing the same pool of lives. These varied modes keep the otherwise simple experience fresh and lend some replay value.





Reflections: *Spectre* borrows heavily from the cyberpunk genre. Static terrain, for example, is described as data caches and cores. The green replenishment squares are upload points, and the antagonists are described as intrusion countermeasures. Even with that veneer, it's hard not to see *Spectre* as little more than a refreshed *Battlezone*, the famed vector tank game released nearly 15 years prior. What it lacks in technical depth, however, it makes up for with fluid frame rates, smooth play, varied enemies, and a myriad of multiplayer modes. Be very careful in Allied Assault, where friendly fire is not so friendly! The alternate third-person views of the PC version would have been welcome here, as would have the level names, alternate weapons, FMV cutscenes, and exploding geometry of the various Macintosh versions (from which the series originates). Still, enough of the *Spectre* experience remains intact in its lone console edition to be worth a look. – DG

Speed Racer in My Most Dangerous Adventures

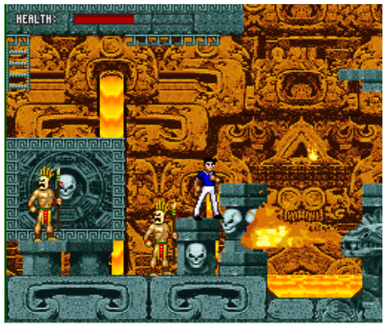


Genre: Racing, Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★⋆





Here comes Speed Racer driving the powerful Mach 5 out of the classic '60s anime and into six races around the world. You won't be guiding Speed just on the track, however – between courses he'll be on foot in one of five missions. The Mach 5 handles well in turns and skids, and it's also able to jump, deploy gripper tires, use turbo boosts, and brandish blades to slice obstacles. You'll appreciate these features to see you through standard circuit tracks, a dusty desert, tropical islands, and frosty mountains. The volcano course can be particularly harmful to your car, but this damage, as well as that caused by hitting barrels, cones, or aggressive opponent drivers, can be repaired, either by visiting Sparky's pit stop or by grabbing wrench icons. Placing at least third in a race grants a password and initiates a side-scrolling episode in which Speed must prevent sabotage, thwart kidnappings of Spritle and Chim-Chim or Trixie, or prove his bravery in a fiery temple. Though he's a demon on wheels, Speed's kind of a clunker on foot, and it's an effort to control how he jumps, climbs ladders, and fights henchman with punches and kicks. Should you clear all 11 levels, you'll be able to replay them as the enigmatic Racer X. While this title suffers somewhat from low frame rates during the races and awkward controls during the missions, it's absolutely still worth a go, Speed Racer, go!





Reflections: The game's manual spends a solid 16 pages detailing the features of the Mach 5 – it even provides schematics and specs as if it were a real car, listing the wheelbase, curb weight, miles per gallon and more. And why not? Though fictional, the Mach 5 truly is an impressive feat of engineering with its 5,000 horsepower engine, bird-like communications probe, g. Force Compensator, and AM/FM stereo cassette. Poring over these marvels made me realize that Speed isn't the true hero of this game – he's just the driver, and it makes sense that when you take away his super car, his lead feet get the best of him. No, the real hero is his dad, the man who created the Mach 5. Without his father's genius, determination, and ingenuity, Speed would probably have to putter around in a golf cart or an AMC Gremlin, but I guess "Go, Pops Racer, go!" just isn't as catchy. – AP

Speedy Gonzales: Los Gatos Bandidos



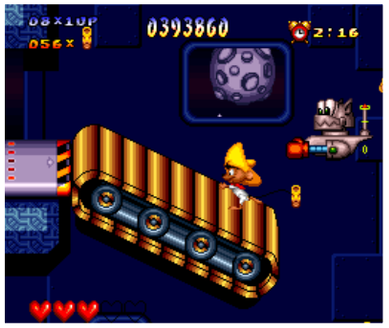
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Sunsoft
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★⋆





Los Gatos Bandidos have kidnapped all the mice in town, and Speedy Gonzales is racing to the rescue! Speedy and other characters reflect the Warner Bros. cartoon style, and Sylvester also appears. True to his name, Speedy moves quickly. Going downhill is faster, going uphill is slower, and there are mechanisms that increase your jump or speed, such as mushrooms, tubes, cannons, and more. You'll need momentum to clear obstacles, including platforms, spikes, lasers, etc. The controls are functional, although the physics feels loose. In each level, you must find an exit before time runs out. Touching cages frees mice and marks a continue point. A level intro screen says how many mice need rescuing, but they only influence your score. The levels move horizontally and vertically, and when you're stationary, you can shift the camera with the D-pad and shoulder buttons. There are power-ups, such as clocks for extra time, extra lives, hearts for health, shoes that increase your speed, and collectible cheeses that become extra lives when your score is tallied after stages. Mice and items are occasionally hidden and require searching. The music and sound are unsatisfying, but the graphics are appropriately colorful for a cartoon game, with well-defined characters and gradient backgrounds. However, the settings are derivative and don't fit the cartoons well: woods, snow, castle, city, space, etc. These areas have multiple stages that look similar and have themed enemies, such as bats, cats with jackhammers, robots, and walruses, yet they're sparse – most levels feel empty. You have a short-range kick attack, but avoiding enemies is easier. Even bosses are infrequent and boring. The game isn't difficult, and you have continues, but trying to get all the mice could be challenging. A map screen between levels allows you to retry them, but why?





Reflections: This game is forgotten yet (in)famous; you even might've played it unknowingly. It became the SNES ROM hack *Sonic the Hedgehog 4*, which has been online for years and has a bootleg cartridge. Fittingly, Speedy's game probably exists because of Sonic; Speedy's fast, so they put him in a Sonic clone (a sort of subgenre in its time). Yet adding Sonic only demonstrates how superior the Sonic games are. Did Speedy deserve better? I think so. – KN

Spider-Man

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Western Technologies
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







In this action-platforming outing based upon *Spider-Man: The Animated Series*, Spider-Man must hunt down supervillains who have escaped from the Ravencroft asylum. Traversing and scaling multi-tiered environments including a lab, construction site, Brooklyn Bridge, Coney Island, J. Jonah Jameson's penthouse, and Ravencroft itself, Spider-Man faces thugs, droids, and armored troopers. However, his biggest threat is the onslaught of foes such as Rhino, Mysterio, Scorpion, Doctor Octopus, Lizard, and more. To counter these baddies, Spider-Man packs punches, kicks, jump kicks, and limited web bolts, stun grenades, and gas grenades. Spidey also has to web-sling around as well as climb and crawl on walls and ceilings to advance. The action isn't the steadiest since Spidey is slightly underpowered against standard foes, and his health meter can quickly drain because he has no short-term invulnerability after getting hit. Flying enemies, such as Green Goblin and Vulture, can be especially tough to take out. Thankfully, health pickups, extra lives, web-armor, and even activatable cameo assists from each member of the Fantastic Four are fairly abundant. The graphics, art design, and animation are all solid and impressive at times, although the foreground/background differentiation in certain stages is difficult to decipher and navigate. Furthermore, entering and exiting stairs/escalators can be wonky, a few platforming areas are a bit unpolished, and the web slinging is somewhat finicky. There are also platforming sections and traps that slow down the game, making it feel claustrophobic. Recommended for fans of the wall crawler, but most should seek a better action diversion.





Reflections: This title didn't garner the same fanfare and sales as previous Spider-Man games on the console... strange considering the popularity of the Fox animated show it's based on. Perhaps it being sandwiched between the releases of *Spider-Man & Venom: Maximum Carnage* and *Venom & Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* didn't help. I applaud the game for fitting in a plethora of villains from Spider-Man's rogues' gallery, with only a few, such as Kraven, Electro, Kingpin, and Sandman, conspicuous in their absence. There is much to like here, but the fighting itself isn't satisfying in the least, and too many precarious falls and unfair traps lurk. The most interesting part to me is the story: Spider-Man eventually has to stop Venom, who decides to kill off Spider-Man's foes to rid of the world of their menace. – PC

Spider-Man & Venom: Maximum Carnage

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Spider-Man and his arch-nemesis Venom team up to take down the psychotic Carnage and his minions in this superhero beat 'em up. Armed with punches, grab attacks, jump kicks, throws, a health-draining special move, and even the ability to jump onto and climb walls, Spidey faces standard brawler action in the streets, fending off somewhat intelligent thugs who use punches, kicks, melee weapons, or guns. Spidey's web-shooter attacks are essential to his success, allowing him to shoot webs to tie up enemies, form a defensive shield, web-swing, or grab and pull in foes to fight. In addition, being accurate with attacks can unleash a powerful strike to clear away enemies. At particular points, the player has the option to select the stronger but slower Venom (with attacks and abilities similar to Spider-Man's), who has his own playable stages and a different path from Spidey's. The game has a very high difficulty, with relentless enemies, tough boss battles, and a meager health bar in comparison. A couple of non-fighting stages in the form of wall-climbing and web-swinging chases are clunky and unnecessary. However, life-replenishing hearts, extra lives, and continues are quite crucial, as are the Super Hero Icon pickups whereby the player can unleash desperately needed temporary help from Captain America, Black Cat, and many others. Graphically, the game shines with its accurate artwork and smooth animation. The comic panel cutscenes are great, the sound effects are satisfying, and the rock soundtrack by Green Jelly is competent. The extreme challenge and the lack of a multiplayer option do sting a bit, though.



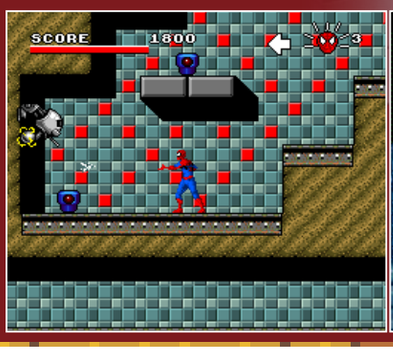


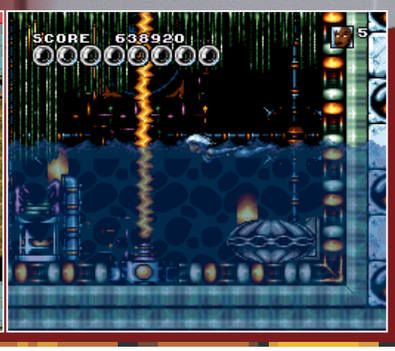
Reflections: "Maximum Carnage" was a huge Spider-Man comics crossover event that involved numerous heroes trying to stop Carnage's murderous rampage across New York City. As a big Spider-Man fan at the time, I was unimpressed by the shallowness of the story and the villain Carnage, who was just a heinous symbiotic copycat of the popular villain Venom. Still, it was important enough to get a quality video game port of the story across multiple systems. In keeping with the theme and color scheme of Carnage, the SNES cartridge was originally released in a red shell, a distinction shared only with *Doom*. Additionally, a limited collector's edition box was available, which included not just the game but also a graphic novel of "Maximum Carnage" and a pin set. – PC

Spider-Man & X-Men: Arcade's Revenge

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★







Supervillain Arcade has captured the X-Men, so Spider-Man must rescue them in this action-platformer. After a tutorial-like level where Spider-Man uses his Spider-Sense to find and grab a series of blinking security eyes, two stages become selectable each for Spider-Man and four different X-Men. Spider-Man's stages have him climbing and jumping off walls, swinging around buildings, and shooting webs at robots and villains such as Shocker and Carnage. Cyclops's stages have him in a mine firing optic blasts and kicking/punching androids and orbs; pesky minecart sections give him trouble before he faces Sentinels. Gambit attacks by throwing charged playing cards at weaponized chess pieces while running from a giant spiked ball in his first level; in his second, the floor slowly rises, making it very difficult to avoid getting trapped. Storm's stages take place underwater, where she swims and shoots lightning at fish and other baddies while getting and maintaining oxygen and blasting valves that cause the water level to rise. Wolverine takes out toy soldiers and clowns with his claws in his first level and contends with a constantly chasing Juggernaut in his second act. After these initial stages, a handful of short ones with each hero follow before Spider-Man faces Arcade. Solid graphics, a decent soundtrack, and a nice representation of the Marvel Comics world are hamstrung by wildly uneven levels and extreme difficulty at points. Some stages are fair (Spider-Man's, Storm's, Cyclops's), Wolverine's Juggernaut stage is unintuitive, and Gambit's requires near perfection due to his fragile health. Compounding the frustration is restarting at the beginning of a level if a life is lost. Recommended only for fans of the comics, but even then, prepare for a mostly unsatisfying journey.





Reflections: This is based on a storyline in *The Uncanny X-Men* #123-#125, where Spider-Man must rescue the X-Men from Arcade's "Murder World." I purchased this game as a preteen, foolishly thinking that it was going to be somewhat like Sega's arcade beat 'em up *Spider-Man* (1991) and Konami's *X-Men* (1992). Yeah, it wasn't. This hodgepodge probably would've been better off as a standard game featuring the same stages playable with different selectable characters. It's a bit too ambitious for its own good with its varying stage structures and themes, and it shows. One laughable (intentional?) detail is when a male hero dies and lets out an exaggerated "Whooooa!", as this sounds more apropos to a rollercoaster ride. – PC

Spindizzy Worlds

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electric Dreams Software
Ported by: Asciiware
Publisher: Asciiware (PAL: Activision)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







GERALD, a Geographical Environmental Reconnaissance And Land-mapping Device, is put to work exploring unknown planets in this isometric puzzle game. To start, there is a choice between two clusters of planets, Easydizzy and Spindizzy. Easydizzy has fewer planets, or levels, which are more straightforward. Spindizzy, on the other hand, has many longer, maze-like worlds to navigate. As a robotic spinning top, GERALD can only control its direction (with the D-pad) and rate of movement, using A for high speed and B to brake. After selecting a world, GERALD is transported to a stage where it needs to activate the exit teleporter by collecting jewels in the form of gems, orbs, and flags. Some of the jewels, however, are blocked by obstacles, such as elevators and barriers. To get past them, GERALD has to teleport to other parts of the world and collect all the jewels there in addition to hitting a switch. If the view of parts of the stage is obstructed by terrain, press L and R to rotate the perspective when the symbol in the lower left is highlighted. While there usually isn't a timer, there is some pressure on GERALD to move along since it loses fuel over time, by falling too far, by touching aliens, etc. GERALD replenishes this gauge through the jewels that it collects, but complete energy loss results in having to restart the world. The physics in this game are clear, and the momentum, acceleration, and braking are easy to use if difficult to master. Exploring these planets is a demanding but entertaining experience, and GERALD is just the robot to deal with the ramps, trampolines, and multilevel stages!





Reflections: A sequel to the computer game *Spindizzy*, this title shares stylistic similarities to *Marble Madness* but with more variety in obstacles and a focus on objectives. I especially appreciate the balance of time-attack-style levels with slower, puzzle-oriented ones. You can also scroll around the level while the game is paused, so it is much more about performance than brute force trial and error. The graphics are a little wanting, being simple geometric shapes on top of uninspired backgrounds, but this may come from being a port of a three-year-old game. The music is fitting, feeling upbeat and energizing. *Spindizzy Worlds* is an enjoyable and challenging title that may just spin your head right round. – KY

Spirou

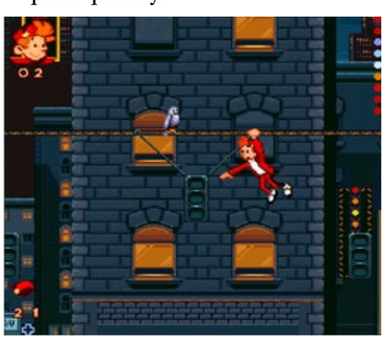
Genre: Platformer, Shooter
Release Date: June 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Spirou must save Count Champignac from evil robot Cyanida and then scupper her plan to use his inventions to take over the world in this absolutely gorgeous but sometimes unfair platform adventure. During his quest, the Franco-Belgian comic book hero can run, jump, and baseball slide his way past all sorts of nasties ranging from beam-shooting robots to plant monsters, but he also gains access to a laser gun of his own. The main focus of each stage is overcoming obstacles to move onto the next section, be it by shimmying across electrified cables or by pushing blocks to reach higher areas. All the while, Spirou's trusty pet squirrel, Spip, points him in the right direction. Levels are varied and go from standard platform stages to side-scrolling shooter sections that add a fun change of pace. With settings such as Parisian streets, factories, rooftops, and even secret caves filled with spike traps, each stage is visually stunning. Spirou himself is wonderfully animated, but his movement frames can't keep up with the frantic action. Collecting hats increases the stock of lives, and hearts replenish health, but the tricky platform sections, instant death pits, and scrolling stages of doom bring on frustration quite quickly.





Reflections: In my opinion, this is perhaps the most beautiful-looking SNES game available. Every stage is filled with wonder, and the presentation on the whole is a fantastic tribute to Robert Velter's creation. It is just a shame that the experience is so disjointed in the difficulty stakes. Take the subway stage as an example: If Spirou even touches the left side of the screen, then a life is lost with no warning. Even the easiest enemies pose a challenge, and if you die, the whole stage begins again. Perseverance overcomes practice to see the game through, especially since you're only given one password midway through the entire story. If you can find a copy of this in America, then by all means give it a go – it is worth checking out just for the art style and to see how to push 16-bit graphics to the limit. – JE

The Sporting News: Power Baseball

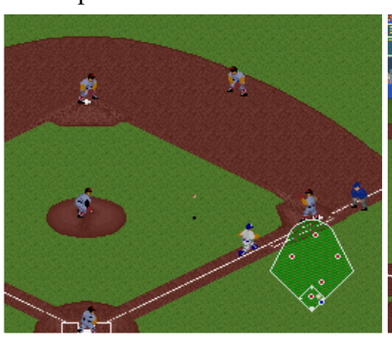
Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Now Production
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







This feature-packed baseball simulation is a conversion of a Japanese game. It doesn't come with a Major League Baseball license, but it does have a Major League Baseball Players Association license, so real players and their statistics are here. In addition, the game's Edit Mode allows users to create their own players and put them in alongside the pros. Team lineups can also be edited, so managers can swap players in and out of starting lineups based on their performance or any other reason. Once ready to play ball, exhibition games and season play can be selected. Exhibition play is a one-game affair, while season play can range from short 26-game campaigns all the way up to 162-game marathons. Standings and stats are saved to the cartridge battery. Once players take the field, the primary camera viewpoint is from behind the batter as the pitcher vs. hitter confrontation takes place. Player models are large, with smooth pitching and swinging animations. Pitching and hitting are easy to execute, though getting the swing timing down takes practice – especially to catch up with fastballs. Standard pitching strategies, such as changing speeds and putting break on pitches, tend to keep opposing hitters off balance pretty well. Pitcher stamina is also closer to real baseball, as starting pitchers can throw 80-90 pitches before fatigue sets in and a bullpen call is needed. Fielding can be a challenge, but an option for automatic fielding can alleviate this concern. The presentation is very nice, with appropriate stat lines for batters as they walk up to the plate and some catchy tunes to accompany the action. All told, this is an enjoyable baseball title with plenty of content and options, including a fun Home Run Derby! Put this game into your starting lineups.



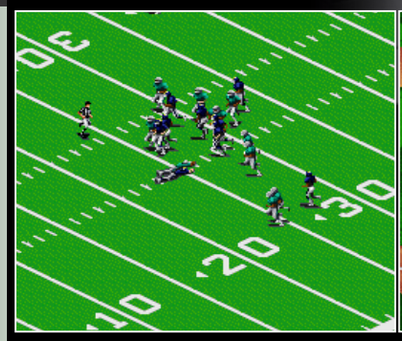


Reflections: This is a sequel to *World Class Baseball* on the TurboGrafx-16, which my brother and I used to play a lot during my senior year of high school back in 1990. It's too bad that it took five years to get a sequel localized, especially a great sequel like this game is. We would've spent time editing our lineups and seeing how our stats compared to each other over cold glasses of Purplesaurus Rex Kool-Aid and kind-of-warm Domino's Pizza, and the Home Run Derby trash talk would have been EPIC. You're still my favorite opponent, little brother. – PS

Sports Illustrated: Championship Football & Baseball

All-American Championship Football (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL (football game only)
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Malibu Games
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★





This game presents the experience of two sports without the hassle of swapping cartridges! Upon starting, you select between football and baseball, each existing independently. In football, you choose your team from a list of cities that are derived from places with actual NFL teams. Before lining up, you have the opportunity to see three options of what play your opponent will make. From that information, you can scroll through the list of plays available to find a corresponding set of three plays that you choose from with X, A, or B. Then, you control either the player with the ball while on offense or a safety when defending. Occasionally during plays, a box will quickly appear if there is a decision to make; choose it by pressing the displayed button. Unfortunately, with a field of graphically uninspired sprites, there isn't much to get excited about. On the other side (which only exists in the NA version of this game), there is a similar setup for baseball, with a choice of teams from cities (again, unofficially the homes of MLB teams). Perhaps as a reflection of the slower-paced nature of the sport, gameplay is mainly either controlling the pitcher and where he throws or the batter and where he hits. If you are overseeing the fielding team, you also have to move the outfielder when the baseball is hit and throw the ball at the bases (even if the runners are stationary and already safe). Once again, there isn't much in the gameplay to keep your interest long enough to want to play a complete season, leaving this game, as a whole, underwhelming. Note: This was released in Europe as *All-American Championship Football*, but did not include the baseball half.





Reflections: On the surface, it might have seemed like a good idea to have two popular sports in a single game, which could be why a magazine like *Sports Illustrated* put their name on it. It's too bad that the gameplay, while functional and identifiable as the individual sports, lacks any sort of entertainment value. I will admit that I found a little joy in the animations of the scoreboards, but with how unresponsive controlling the players felt, this was usually to watch the other team celebrate scoring. Sound effects are a big issue, with a constant and annoying static drone as the cheering of the crowd. It's enough to make you want to actually step outside and play real-life sports. Yep, it's that bad. – KY

Star Fox

Starwing (EU)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Argonaut Software, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★⋆





Fox McCloud and wingmates Slippy, Falco, and Peppy take to the skies in their Arwings to defeat Emperor Andross in this rail shooter. Gameplay is in a third-person perspective behind the Arwing or an optional cockpit view in space, with your fighter able to fly around and aim in limited freedom while on a fixed path. The grandiose visuals feature revolutionary polygonal 3D models that aren't the most detailed but remain appealing in their own way. Three different game paths representing skill levels are available, with each consisting of six or seven dangerous stages such as an ice planet, lava planet, outer space, dinosaur planet, asteroid belt, and more. The combat is riveting with near-constant action as you take on a plethora of air and ground targets with lasers and limited Nova Bombs. Your wingmates come from behind to assist from time to time but usually have to be bailed out from a bogey on their tail. The Arwing has the ability to fly on its side to get through tight situations or roll left/right to avoid/deflect incoming fire, while retro-rockets and speed boosts help prevent collisions. Energy can be restored by flying through rings, and pickups can be obtained: extra Nova Bombs, shields, Laser Blaster upgrades, and repairs to broken wings. Ace combat skills and reflexes will be tested by the behemoth boss commanders and when flying inside planet cores and battleships. The presentation receives high marks with short mission briefings and delightful stage outros featuring charming chatter between the four wingmates. The lustrous, cinematic soundtrack complements each mission perfectly. While there is some slowdown and choppy framerate issues when it gets busier, experiencing the thrills of this unique universe is a treat.





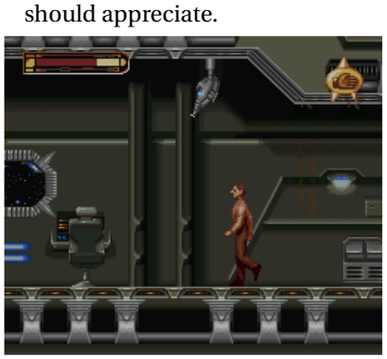
Reflections: Powered by the Super FX coprocessor graphics chip, *Star Fox* became the poster child for Nintendo's new technology that helped to squeeze as much out of the Super Nintendo as it could. The chip was designed by British company Argonaut Software, who also co-developed *Star Fox* along with Nintendo. The Super FX chip succeeded as a marketing counterpunch to the gimmicky "Blast Processing" line that Sega was touting for the Genesis while actually contributing in creating games that otherwise weren't possible on the SNES. At the same time, Nintendo and Argonaut managed to create a bold new gaming franchise (a space shooter no less) with a batch of beloved characters that would reappear in Star Fox adventures on almost every subsequent Nintendo console and handheld. – PC

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine – Crossroads of Time

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Novotrade
Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
(PAL: Virgin Interactive Entertainment)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★




Take on the role of Commander Benjamin Sisko in this game based on the sci-fi television series. The space station Deep Space Nine has been set upon by Bajoran terrorists, and it's your job to thwart their plot while uncovering the sources of political turmoil in the areas nearby. Run, jump, climb, and shoot your phaser to defend yourself against hostile enemies. You'll take on a variety of perilous missions, such as locating explosive devices before they can detonate, navigating through a wrecked starship to retrieve its tactical computer, and, as Major Kira Nerys, piloting a Runabout craft in pursuit of a terrorist ship! The danger level seems to increase with each new side-scrolling quest, so don't forget to bring along a batch of bilitrium grenades for blowing up stubborn obstacles. Finding security cards grants access to otherwise unreachable areas, and keeping your eyes peeled for food helps restore health. Your tricorder assists with deciphering puzzles, so it can be an invaluable tool as well. Seek out aid and guidance from familiar characters (some of whom you briefly become) including Dr. Julian Bashir, Chief Miles O'Brien, and Odo. The jumping physics and platforming take a little getting used to, and the missions can get fairly repetitive, but you move at a brisk pace, which helps keep things fresh. The game's background art and settings are said to be painstakingly recreated from the show, which Star Trek aficionados should appreciate.




Reflections: Let's take the "Crossroads of Time" back to 1997… In college, I had a roommate who literally spent 60 percent of his time watching *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. The other 40 percent was spent playing video games. I never saw him do an assignment for school, and I'm pretty sure he never even attended class. The Deep Space Nine theme song was branded into my eardrums, but I never actually watched the series myself. Often hearing the show from the next room, I imagined what the settings and characters looked like, passively crafting my own versions by interpreting the audio and inventing my own visual elements. It was a strange way to ingest a TV show. Years later, when I finally sat down and actually watched *Deep Space Nine*, I was a little disappointed – my imagined version was cooler! What really bugs me, though, is this fact – had he known about this game, my old roommate could have spent 100 percent of his time with both Star Trek *and* video games – at the same time! – DM

Star Trek: Starfleet Academy – Starship Bridge Simulator

Genre: Action, Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Prepare for the most intense schooling of your life at Starfleet Academy, where you learn to become a Federation starship crew member. Before beginning your education, you can go through basic training, which introduces most of the functions and controls of a spaceship. Each day, you have a new training mission in the briefing room, where most of the gameplay occurs. For each year at the school, you are given five different simulations aboard a starship that revolve around diplomacy, science, and combat. Each mission begins at a starbase, requiring you to warp to your destination. All stations, including the helm, are accessed from the menu by pressing SELECT. The D-pad controls smaller movements of the ship, X and B control ship speed, and Y and A shoot the phasers and torpedoes, respectively, although you must be in Red Alert to access weapons. The various simulations are not always straightforward, requiring you to use a combination of skills and resources, such as the sensors, science officer, and your ability to hail others in the sector. After completing your training for the day, return to your room and sleep to save your progress and receive a password. You can also head over to the training simulator and experience a mission straight out of a Star Trek movie or grab another player and enter head-to-head combat with your choice of spacecraft! The music features familiar tunes from *Star Trek: The Original Series* as well as new songs, and the visuals feel right at home for this universe. You won't need to be familiar with Star Trek to enjoy the game, but it sure helps you appreciate it.





Reflections: When I think of what I want in a Star Trek game, it tends toward simulation and pretending to be a Starfleet officer. Dialogue choices during diplomatic missions are fairly superficial, as there are obvious good and bad choices, leaving this aspect disappointing. Learning to maneuver the ship takes time, but figuring out how to accurately read the sensors makes controlling the ship feel more comfortable. It was a smart decision to allow you to "skip" a few missions by not requiring a passing grade for all. This prevents you from getting stuck and frustrated over just one part of the game. With three difficulty levels and the two-player combat mode, this title is one you may find yourself returning to at warp speed. – KY

Star Trek: The Next Generation – Future's Past

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Spectrum Holobyte
Publisher: Spectrum Holobyte
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Looks like those pesky Romulans are up to their old tricks again! Not surprisingly, the valiant crew aboard the *USS Enterprise* is called in to keep an eye on things. Based on the popular TV series, this single-player title offers three main areas of gameplay: commanding the *Enterprise* from the Bridge, controlling an Away Team on various missions, and doing battle with enemy ships. From a first-person perspective on the Bridge, you can set a course to various planets, receive info on your surroundings, get instructions from the briefing room, or visit engineering to initiate repairs. To organize an Away Team, choose up to four crew members with differing abilities, and dispatch them to an array of top-down destinations for carrying out their objectives. Don't forget to equip a tricorder to examine alien environments or aid the injured, and be ready to fire phasers at foes. Missions throughout the game include rescuing trapped miners, delivering medical supplies, and aiding a distressed ship. Once you enter into combat with hostile craft, the view shifts to an overhead angle so that you can attack the enemy with phasers and photon torpedoes. Keep an eye on your shields, and consider surrendering if you take too much damage. Many of the show's most beloved characters make appearances in the game, including Commander William Riker, Geordi La Forge, Data, Worf, and of course, Captain Jean-Luc Picard. This title is faithful to its source material, with many details accurately captured in the character art, settings, and even the sound effects! Star Trek fans will almost certainly be ENGAGED.





Reflections: If you love *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, you will likely be particularly delighted with the fact that, with this game, you're no longer just watching your favorite show – you're controlling it! You can monitor the *Enterprise*'s shields from the Bridge, get hailed by hostile foes, set warp speeds for interplanetary travel, and even play as Lieutenant Worf during space battles! There's a lot to do, and Trekkies should be overjoyed with the amount of engagement this game allows. Enjoy, and remember these words of wisdom from Captain Picard: "Every choice we make allows us to manipulate the future." Or in this case, *Future's Past* for the SNES. – DM

Stargate

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment, Tantalus Interactive
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment (PAL: Metro Games)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Warp through the mysterious Stargate to the perilous world of Abydos! Take control of Colonel Jack O'Neil, stoic commando and avid troubleshooter of dimensional disturbances, choosing one of three difficulty levels before setting off on your dangerous mission. Run, jump, climb, and blast your way through various levels of play in this fluid but ultimately imperfect movie tie-in. From the opening level, you begin searching for your scattered team of soldiers and some specific items. The menu at the top of the screen helps you monitor your life gauge, weapon status, and other essentials while various allies, including Egyptologist Daniel Jackson, task you with objectives along the way. Earlier stages in deserts, caves, and villages feel drab and colorless, but the art direction becomes more interesting in the enemy armory and Ra's Pyramids; these later locales feature a distinctive blend of futuristic and Ancient Egyptian elements that feel relatively vibrant and immersive. Massive scarab beetles, wily Horus guards, and other aggressive minions try to thwart your progress, but enemy sprites are mostly standard fare, featuring limited animation and predictable attack patterns. Your primary weapon boasts unlimited ammo, but mind that itchy trigger finger – your machine gun is prone to overheating if fired continuously. Trick out your trusty gun with power-ups such as "Rapid Fire" and "Wide" at every opportunity, and remember to replenish your stock of grenades, as these are the most powerful weapons available. Third-person glider-flying segments feel shoehorned into the experience and are completely bereft of fun, and the few boss fights throughout are similarly dull and disappointing. The music is repetitive and unexciting, including possibly the worst track ever to accompany a video game boss battle. All things considered, this is a somewhat serviceable but generally uninspired title.





Reflections: Based on the 1994 film starring Kurt Russell, *Stargate* is a game that feels both extremely polished and in need of serious refinement at the same time. Many of this title's most fun and thoughtful touches are on display in our protagonist's extremely fluid animation and in the sheer amount of nuance to the physical actions that can be performed. However, bland and unimaginative environments, mediocre platforming, and occasionally complicated controls tend to tarnish the overall experience. This certainly won't please the Colonel, but at least he'll look silky smooth while being average! – DM

Steel Talons

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Panoramic Software
Publisher: Left Field Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Do you have the guts to be a member of the elite chopper team known as the Steel Talons? Find out in this port of the 1991 combat flight simulation arcade game. In addition to Training and Expert stages, there are 12 timed missions to complete – 10 of them with basic "destroy all targets" objectives, and the other two requiring you to navigate your chopper through a canyon. During missions, you have a choice of views from behind the helicopter or from within its cockpit, with information such as speed, altitude, radar, map, and targets remaining located on the bottom of the screen. The flat-shaded polygonal graphics of both the terrain and enemies get the job done, but mountains and other large objects tend to pop up out of nowhere, making them difficult to avoid. Flying the chopper can also be a chore, largely due to its insanely stiff controls. During combat missions, you use the chopper's cannon and limited missiles to take out ground units, such as tanks and jeeps, as well as air units, such as fighter jets and enemy helicopters. Different times of day, types of terrain (desert, mountains, etc.), and weather (fog, haze, etc.) accompany each mission. As the game progresses, missions become increasingly difficult. This is mostly because of the ridiculously short amount of time allotted for destroying targets. To make things more harrowing, some missions start you off with enemies hot on your tail, giving you virtually no chance to succeed. There is a simultaneous two-player mode, but it's not what you'd expect. Basically, your pal can control the altitude and the cannon/missiles while you fly the chopper. The soundtrack is full of military-themed tunes, but they grate on the ears and sound as though they're coming from an Atari 2600. This is a port to avoid.



Reflections: I love me some old school games with polygonal graphics! My favorite early polygonal game would have to be *Stunt Driver* for MS-DOS. There is something charming about those big, blocky cars smashing into each other while hitting loops and opened drawbridges. When it comes to the SNES library, I tend to stay away from any game with polygonal graphics. The console just wasn't equipped for such a big leap in technology. They tried to make up for this by installing Super FX chips into some carts, but this often resulted in poor frame rates and visuals. Personally, I'm sticking to MS-DOS for my polygonal fix. – MV

Sterling Sharpe: End 2 End

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





It's back to the virtual gridiron with this 11-on-11 football simulation, bolstered by the endorsement of popular Green Bay wide receiver Sterling Sharpe. Sharpe's role in the game is two-fold; he plays on the field for Green Bay while offering analysis and in-game reactions. Since the game doesn't have an NFL or NFLPA license, team names are limited to cities and players are denoted by numbers. Hardcore fans will be able to figure out who is who, but more casual players won't really understand. For a title so late in the SNES lifespan, this game is light on features; while it does offer exhibition (called End 2 End) play, an All-Star mode, and a Playoff Mode, there isn't an option for full season play. This lack of features could be overcome with stellar action on the field, but that's just not the case here. Passing is frustratingly inconsistent, especially for a game with a wide receiver's endorsement. Receivers get open and catch passes when the game wants them to and not really due to player control or skill. The running game, thankfully, is better and will be where a lot of the offense takes place. For some reason, button inputs have delayed responses; bringing up passing icons takes just a bit too long, especially when a quarterback is under duress. Even play calling, which smartly uses all of the controller's face and shoulder buttons, seems to lag. The visuals are adequate, with decently animated players and the camera at the familiar three-quarter view. The sound is a mixed bag, with occasionally great effects (such as an eerie-sounding thunderstorm) counteracted by bouts of silence for no reason. Overall, while playable, this is a lackluster experience when all is said and done. It's a benchwarmer at best.



Reflections: I wonder if Sterling Sharpe or Emmitt Smith thought that their football games were any good back in 1995. Sure, they'd publicly say that the games are all right... but come on. They were playing *Madden* or *Tecmo Super Bowl*, like just about everyone else was during the early and mid-1990s. I am pretty confident in saying that there weren't likely very many *End 2 End* parties at Sterling Sharpe's house. If there were one, I could imagine Brett Favre shouting at the TV, wondering why Sterling couldn't catch a pass in his own game. He'd have a point, too. – PS

Stone Protectors

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Eurocom
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★







When the evil Zok and his army try to steal the Great Crystal, Princess Opal breaks it into pieces and sends them away to their destined keepers: a rock band. They fuse with the stones and transform into powerful trolls. Now they must stop Zok and save Mythrandir! Like any beat 'em up, you walk right, stop to fight enemies, and continue. The five heroes – Cornelius, Clifford, Chester, Angus, and Maxwell – have different speeds and strengths but can all kick, punch, jump, and use longer-range attacks. By executing specific button sequences, they can unleash special moves. For example, Maxwell plays drums and rains fireballs, and Clifford plays guitar to summon lightning. Items sometimes appear on the ground, such as food for health, weapons, and stones which can be collected to gain extra lives. The options menu allows you to set skill levels for each player, and you can activate "hostility," allowing your characters to hit each other. If you don't have a another human participant, there's a CPU second player mode. The AI seems to match your performance but sometimes only stands and distracts enemies. There's also a two-player "tournament" mode, but only the heroes are available. This game uses the cartoon's locations and visual elements, although this still results in the usual stage tropes: ice, mine, woods, and even *two* elevator levels. Most Saurian Guard enemy designs come straight from the show, but they're repetitive. Some wear armor, but after you break it, they're the same underneath. The bosses are a bit more creative, and some are from the series, but you fight Zok's henchman Zink thrice. The music is good, and when the heroes play their instruments, they sound appropriate. For being a licenced game of a forgotten cartoon, this is better than it has any right to be.





Reflections: I remember seeing ads for the show and thinking "Ugly troll dolls ripping off TMNT? Stupid." For this review, I watched some episodes, and it *does* seem stupid (but if you liked it, that's great). The cartoon wasn't successful for a variety of reasons, such as the troll doll characters and the hackneyed "1990s 'tude" style. One of the Stone Protectors plays keytar. How RAD is that? If you Google "Stone Protectors," this game is a top result alongside the show, so it has some appeal. There's an unreleased Genesis prototype too, which was found in 2010. – KN

Street Combat

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★







Here's a game as generic as its name, a slipshod fighter devoid of plot, context, and any sense of aesthetic style. The hero, apparently, is Steven, a mullet-loving pretty boy who must "destroy a group of ruthless villains" who are itching to murder a nameless "global leader." Yep, nothing inspires more fear than a scrawny, club-wielding clown named Dozo, a skateboarding robot called Helmut, or the spandex-clad final boss, C.J. But Steven isn't worried. Before the start of any match, he can don a suit of armor, thus doubling the playable roster to a whopping cast of two: Steven… and Steven again! Indeed, the other six combatants are strictly hands-off in the single-player experience (cheats notwithstanding), existing to be pummeled and nothing more. Yet, Steven's own dual forms play almost identically, possessing similar attacks, power levels, and even the same disjointed animation. In fact, the entire fighting system is artless and mechanically hollow, tethered to a misconceived control scheme in which X jumps, L and R block, and A performs a special attack. The result? Battles are floundering, flailing affairs, featuring little strategy and plenty of button mashing as characters leap around the screen with the same predictable attacks. This is especially evident in the "2players" versus mode – here, the expected roster of eight fighters is available from the outset, but their misbegotten sprites only serve to spotlight the gameplay's unbalanced design. Street punk Tyrone, for instance, can spam fireball projectiles with a single button press, while the towering G.I. Jim strikes with a javelin-sized sword. Worse, those willing to suffer the broken gameplay must also endure bland locales, weird bonus stages, obnoxious sounds, inconsistent hit detection, and a dearth of options. No doubt, the title strives for its wacky, B-movie vibe, but all it provides is a D-minus game.





Reflections: Do games benefit from having a plot or running narrative? Do gamers require some level of context or motivation to fully embrace an artificial world? Can a game be entertaining without possessing a charismatic avatar for players to adopt? *Street Combat*, by offering none of these things, inadvertently reveals how crucial both storytelling and character design are to a game's overall appeal. Indeed, one need only seek the game's Japanese original; based on the popular Ranma ½ anime and manga franchise, that version is leagues more endearing thanks to the likable characters and added context, despite playing just as poorly as its Western counterpart. – DA

Street Fighter Alpha 2

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★⋆







A prequel to the legendary Street Fighter II series, this late SNES release sports an impressive roster of 18 characters and stands as one of the system's grandest swansongs. This fighter is a radical upgrade from previous entries in both presentation and mechanics, providing a flamboyant cast redefined by more dramatic, dynamic action. Beloved characters such as Ryu and Chun-Li are still familiar despite their more youthful forms, but others, such as the hulking Birdie or mystical Rose, offer exciting new ways to approach battles. Indeed, the game is a skillful fusion of past and present, preserving the classic six-button formula while adding layers of nuance and advanced technique. Most notable is the revamped combo system – normal and special attacks slowly fill a three-tiered power meter that can be spent to enact both Super and Custom Combos. Super Combos are flurries of punches and kicks, their power dependent on the gauge's level, while Customs allow players to string together a rapid succession of improvised attacks, draining a third or more of the meter's capacity. Similarly, players can now blunt an opponent's strike via an Alpha Counter, using this same energy reserve to perform a vicious reversal. The complexities don't end there; players can choose between Manual and Auto styles of play (the latter providing CPU-assistance in executing some maneuvers), roll out of certain catastrophic falls, block attacks while caught midair, and even guard while being thrown. Artistically, the game is a celebration of color, with large, expressive sprites, atmospheric backdrops, and plenty of pyrotechnic flourishes that enhance the action. In fact, the SNES seems to buckle under this constant exuberance, the game "pausing" before each round to load all that incredible graphical data. Alas, the music and sound effects are less robust, perhaps compromised by the system's already straining hardware. But considering the feature-rich nature of the entire package, these minor complaints are easily countered.





Reflections: Ah, the age-old question: Which SNES Street Fighter game is the best? The safe bet will always be *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting*, thanks to its classic template and balanced design. Others will cite *Super Street Fighter II* for its added content. But for those needing a more contemporary experience? *Street Fighter Alpha 2* is the definitive answer, a title that still surprises with its modern mechanics and sensibilities. Indeed, it's a great addition to a series that, at the time, was desperately seeking new ideas. – DA

Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







The seminal one-on-one, best-of-three-rounds fighting game with fists and feet returns with a significant upgrade, featuring two distinct modes available for both the arcade-style and V.S. Battle play types. The Normal mode is a port of the arcade's *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition*. It features minor rebalancing of characters and their attacks, such as E. Honda's Hundred Hand Slap and Zangief's Spinning Clothesline now allowing for lateral movement, and Ken/Ryu's Hurricane Kick being able to be initiated in midair. Non-special attacks have also been added, such as Guile's Bazooka Knee and Chun-Li's Flip Kick. The biggest and most welcome addition is the ability to select the four Grand Masters to play: boxer Balrog, Spanish assassin Vega, Muay Thai fighter Sagat, and criminal mastermind M. Bison. The Turbo mode (based on the arcade's *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting*) is available in one of five speeds. It includes everything seen in Normal mode while adding a different default character palette, further character and attack refinement, and more special moves, such as a Fireball for Chun-Li, a Yoga Teleport for Dhalsim, and a Vertical Rolling Attack for Blanka. All the punches, jump kicks, throws, and combos are still here, but the brawling has been perfected for a supreme experience.





Reflections: *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* is the definitive 16-bit console version for the original, non-Super version of this game, not only because it features better graphics and sound than the Genesis one, but also because the default controller for that Sega system only offers three buttons, making it nearly unplayable without buying the six-button control pad. Somehow, the blood missing from the original SNES port made its way back into this release (I wonder if Capcom had to twist Nintendo's arm?). Many tournaments for this title were had at friends' houses and family gatherings, with the controller being passed from the loser to a new challenger for the next match. In my day, I was (and probably still am) a formidable *Street Fighter II* opponent, using Ryu as my main fighter and Chun-Li as a backup. Hadouken! I would be remiss not to mention the Grand Master names being changed from the Japanese originals. In the US, Vega became M. Bison, Balrog became Vega, and M. Bison became Balrog. All these swaps were due to M. Bison (Mike Bison) sounding too similar to Mike Tyson, on whom the character was already heavily based in appearance. – PC

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

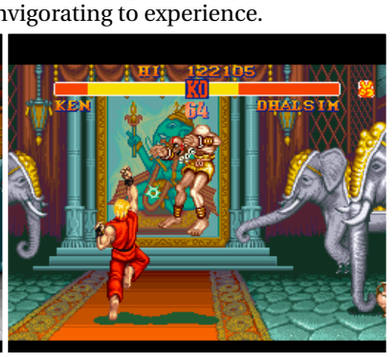
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★⋆





Eight international martial artists face off to be the best in the world in this groundbreaking one-on-one fighting game. In best-two-out-three-round fights, two combatants on a 2D scrolling plane bludgeon each other with kicks, punches, crouching attacks, jumping attacks, and grapples/throws until one fighter's energy bar is depleted. Each warrior has his/her own unique strikes, attack strengths and weaknesses, jumping/walking speeds, and at least two special moves activated either with a combination of the D-pad and a punch/kick button or by rapidly pressing a punch/kick button. Blocking is accomplished by pushing back on the D-pad while under assault. There are six attack buttons (usually three for punches and three for kicks); this allows for a wide variety of moves that vary in quickness and power, making for a deeply strategic experience, especially when factoring in the special moves and matchups between different fighter types. For example, the quick and strong-legged Chun-Li may be a tough out for the slow grappler Zangief, but the long-limbed Dhalsim may challenge her, especially with his Yoga Fire ability. Characters such as Ryu or Ken, however, may be more suitable as all-around fighters with their handy Hadouken projectiles and Dragon Punch uppercuts. All 12 characters (four unselectable bosses are unlocked after defeating the playable combatants) have their own unique stage environment and music theme that complement them and their world area quite nicely. A distinct two-player mode is available outside of the normal arcade route, but the bosses are still not selectable, and participants must input a code to use the same warrior. Although not perfect, this fighting game is a true tour de force, with engaging characters, fantastic graphics and sound effects, smooth gameplay, great computer AI, and a well-thought-out design that is invigorating to experience.





Reflections: *Street Fighter II* was an absolute game changer both in arcades and on home consoles, establishing the style, rules, and feel of the fighting genre to a much larger extent than its mostly forgotten, clunky predecessor. Its high quality resulted in a myriad of similar fighting games being released in its wake and in the rejuvenation of the fighting genre itself. It would become the longest-lasting fighting game series and to this day is highly respected both on the casual and competitive scenes. The SNES port keeps almost the entire arcade experience intact, save for altering bonus rounds, removing some sounds and voice samples, and eliminating most of the blood. – PC

Street Hockey '95

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: GTE Vantage
Publisher: GTE Entertainment
Players: 1–4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆





Shred in this side-scrolling Street Sports title that presents inline hockey in a gritty yet surreal '90s veneer. Up to four people can play as one of nine skaters with unique styles and catchphrases. Six outdoor hockey venues are available, ranging from a dry pool to a rooftop, each with different hazard placements along the walls and floor. There are five different modes for 2-on-2 hockey play with goalies: Fat Point (play to a specific score without faceoffs), Rush (play for a specific number of minutes), Whack (Rush with closer nets and no faceoffs), Crammit (Whack with extra points for throwing yourself into the net after scoring), and Hot Puck (Fat Point with a hot-potato mechanic for bonus scoring). There is also a Practice mode to get comfortable with the game's pace, and a Tournament mode lets you take a team of three through various modes and matchups. Three intensity settings (Slack Off, Hype Around, and Blow Out) determine the speed of play. Fluid character animations captured through digitized actors pair with digitized voices to give the game a unique look and feel that is technically impressive. Controls are challenging to master, so playing on a lower intensity setting early is advised. The animations also mesh with gameplay; skating backwards, gloving down the puck, and slide stopping evoke hints of the sport surprisingly well, despite the inauthentic recreation of actual inline hockey.





Reflections: As a lifelong player, I'm glad inline hockey got some SNES representation. Nothing disappoints me more, however, than anonymizing this game's cast. Rather than settle for actors, it tapped into Southern California's greatest talents! Jess Dyrenforth (Lars) started Fifty50, a company dedicated to aggressive inline equipment. He also co-starred in the 1992 Street Scene film *Dare to Air* alongside skaters John Tyson (Buz), Chris Garrett (Baruk), and Angie Walton (Lenya), the latter of whom founded the magazine *Daily Bread*. Alan Vano (Victor), A.J. Jackson (Abe), Kim Bowie (Grace), and Donna Dennis (Jill) were four of the 10 "Warriors" on the six-month run of the television show *Blade Warriors*, an *American Gladiators* clone themed around rollerblading. Jackson, in particular, was known for working hard to spread skating and inline hockey to youth communities. Vano and Dyrenforth were part of the 1993 rollerblading movie *Airborne*. Garrett was a decorated pro. As for Scott Sherman (Hex)? No record of his inline acumen, but he did go on to be a senior-level developer for *Gears of War*, which shreds in its own way. – DG

Street Racer

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Vivid Image
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Welcome to this colorful racing circuit! Listen to those engines roar, and smell that burning rubber! You have over 20 tracks to master, so get moving in a behind-the-car perspective! Each one of your fellow racers pilots a vehicle that fits their personality. See that big, green guy over there with the bolts in his neck? That's Frank. His hot rod's equipped with quick acceleration and dangerous attacks. And check out that white-bearded man over there, tinkering with his car. That's Hodja. Don't underestimate him; his vehicle handles like a dream! There are eight selectable competitors in all, so study up on their strengths and flaws in speed, defense, and more. Then head to the starting line for Practice, Head to Head, or Championship races, keeping in mind that you may want to try battling in Rumble's arenas or scoring goals in Soccer later. Okay, the starting lights are beginning to count down – remember to keep an eye on your damage meter! Each one of your fellow racers has custom short-range attacks to slow you down. Look for yellow tool icons that repair any damage sustained, and keep your eyes peeled for blue turbo icons that provide helpful bursts of speed. The light just turned green, hold on tight! You're approaching the first bend already! Feel that wind in your hair! Hey, that sneaky bully Biff is trying to take a swipe at you! Whew, that was a close one! Staying on the track is vital, as veering off course can cost serious time and put you far behind the pack. You're approaching the finish line now; think you have what it takes to get behind the wheel for the next race? The keys are all yours! Good luck!





Reflections: Here's one lesson I learned during a childhood of gaming: Never judge a video game solely by its box art. A dazzling illustration could be masking a horrendous game, and a poor piece of art could be blocking an awesome game from getting the love that it deserves! In *Street Racer*'s case, behind that exceedingly cheesy illustration hides a surprisingly fun and competent title. Boasting a playful and cartoony art style, the graphics are polished, and the animation is quite fluid. But seriously, with all that hard work and craftsmanship put into the game, they couldn't think of a less generic title? Gaming lesson number two: Don't judge a game by its name, either. – DM

Strike Gunner S.T.G
Super Strike Gunner (EU)

Genre: Shooter, Action
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Athena
Publisher: NTVIC (PAL: Activision)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







In this vertical shooter, peace on Earth is threatened by the treacherous Sovinian army – and aliens! The player takes control of a Strike Gunner fighter jet, which has available before each mission a selection of 15 unique special weapons, ranging from homing missiles and laser cannons to plasma shields and screen-clearing sonic waves. Tethered to a dwindling meter, each one yields different results but can only be used once per game, so careful strategy is required if a beloved weapon is to be saved until later. In addition, the player's aircraft has a standard laser spread that can be upgraded via icons drops as the stages progress; these items can also refill the special weapon bar. Losing a life results in the guns reverting back to a weaker state, and dodging bullets and a myriad of enemy aircraft, tanks, and even asteroids can become tricky. The sprites are all well detailed, but the presentation falls flat with the lackluster backgrounds that don't enhance the action (although when the hulking bullet-sponge boss battles begin, there wouldn't be any time to notice them anyway). With the two-player option allowing the ships to join together for a quirky double-control-and-attack feature and the replayability to see what each special weapon does, there's a fun title here – if a little dreary in places.





Reflections: I'm usually terrible at bullet hell shooters, but this game isn't completely unforgiving, so it is much more accessible to play. The different weapons are a cool touch, (if you want to check them all out, it'll take just under two playthroughs), and I like the idea of being forced out of your comfort zone by not being allowed to use the same type over and over. The biggest quibble with it is that the bosses take an age to die. Learning boss patterns was a more prevalent part of gaming back in the '90s, but having it go on for an eternity just becomes dull. Aside from the stage where you are flying over the surface of the moon, the level backgrounds are truly boring and add nothing to the presentation – much like the music tracks, which are drab once they start repeating. It is how shooter games should be, though, in that you ignore the nonsense story and just go blow stuff up for kicks. – JE

Stunt Race FX

Genre: Racing
Release Date: July 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo, Argonaut Software
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Touting the Super FX chip in its name, this third-person 3D polygonal racer offers a roster of five vehicles scattered across four modes of play: Speed Trax, where the player races a circuit against AI opponents; Stunt Trax, where the player tries to collect 40 stars in obstacle courses; Battle Trax, where two players compete on four unique short tracks; or Test Run, where the player takes the 4WD truck for a few laps on a test course. Each of the three Speed Trax difficulty classes consists of four courses plus a midpoint bonus game of taking laps in the bulky Trailer to earn extra lives or time. Completing a class converts Test Run into Free Trax mode, allowing time trial racing on any course in a defeated circuit. Completing the Expert class unlocks Master, and completing Master unlocks the 2WD vehicle for every mode. The limited draw distance of the 3D terrain and less-than-clear minimap are usually compensated for by bold arrows in the environment, but sometimes turns sneak up on players, making the use of L/R to swing more sharply as necessary a skill as easing on the throttle, deploying boost, or tilting the nose of the vehicle to land smoothly. Excellent course design takes players along scenic routes through canyons, underwater paths, city streets, and more. The scenery pairs with a clean interface to help offset the game's relative lack of depth and choppy frame rate, which take patience to acclimate to. Buckle up... and keep the car's eyes on the road!





Reflections: *Stunt Race FX* gets a lot of mileage out of its artistic choices, which range from the expressive eyes of each vehicle type to the bold-stroke designs of some levels. The leaping dolphins and glass underwater tunnel in the Aqua Tunnel level of Speed Trax are prime examples of this ambition. The large physical objects and the player's interaction with them make the decision to go to 3D feel not only meaningful, but also essential. Unfortunately, there's only so much of that visual polish and charm that can be effectively communicated with the hardware afforded it. Even when the game finds interesting avenues to explore, such as the unlockable Radio Control race in Stunt Trax, it proves to be stilted by camera angles and limited draw distance that detract from the overall experience. *Stunt Race FX* is energetic, varied, and fun. It's also a title that simply can't outrace the limitations of its chipset namesake. – DG

Sunset Riders

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★







Four Wild West bounty hunters set out to take down wanted criminals and their gangs in this exceptional run and gun shooter. Players must gun down scores of bandits in Old West environments, such as towns, a mountain, a saloon, a train, and even on horseback. Most stages travel left to right, often with two different stage levels that can be jumped between. Players can choose to play as Steve or Billy, who have pistols, or Bob or Cormano, who are armed with a spread-fire rifle and shotgun, respectively. Gameplay is smooth and quick, with players shooting in all eight directions to fend off approaching outlaws who often pop up from stage scenery. Meanwhile, incoming bullets have to be avoided by moving, jumping, or sliding. Stages are detailed and have interesting features such as hand walking on suspended ropes, throwing dynamite back at enemies, or even humorously jumping and running on stampeding bulls. Weapon upgrades are available in the form of doubling the weapon to fire in two directions and rapid fire, both which are very much needed to stay clear from one-hit deaths. Boss battles take place on a single screen, with the player usually aiming at both stage planes. They are all very frantic and require near-constant precise movement and shooting for success. The overall pace of the game suits the steep challenge perfectly, with a couple of shooting gallery bonus rounds serving as respites. The graphics and animation are top-notch, with the cartoony style lending itself well to the comical moments found throughout. The presentation shines with nice cutscenes, audio dialogue at the ends of stages, and a cinematic, animated opening. The soundtrack receives high marks for energetic Western-influenced songs that complement the fast-paced play. With a great theme and fantastic action that doesn't let up, this rootin'-tootin' title is one of the best on the SNES.





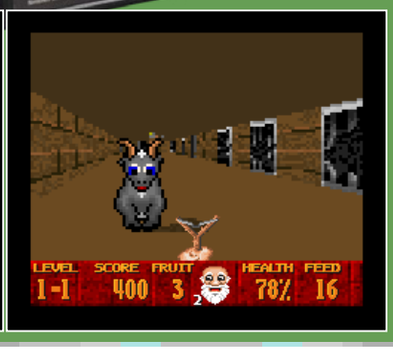
Reflections: A four-player arcade cabinet originally, this port thankfully landed on the Super NES retaining almost all of the excellent experience. Sure, some censorship exists (different death animations, more conservative barflies, etc.), some enemies were changed, and some stages were trimmed/altered (especially the mountain one), but this version of the game is one that you can hold up to note how well the console could handle straight arcade translations, particularly when compared to the rival Sega Genesis, which usually suffered from inferior arcade ports – especially in this case. – PC

Super 3D Noah's Ark

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Wisdom Tree
Publisher: Wisdom Tree
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Rare
★★







Noah's task is to get restless animals to fall asleep on board the biblical Ark in this first-person shooter. Armed with a feed-launching slingshot, he must fend off kicking goats and spitting sheep, antelopes, ostriches, and oxes. The pesky beasts attack until enough feed puts them to sleep. To continue to the next labyrinth-like stage, Noah must seek out the stairs, often by first obtaining one or two keys to pass through areas behind locked doors. Six stage bosses, including a kangaroo and an elephant, await at the end of each main area. The controls are fine, as Noah can freely roam and strafe around the stages, but the terrible frame rate makes movement choppy, especially when several creatures/objects are on the screen at once. This, coupled with the mediocre graphics, makes the game harder to play, especially when trying to view what's at long distances. It's also tough to turn around quickly, making a quick death a real possibility when an enemy is spitting at Noah from behind. Noah is assisted by bandages and breadcrumbs to restore health, two upgrades to the main feed launcher weapon for rapid fire, and two more powerful launchers that use cantaloupes and watermelons to put critters into slumber. Secret areas can be found with much-needed weapon and ammo stashes, and collecting fruit contributes to extra lives. There's some heart, charm, and a little humor here, but technically, this game is stuck underwater.

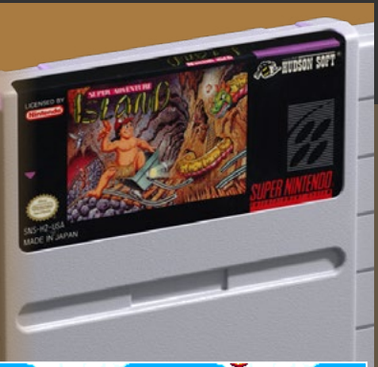




Reflections: This is a clone of id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D*, with the art and sound assets simply reskinned and retooled. Urban legend says that id Software gave their code to Wisdom Tree out of anger after Nintendo censored their console port. The reality is Color Dreams/Wisdom Tree licensed the engine from id Software for use in a *Hellraiser* NES game that never quite got off the ground due to the hardware limitations and potential high costs involved in manufacturing. Instead of letting the engine go to waste, the decision was made to use it for what would be the only unlicensed SNES game released during the console's natural life. To get around the SNES lockout system, the cart has a passthrough system, requiring another SNES game to be inserted into it before powering on, similar to how a Game Genie operates. – PC

Super Adventure Island

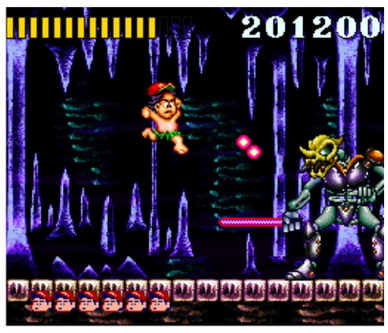
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Master Higgins is at it again, saving his lady from the evil Dark Cloak. Continuing the same style as the NES series, Higgins must work through Adventure Island's five areas, each with three stages plus a distinct boss, such as a rock-spitting squid or a large snake. This is a difficult task, as Higgins is always one hit from death. Running out of lives means he'll have to use one of his limited continues. Also hindering him is his raging hunger, shown as an energy meter that slowly drops and can only be replenished by collecting fruit. Coming to the frugivore's aid is a skateboard, which speeds him around and allows him to take an extra hit from the adorable island enemies, such as belly-sliding penguins and bouncing jelly blobs. On the offensive side, he sees the return of his trusty weapons: the hammer and boomerang. Higgins can continue to collect his weapon to level it up, allowing him to have an additional projectile on the screen and turning them into fire when maxed. If the difficulty of this game seems daunting, use the level select code (L + RIGHT + X + START) the second time the title screen shows to drop Higgins at the beginning of any area. Other than the fact that a super jump is an awkward DOWN + B, this is a smooth, well-designed game that is worth the effort to carry out Master Higgins's goal of rescuing Jeanie Jungle and taking down little Dark Cloak.





Reflections: Normally, I cannot get into high-difficulty platformers, but once I fell into the groove of how *Super Adventure Island* works, I found it satisfying to make my way through each stage. The game keeps things interesting by having a variety of level types, such as swimming and ice physics stages. The second form of the final boss even throws a curveball by requiring a different tactic to defeat than just "throw weapons – don't get hit." While I enjoyed this game on its own merits, I was disappointed that Hudson Soft left out some elements from the NES games. Something simple like a map screen would have made it a more complete experience. I especially felt the absence of Higgins's cute dinosaur friends from the NES sequels. Considering that this game came out between *Adventure Island 2* and *3*, why get rid of them? – KY

Super Adventure Island II

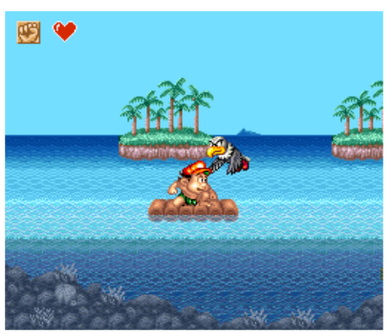
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★





Master Higgins finds himself with amnesia after washing up on a foreign shore; his wife, Tina, is elsewhere, similarly afflicted! Unlike previous games in the series, Higgins must collect weapons, armor, and magic spells throughout platforming stages to reunite with his love. He starts on Waku-Waku Island and travels by raft to six others on the overhead world map. While rafting, Higgins encounters random platforming stages with a handful of easy enemies where he only needs to travel to either edge of the small area. The basic goal of the game is to defeat the boss of each island to collect Stones, which are keys to new areas. On an island, Higgins attacks (default punch), runs, and jumps across a side view of themed terrain, such as Hiya-Hiya's ice and snow. In chests along the way, he finds weapons, armor, and other equipment that make survival possible. Additionally, enemies, such as Venus flytraps and baby dragons, occasionally drop refills or coins, which are mainly used at the casino later in the game. Switches are an important element of the stages, allowing access to the boss or even to a chest on another island! If Higgins ever gets lost in the multilayered stages, X opens a menu with a map. This is also where he equips his gear and even saves the game. If Higgins loses all his health (the hearts in the upper left) he limitlessly continues at the start of a stage or his last location on the world map. This title has entertaining gameplay with responsive controls and offers a good combination of platforming and puzzle elements. Don't worry about having played the other games in the series; this one is a great stand-alone.





Reflections: How did I live so long without even hearing about this game?! It's not just the tight controls or colorful graphics; it's also the depth of gameplay. You can run through it quick and dirty, or you can take your time, noting all the areas you can't access when you first encounter them and returning later with the appropriate ability. Or why not spend hours at the casino filling Master Higgins's coffers? It strikes a wonderful balance of challenge and fun. If you are reading this review as ignorant about this game as I was before playing it, put this book down and go try it right now! The rest of the reviews can wait… – KY

Super Alfred Chicken
Alfred Chicken (EU)

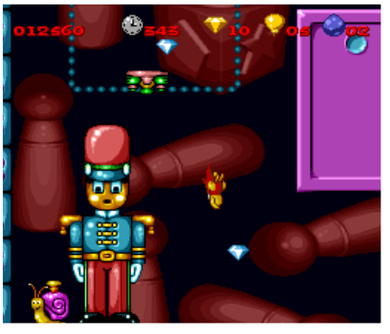
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Twilight
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Innocent eggs have been kidnapped in this odd, nonlinear platformer, forcing the plucky Alfred Chicken to explore 21 sprawling levels in an attempt to crack the case. Apparently, the culprits are the Meka Chickens – three mechanical monstrosities who stand between Alfred and the abducted shells. Each serves as a boss armed with its own fowl surprise, the most seasoned one providing the game's final battle. That's assuming, of course, the rueful rooster ever makes it there. Indeed, Alfred is perpetually outrun and outgunned; touching anything even remotely hostile spells instant defeat for the wee hero. Worse, the bird's main means of attack – using his toucan-sized beak for a misguided nosedive – is a clumsy maneuver, encouraging players to instead jump and flap over the game's many dangers. Enemies are everywhere, from mechanical mice that skitter erratically to cannons that skirt along the walls, firing an endless payload. The greatest threats, however, are the spikes, blades, nails, bombs, and swinging flails embedded in every stage. These make searching the large, open-ended environments for their respective exits especially precarious, as death literally awaits at every turn. Fortunately, special items offer limited relief, the more significant being the Can O' Worms that grants a defensive shield and the Pot Of Jam that allows Alfred to fire ricocheting bombs. The most common objects, however, are buttons; pecking these gizmos triggers their respective barriers, either opening or obstructing the way forward. This switch emphasis leads to some obnoxious puzzles late in the game, as a wrong button press often forces risky backtracking. Yet, for all its annoyances, the game still holds some charm, with bright, surreal visuals and zany tunes comprising such locales as a ghost train and a maniacal funhouse. Furthermore, a bounty of hidden areas and a second ending increase the replay value nicely, while the controls themselves are surprisingly tight once their quirks are understood. All in all, this is a competent effort that never quite reaches the other side.





Reflections: *Super Alfred Chicken* is a game better pecked at than gobbled. I should know; for this review, I did just the opposite, playing the title in two long, arduous drafts, after which I was relieved to be finally free. Those who take a slower approach will likely appreciate the finer nuances of Alfred's weird world, while those who barrel through will only notice its increasingly tedious gameplay. In sum, run and gun lovers need not apply. – DA

The Super Aquatic Games Starring the Aquabats James Pond's Crazy Sports (EU)

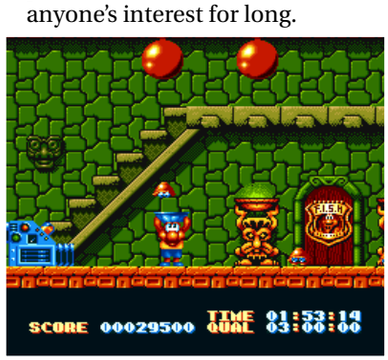
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Millennium Interactive, Vectordean
Publisher: Seika
(PAL: The Sales Curve)
Players: 1-4
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







James Pond is taking a break from working for the British Secret Service by competing in a multi-sport event with qualifying times and medals (*definitely* not like the Olympics). James can either jump straight into competition or practice in the training mode. There are eight different events plus a secret one that you can earn while competing. The first sporting section is the 100 m Splash, where you have to button-mash to get James to a good speed so he can run across the water that covers most of the track rather than be bogged down running through it. If his time qualifies, he and his teammates, the Aquabats, will continue onto the other events, including Kipper Watching, where a group of sleeping seals must be protected for as long as possible from bouncing beach balls, and Shell Shooting, where shelled creatures have to be launched into the air to pop a row of balloons. If a qualifying time is not met for an event, James can use a continue to try again, although rapid button tapping is necessary to trigger it. There are options to play with up to four people by passing the controller around. The graphics of this game are cute and colorful, but what the developers were trying to pass off as a sports game plays more like a series of mediocre minigames. This entry is part of the James Pond series in name only and will not likely hold anyone's interest for long.





Reflections: Released between the second and third entries in the James Pond series, *The Super Aquatic Games* adds nothing to his story or background, and there is no mention of his main nemesis, Dr. Maybe. Half of the time, you're controlling one of James's teammates, who have no history in the series at all. While some events, such as the Tour de Grass, are fairly straightforward, others, such as The Bouncy Castle, may take many attempts to figure out what the goal is (I'm still not clear about how I finished it; I think it has to do with spinning the shells). The names of some of the events as well as the bright sprites and their reactions keep up the humor that James Pond is known for, but what is a Bond parody doing in a sports game anyway? – KY

Super Baseball 2020

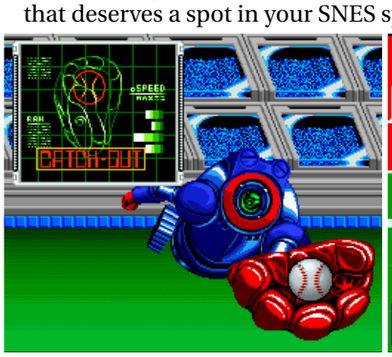
Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Pallas
Ported by: Monolith
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







This is a port of the 1991 Neo Geo arcade game of the same name. Players can choose from 12 different teams, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Solo players can take their selected team through a 15-game League mode to try to win the championship. While many traditional baseball rules apply, there are some appreciable differences to get used to in the game's Cyber Egg Stadium. For example, not every ball hit over the wall is a home run; instead, only those flying over the straightaway center field wall (the "Home Run Zone") count as round-trippers. Balls hit over the wall in left and right field bounce off of the shielded stands and back into play. Foul territory has shrunk, so any ball that stays in the air past either side of first or third base is live. These rule changes, among others, make this a unique experience. During each game, teams accumulate (or lose, depending on the play) money that can be used to power up players in certain situations. Robots can be bought to replace the male and female human athletes and enhance performance, but these break down over time – especially while making plays in the field. Strategic use of funds to power up players at the right time is key to victory in many instances. Visually, the game looks great, with nice player and robot models and a colorful stadium backdrop. There are some neat cutscenes for close or big plays. One downside is that the camera doesn't pull back quite enough for defensive plays, which can hamper trying to go after line drives. The music is well done, although it can be rather repetitive with time. This is a solid arcade baseball game that deserves a spot in your SNES sports title lineup.





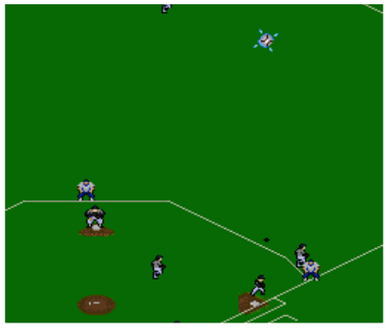
Reflections: The SNES version of this game leaves out one pretty cool component of Cyber Egg Stadium that the arcade game and the Genesis port have: Crackers. No, I'm not talking about Triscuits or Ritz; I'm talking about land mines. Seriously. These Crackers are placed in random spots in the outfield, so players have to be on the lookout for them. If not, well... BOOM. Of course, human players aren't blown to smithereens, as this isn't the *Mortal Kombat* or *Mutant League* of baseball. Crackers slow down defensive players, though, and that can cause plenty of damage on the scoreboard. – PS

Super Baseball Simulator 1.000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1-6 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★




The national pastime's second installment on the Super Nintendo is a cartoonish joy with a deceptive name! Two game modes are available: a one-off Exhibition and a six-team Season where games can be played or simulated. There are six stadiums to choose from, with varying field sizes and styles, and three divisions (Atlantic, Northern, and Ultra League) with six teams each. Players in the Ultra League can unleash Ultra Plays by spending a specific amount of Ultra Points. These give them superhuman abilities in the overhead field, on the mound, and in the batter's box (the latter two locations are viewed from behind the catcher). There are 20 Ultra Balls for pitchers (e.g., Warp Ball, Spark Ball) 15 Ultra Batting powers (e.g., Meteor Hit, Squirrel Hit), and four Ultra Fielding maneuvers (e.g., Rocket Jump). These range wildly in function and in Ultra Points cost. Once a team has spent its allotment of Ultra Points, they can no longer use Ultra Plays. Players come with preset statistics and abilities, but the game offers a robust Edit mode, allowing the creation of all-new teams. Uniform colors, names, statistics, and available Ultra Plays can be customized, adding great personalization. Three AI difficulties, optional errors, and the number of Ultra Points per team offer additional tweaks. Season Mode includes statistics tracking for position players and pitchers. Battery backup preserves Edit mode teams and in-progress seasons, but only one season can be saved at a time. Glacier-slow simulated games and some rough edges hold a good experience back from actually batting 1.000.

Reflections: The second instance in the Baseball Simulator series by Culture Brain is among the earlier sports entries for the SNES, and while the graphics are an improvement over its NES counterpart, they lack the polish of other baseball titles that would be released for the 16-bit system. However, the biggest problem with *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000* might be its title. *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000* shines brightest when played in the Ultra League, where the Ultra Plays can give the game a welcome jolt of heroic surrealism. Future Baseball Simulator titles, exclusive to the Super Famicom, were released with the Nippon Professional Baseball ("NPB") license, lending some "simulation" validity that feels far from possible in this Super Nintendo incarnation without the support of the major leagues. – DG

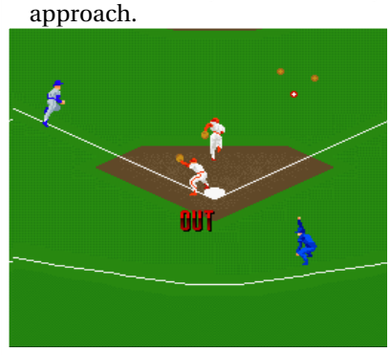
Super Bases Loaded (Ryne Sandberg Plays)

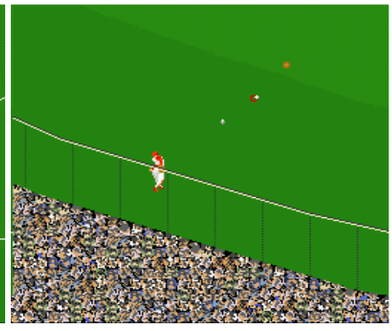
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Very Common
★★★





The ultimate goal of this baseball title is to play a "perfect game" against a Level 5 opponent, the hardest difficulty available. This means not making any in a series of gaffes that the game tracks, ranging from striking out at the plate to walking batters to committing fielding errors. This demand can be as difficult as completing a perfect game in actual baseball, and unfortunately, aside from a congratulations screen and a credits roll, there isn't much payoff for achieving such a daunting task. To accomplish the feat, players can either use one of the pre-built teams or create their own, changing the default names as desired and powering up player batting averages, home run power, pitching, and running stats to ease the challenge. The underlying gameplay is fine. The perspective for the pitcher/batter battle sets the view behind the pitcher and then switches to a view from the outfield when the ball is put in play. This defensive view may take new players some getting used to. Offense generally rules the day, with lots of home runs and extra base hits to be had on both teams. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it tends to minimize the importance of pitching and defense. The visuals are decent for an early Super NES title, with a neat Mode 7 sequence between innings and cutscenes to reward home runs. The music is pretty good, too, though it gets repetitive before long. The game is a unique take on baseball and may be worth a try for players looking for a different approach.





Reflections: During the fall of 1991, *Super Bases Loaded* was one of the games that my friends and I played quite often. Chasing that "perfect game" was a fun objective, and we all tried to do it first so that we could each earn bragging rights. I can still hear the stream of choice expletives from my buddy Chris one afternoon after he inadvertently threw to the wrong base in the bottom of the ninth inning, spoiling his bid for perfection. None of us ever accomplished the feat, and I still hadn't done it prior to playing the game for this review. Now I can finally say that I did it, nearly 26 years later… and it's all thanks to working on this project. – PS

Super Bases Loaded 2

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







The popular baseball simulation returns to the SNES for another season, armed with updated graphics and a focus on the basics of the game. The graphics are notable because a special digital signal processor – or DSP – was added to the cartridge to help with the Mode 7 effects used for the infield perspective. The camera smoothly follows the track of the ball as it's struck or as it's thrown from one base to another. The players are large in this perspective compared to the other, a bird's-eye view hovering high over the field. It's not the best-looking baseball game out there, but it definitely has a unique look that can dazzle players initially. Graphics aside, the play controls are simple to learn and generally responsive. Batting is driven by timing, while off-speed pitches are devastating and can fool even the best hitters. The only major gripe is that the fielding can sometimes be a bit wonky in either perspective. Players don't react to batted balls quickly enough at times, leading to costly extra-base hits. There are plenty of options here, including the ability to edit and create teams and players, playing single game exhibitions, trying an "All Star" game, and working through an entire 162-game season – complete with full stat tracking and results saved to the battery. The flow of each game can be a bit sluggish, so playing through a full season is going to require a healthy time investment. The sound is sparse, with some weak organ music mixed in with the occasional umpire call. There are just too many silent periods, though; even at the worst baseball game, there's at least some crowd noise... but not here. Overall, it's a slightly above-average effort that can come off of the bench and be fun for a few innings.





Reflections: I got this title new when it came out, along with a used copy of *ActRaiser 2*, after trading in some games at my favorite local game store. While my interest in *ActRaiser 2* (which you can read about elsewhere in this book) was fleeting, there was just something about playing a baseball video game right as Spring Training was starting. I played this title for hours after creating my own "super team," and I tried to put up some crazy stats. Then some game called *NBA Jam* came out a few weeks later, and I forgot all about baseball. – PS

Super Bases Loaded 3: License to Steal

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







It's the third SNES installment of the popular baseball simulation series, and this one sports a Major League Baseball Players Association license. While the absence of the Major League Baseball license means that generic city names are used instead of team names, it's nice to have the real players and their statistics to add a bit of authenticity. The main hook here is the different visual perspective that the game uses, in which the camera is situated behind the pitcher instead of behind the hitter. It's a television-style view that series veterans are familiar with, but newer players may initially struggle with it. The player models in this view are large and detailed, with nice swing and pitch animations. The three stadiums in the game all look decent, too. The sound is adequate, with short organ ditties, some crowd reaction, and occasional umpire barks. The usual Season and Exhibition modes are joined by an MVP (or All-Star) game and a Championship mode for two players. Thanks to the battery backup, full season standings are saved after each game, along with a variety of statistics. Player stats are updated after each at-bat as well, and it's neat to see them change from appearance to appearance. While the game looks quite good and has a lot of features, the gameplay is a bit off. Pitching is fine, with pitches selectable via the face buttons. However, when the ball is in play, it often quickly finds a glove. No matter where the ball is hit, the SNES-controlled defenders are almost too good to miss it. This tends to make for defensive battles and not a lot of offense. Home runs are also pretty rare, limiting the excitement a bit, but small ball isn't always a bad thing.





Reflections: Playing this title is like playing in a baseball game where every defender is Ozzie Smith. Sure, you might get one or two past The Wizard, but not often. The batters are like Ozzie Smith, too; he had a .262 lifetime batting average, or a little more than one hit per game, and a mere 28 home runs in almost 9,400 at-bats. Defensive-minded baseball games aren't necessarily bad, but a better balance between offense and defense is preferred for an outstanding baseball title with wide appeal. There are other baseball games in the SNES library that strike this balance better, such as *Super Batter Up* and *Super Bases Loaded 2*. – PS

Super Batter Up

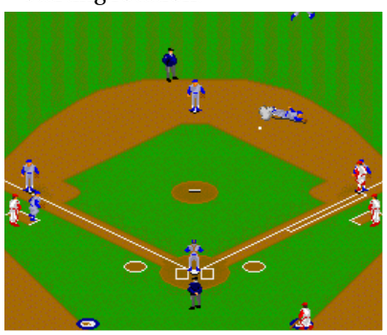
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







There's an air of comfortable familiarity in this baseball simulation, which takes a straightforward approach to a popular sport. The game has a Major League Baseball Players Association license, but teams are based on generic city names. Season play is on offer, supported by a fairly simple password save system. It's possible – and even likely – that players will make their way through it, as it's really the meat of the game. Stat tracking is limited to wins and losses, though updated team stats for each game are displayed on the scoreboard between innings. On the field, the gameplay is a winner. There's no reinventing of the wheel here; batting, pitching, base running, and defense are all simple to learn and easy to control. The fielding, as in most baseball games, is where new players may have a bit of a learning curve, but it doesn't take many games to adjust. Pitching relies on inside and outside location, along with the occasional change of speed to keep hitters off balance. Offense is adequate, with some outbursts at times, and the long ball makes its share of appearances with proper swing timing. Team management during the game, especially use of the bullpen, is necessary to win; players will know when to make the switch when they see the pitcher sweating on the mound. There isn't an award-winning visual presentation here, but it gets the job done. The stadiums look nice, but the player models look a little off – especially in the pitcher/batter screen. The music will please fans of a certain popular series of NES baseball games with its upbeat and peppy style. The sound effects are fair, mixed with clear umpire calls. This is a fun throwback to the NES days and deserves a spot in your starting rotation.





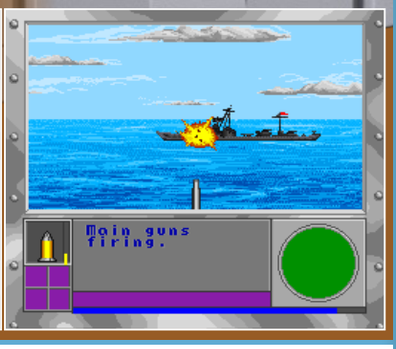
Reflections: Make no mistake: This game is, for all intents and purposes, *R.B.I. Baseball* on the SNES. The only thing missing is the name, which, at the time, belonged to a different publisher. All of the things that I love about *R.B.I.* are here, from the catchy tunes to the simple play controls. Could it have been better? Sure, with a battery backup and more stat tracking. That said, I'm not going to complain about what this game isn't. I'm just having a blast enjoying what it is. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got another season game to play. – PS

Super Battleship

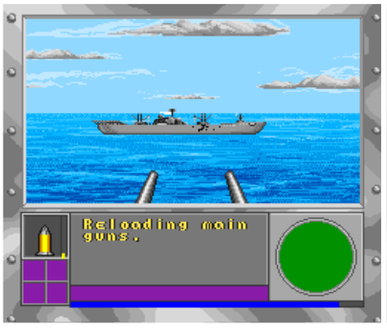
Genre: Strategy, Board Game
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Synergistic Software
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★

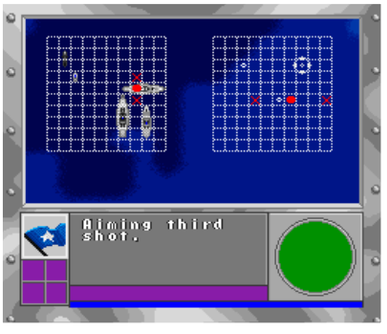






Man your battle stations! The classic board game makes it to the Super Nintendo and brings along a strategy game themed on the tabletop original. Classic Battleship mode recreates the former – the player positions their immobile fleet on a grid, then engages in volleys of fire with the enemy, hoping to sink the opposing fleet before losing their own. Unlike the board game, each side fires at three locations per turn, making each individual turn significantly more lethal. Super Battleship mode is an entirely new experience. Rather than placing ships statically, the player maneuvers them in a turn-based fashion across 16 progressively more challenging strategy scenarios. A turn timer at the bottom of the screen forces rapid decisions on where to move and/or fire, while ship speed and heading add strategy to the positioning of fleet assets. Firing successfully on enemy ships transitions the player to different real-time battles based on the weapon; deck weapons, depth charges, and missiles each offer a unique challenge to target and connect with. Multiple damage zones force the player to aim carefully and consider disabling specific areas of enemy vessels. Strategy typically boils down to targeting enemy deck guns first, then engines, and finishing off sitting ducks with torpedos. Ships come equipped with limited ammunition, so precision and risk come into play as well; some missions offer land assets capable of providing resupply. Completing periodic missions awards the player Secret Codes that function as progress passwords. Overall, there are some intriguing ideas at work here, but balance issues and weapon economies hold the action side of things back. Conversely, simplistic mechanics leave wargame strategists wanting more, rendering neither entirely satisfied with the experience.





Reflections: In Super Battleship mode, where hitting the ship along various points in its hull eventually sinks it, the myriad changes it makes to convert the board game to a strategy one create an altogether different experience. The different weapon camera modes are a clever trick that helps give each a more realistic feel, and it's a move Synergistic Software would repeat with *Carrier Aces* years later. If you're struggling, you can game the system somewhat by letting an enemy ship engage you, damaging its weapon battery, then drawing out their turn timer. Support for a second player would have gone a long way in improving the final product, but then again, *Battleship* was always a hit-or-miss affair. – DG

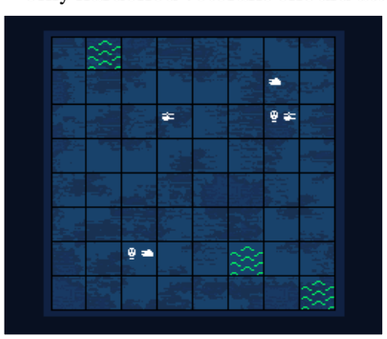
Super Battletank 2

Genre: Action, Simulation
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Players take the reigns of an M1A2 battle tank to fight their way through the Middle East in this war simulator. A first-person cockpit view gives players a front-row seat of the battlefield and includes vital information such as fuel, ammo, tank speed, and a short-range radar via the dashboard. The M1A2 is equipped with four different types of weaponry, ranging from the basic machine gun to powerful heat-seeking missiles. Players also have the ability to summon a Patriot missile to defend against long-range air attacks. Additionally, the M1A2 is equipped with a limited amount of smoke screens and a built-in scope that gives players the ability to see in the dark during night assignments. The 16 missions are pretty basic but quickly spike in difficulty due to the insane amount of enemies. Some missions end with fun sequences that place the player in the gunner seat of the tank, requiring them to shoot choppers and missiles that are raining down from the sky. Ammo must be conserved since it is limited, but there are ammo depots spread throughout some maps that can be visited for replenishment and tank repairs. Enemies are in abundance and consist of attack choppers, Scud launchers, and battle tanks, and they look incredibly realistic considering they are digitized versions of their real-life counterparts. Unfortunately, the desert's graphics come off as too pixelated, making it hard to detect mines that are scattered about. Night missions render this game nearly impossible, especially since the aforementioned night scope is indescribably limited. Due to the quick spike in difficulty and limited night vision, only hardened veterans should attempt to win this war.





Reflections: Man, the difference in difficulty between this and the much easier *Super Battletank* is crazy. I was thinking I was going to be able to breeze through this in a few hours, but it took me a few days and has added several gray hairs to my head. The night missions had me turning up my television's brightness to the max, but I was still unable to see enemies who were parked right in front of me! Thankfully, the game grants codes after the completion of missions five, nine, and 13, but even with that assistance, I still had some major trouble finishing this off. – MV

Super Battletank: War in the Gulf (Garry Kitchen's)
Super Battletank (EU)

Genre: Action, Simulation
Release Date: June 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





Players take control of an M1A1 Abrams battle tank and are thrust into the middle of the Gulf War in this simulation. Gameplay takes place in the armored vehicle's cockpit, giving players a first-person perspective on all the action. Important information such as ammo, fuel, and tank damage can be monitored on the dashboard, which is located directly below the view of the battlefield. The tank is armed with four types of weaponry: 120 mm standard rounds, laser-guided rounds, a 7.62 mm rapid-fire machine gun, and smoke screens that can be used defensively when taking heavy fire. The armored vehicle controls as it should, with the shoulder buttons being used to steer and the D-pad aiming its turret. Firing weapons is incredibly satisfying due to the booming sounds they make when attacking enemies, but the paltry sound of the tank's engine feels out of place. Enemies are visually striking and look photorealistic, although they are limited to just tanks and helicopters. Taking them out is simplistic considering they only attack one at a time, and all have the same strategy – fire a few rounds, drive (or fly) away from the player, and turn around to do it again. Mission structure is also rinse and repeat, consisting of only one objective – destroy everything. Players looking for realism will find it disappointing (and laughable) that tanks can warp to the opposite side of the country when they reach the edge of the map, but due to the tank's massive fuel consumption, this can be used to the player's benefit. The oversimple gameplay and straightforward missions make this a hard recommendation for players looking for a true-to-life war simulator.





Reflections: If you take a look at the title, you'll notice that this is *Garry Kitchen's Super Battletank*. You might be under the assumption that Garry Kitchen was a war veteran, but he's actually the game's developer. He also worked on the Atari 2600 port of *Donkey Kong* and would later move on to Activision to create *Keystone Kapers*. For the uninformed, a lot of developers at Atari didn't get credited for their efforts and left to work for Activision, a company created by disgruntled Atari employees. I have to wonder if this is why Garry's name is in the title. I'd make sure to put my name on everything if I previously wasn't credited for my work. – MV

Super Black Bass

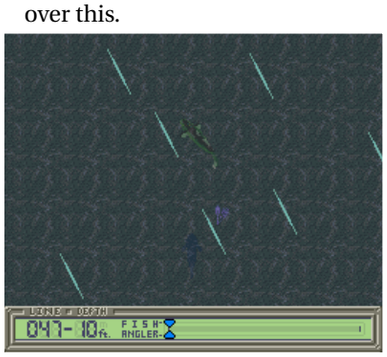
Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Hot-B
Publisher: Hot-B
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★







Grab a tackle box and try to hook the big one in this sequel to the NES's *Black Bass*. Players start off by entering themselves in the Local Amateur Tournament, where they're tasked with catching black bass (while avoiding catching other types of fish) in a set amount of time. If the total weight of the player's top five fish places them within the top three fishermen in the tournament, they'll advance to the Amateur Bass Championship. After victory in that competition comes the Pro Bass Circuit, and the final test is the Super Bass Championship. The majority of the player's time is spent in an overhead view, driving the boat around the lake while keeping an eye on the fish finder. Once the player reaches a good spot, their viewpoint shifts to the inside of the boat. It's here that they decide on which color and type of lure (depending on weather and water depth) they should use to catch their bass. In order to reel in the fish after casting the line, the player must make sure to pull the rod in the direction opposite of the fish's swim path. Meters displaying the strength of both the bass and the angler shift depending on who is winning the fight. If the fish overpowers the angler, the line snaps and the fish gets away. The meters are very inconsistent, and players quickly find out that reeling in a catch comes down to pure luck. After hooking a few bass, the angler levels up and gains strength, but this doesn't seem to make things any easier. The visuals are nice, but the country music during the boat-driving sequences can be grating on the ears. Fans of fishing should be a little hooked, but others might consider a real fishing trip over this.



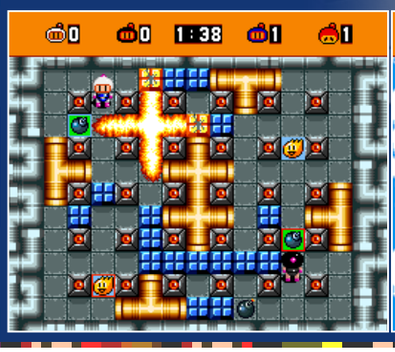


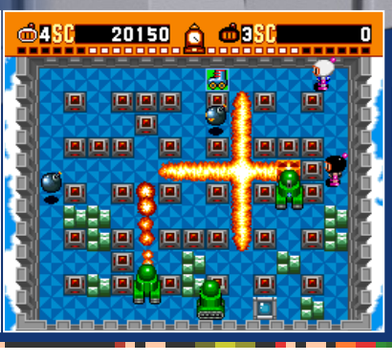
Reflections: After completing this title, I decided to go off the cuff and experiment a bit. I love putting a game through unorthodox play sessions to find out how it responds, so naturally I started smashing the boat into anything I could find. Docks, spillways, rocks – nothing was safe! It was actually very reminiscent of a real fishing trip that I've been on; the only thing missing was some beer and a drinking buddy. The game didn't really respond any differently to my mayhem, which was disappointing. The in-game country music that accompanied my aquatic destruction derby seemed fitting, though! – MV

Super Bomberman

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft, Produce!
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional), Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Your name is Bomberman, and your business is booming! Employ your bomb-deploying flair in two top-down play types: Normal Game and Battle Mode. The former features a six-destination quest for one or two against crooked Carat Diamond and his minion, Dr. Mook; locales are split into octets of single-screen stages set out on grids of impervious barriers and breakable "soft blocks." Save for boss battles and the fifth level's Robot Tournament, your timed task is to blast walls in search of stage exits that can't be used until baddies are all eradicated. This becomes increasingly challenging as you encounter foes that burrow, spit flames, take multiple hits, and more. You're initially able to drop bombs singly, with each exploding in the cardinal directions seconds later, but collectible special items let you set more charges simultaneously, expand their range, and detonate them when desired. Try not to get caught in the literal crossfire, however – you'll lose a life and many acquired powers, including the abilities to walk through soft blocks and to sock bombs across the screen. Should you eventually find the kooky journey a little TNT (Tiresome 'N' Tedious), prepare for Battle Mode! The best way is to plug in the Super Multitap (bundled with this title in the Party Pak) and invite your pals to try the SNES's first four-player experience (colorful opponent Bombermen can also be guided by AI). After setting the number of wins for victory, choose from a dozen devious zones (e.g., a spotlit dark room, a close-quarters arena, a world of warp points) and strive to be the last bot standing by blowing up your buddies! Power-ups come in handy here, but watch out for troublemaking skull icons – and occasional thrown controllers, should the friendly firefights turn fierce. It's all in fun, though – this game is dynamite!

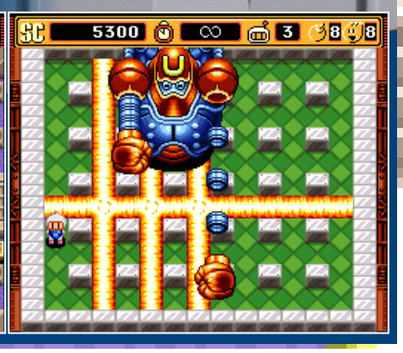




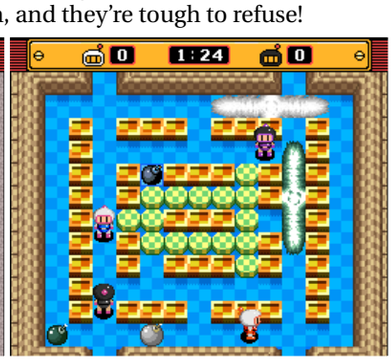
Reflections: The multiplayer mode is fantastic for four... three... two... fun blast-offs! But I'd advise you to make your speech less incendiary than your salvos, or else you may shame sore losers and get stuck with the single-player game. Make no mistake: Solo *Super Bomberman* is quite enjoyable – in short bursts – but it does get repetitive before long. It also features one of the most disconcerting bosses I've ever had the displeasure of dealing with – a freaky clown head that drops its jaw and flashes its pristine pearly whites. Hey Bozo, zip your fuchsia lip! I'm a detonator, not your dentist! – AP

Super Bomberman 2

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft, Produce!
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★⋆

Abducted by the Five Bad Bombers on the eve of an alien invasion, you must escape the confines of their quintuple spaceship to save the world. But you're Bomberman, so fighting evil is a *big plus*! You drop bombs that explode in that symbol's shape to torch enemies, trip traps, and demolish "soft blocks" in search of special items. These offer effects ranging from increasing your speed, blast radius, or concurrent bomb quantity to letting you step through blockades and laid devices, tossing tickers to detonate at will. Just don't blot your eyes and cross your t's – your own charges can kill you, curtailing your abilities for clearing 35 intriguing top-down stages. Some of the quaint, cute, and industrial environments sport unshifting single screens, while others scroll horizontally or vertically; along with adversaries, most contain puzzling problems to try your mental and motor dexterity before exiting is allowed. Many are overtly deadly – mines, dynamite, fiery furnaces, etc. – but span-crossing trampolines, corralling cracks, regenerating soft blocks, and more can lead to laying you low if you're careless. You must also set explosives to bridge gaps, flick switches, or strike "capsules," and swiftly sequencing these actions is an engaging challenge. Still, even the thrill of beating Magnet, Fire (Golem), Pretty, Brain, and Plasma Bomber might pale in comparison to the joy of igniting someone you know in Battle Game. Up to four human or AI-controlled Bombermen can compete singly or on a tag team, creating color-coordinated explosions to cook computer and companion alike in 10 chaotic arenas. Winning can make you the Golden Bomber, potentially earning you a random perk (from the game) and specific pique (from your friends). Nevertheless, both game modes light up a room, and they're tough to refuse!

Reflections: Not only do this sequel's puzzle elements avert the monotony besetting its predecessor's one-player campaign, but also we get to enjoy another bizarre boss (yay?). This time, it's Pretty Bomber's second form, which seems to be a razor-rayed sun with the hots for Bomberman! While it's certainly bad to stare at the sun, what if the sun stares at *you*, following every move while lovingly winking out twinkles and hearts? It must spot a sol-mate in our combustion-causing robot because even his blasts set its ardor ablaze, its face aglow with agonized ecstasy. It's all a little overdone – sunburnt, even. Soleil, off! – AP

Super Bomberman 3

Genre: Action
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




Salvaged by the pernicious Professor Buglar, the Five Bad Bombers cause chaos by capturing crucial computer chips from the Bomber Nebula. The only champ that can check the chip-napping chumps is you!… or a friend, should you try the Normal Game's top-down quest for two Bombermen instead of one. Either way, get ready to rocket to five planets – Swamp Attack, Firestorm, Deep Sea, Pyramid, and Winterland – before boarding Buglar's Battleship. Outside of boss fights, the aim in every single-screen room is the destruction of all blinking beacons by dropping bombs, which opens access to another chamber or frees one of a world's four filched chip fragments. Naturally, planet-appropriate enemies seek to stop you, so be sure to sidestep or set ablaze bizarre blossoms, speedy seals, and roguish rocks while managing interesting environmental features (minecarts, whirlpools, quicksand, etc.). "Soft blocks" ranging from seaweed to snow also impede your progress, but blasting them with bombs that blow not just up, but also down, left, and right might reveal items that improve your range, let you walk through obstacles, and more. If an egg is uncovered, scramble for it! It contains one of five cute Louies to ride, providing you protection from a hit (at your kangaroo-like mount's expense) and an ability such as jumping or dashing. These critters come in handy during Battle Game, where up to five human or AI-controlled Bombers hailing from China, England, France, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, or the USA dare to detonate each other (alone or on a team). Some of the 10 available arenas are recycled from the Normal Game's locations, but the Bad Bomber option to attack from the outskirts after expiring is nifty. In fact, the whole game's simple play and sizzling tunes are sure to set off a great time!




Reflections: I really enjoy the Normal Game here – though less complex than *Super Bomberman 2*'s, its relatively short length still offers engaging features, such as the chance to revisit completed areas for extra items. Plus, none of the bosses seem overly unsettling in this installment… but there's nonetheless something disquieting to discuss. You see, skulls are a perennial power-down in the Battle Game, and they can potentially beset Bomberman with unstoppable bomb dropping. The manual names this malady "diarrhoea" (and it's even explosive)… so where does that suggest that regular bomb movements come from? – AP

Super Bonk
Super B.C. Kid (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: A.I
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★⋆

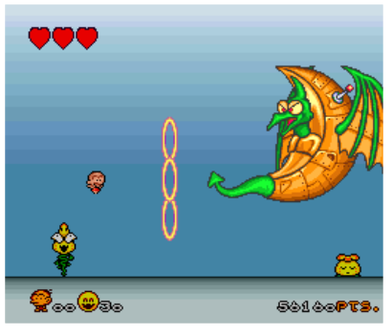






The conniving King Drool has tricked Bonk, propelling him into the far future and onto the Super Nintendo! Bonk can throw vicious headbutts to eliminate foes, bounce off walls, or slow his fall. Eating meat transforms him into one of a few animalistic forms, while candy reduces or increases his size. Combined, these features result in unlocking some truly madcap powers for the kooky cave-kid, such as the abilities to shout "RAGE!" and ride upon the words themselves, to stare enemies into stone as a wrathful cockatrice, and to smash through buildings as a giant lizard capable of turning invisible. Many of these abilities require using Smilies, which are collected throughout levels that are every bit as varied as the powers. They take Bonk to some far-flung locations, from the inside of a dinosaur's circulatory system to the outer reaches of the solar system. Discovering flowers teleports the cave-kid to one of a number of short minigames for bonus points and Smilies. Red hearts restore health, while blue hearts add additional maximum health, permitting Bonk to take more hits before passing out. The options menu allows for toggling stereo/mono as well as remapping buttons and testing them in a tutorial zone based on the first level. Mechanically manic and altogether absurd, this anachronistic action-platformer is a fun one and worth a good-humored foray through.





Reflections: When a first-party flagship mascot makes the migration to another console, it is usually worth noting. While not the first time that NEC's cave-kid has appeared on a Nintendo console, Bonk's initial trip to their 16-bit system is just that – a trip. The creative freedom on display is impressive, from being sneezed into space to sailing through time as a crab. The graphics and music do not always keep pace with these imaginative aspects (albeit with exceptions, such as the brilliant track "Twilight Space"), but they rarely clash with the loony level design on display. Sometimes, that design is insane yet intuitive, like finishing a level by jumping into a dinosaur's drink. Other times, the way to go is not as clear, and I found myself wandering aimlessly through a space station or a brain's neural pathways in the hopes of stumbling into progression. While *Super Bonk* is not challenging, and a few hours is all it takes to see everything the game has to offer, it must be seen to be believed. – DG

Super Bowling

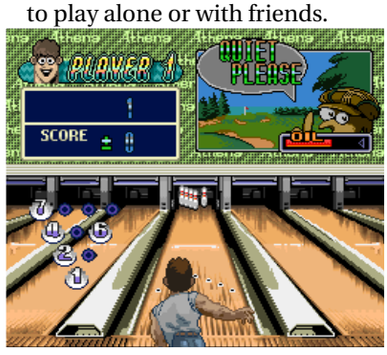
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: KID
Publisher: American Technōs
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★







Lace up those bowling shoes and hit the lanes! Up to four players can choose from one of four bowlers: "Muscles" Maxwell, "Pins" Peterson, "Red" Randall, and "Spinner" Spencer. Each has a specific talent and can be customized with handedness and bowling ball weight. In addition, three oil patterns on the lane and two difficulty settings offer a different feel to ball flight and/or additional challenge. Once bowling, the player can choose their position on the lane and target direction, while timing-based mechanics drive hook and power. Moreover, the player can shift position during approach, so there's an opportunity to correct in the event the player doesn't time the hook or power quite as desired. Once the ball is thrown, a split screen shows the results of the throw and the bowler's reaction, playing animations for strikes and spares. Three modes of play are provided: Turkey Bowl, Golf Mode, and Practice Mode. Turkey offers the traditional ten-frame ten-pin experience, with all the normal rules for the sport. Golf presents a twist, with a series of nine specific pin setups to be cleared in as few shots as possible and a golf-style "par" for each. Practice allows players to configure any arrangement of pins, helpful for practicing specific spare pickups. The actual pin action looks stilted, with strange overlaps that can look inauthentic. Thankfully, the rest of the game's graphical polish makes up for this, as does solid sound effect work; the result is a pleasant bowling title to play alone or with friends.





Reflections: *Super Bowling* was the only bowling title on the Super Nintendo for the majority of the system's window, as *Brunswick World: Tournament of Champions* wouldn't come out until 1997. In many ways, it has similarities to the sole bowling game released for the NES, and the one my family spent years playing at gatherings, *Championship Bowling*. Both offer a diverse cast of characters with unique benefits, use timing to determine throws, play a single song for the entirety of the match, offer multiple oil patterns, and use victory animations for marks. The addition of Practice and Golf modes is nice, with the former being helpful for those looking to play to the point of mastery. Each mode has a strange technicolor "turkey" that provides information at the top of the screen. These odd birds give the game some personality, though I am unsure what planet they came from. – DG

Super Buster Bros.
Super Pang (EU)

Genre: Shooter, Puzzle
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Mitchell
Ported by: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Strafe, shoot, survive! The second entry in the Pang series, this version plays much like its arcade predecessor. The objective of each single-screen stage is to shoot bouncing bubbles with a speargun while dodging them. The player can move side to side and climb ladders but can only fire directly up. Popping a bubble splits it into two, unless they're so small that they simply burst when hit. This interplay of moving underneath falling bubbles in order to pop them, only to make more threats, is what drives the design of the single-screen stages and provides the tension from deceptively simple rules. Two game modes mix up the formula. The first, Tour Mode, challenges the player to globetrot through 40 time-limited levels filled with cleverly arranged bubbles and terrain. Four difficulties can be chosen, impacting the speed of the bubbles and potentially adding more terrain to account for. Roaming monsters will actually pop bubbles but can also temporarily disable the player's weapon. There is a puzzle-like strategy to stages, from identifying the order of bubbles to attack to determining which power-ups to grab or avoid, like the clock to freeze time or the dynamite to reduce the balls' sizes. The second, Panic Mode, challenges the player to see how far they can take three lives in an empty level as bubbles descend from the ceiling. Popping bubbles advances the level meter, while flashing bubbles temporarily freeze the room when broken. Special bonus spheres also fall, rotating each bounce to offer, once popped, either an extended freeze or destruction of all bubbles. Backgrounds change and spheres accelerate as levels advance. If the player can survive 99 levels, the bubbles stop spawning, and a huge score bonus is awarded.





Reflections: This is a quality port of a very fun arcade game. Both game modes are faithfully recreated, as are level designs, weapon upgrades, enemies… yet I'm left wondering how a game called *Super Buster Bros.* gets away with being single-player. Of all the things to eliminate, nothing burst my bubble like finding out support for two-player simultaneous play was shot down. Thankfully, the postcard-like design of the game's backdrops remains. Saying you're flying around the world is one thing, but having stellar pixel art of the Kathmandu Boudha Stupa, Yogyakarta's Borobudur, the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, just to name a few? With multiple versions for different times of the day? The backgrounds in *Super Buster Bros.* are a highlight, best shared with a frie... oh. Right. – DG

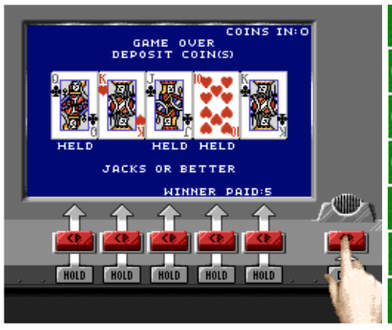
Super Caesars Palace

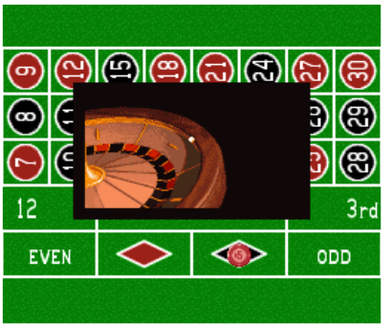
Genre: Gambling
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Illusions Gaming Company
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★





Step inside the opulent Las Vegas casino and try your digitized hand at a wealthy offering of games. If you're a first-timer, inputting your name at the ATM bankrolls you with $2,000; seasoned gamblers can instead key in a 16-character password to access their accumulated loot. Before leaving the teller to trip the top-down casino floor as a conservatively dressed man, you can purchase one of three $100 scratch tickets. Then you're up and weaving around the tables, machines, and screens that let you play the following in a first-person perspective: Blackjack, Craps, Keno, Red Dog, Roulette, Slots (three variants), Video Horse Racing, and Video Poker. Most games can be accessed at multiple stations (providing assorted betting limits), and all come with Help Kiosks that explain the rules and/or button presses associated with them, such as how the R and L triggers are respectively used to hit and stand in Blackjack. With the exception of giving mouse-specific guidelines and elucidating certain betting complexities, these instructions adequately teach you to wager chips of five denominations, mark Keno numbers in red ink, make Quiniella bets on a pair of ponies, and more. For additional advice, you can chat with other casino patrons. Their pixelated portraits provide a change from the red carpet and from your hand cursor hovering over the easily recognizable card, chip, table, and screen graphics. There's little else to this experience aside from two uninspired "high roller" areas, but the odds are that you'll enjoy it.





Reflections: The scratchers are a fun and surprisingly decent way to line your pockets (little by little, at least). I can't recommend the Match Two ticket, as you will most likely win only $25, but I found that it's easy to double a $100 investment in 60-Yard Fight before running across a game-voiding bomb. Also, according to a "hot tip" from a conversation in the game, the "overall odds [in Triple Jacks] are over one hundred percent." It's not a bad return for so little risk, but if that sounds boring, why not bet on a few ponies before heading to a card table? You'll be informed of the race's outcome even while you're playing something else. However, you never get to see any actual horses, so you'll have to use your imagination to know how Purple Pickle won by a nose or why Doctor Dude brought up the rear. – AP

Super Castlevania IV

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







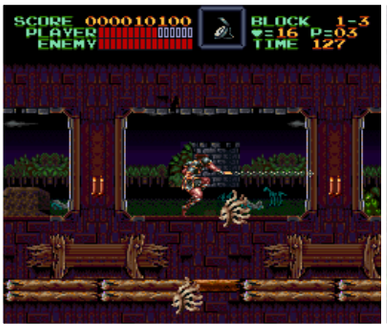
The sinister mists of a century's cycle obscure the nightscape of Transylvania – alas! As foretold, Dracula has revived and returned to ravage the land. Yet as the scythe-like moon scars the darkness, so shine you, Simon Belmont, sole hero seeking to vanquish the shadow cast by the vampire. His quietus is no quick quest to a coffin, however – 11 malevolent levels loom betwixt you and your stake in the survival of mankind, with the first five flung far across the grounds of Dracula's evil estate and the rest set within his castle's ominous opulence. The trails of your travails are traced on maps before you traverse the timed side-scrolling stages, but only the initial quartet of shown paths presage the diversity of devious destinations ahead. Indeed, each level is dismembered into multiple "blocks," creating a massive variety of vile environments crawling with eerie elements. The third level alone sees you searching dank, dripping caverns, wending past strangely silent waterfalls, and crossing corrupt classical columns – that's only a taste of the terrific terrains, all of which feature engrossing expressions of depth, scale, and detail. Spectral ponies outside the stable, arcane tomes teetering in the library, golden coffers overflowing with molten wealth and weary spirits… Dracula's domain hosts an evocative feast for the eyes – and ears. Effortlessly shifting from pensive to pulse-pounding and from creepy to encouraging, the music accompanying your mission is instrumental in lending senses of impending doom and daring determination.





The myriad sound effects also share in shaping the spooky experience, but your own groans might echo the most often. After all, what befits a beautifully bleak journey better than a bevy of harrowing hazards? You're often dogged by standard death dealers – platforms, pits, spikes, and the like – but Dracula has conjured up so many creative cruelties that you could almost accord him your grudging respect – if they didn't work so well. Thank Heavens for gridded passwords that let you challenge gargantuan chandeliers, rotating rooms, and whirring clock cogs anew. Of course, pernicious obstacles only comprise a portion of the vampire's vicious defenses; his unholy hordes equally ache to end you. Some foes become familiar sights – bats, skeletons, axe knights, etc. – but in most regions, unique legions also reside – the waltzing dead, multiplying mud men, iridescent ectoplasms, and more seek your blood to sate their master. Most notable are that elder impaler's lieutenants, who often appear at the conclusion of levels to do battle. Decapitating Orphic Vipers, unraveling the wraps of Akmodan II, and grinding Koranot into gravel grant a Ball of Light to tally your score and top off your health, but not all bosses extend this luxury.

So how will you survive the onslaught? Be grateful that you're a Belmont and blessed with your ancestors' mystical whip. Not only can you lash it in eight directions and use it to swing from well-placed rings, but also you can twirl it freely. Leaving it to drape and graze enemies still inflicts minor damage – such is its sacred might that mere touches tear up terrors. Ensure that you use it to snuff out candles for the stuff inside – those luminaries hold precious items, including Morning Stars to increase the whip's reach and righteousness, pork chops to heal, money bags to accrue points for lives, plus additional weapons and hearts to power them. Though perhaps not as handy as your whip, the Axe, Dagger, Fire Bomb (Holy Water), Boomerang, and Watch are welcome helpers as you stride, duck, and leap through Dracula's realm. What serves you best, however, is the fact that this entire experience is exquisite. From the maw of the drawbridge to the top of the terminal tower, the encounters are intriguing, the sounds are scintillating, and the gameplay slays. Dare to defeat Dracula – the goal is noble, and the journey to achieve it is truly magnificent.





Reflections: Although it's a pseudo-remake of the iconic series' first title (*Castlevania* on the NES), this early Super Nintendo masterpiece is considerably easier to complete – and I applaud that accessibility. It permits everyone to appreciate the stellar action and artistic choices throughout the game. There are tons of dark details that delight – gripping ghoulish hands, conniving under-carpet creatures, unnervingly awesome Mode 7 sequences – I could go on forever about the lush facets that haunt every playthrough. And since I'm rhapsodizing, how about the amazing music? From mournful dirges and ethereal strains to rewarding recreations of previous Castlevania anthems ("Vampire Killer," "Bloody Tears," and "Beginning"), the soundtrack stands out as one of the finest on the console and succeeds at sucking you into a well-realized world that would almost seem living – if it weren't so deadly. *Super Castlevania IV* lavishes you with memorable enemies, innovative backgrounds, intense auditory effects, and satisfying attack mechanics – for a straightforward story of good versus evil, there are more striking features than you can shake a whip at. – AP





Super Chase H.Q.

Genre: Racing, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL (AUS)
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





In this unique racing title, undercover officers use a sports car to pursue and apprehend crime syndicate members attempting to escape on the road. After a quick cutscene explaining the situation and Nancy at Chase Headquarters alerting the officers to the vehicle at large, the timed chase begins. Gameplay takes place in a first-person perspective inside the car, with the top third of the screen displaying the time remaining, car gears, speed, car condition, score, turbo boosts, and distance from the fugitive. The first half of each mission consists of trying to catch up to the criminal while staying on the road and avoiding civilian vehicles and dangerous assailants, such as bikers and even a helicopter. If the officers reach their target with seconds to spare, the timer resets to allow them a chance to repeatedly slam into the fleeing vehicle, grinding down its status bar until the crook inside can be captured. However, the officers' own car can be harmed by driving into roadside obstacles or tunnel walls, or by criminals attacking with Molotov cocktails, guns, and rockets. Staying on the road while crashing into the escaping criminal is challenging within the time limit, but thankfully, three turbo boosts per mission can help turn the tide. Visually, the game is fine, and the sense of speed conveyed is remarkable, especially when engaging the 250 mph turbo boosts. While it's a relatively short diversion with only five rounds plus a potential bonus one, it may be worth it for a quick joyride.





Reflections: Part of the Chase H.Q. series of games, *Super Chase H.Q.* is loosely based on *Super Chase: Criminal Termination*, released in Japanese arcades in 1992. While the previous games in the series take place in a third-person perspective behind the car, the Super Chase games shift into first-person, which is much more visually impressive, even if it takes some getting used to while playing. The series feels a bit like the Out Run games with good ol' fashioned crime thrown in, and it offers some nice continuity – officers Tony Gibson and Raymond Broady reappear in several games, while Nancy alerts them ("This is Nancy!") about the criminal to track down. *Crime City* (1989) took Tony and Raymond out of their car and into side-scrolling arcade action, but it was never ported to a home console. – PC

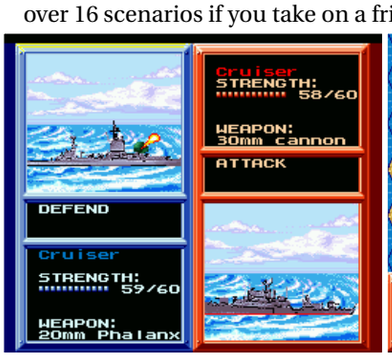
Super Conflict

Genre: Simulation, Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Manley & Associates
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★⋆





Welcome to the world of strategic war simulation! In this title, you have the opportunity to command your armed forces and wage war against your adversary by land, sea, and air. With its hexagonal grid system, this chess-like competition tasks you with moving your various units, such as tanks, planes, ships, and infantry, to eventually engage in battles with enemy soldiers and vehicles. The goal is to seize victory by destroying the opposition's Flag Unit in each scenario. Take on the computer or challenge a buddy to a friendly (or not-so-friendly) conflict. Maneuver and mobilize your forces over different types of terrain, including deserts, forests, and mountains. Once you arrive at a space adjacent to an enemy unit, you have the option to fight! For battles, the game cuts from the top-down "game board" perspective to a side view of the action. You are shown the military assets currently engaged along with stats including strength and remaining ammo. It takes a little bit of time before you can tangle with enemy units, though, as each of your "pieces" can be moved just once per round, and you only have access to certain designated spaces during each turn. War is a brutal affair, but it requires patience, thought, and strategy. Would-be generals can order their forces to occupy cities, airports, and shipyards to provide valuable assets the chance to get repaired and resupplied. You also earn Production Points throughout the campaigns; these can be used to build additional air, sea, and land units using factories. Destroying an enemy unit earns 300 Productions Points, which are taken from your defeated foe. Production Points can also be accumulated over time by claiming and holding cities and airports. Single-player games against the computer span across five intense levels with a total of 55 scenarios in all, while the war rages over 16 scenarios if you take on a friend.





Reflections: Does this game seem a touch boring? Well, just jazz things up by using your imagination! Pretend that you're Tom Cruise from the film *Top Gun*, piloting your F-14A Tomcat against evil MiG-28 fighters! Go Maverick! Or make believe that you're the kids from *Red Dawn* taking on an invading totalitarian army with some stolen tanks and grenade launchers! See, all those war movies that were drilled into our heads while growing up in the '80s were good for something after all. Wolverines! – DM

Super Copa

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil)
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Rare
★★★







This soccer title is in Spanish or Portuguese (selectable upon loading). It offers a hybrid of arcade and simulation elements that is accessible both to casual and to more serious fans of the sport. The swooping camera, which is situated just above the possessor of the ball, is the most notable trait of the game. The offensive goal is always at the top of the screen, so the camera rotates 180 degrees around when possession changes, which is a fine display of the console's scaling and rotation capabilities. Rapid possession changes and camera swivels can get annoying, though. On the pitch, play controls for passing and shooting are simple. The action is fast, too; in fact, it's considerably faster than most soccer games, giving the experience more of an arcade feel. Fouls are called on a seemingly arbitrary basis, often to change momentum if one team has been dominating. Red cards are issued, so it will be necessary to rotate new players in when carded players are ejected. The simulation aspect comes in the form of formation management and play-calling strategy. Players more familiar with the sport will appreciate the inclusion of these features, but casual fans can skip these and have success without using them. Getting to the game action is more complicated than it should be, thanks to a menu system driven purely by symbols that don't always make sense. Friendly matches, league play, and tournament play are available, but players need to know the symbols for each to start them. It's very strange. The visuals, aside from the camera, are a mixed bag. Players look the same, but the pitch looks good, and the gameplay is smooth. The music is kind of like guitar rock and sounds okay; it covers up the meager sound effects. All told, this game is surprisingly fun. Give it a try!





Reflections: This is the Portuguese and Spanish-language version of *Tony Meola's Sidekicks Soccer*, released in Latin America and Brazil. While the Spanish-language box back states that it is "for sale in the USA, Canada, and Mexico only," it is likely that it was only available in Mexico and maybe the Southwest United States, due to its high degree of rarity. The Brazilian release from distributor Playtronic has its own unique cart label and box which is in Portuguese. – PS

Super Dany

Genre: Action-Platformer, Puzzle
Release Date: July 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Cryo Interactive Entertainment
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★

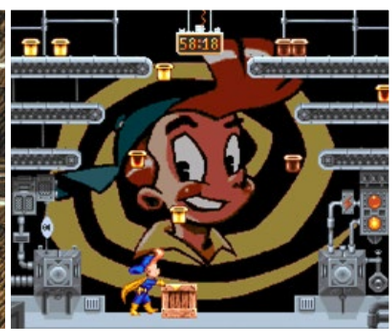






Pulled into their television set by Doctor TV while they were enjoying some yogurt, young lad Dany and his pals Marius and Mathilde must save their captured chum Norbert in this product-pushing puzzle-platformer. The player can switch between the three kids on the fly (characters in reserve transform into statues until needed) as they traverse the five worlds, taking advantage of each one's unique attributes: Dany can shoot lasers, Mathilde can jump high, and Marius can crawl into small spaces to reach areas the other two can't. The idea is to use their traits in a complementary fashion, but this concept immediately falls flat as many stages don't require any teamwork at all, defeating the whole gameplay mechanic. Dany and friends can pick up keys to open doors and items which make them impervious to specific enemy types, but they can only hold one thing at a time, so juggling between characters for inventory slots is required. Each teammate has a heart meter, but it's game over if any of them die, so collecting health potions delays the continue screen. The enemies are of generic skeleton, dragon, and spider stock, and aside from the final stage's TV studio setting, the unimaginative castle and spooky mansion environments just add to the tedium, despite how attractive everything looks.





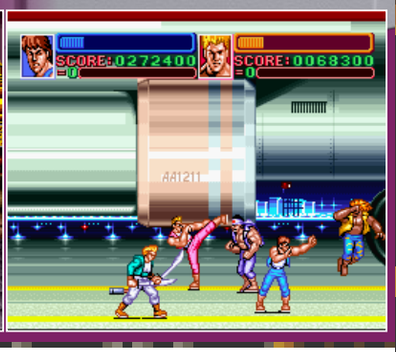
Reflections: *The Lost Vikings* has randomly been aped here by French company Danone (AKA Dannon) in order to sell yogurt to kids. Why this needs their cartoon mascots running around uninspired levels is beyond me, but it all becomes strangely clear during bonus stages, where you dash from left to right collecting yogurt cups! The game itself is functional, and had the puzzle elements been more focused, then it would've been fun. As it stands, huge chunks of levels can be bypassed by using Mathilde and her jumping ability, and having the option to restart a stage in the pause menu sets off alarm bells because it's entirely possible to use a key on a door and not have enough to complete the board! You're expected to complete the game in one sitting, as there is no password function, but frustration kicks in after the first couple of stages, so it's a tall order. The only plus point out of this title, aside from the graphics, is that Dany's laser attack seemingly comes from his nipples. Hopefully, that isn't where his yogurts originate from. – JE

Super Double Dragon

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Technōs Japan
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







The Double Dragon brothers have returned. Again. As usual, Billy and Jimmy Lee are out to stop the Black Shadow Warriors, who have apparently kidnapped their friend Marian. Again. But never fear! This colorful side-scrolling beat 'em up for one or two players is packing a *special* kind of punch! Uppercuts, flying kicks, hair grabs, and throws are all still part of your repertoire. Again. But now you can unleash even *more* pain by filling your Dragon Power Gauge, allowing you to take advantage of a number of Special Techniques to punish the thugs who stand in your way. And who says brutal fighting moves need fancy names?! The Round Back Fist and Jumping Back Round Kick may *sound* boring, but these attacks are designed to dish out heaping helpings of hurting! Use all your vigilante scrapping prowess against baddies such as Duke, McGuire, Steve, and Jeff. ESPECIALLY Jeff. Disarm your enemies and turn a variety of their own weapons against them. And don't forget the new blocking mechanic! If timed just right, an incoming punch can be stopped and then countered with a crushing blow of your own. Beat 'em up fans will love the nuanced bits of gameplay, such as the ability to grab and hold one enemy while attacking another. Seven stages will have your heroes traveling to a variety of locales, including a Las Vegas casino, a forest, and the Golden Gate Bridge. The music in this game is catchy and fun, and the sound effects are a satisfying companion to the action. Billy and Jimmy Lee are on a quest in the name of vigilante justice. Again. And this time around, it truly is double the fun!





Reflections: According to legend, Marian was not actually in need of rescuing here. Some say she staged her own kidnapping and skipped town, later mailing a "Dear John" Letter to the Lee brothers, which read: "Dear Billy and Jimmy, I think it's time for me to move on. I've been growing so bored of street brawling, the Shadow Warriors and being the damsel in distress. Maybe the day will come for you guys to reconsider the sleeveless denim jackets, fingerless gloves, and parachute pants. After all, it's 1992 now! Honestly, the whole "vigilantes with mullets" thing is just so '80s! I have traded my teased hair and neon jelly bracelets for grunge CDs and earth colors. It's such an amazing new world! Anyway, take care. (It's not me, it's you.) Sincerely, Marian." – DM

Super Dropzone (Archer Maclean's)

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Defend the Earth colonists on four of Jupiter's moons (Io, Callisto, Ganymede, and Europa) before heading to the gas giant itself in this throwback to the original 2D side-scrolling shooter classic. Waves of aliens, wave leaders, and a boss Planet Guardian must be obliterated by a soaring, jetpack-clad spaceman in order to proceed onto the next wide, horizontal location, each becoming more difficult than the last. Lasers, screen-clearing smart bombs, and spinning shields can be collected via dropped weapon icons to bolster your attack. A map on the bottom of the screen shows the locations of enemies and also pinpoints dangerous, red UFOs that zip across the screen, instantly costing a life when touched. Luckily, there is a cloaking device that can be activated to assist in defense, but it has to be used sparingly, adding extra strategy. Colonist orbs are scattered across the locale; these can be collected for bonus points at the end of a wave, while the aliens are tasked with kidnapping or killing them. If all the colonists are killed on a stage or you lose five lives, it is game over. Using the map and not speeding along will cause less careless deaths, but the game never lets up its frantic pace, clearly inspired by arcade games.





Reflections: This is one of those perfect titles for someone who has 10 minutes to kill – because they probably won't last that long. As a spiritual descendant of coin munchers from a time when all that mattered was getting that high score and being better than your friends, it can be as fun as it is frustrating. Rushing into battle causes guaranteed death unless you have put in some serious practice – which I haven't. I am just plain bad at it, and those red aliens make me so angry, especially when they spawn right next to me! Still, it doesn't stop me from wanting to try again and again, which makes this a good game in my book. – JE

Super Empire Strikes Back

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software, LucasArts
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries (THQ: Rerelease)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★⋆





The battle against Darth Vader and the evil Empire continues in this action-platformer sequel. Beginning on ice world Hoth, the player controls Luke Skywalker on and off of his Tauntaun as he fights the elements, snow creatures, and Imperial probe droids before facing stormtroopers. Luke is armed with a pistol and a much more effective lightsaber that can be swung in multiple directions and used as a shield to block/deflect incoming fire. Han Solo and Chewbacca are given their own stages on Hoth and in Cloud City, with Han being able to acquire and throw plasma grenades and Chewbacca having a powerful, rechargeable spinning attack. Pickups are numerous and include hearts, health swords to extend the life bar, shields, pistol upgrades, thermal detonators, and more. Players can aim in all main directions but down, slide/roll, and even double-jump to get around sprawling levels filled with platforms and dangers. Luke's double jump with the lightsaber results in a devastating spinning attack, which is crucial for survival. On Dagobah, Luke can discover several Force abilities, such as healing, throwing the lightsaber, and elevating. The nuisance of the Cloud City stages makes the use of these skills almost a necessity, even before finally facing Vader. A handful of vehicle stages vary in polish and fun, with the Snowspeeder level on Hoth a highlight, and the first-person Millenium Falcon asteroid field stage a slog. The graphics are fantastic, the sound effects and score authentic to the film, and the presentation top-notch. A high degree of challenge due to constant streams of enemies, difficult platforming, and overpowered bosses may annoy some, but most should be very pleased.





Reflections: Like the original, this sequel does a great job of translating the film's plot into a quality gaming experience while doing justice to what's regarded by most fans as the best Star Wars film (it certainly is to me). The default challenge is certainly ramped up from the first game but can be overcome with lots of patience, dying, and more patience (and dying). The sound effects and voice samples used in the game are awesome, and Darth Vader's voice is just as chilling to hear in 16-bit form. There's almost *too* much packed into this game, though – a couple of 2D shooter stages *probably* aren't necessary, and some levels seem to continue on forever. Thankfully, this title is of such quality that you'll want to power on in the face of such galactic adversity. – PC

Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★⋆





Noble knight Arthur seeks to rescue Princess Guinevere from Sardius, the Emperor of Evil. Armed with a default throwing lance, he must take out ghosts, monsters, and other gruesome foes across several lush and lively side-scrolling stages. Eerie environment-specific dangers, such as avalanches on the icy mountain, spiky coral columns in the open sea, and nasty steam emanating from inside of a ghoul's stomach, accompany standard pits, moving platforms, and ladders. The challenge is daunting; Arthur loses his armor with a single touch and dies if hit while stripped down to his underwear. Fortunately, treasure chests may hold imperative armor improvements. If not wearing any, obtaining armor outfits Arthur in the standard steel version. The bronze armor upgrade makes his current weapon more powerful, and the superior golden armor adds a chargeable magic attack; projectile shields can be gained after that. Weapons of varying effectiveness (dagger, torch, scythe, and more) can also be garnered from inside pots and treasure chests, but some chests hold traps (for example, one type turns Arthur into a defenseless woman). The difficulty is hefty but not overwhelming, as the controls are decent and the double jump can help Arthur out of tight situations. Stage layouts are varied, and the Foul Guardian boss fights are a little intense but still reasonable. The map presentation between levels is great for tracking progress, and the organ-heavy soundtrack nicely frames the tone of each stage while being memorable in its own right.





Reflections: A very strong sequel in the Ghosts 'n Goblins series, this is fortunately a much fairer (and more fun!) game, as Arthur is a bit stronger and more agile to meet the perilous challenges. As in the prior entries, you must run through the game twice while also defeating the final boss with a specific weapon to achieve the true ending. One could argue that Arthur is a bit overpowered with the golden armor, but only the best players will be able to last more than a short time before being reduced to their skivvies. There are impressive graphics and effects on display here in terms of the foregrounds and backgrounds, with a couple of highlights being the snowfall in the ice forest and the rotating ledge of the tower that Arthur ascends. Definitely an early SNES standout. – PC

Super Goal! 2

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★



Take to the pitch and go for the Super Cup in this soccer game, which walks a line between arcade action and simulation. Players can choose from 24 different countries, each of which has team stats and tendencies that at least somewhat reflect the real-life capabilities of that country's squad in four different areas: attack, speed, defense, and goalkeeping. The game's Exhibition mode is basically a friendly match between two teams. PK Mode is a penalty kick shootout where the team with the most goals wins. The core of the experience here lies in the Super Cup mode, which is a loose approximation of the World Cup. Results are saved with passwords so the entire championship journey doesn't have to take place in one sitting. Getting used to the play controls takes some adjustment, especially without an instruction manual, so expect to spend a few games in Exhibition mode figuring out what each button on the SNES controller does. While the button layout isn't necessarily intuitive, the play controls are responsive. Scoring chances require accurate passing and deft player maneuvering, and the best chances come from rebounds off of the goalkeeper. Visually, the camera follows the fast-paced action from a vertical bird's-eye perspective. The camera zooms out when the ball gets airborne and zooms back in when the ball returns to the field – it's a pretty neat touch. The player models and animations aren't all that impressive, but they get the job done. The four different fields all look quite good, each with their own condition. Snow, dirt, and grass all present different effects on player speed and how the ball moves. The sound fares better with energetic music and effects. Soccer fans may ultimately like this more, but anyone can play it.



Reflections: Playing this game takes me back to high school, before the SNES was even a thing. Soccer and gym class went hand in hand, and for four years, I was the permanent goalkeeper. This wasn't because my teachers saw potential; I just didn't understand the other positions. The best save I ever made was on a shot that I didn't even see. I took it right off of my head and ricocheted it back into play. I heard "Nice save!" through the ringing in my ears, and I think my forehead read "SPALDING" for a week. Good times. – PS

Super Godzilla

Genre: Fighting, Strategy
Release Date: July 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Advance Communication Company
Publisher: Toho
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



In this strategy/fighting game, alien invaders are controlling monsters to take over Japan, and Godzilla is the only one who can stop them. The monsters being manipulated are some of Godzilla's toughest archenemies, including King Ghidorah, Mechagodzilla, Biollante, Battra, and Mecha-King Ghidorah. There are two gameplay modes throughout the experience – movement and battle. While in movement mode, the player is given a horizontal split-screen view, with the top displaying cinematic visuals of Godzilla walking/destroying buildings and the bottom showing Godzilla's position on a map. The player must navigate Godzilla around the map while searching for whichever monster the invaders happen to be controlling. During his travels, Godzilla can visit energy resupply bases to restore health, pick up offensive/defensive boosts (for battle mode), or utilize warp portals to travel to different areas of the map. This mode requires plenty of patience due to Godzilla's excruciatingly slow pace. Once Godzilla locates his target or gets attacked by a UFO, the gameplay switches to battle mode. This 2D fighting game has players guiding Godzilla as he squares off against the enemy. This may sound amazing, but thanks to the game's confusing Fighting Spirit Meter, it's an overall disappointment. During battle, the player must fill the meter by attacking and defending at the correct times. As the meter fills, Godzilla becomes able to pull off more devastating attacks, such as his trademark fire breath. The meter makes Godzilla feel like a weakling since he's constantly having to back away from the action. Godzilla's enemies also have a Fighting Spirit Meter that inexplicably fills faster than his, making fights seem unfair. The gameplay may be lacking, but the visuals and sound fit the bill. Godzilla's roar sounds just as it does in the films, so fans of the franchise might get some enjoyment out of this.

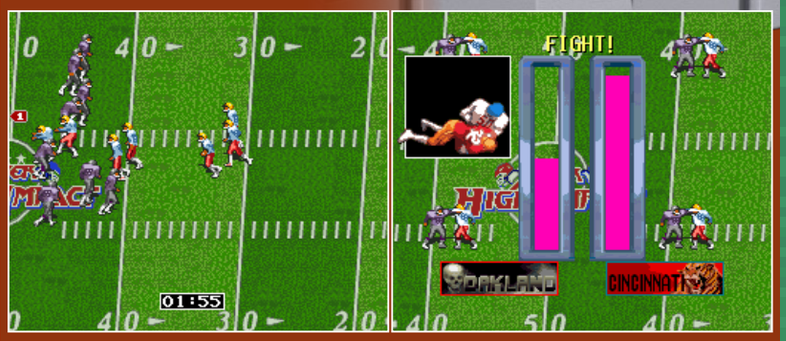


Reflections: Godzilla films were a pretty big part of my childhood, so I was really excited when this showed up at my local rental shop. As with 99% of all my game rentals, *Super Godzilla* was missing the manual. Usually this wasn't a big deal, but in this case I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. Once the confusing Fighting Spirit Meter made an appearance, I began to realize that I may have wasted my weekly allowance. This game does have some redeeming qualities, though. The special attack cutscenes are stellar and capture the spirit of the films nicely. – MV

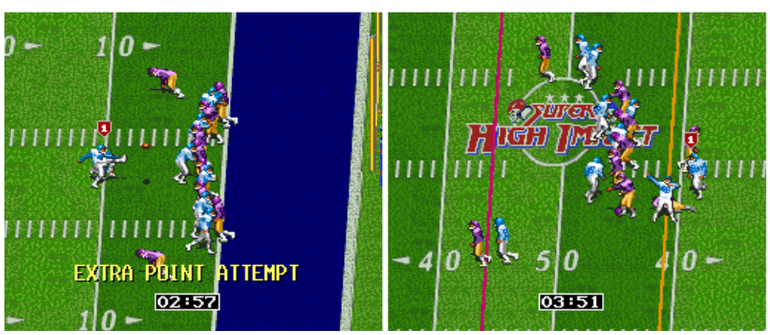
Super High Impact

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Beam Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★





In this side-scrolling arcade football game, rules are at a minimum, post-play fights happen, and fierce tackles can result in a player's helmet being knocked from his head. Those looking for a serious football experience can stop reading but will miss out on a pretty entertaining and easy-to-play game. The controls are simple, with one-button commands for passing, player switching, diving plays on offense or defense, and the all-important Turbo function – which can only be utilized once per play. 13 offensive plays, 15 defensive plays, and a pair of special teams plays (punt and field goal) are available. While running plays are an option, this game is driven by the pass. Players must be swift in their decision-making, however, as defenders are generally quick to get to the quarterback for potential sacks. Occasionally, a fight sequence ensues after a hard tackle; the screen switches to a two-meter display with "cameras" that show fisticuffs while players hammer on the controller buttons to fill their respective meters. The first player to max their meter wins the fight. Rapid button presses are also required for kickoffs and field goals, and it's possible for players with quick fingers to kick extremely long three-pointers. Unfortunately, while the game is fun to play, it's light on replay value; there aren't any season or franchise modes, and "high scores" are lost when the game is powered off. Graphically, the game looks pretty good, with smooth player animations and lots of digitized scenes. A bit of detail was lost from the arcade original, but it's still above average by SNES standards. The sound is great, with high-energy music and a fair amount of speech samples. This game is fun in short bursts alone or with friends.



Reflections: *Super High Impact* is to *NFL Blitz* as *Arch Rivals* is to *NBA Jam*. Several of the same concepts, including the play-calling screen, the over-the-top and brutal hits on defense, and the general in-your-face attitude on display here made the trip over to Midway's 1997 arcade hit. Notably, the trademark "rubber band AI" that would go on to be found in other Midway sports games isn't as prevalent here. It's not uncommon for skilled players to destroy the AI by 50 or more points on easier difficulty settings, but running up the score and getting into a few fights along the way can be more fun than you might think. – PS

Super Ice Hockey

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Opera House
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Rare
★★





Face your friends head-to-head-to-head-to-head in this chilling ice hockey game! There are three modes to choose from: a one-game versus mode, a single elimination tournament, and Olympic, which consists of a two-group round-robin followed by the top eight in a traditional bracket. In each mode, your team comes from a list of 16 international teams that have varying attack, defense, and movement abilities. Every mode also allows you to play with up to four controllers by using a multitap. In versus, each player can be on whichever side they choose, while in the other two modes, players control their choice of team. There are many options you can adjust, including rules (e.g., the length of each period), and the speed of the players, so you can have fast-paced, constant action or slower, more methodical play. In the menus as well as in-game, there is decent, upbeat music. During matches, the rink is a well-done Mode 7 background that gives an angled, top-down view with a great distance effect. Unfortunately, this is where the game goes awry. The movement feels sluggish and unresponsive, resulting in the players being slow to pick up and go. You are able to halt the player you're controlling, which mediates fighting the momentum for turnarounds. In addition, there is no indicator of where other players are, making it difficult to pass the puck effectively. It's nice that there are options to customize your game and to play with up to three other people, but without good controls and movement, there isn't much fun to be had.



Reflections: I admit, I was fooled into thinking positively about this game before I laid skate onto ice. The cheerful music, game options, and even the first shot of the Mode 7 effects all bespeak of a better experience than what you are treated to. The movement was frustrating most of the time, and I felt like I more often struggled to get to the puck than played around with it. I get that you're on ice, but it shouldn't mean having to deal with constant ice physics. Ice levels in games are generally disliked, and this title is like that for the entire time. It may be worth trying if you're a diehard hockey fan, but casual players: beware! – KY

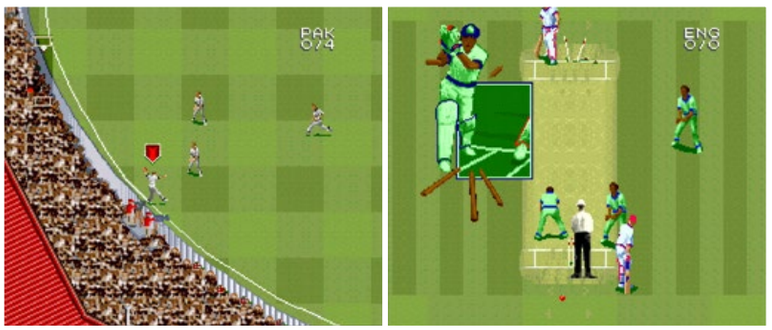
Super International Cricket

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Nintendo of Europe
Players: 1-4 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★





Compete as one of eight teams in the World Series or have the quicker experience of a test, one-day or fast match in this bird's-eye-view cricket sim. The player takes control of the batter or bowler depending on which side wins the coin toss (held in all modes aside from fast match), and an on-screen arrow suggests where the ball will bounce. The bowler can change the ball speed and position of the arrow, and it is up to the batter to respond and hit the ball. If the player hits the ball, they can then score runs to and from each wicket on the pitch while the bowling team tries to return the ball as fast as possible to stop them. The teams swap sides when a certain number of batters have been bowled out. The game has simple controls that are easy to pick up, and keeping an eye on the radar helps to catch any running batters out. Pop-up boxes and animations appear whenever an important play or referee decision happens. These moments, varied player statistics in batting, bowling, fielding, and running, team selections, and the ability to alter fielding positions all add up to a decent sports title for cricket fans.

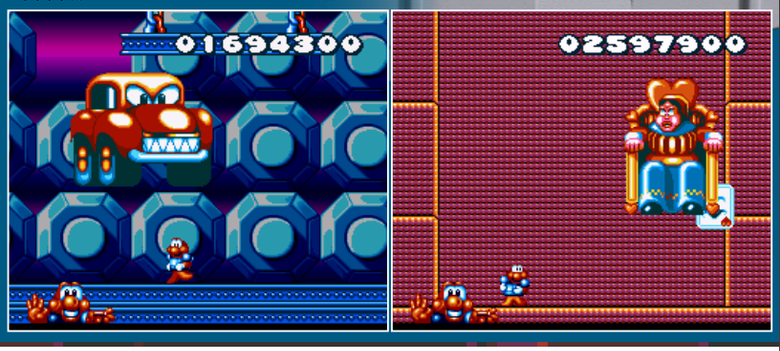


Reflections: The game is a fairly good representation of a cricket match, and it's the little touches that make the difference, such as the pop-up boxes and the crowd noise if the ball is hit out of the boundary. Different match lengths help with accessibility, as playing a four-hour tournament isn't for everyone, especially when there is no password system or battery save to pause it for another day. The game looks complicated, but it really just comes down to batting, bowling, running, and catching, all of which it performs routinely. Cranking up the difficulty will punish even serious cricketers because the AI seldom faults, so starting off on the easier settings will help in getting used to how the game operates. As it stands, there isn't really a choice when it comes to cricket games on the console, but luckily, it doesn't do anything untoward. It will never square up to *NBA Jam* or *International Superstar Soccer* in terms of frantic excitement, but there's plenty here if you want to try a new sports title. – JE

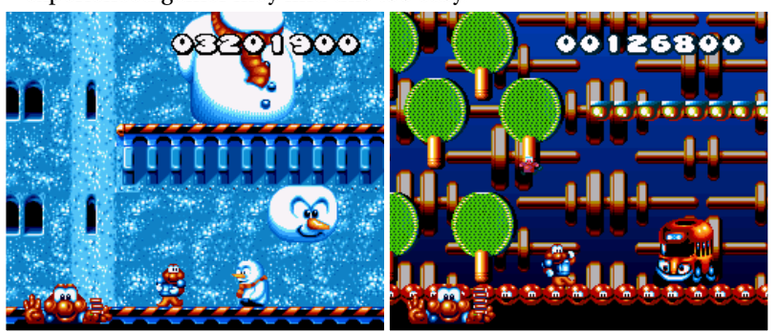
Super James Pond
Super James Pond II (EU)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Millennium Interactive, Vectordean
Publisher: American Softworks (PAL: Ocean Software)
Players: 1
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





In this nonlinear action-platformer, you control special agent (and fish) James Pond as he battles his arch nemesis, Dr. Maybe, who has planted bombs disguised as toy penguins throughout Santa's workshop. Gameplay involves freely exploring themed areas of the workshop while collecting random objects for points and searching for the penguin bombs. Most of the locations are what you'd expect to see if visiting Santa. There's a candy area full of sweets, a plushie one stuffed with teddy bears, and a car area zooming with toy vehicles. There are also a few odd sections, such as a casino and bathhouse, that feel weirdly out of place. James traverses the workshop by jumping from platform to platform while dispatching Dr. Maybe's minions by hopping on their heads. To access higher, hard-to-reach areas, James has a stretching ability that allows his body to lengthen and attach to surfaces above him. Although interesting, this ability is greatly underutilized. There are also a few power-ups that James can acquire, such as an umbrella that lets him float and wings that let him fly. A car, a plane, and a floating bathtub (yes, you read that right) can also be commandeered and driven around certain levels. Once all bombs in an area have been found, the exit pole will light up, meaning James can progress to the next part of the workshop. Every third area has James battling a boss. These battles feature fun enemies, such as an evil teddy bear and a larger-than-life ballerina, but they're mostly boring due to predictable patterns. The visuals are vibrant and full of color, but expect major slowdown when the action picks up. Although a fun challenge for younger players, the more experienced gamer may find this too easy.



Reflections: I first played this game on the Sega Genesis, where it's the second game in the series and titled *James Pond II: Codename: Robocod*. The "Robocod" codename refers to one of my favorite films, *RoboCop*. Even though the SNES version lacks the Robocod name, it still features the *RoboCop* theme song, the metal suit, and the continue screen that reads "Continue? You have 10 seconds to comply." I'd like to know how many kids were clueless to the references. Considering *RoboCop*'s R rating, I'm guessing it flew over most youngsters' heads. Nah, who am I kidding? – MV

Super Mario All-Stars

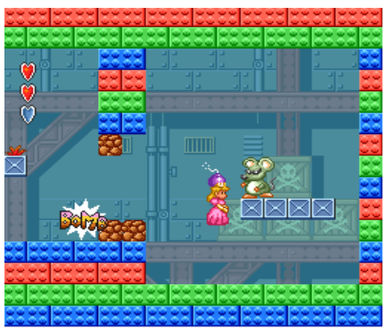
Genre: Platformer, Compilation
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







This compilation features remakes of three previously released Super Mario Bros. games plus one that never made its way from Japan. *Super Mario Bros.* is the classic NES adventure of Mario and Luigi that started it all, with the brothers platforming through eight worlds of the Mushroom Kingdom to rescue Princess Toadstool from Bowser. *Super Mario Bros. 2* stars Mario, Luigi, Princess Toadstool, and Toad (all with unique abilities), who must save the Subcon dreamland from Wart and his minions. *Super Mario Bros. 3* has the brothers returning to save the kingdoms of Mushroom World and Princess Toadstool from Bowser and his seven Koopaling children. *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels* is the Japanese Famicom Disk System's *Super Mario Bros. 2*, released for the first time in Europe and North America. *The Lost Levels* acts as an expansion of the original *Super Marios Bros.* but with a punishing difficulty. It mostly trades clever stage design for unfair frustration, with extra traps, poison mushrooms, trying enemy placement, and dead ends. All four games have been beautifully upgraded visually, with character sprites replaced, lush stage backgrounds added, and even parallax scrolling included to take advantage of the 16-bit platform. Likewise, the musical scores have been altered to feature the more realistic-sounding instrumentation of the SNES sound chip, although mileage may vary in preference of the updated soundtracks over the originals. The games play and feel similar to the originals, although slight movement/physics changes are apparent (most noticeably in *Super Mario Bros.*). Welcome additions include the in-game *Mario Bros.* arcade Battle Game from *Super Mario Bros. 3* being accessible from its game menu and having four save slots per title. This compilation is a perfect way to discover these classics, but even if you already have, it's a great for enjoying them again.





Reflections: *Super Mario All-Stars* served as a nice marketing piece for the "middle age" of the SNES. It was heavily advertised and became a pack-in title for European SNES consoles, while in North America it was presented as a bonus via stickers slapped on the boxes of the standard SNES bundle that included *Super Mario World*. It sold so well that it was one of the dozen or so titles that were rereleased with the "Players Choice Million Seller" label. I still prefer the original NES game versions... shocking, I know. This would be ported to the Nintendo Wii in 2010 and released to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Super Mario Bros.* – PC

Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World

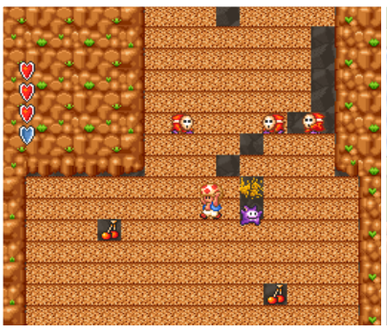
Genre: Platformer, Compilation
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
Not Rated







Formerly released separately, this combination title features S*uper Mario World* and the four games originally included with *Super Mario All-Stars* (*Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2*, *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*). Games are accessible via a standard menu and have four save slots per title. For more information on each, please consult the individual reviews found on pages 319 and 321.





Reflections: While it was released as a standalone title in Europe, in North America *Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World* was only available as a pack-in with the "Mario Set" console bundle. It acted as the replacement of sorts to the standard "Super Set" that included *Super Mario World* and a separate *Super Mario All-Stars* bonus. By this point in time, Nintendo had released a few different console bundles that included titles such as *Killer Instinct* and *Donkey Kong Country*, but of course, Nintendo would always have a set available that featured that lovable plumber and friends. – PC



SUPER MARIO 2
1989

Super Mario Kart

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★





What's black and white and *rad* all over? It's Lakitu's checkered flag, flying for your latest triumph in this super-fun split-screen go-kart racer! Just don't get ahead of yourself before getting ahead of everyone else – there are choices to make! Selecting the number of participants determines the modes on offer, but the eight-entrant Mario Kart GP is available for both solo and paired play. Pick this and a 50, 100, or winnable 150cc engine – the "cc" could almost stand for "competitor combativeness" because AI opponents drive better and attack more with the higher figures. Next, decide who gets behind the wheel – you'll get behind them for five diverse courses in one of three cup race circuits: Mushroom, Flower, or Star (a fourth, Special, is unlockable). The eight characters embody four driving styles: slow, steady steering (Koopa Troopa/Toad), agile, unwieldy accelerating (Princess/Yoshi), tempered, tremendous speed (Bowser/Donkey Kong Jr.) and basic, balanced attributes (Mario/Luigi). Whoever you don't pick uses individualized means of curbing your karting, from lobbing eggs to flinging fireballs. Combined with track-specific hazards including bottomless pits, crushing Thwomps, and leaping gophers, these tactics can make placing in the top four challenging. Happily, racing feels responsive, and driving across Question Blocks grants items ranging from shell projectiles to collectible coins that keep your speed and endurance up. If you only want to plague a pal with banana peels, you can leave AI drivers in the dust during two-player Match Races on any available track. Better yet, Battle Mode provides four item-rich arenas for besting a buddy by busting balloons festooning their kart, but if they succeed instead, Time Trial's a worthwhile GP practice session for you alone. Take a spin with some Mode 7 motoring – though simple, this celebrated start to a great series wins the gold for fun.





Reflections: I loved two-player *Super Mario Kart* as a kid, but in college I was too shy to join a game with the cool guys across the hall. I remember the enticing glow of the TV flickering through their open dorm room door as they laughed over familiar music – Koopa's victory shuffle, my fave – but words as simple as "Hey, *Mario Kart*! Can I play?" would not escape my mouth. I wonder if I missed out on making friends that day – guys I might've kept in touch with years later – but the only one from that moment who'll ever drop me a line is Lakitu. – AP

Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars

Genre: RPG
Release Date: May 1996
Region: NA, PAL (Brazil only)
Developer: Square
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★





Jump into Mario's shoes and 'stache and keep on leaping on this role-playing romp to stomp sinister Smithy's schemes. Setting his sights on conquest, that mechanized miscreant stole Bowser's castle and shattered Star Road with a monstrous sword, arresting the fruition of wishes lest the latter's seven Pieces are secured. You needn't worry, however – your yen for fun will still be fulfilled thanks to this title's delightful writing, diverse objectives, and compelling companions. Though only three (including Mario) can populate a party, four friends join the journey: Mallow, an emotive lad of mysterious lineage; Geno, a lively doll dedicated to "a higher authority"; Bowser, a familiar foe turned strange bedfellow; and a certain lovely royal that the manual doesn't spoil. When brought into battle by touching enemies, your chosen trio takes turns wielding creative weapons, using healing mushrooms and more from a limited inventory, and spending Flower Points (FP) on Special support/attack skills to win experience/coins. While all this seems typical of the genre, quirks in the structure abound: Flower Points are pooled, commands are assigned to the face buttons instead of selected from a menu, and many offensive moves require extra timed inputs to up their efficacy, demanding your attention during every bout. You'll remain engaged outside of fights with Boos, Goombas, bosses, etc. because the isometric perspective increases the challenge of platforming through Booster's Tower, Bean Valley, and other labeled locales (unlocked on area maps). Furthermore, the plethora of kooky characters, treasure boxes, items purchased via two currencies, minigames, side quests, and Easter eggs is incredible – you'll be making tadpole music one moment and stumbling upon *The Legend of Zelda's* Link the next! Along with terrific tunes, pre-rendered graphics, and SA-1 chip enhancement, these fabulous features set Mario's quest ahead by leaps and bounds.





Reflections: From Bowser's bravado to an epic optional fight with the Final Fantasy-esque Culex, many grand things in this game grabbed my notice – yet the tiniest twinkle shone brightest. Scattered across Star Hill, ungranted wishes wait with wistful smiles, and it moved me to read these simple hopes – especially "I wanna be a great plumber like my brother Mario." With Luigi absent outside of the manual and ending, this admirable desire took me by surprise. Fear not, dear Luigi – your sweet request plumbed the depths of my heart. – AP

Super Mario World

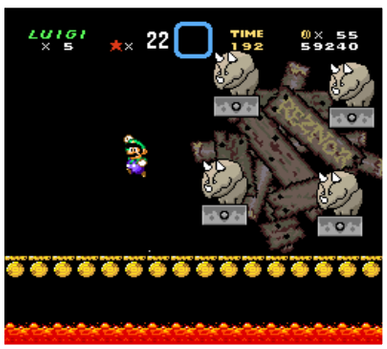
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★

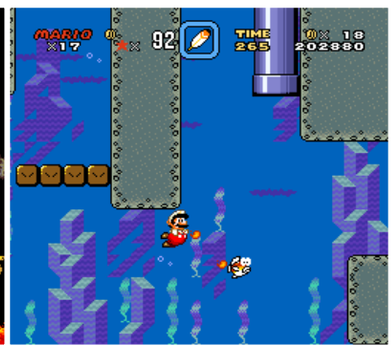






While Mario and Luigi are on vacation in Dinosaur Land, the evil Bowser kidnaps Princess Toadstool. The heroic brothers must save her and Yoshi's pals in this superior platforming adventure. At the outset, players are presented with a colorful, animated overworld map of Dinosaur Land, where they can move Mario/Luigi characters around to travel to and play selected stages. Once stages are completed, the map reveals pathways to new areas. Familiar side-scrolling platforming from prior games in the series makes its return, with the objective being to run through each course and hit a moving gate to finish in the allotted time. Throughout each stage, players encounter a variety of cute but dangerous foes, including stompable Goombas, Koopa turtles that can get bopped from their shells, Monty Mole, Dino Rhino, Wiggler the caterpillar, Sumo Brother, Chargin' Chuck, and a whole lot more. The enemies are unique in their looks, movements, and personalities. While treading through stages that often have different paths, players might proceed underground by ducking down a pipe, up into the clouds by climbing a growing vine, or even underwater for some swimming fun as they evade marine life, such as Rip Van Fish and Porcu-Puffer. The controls are superb in any situation, with precise running and jumping, midair directional changes, and even consecutively bouncing off of different enemies simple and fun to do.





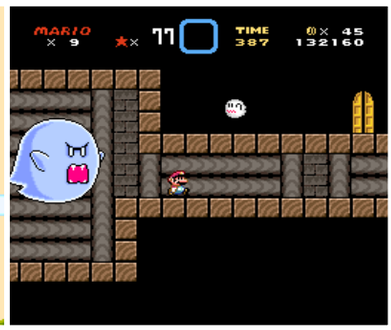
Mario and Luigi have to avoid foes such as parachuting Bob-ombs or the giant Banzai Bill who zooms across the screen, but going on the attack and jumping on baddies to stun or squash them is necessary to clear out trouble. Spin jumping is new to the series and can crush some enemies that cannot be eliminated by regular jumps. However, objects including blocks and Koopa shells can be picked up, carried, and thrown for a different offense. Players are encouraged to jump and hit the numerous "?" blocks in stages, as they contain coins (gathering 100 awards an extra life) or a helpful item or power-up. Returning from previous games in the series, the Super Mushroom increases Mario or Luigi's size, the Fire Flower increases size and allows the throwing of bouncing fireballs that take out most enemies, and the Super Star grants temporary invincibility. The new power-up (and a calling card for the game) is the Cape Feather, which gives Mario/Luigi a yellow cape and superpowers. With it, players can spin to strike foes and float slowly to the ground while in midair. However, its main selling point is the awesome ability to run and launch into the air to fly and glide.

When flying, players can reach areas in the clouds not accessible otherwise, or they can traverse large expanses of stages or even divebomb onto baddies. Another impressive new item/power-up is the egg that hatches into dinosaur Yoshi. Mario/Luigi can jump on Yoshi and ride him around, hopping on enemies or making him stick out his tongue to gobble them up! Yoshi can keep certain objects and enemy parts in his mouth and spit them out. He can expel red Koopa shells and some other things as fireballs, retain yellow shells to create an enemy-defeating sand cloud when jumping, or hold blue shells to fly with wings.

The wide variety of stage types across the seven visually different worlds, including Donut Plains, Chocolate Island, and the Forest of Illusion, keeps the long journey fresh. Courses with auto-moving lifts in the sky, spooky ghost houses with Boo Buddies and the Big Boo, subterranean stages with Swoopers, Buzzy Beetles, and fiery Blarggs, and fortresses with Dry Bones, Thwomps, Thwimps, and more challenge players. Many stages can be completed in a second way by using Switch Blocks that transform coins into blocks or vice versa to discover alternate paths and/or by finding a key to unlock a magical keyhole; doing this reveals hidden stages or warp pipes on the overworld map, including potential access to the bonus Star World. The main challenge awaits in the castles that Bowser's seven Koopaling children inhabit. These offer especially dastardly traps, such as saw blades and crushing ceilings, and occasionally sections where Mario/Luigi can punch Koopas off a fence while climbing. The end Koopaling boss fights are much simpler but still entertaining, while the final castle of Bowser features a maze-like room setup on the way to the big baddie himself.

This supreme platforming experience offers an abundance of replayability for one player or a pair to conquer. The stage and character designs are outstanding, with a light and humorous tone belying the difficulty. Accompanying the grandeur is a marvelous soundtrack composed by Koji Kondo, which often utilizes "happy" ragtime and Caribbean influences in the overworld songs to great effect while being appropriately moody and creepy in fortresses, castles, and ghost houses. With top-notch gameplay, ingenious level design, wonderful enemies, clever secrets, and tons more, so much classy entertainment is stuffed into this cartridge that the only negative might be the feeling when the grand adventure finally comes to an end.





Reflections: *Super Mario World* (originally *Super Mario Bros. 4*) was developed for Nintendo's upcoming Super Famicom system, with Shigeru Miyamoto in a producing role (he has stated it's his favorite in the series). While it was one of two release titles in Japan (along with *F-Zero*), Nintendo wisely made it the pack-in game for the Super NES when it launched in North America in August 1991. In the same way that *Super Mario Bros.* acted as a marketing centerpiece for the NES, *Super Mario World* perfectly demonstrated the superiority of the new 16-bit system in all aspects: graphics, music, sound design, gameplay, and presentation. For players of all ages, this title was a sparkling introduction to an exciting era of video games. While nearly 800 SNES games would follow suit, very, very few would come close to capturing the majestic essence of this platforming masterpiece. – PC





Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







A group of delightful and dedicated Yoshis must get baby Mario back to his parents while the wicked Magikoopa Kamek tries his utmost to kidnap him in this sumptuous platform adventure. In each stage, the player controls a Yoshi of a different hue – green, blue, red, and more – that can use his tongue to grab enemies, either spitting them back out as projectiles or turning them into eggs, up to six of which can then be accumulated, aimed with a roving crosshair, and pitched. A well-placed shot can hit not only Shy Guys and other baddies, but also switches and winged clouds that offer an array of bonuses and secrets. Additionally, Yoshi can jump on foes, do a damaging ground pound that's handy when an enemy can't be eaten, and briefly float to reach higher platforms. At times, Yoshi can transform into a helicopter, a train, and even a mole-like digger, which offers a new set of mini-puzzles to master and marvel at. Not to be outdone, baby Mario gains the ability to run at high speeds, jump, and float during loop-the-loop areas and mazes when a Super Star is acquired.





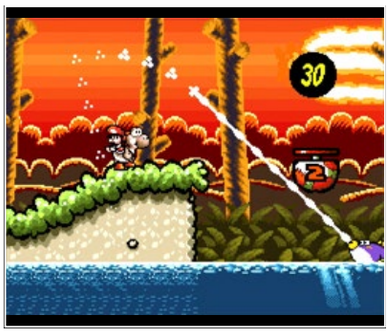
Each one of the 48-plus stages is beautifully hand drawn, as if by a young child telling a fairytale. The whimsical aesthetic of pastel scenery and cutesy characters isn't to be taken lightly, however, as the game can offer a serious dexterity challenge. There are three types of collectibles (stars, flowers, and red coins), and set amounts are hidden in each stage. Finding them all in a world means that secret levels can be unlocked – this is no mean feat, but it adds replay value because completed stages can be tried again. When Yoshi is hit, baby Mario gets captured in a bubble that Yoshi must pop before a timer reaches zero; if all seconds elapse, Yoshi loses a life. However, the aforementioned collectible stars add to the timer, giving a greater opportunity to free the infant. Acquired flowers unlock more chances at the end of each stage for a bonus game; there, Yoshi can earn items such as 1-ups, extra stars, or random cloud blocks that can be used from the pause menu. Both the special red coins and the regular gold coins strewn about can be collected for extra lives.

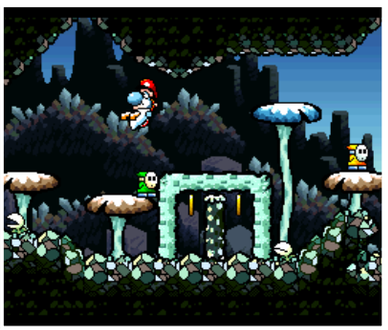
The entire experience flows from simple platform sections to nonlinear puzzle labyrinth castles to bosses to places that require keys for unlocking doors to a whole raft of secret areas that can be found off the beaten track with alternate routes. There is no level timer; the game encourages exploration, and there is always something waiting to be discovered. A joy from start to finish, with its tight gameplay, fantastic presentation, and hidden secrets, this is an absolute must for any Super Nintendo player.

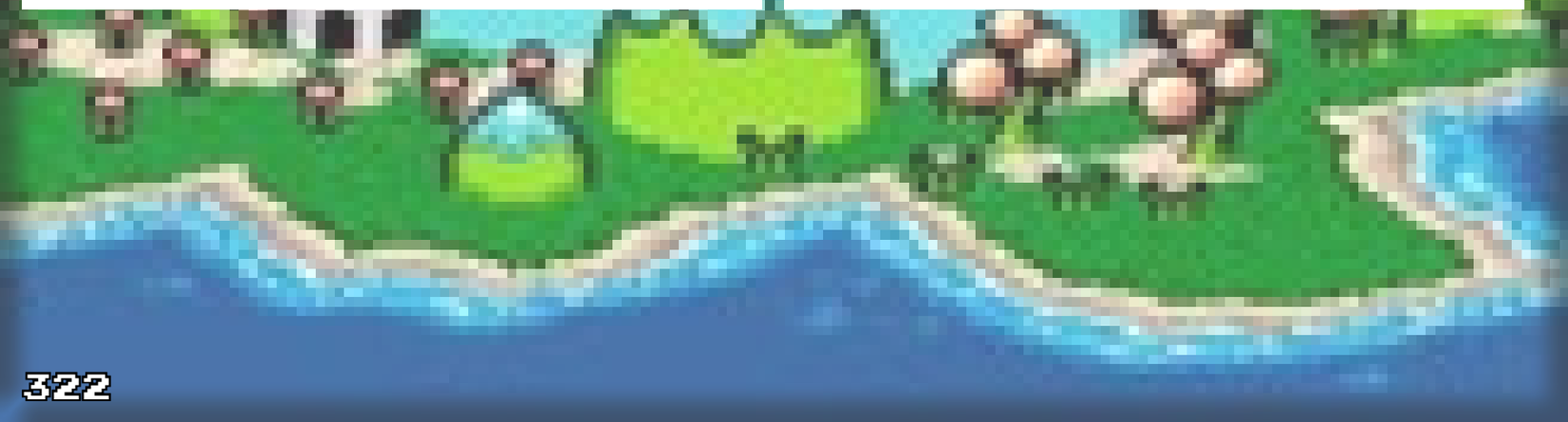




Reflections: In gamer circles, this amazing title is sometimes reviled as much as it is celebrated, so let's get the elephant in the room out of the way first: Some people despise baby Mario's cry when Yoshi takes a hit. He whines and moans with a shrill shriek that could burst eardrums... but isn't that the point? The game is telling you to stop being bad at it and that this is your punishment for letting a poor, defenseless child come to harm. The panic that noise creates is off the charts as you jump all over the screen, lobbing eggs at him in an attempt to pop the bubble and return the status quo. Graphically, the game is unrivalled on the console and, at times, makes you wonder how the system could even manage it, but it does with aplomb (and a little help from the Super FX2 microchip). It is the longevity that makes this title stand out even further, as each stage offers something different, from being chased by a Chain Chomp to using a boulder throughout an entire level to squash enemies and solve platforming challenges. The game is a masterpiece, a gift from Miyamoto to the SNES and to players everywhere. – JE





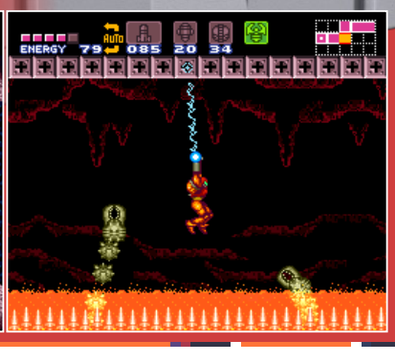


Super Metroid

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems, Nintendo R&D1
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★







An orphaned infant wails in the dark, its caretakers slaughtered by marauding pirates. Its cries belie its power, however – it is the Metroid, last larva of a world-desolating species that the pirates plot to exploit in service of Mother Brain's malevolence. Summoned to recover the energy-sucking suckling, brave bounty hunter Samus Aran arrives on Zebes, site of her previous bout with the sinister cerebrum and a planet presently pregnant with peril, potential... and Super NES perfection. In this pinnacle of 2D action-adventures, you step into Samus's suit and see that she is no mere babe in armors but a dynamic champion relentlessly evolving into an exceptional force for justice. Your mission is a marvel of mental and mettle tests seldom enjoyed elsewhere on the console, so be prepared to bear the brilliant challenges ahead.

You begin simply equipped, able to duck, run, and jump normally while firing your basic beam at eight different angles, but few areas yield access to these skills alone. Indeed, acquiring crucial items to expand your abilities is the lifeblood of this engagement. You must find the Morphing Ball to roll through tight tubes; the Bomb to bust open channels; Missiles, Super Missiles, Power Bombs, and the Speed Booster to breech certain doors or walls; upgraded suits to withstand trying climates, and much more to widen your travel range. Backtracking is obligatory but also obliging – it's satisfying, for example, to grab the Grappling Beam, transmuting erstwhile uncrossable chasms into child's play, and returning to scan seemingly barren rooms with the X-ray Scope often produces a capacity-increasing Missile Tank or life-extending Energy Tank.





There are even tremendous tricks to glean from amicable animals, but benevolent Zebes residents are a rare breed. Before you can even think of wracking Mother Brain in her Tourian lair, you must face fiendish foes while probing five other enthralling labyrinths, each comprising a complex cellular structure – a honeycomb of side-view rooms to traverse in all directions. Elevators and color-coded exits stitch together these exciting spaces, which offer distinctive sizes, shapes, and surroundings – from seething heat in Norfair to submerged caverns in Maridia to derelict devices fraught with phantoms in the Wrecked Ship. Most chambers teem with grotesque creatures that leap, creep, squirm, and strike mercilessly, so taking the combinable Charge, Ice, Plasma, Spazer, and Wave Beams from the talons of Chozo statues is critical – but beware, some of their sculpted brethren also hold surprises in their avian grip. More astounding still are the huge, horrific bosses, dire to the sight and to fight, but at least draconian kidnapper Ridley, great-bellied behemoth Kraid, and others drop ammo and energy balls upon expiring, much like lesser adversaries do.

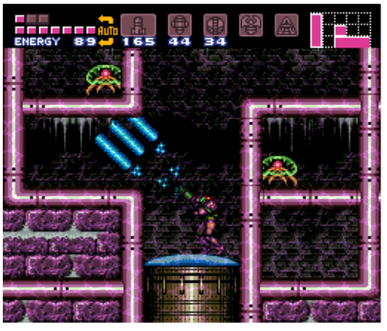
The immensity of these monsters' domains is almost as intimidating as it is impressive, but thankfully, every setting you step in is automatically mapped in pink; scattered computers reveal certain unvisited sections in blue, and progress-recording data save units abound. Diverse visuals including Brinstar's fecund flora and Crateria's acid-clouded skies also provide memorable mileposts, but perhaps the most salient landmark is the amazing, mood-modulating music. At turns, the tracks are spare, sonorous, and even scary, frequently featuring a synthetic chorus to chronicle your quest in evocative bursts. As you hear the horns sounding your noble labors and tremble at the trenchant tick-tock of your time coming due, marvel at the majesty of this SNES paragon. Its graphics and music are consummate to the tiniest detail, and its gameplay is more absorbing than its iconic namesake. Borne aloft by superior design and a peerless heroine, it's truly amongst the most magnificent titles ever conceived in 16-bits.





Reflections: The soundtrack to *Super Metroid* is intensely fantastic... and fantastically intense. Composers Kenji Yamamoto and Minako Hirano wove a masterful tapestry of sounds and silences where even rests provide no respite from the looming yet engrossing sense of dread. I experienced the full brunt of its transformative might during an otherwise typical walk one day. Listening to the music enshrouded my familiar route in eeriness – the morning mist, a barking dog, and even a neighbor's cheery yard decorations took on an unsettling, alien quality, and I hate to admit how startled I was when a jet roared overhead – thanks to the music, it felt like it could've been Ridley! The soundtrack's incredible ability to heighten the imagination is just one of the myriad reasons this game endures in the hearts and minds of many, including my brother. After the Castlevania series, Metroid is his favorite, so he decided to express his affinity with a vanity plate for his car. Naturally, he went with the way that Samus rolls for his wheels' awesome new tag, but "Morphing Ball" was too many letters – MRPHBLL had to do – so let's just say he took it rather well when I asked him who "Mr. Phibell" was. – AP





Super Morph

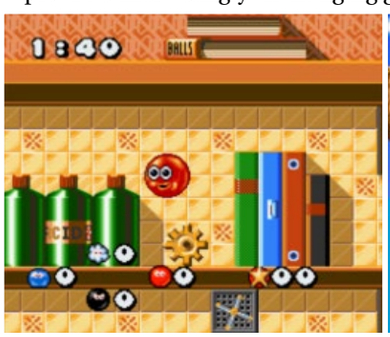
Genre: Puzzle, Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Millennium Interactive
Publisher: Sony Electronic Publishing
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







A young protagonist has volunteered for an experiment. Unfortunately, the machine breaks, and he gets transformed into a morphing ball. It's up to him to help repair the machine by collecting a cog in each of 36 puzzling levels. In his way are various hazards such as spikes, puddles, and fire, but he can assume four different forms to get around those obstacles: a cloud that flies, water that slips through small openings, an extra-mobile bouncy ball, and a heavy ball that can break barriers. Choose the form by pressing the face button that is in the same position as the icons on the lower left: for the cloud (at the top), press X; for the bouncy ball (on the right), press A, etc. The numbers next to the forms show how many times that form can be taken, and the stars on the right indicate how many total transformations are left – a level cannot be successfully completed if more than the allotted metamorphoses are used. The game has a great difficulty curve, and each world keeps the experience fresh by introducing a new setting and new hazards, such as Bunsen burners in the lab and puddles of ooze in the sewer. Any of the four worlds can be accessed at any point, so there's no need to get bored or frustrated over a single level. It's a well-made puzzle game that provides increasingly challenging gameplay with cute graphics.





Reflections: The physics in this game are fantastic! You really get a sense of the different forms from how each of them handle. While there is a lot of trial and error, at no point did I feel something was impossible. I will admit that it did drag on sometimes from constantly restarting a stage, but there was always a different form to take or route to test out, especially with the heat and ice squares that essentially give you a free transformation. I was disappointed by the lack of music during the stages, but this is easily the worst part of the game. It's sad that this never got a release in the US because I would have loved it as a kid. The colorful cartoon sprites are a joy, and the scientist's cheeky death messages provide the comic relief you may need after a death. Hit a thornbush in bouncy ball mode? Yeah, I'm sure "that deflated your ego." – KY

Super Ninja Boy

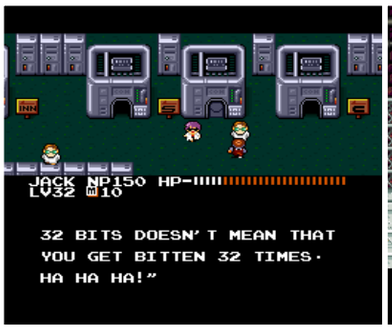
Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







It would be horrible should every Auraball fall into hands of Galands – the seven spheres' might would be a big blight, letting villains command all the lands, so help Jack (and Ryu, when you're Player Two) take a stand before evil expands. Understand? It takes time to get this plot because it surfaces in haphazard pieces, but then again, the entire game is a strange pastiche of features. It's an RPG at heart, with you braving the overhead Field Map on foot or in one of several vehicles, including a hoverboat and a flying mech, to visit themed cities, such as samurai Edo and sporty Athletown. There, you can chat up folks for objectives, rest at inns, shop for items, and visit convenience stores to see about leveling up, getting passwords, or inviting/reviving/rejecting a second participant. The fact that two can play at this game is unusual for an RPG, and the oddness doesn't end there. Yes, random battles occur (too frequently), but they're not turn-based – that format is reserved for certain bosses. Instead, you enter a side-scrolling beat 'em up scene to punch, jump attack, and throw tiger-drum hybrids, flamingo baseball players, naginata-wielding anglerfish, and other creative enemies for experience and money. Accessing the menu affords additional options, including equipping swords or spending Ninja Points (NP) on offensive or support spells (some especially potent skills cost "M" icons, collected by striking "P" blocks). The fights are engaging but clunky, a fault which carries into yet another gameplay type: platforming travel and "training" sequences with pits, spikes, wall climbing, and other obstacles. But wait – there's still more! Care to try card-based minigames? With so many aspects, it's surprising this title gets repetitive at times, but catchy music and kooky characters will see you to the end, friend.





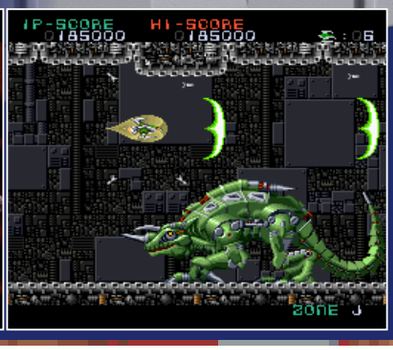
Reflections: I'd like to thank one character in particular who, above all others, got me through this game. Sure, I adored seeing Scheherazade, star of Culture Brain's *The Magic of Scheherazade*, but even she can't match Old Whaleman. He caught me up in the belly of a great fish, saving me from doom, and then he let me *steer that joyous whale* – no fluke! How freeing it was to be a Moby dictator – no enemies, no worries, just me and the sea... oh, excuse me for spouting off like that; Old Whaleman's awesomeness just makes me blubber. I'll stop now. *Fin.* – AP

Super Nova

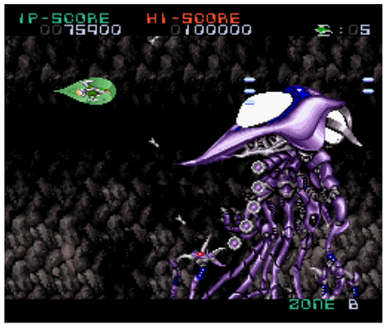
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

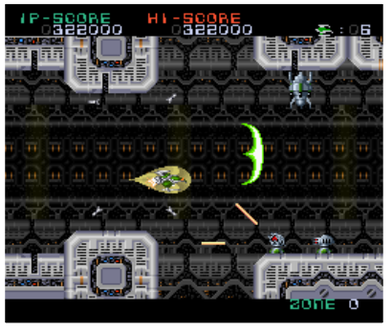






Return to the classic mano a mahi-mahi narrative in this second Darius game for the Super Nintendo. The series' staple side-scrolling shooter gameplay is here; the player must hop into one of three Silver Hawk ships and battle the sea-themed spaceships of Belsar, choosing a path along an increasingly taxing set of branching stages. Each ship has a unique primary weapon and can toggle between missiles and bombs for their secondary weapon. Shooting down certain enemies yields rewards. Blue orbs give a progressively stronger shield that absorbs some projectile attacks or collisions, while red orbs scale up the attack power of primary and secondary fire. Rarer green orbs award either points or an extra life. Since holding down both fire modes scales down each, the player has to survey the situation on the screen and determine the best option from moment to moment, particularly in boss battles that employ multiple destructible parts and unique attack patterns. Some are particularly memorable, such as the multi-stage Peace Destroyer, a mechanical oarfish the player sails through to defeat. The options allow the player to select from three difficulty modes and up to five starting lives, remap buttons, toggle autofire for either weapon, and change from stereo to mono. Different endings await at each route's end, adding replay value to a solid SNES shooter decidedly designed for fans of the genre.





Reflections: Unlike other entries in the series, there are no separate power-ups for primary and secondary fire, but it's a thematically and mechanically cool trick to have them drop power levels when used in tandem. The stages are lovely, and the rotation effect in Zone J looks great and adds challenge. Even the continue screen is beautiful (which is fantastic, since I saw a whole lot of it!). The same can be said for the soundtrack; it wanders among genres, at times channeling the sort of sweeping composition that belongs in a role-playing game (see "Bio," "A King"). I also love how the ship menu mentions each one's first time seeing action: the Exodus War on Planet Darius for the ZZ9X (from *Darius*), the Solar System Defend War for the FFSA (from *Darius II*), and the brand-new FRSA. The difficulty is quite high but never feels patently unfair, which, when combined with the game's patient pace, makes something of a strategic shooter. Sadly, losing the cooperative multiplayer of *Darius Twin* while ramping up the challenge makes *Super Nova* a harder game to share, despite getting so much right. – DG

Super Off Road

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Leland Corporation
Ported by: Software Creations
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★







Rev up your engines and hit the dirt track in this off-road racing game ported from the arcade. Gameplay takes place on a single screen in an overhead view with four trucks facing off. The first to complete four laps filled with bumps, hills, ramps, puddles, and more is the winner. Limited nitros are available for short-term speed boosts that are the most useful on straightaways. Extra nitros and bags of cash can be picked up when they appear randomly. The controls are simple but responsive and fun, offering the ability to take tighter turns by using the L and R triggers. Truck upgrades can be purchased between races via cash won ($150K for first place, $100K for second place, $50K for third place). Improving the truck's top speed, tires, shocks, and acceleration is essential for keeping up since coming in fourth place results in being forced to use a continue to return with a truck with degraded features. The racing does eventually get a bit tiresome, even though tracks are run in reverse and some feature two different paths. After your truck is beefed up fully, racing becomes a more tedious turbo boost battle between you and the gray CPU truck driver who has dozens of nitros at his disposal. There is no definitive ending to the game, and the entirety runs thin after a while. It's a fine adaptation of the arcade experience, but the lack of additional gameplay features and modes makes this a bare-bones racer.





Reflections: This was originally released in 1989 in arcades as *Ivan "Iron Man" Stewart's Super Off Road*. It was a very popular machine that featured three steering wheels for players, much like Atari's *Super Sprint* did in 1986. While the Ivan "Iron Man" Stewart license stayed for the 1990 NES version, on the SNES it was swapped out for a Toyota license, whose branding appears on the trucks in the menu screens and on the tracks. The NES version had the eight original racetracks, but the SNES version nicely included the eight additional tracks from the arcade's *Track Pack* upgrade. The one area where the NES version does outshine its younger brother is in its support for three or four players through the use of the NES Four Score or NES Satellite. Being an early SNES release, unfortunately, this port was around before any of the SNES multitap devices debuted, the first being Hudson Soft's Super Multitap in 1993. – PC

Super Off Road: The Baja

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★







Your chase toward the legendary Ivan "Ironman" Stewart begins anew in this racing game sequel set in Mexico. Driving a truck in a third-person view across dirt and sand roads down the Baja California Peninsula, you compete in three races: Mexico 250, Ensenada 500, and Baja 1000. Each one starts at the same location but runs progressively longer distances. You drive alongside other trucks and four wheelers as you attempt to stay ahead and collect pickups (money and nitro boosts) along the way. However, you have to be careful of the four wheelers – running over them incurs a fine. Spectators, as well as wildlife, can also put your precious funds at risk, while the rocks and fauna can flip and damage your vehicle. If the damage meter fills up, your truck breaks down and you are out of the race. Should you make it to the end of the leg, you are rewarded with cash (minus penalties) and can upgrade your truck's parts, such as the engine, shocks, brakes, etc. Of course, you can also purchase nitros, which provide a short speed boost. When done shopping, it's back to the dirt as you continue to fight for a top spot. Once you've finished your race, you are just left with either trying another length or grabbing a second player to take turns across each leg. While at first this game seems like an interesting take on the racing genre, there isn't enough substance to provide entertainment for long.





Reflections: *The Baja* had me thinking there was a multitude of experiences in this game, but boy, was I wrong. All three races start on the same leg and have the same roads, layouts, and hazards. Also, the odd third-person view makes maneuvering difficult in the first place. Rather than the camera following the truck's orientation, it's your vehicle that turns, making it difficult to see what's around a corner or what might be coming from the side. This can be especially frustrating since you are the only one who can run people over. How is that fair? It's not all bad, though, because this game does have nice graphics, and it is fun to jump your truck over ramps, and… nope, not over it. *How is it fair that you're the only one who can run people over?!* – KY

Super Pinball: Behind the Mask

Genre: Pinball
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: KAZe
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★







To become Wizard, the player must conquer three pinball tables: Jolly Joker, Blackbeard and Ironmen, and Wizard. Presented at an angled perspective that mirrors real-world tables with dot-matrix displays, this pinball simulation's three playfields feel as if they could be digitized versions of real-life counterparts. There are two modes of play. Competition mode allows up to four players to take turns playing on any table, battling it out for a high score, while Conquest mode gives one player the challenge of clearing all three tables by reaching enough points to unlock the Forbidden Door countdown and shoot a specific lock. The player must complete all three tables' Forbidden Door challenges to see the game's ending, though continues do come in handy when trying to reach the higher required score thresholds. Despite their attempt at being distinctive, all three tables are rather mundane in design, with layouts that do little to communicate much about their characters or themes. All three also function using similar mechanics for scoring: a start with a skill shot to enter the playfield, five targets that advance a bonus multiplier, a ball lock for a roulette bonus, letters to light for multiball and a timed jackpot opportunity, a well of bumpers, a grace period where draining puts the ball back in the launcher, one-time-use kickbacks on each side, etc. The physics, save for multiballs not interacting with each other, feel authentic. The ball feels substantial, the table can be nudged, and while it's not great music, the sound is spot on. Though its motif might be creepy, beneath the mask sits a simple, accessible pinball game.

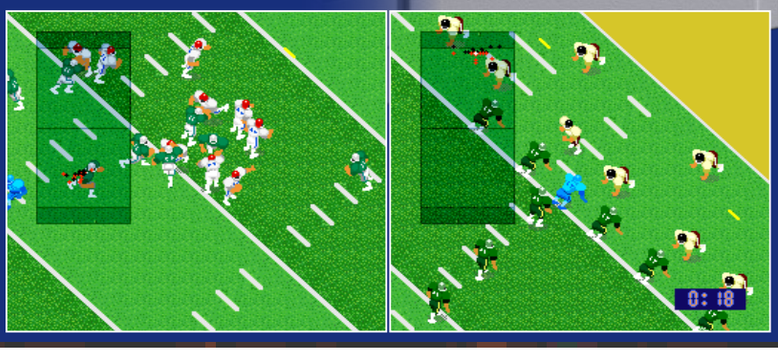




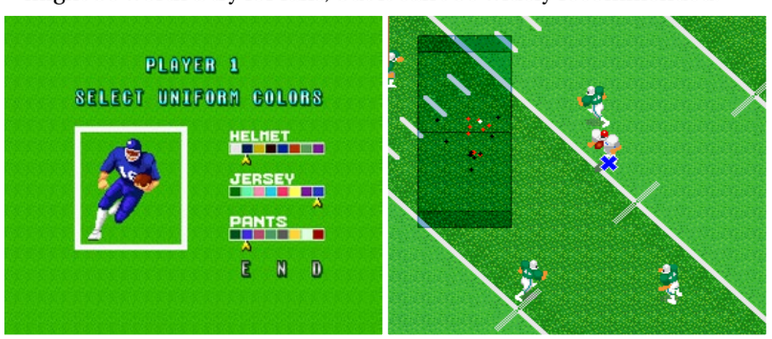
Reflections: Immediately upon starting *Super Pinball: Behind the Mask*, I'm greeted by two smiling figures on the splash screen. These stick-affixed, joyous albeit plain pranksters remind me of the *volto commedia* masks worn by revelers seeking anonymity at *Carnevale di Venezia*. The game certainly plays off the concept of getting away with something. The tables are unique only in their aesthetic. Underneath, they all run on nigh-identical scoring objectives. With its intimidating facade of intensely staring characters and its well-drawn dot-matrix display animations that emulate the experience, *Super Pinball* presents an echo of something grander, some sort of bold trio of tables. The real soul of a pinball table is how the mechanics and theme interact to make it memorable, however, and it is there that *Super Pinball: Behind the Mask* loses steam. Before long, the facade can wear thin, revealing a hollow truth beneath. – DG

Super Play Action Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Common
★★



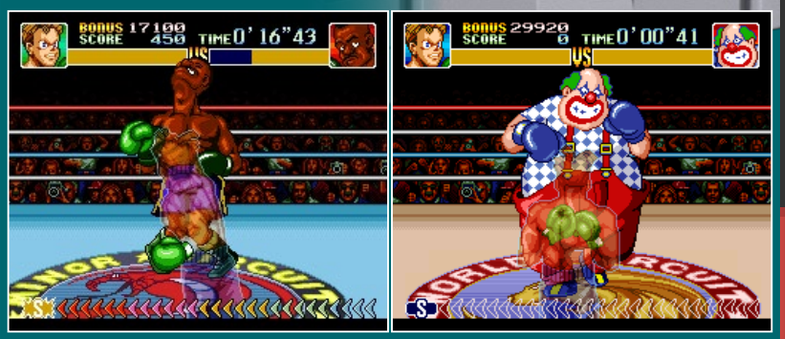
This football simulation is a sequel to the 1990 NES game, sporting more features and 16-bit visuals in a top-down isometric view. The feature set is fairly ambitious, offering three different classes of football to play: high school, college, and NFL. The high school game is by far the simplest, with its limited playbook and relatively easy difficulty, although it's unique amongst the classes by allowing team names and uniforms to be customized. College expands upon the high school experience, offering season play, Top 20 rankings, and postseason bowl games. The playbook is also larger for college play, and the AI is considerably smarter. Finally, playing at the NFL level incorporates a full 16-game season with actual NFL teams and includes postseason play all the way through the Big Game. The playbook is maxed out here and includes trick plays. Unfortunately, despite the deep feature set, the gameplay is flawed. The pacing is quite slow, completing passes relies too much on luck, and the stamina system drains too quickly. The running game is decent enough, but swiftly draining stamina – especially at the NFL level – leads to too many substitutions. The passing game is frustrating; it's almost better to let the computer move the receiver to the ball, but there are times when the receiver inexcusably finishes his route late, leading to costly incompletions. On defense, it's tough to see which player is being controlled in a sea of similar-looking defenders, which creates chaos when initially pursuing ball carriers. While the player models are too generic, the rest of the game looks good and the presentation is highlighted by cutscenes after scoring or big defensive plays. The sound is fine, with upbeat music, clear speech samples, and hard-hitting effects. When all is said and done, this one might be worth a try for fans, but it can't be widely recommended.



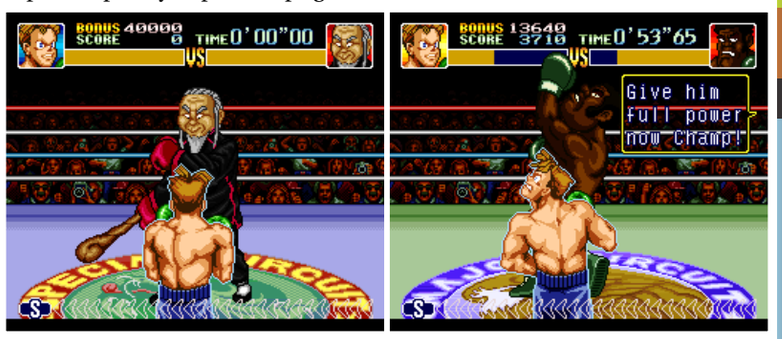
Reflections: I enjoyed *NES Play Action Football*, so I thought this was a no-brainer purchase for me in 1992 – I didn't need to wait for reviews or anything. I remember reading the manual over lunch at a local McDonald's before racing home to check out my new game. I popped it into my SNES and... well... my roommates were concerned about me as I repeatedly asked myself, *"Why did you waste money on this game, you dope?"* I asked myself this question again while playing the game for this review... and I still don't have a good answer. – PS

Super Punch-Out!!

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo R&D3
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★⋆



16 boxers stand between the player and the title of Ultimate Champ of the World Video Boxing Association. Nintendo's stellar return to the ring follows the formula of its famous predecessor while making numerous tweaks and improvements. From a perspective set behind their boxer, the player must defend against incoming attacks by guarding, dodging, and ducking while looking for openings to counter. The key is to watch for tells that the opposing boxer will throw, such as wind-ups or shifting stances, then respond with jabs, body blows, and once the Power Meter is full, one of four Knock Out Punches. The first boxer to go down for the count or be toppled three times loses. The large sprites, combined with chat bubbles from opposing managers calling out strategy, really help when learning the nuances of each fight. A handful of familiar faces from the series, including Bald Bull, Super Macho Man, and Mr. Sandman, bring continuity to the Circuits. They are joined by new characters with unique abilities, such as the spitting Masked Muscle and the brutal Aran Ryan. Championship Mode features three circuits: Minor, Major, and World. Completing each unlocks the next, with a fourth Special Circuit unlocked if the player can maintain a flawless record throughout the first three. The trial-and-error gameplay is fun early but becomes a bit taxing later on, as the World and Special Circuit combatants may take numerous bouts to master their very narrow timing windows. The game does a superb job of building replay value through the addition of scoring, time, and personal leaderboards. Time Attack Mode allows the player to battle one fighter from any completed Circuit, and eight save slots permit plenty of parallel pugilist careers.



Reflections: Where the original *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* for the NES had to settle for smaller sprites than its arcade counterpart employed, *Super Punch-Out!!* has no such trouble, with a diverse cast of larger-than-life combatants. This time around, they feel slightly less stereotypical and more referential, particularly with characters like Bob Charlie and Dragon Chan, but the game is far, far from perfect in that respect. The instruction manual details all 16 fighters with some nice thematic posters but doesn't provide much assistance in defeating them. Interestingly, early screenshots in *Nintendo Power* actually had a fighter that looked far more like Little Mac than the protagonist of *Super Punch-Out!!* does. Turns out the toughest title fight in this superb Super Nintendo sports classic is agreeing on the main character's identity! – DG

Super Putty

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: System 3
Publisher: U.S. Gold (PAL: System 3)
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Take control of a transforming blue putty blob who has been ousted from Putty Moon by the evil wizard Dazzledaze and his pet, Dweezil the cat, in this vibrant platformer. Putty must collect a specified number of robots on each stage and escort them one by one to the exit to complete it. Levels are varied and consist of space stations, toylands, a training gym to hone skills, and more. To collect a bot, Putty can sink into the ground to suck it up and can also use this talent to gobble up smaller enemies or avoid bigger ones. He has a helpful punch attack, and he can expand and pop to clear the screen of foes, but this drains his pliability meter (life bar). Foodstuffs can be collected to replenish health, and obtaining magic items can make Putty invincible for a short time against a weird bestiary of pigs on space hoppers, things on springs, and Liverpudlian hotdog sausages. Occasionally, Dweezil bursts through the screen in an attempt to cause damage, but he can easily be avoided. This is a game that starts off quite simple but soon becomes a true test of skill when Putty is constantly bombarded from all sides. Overall, it's quirky title that offers something different from a traditional platformer.

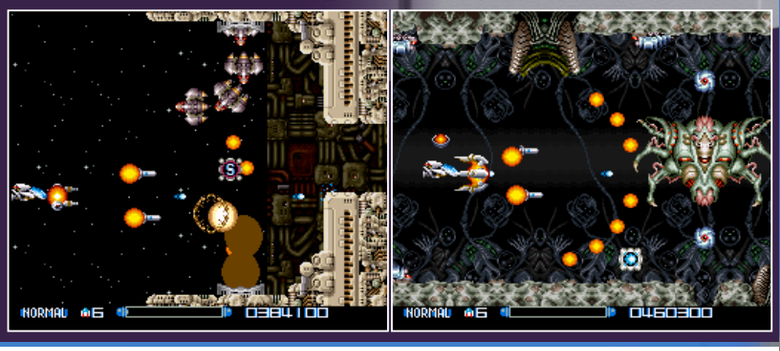


Reflections: This is a perfect example of irreverent British humor in gaming in the 1990s – a time when programmers could pretty much shoehorn anything into their games. Why a Scouse hotdog making threats towards a blue blob while a cat in a spacesuit pops up to attack is beyond me (let alone collecting robots to get revenge on a wizard), but the game itself plays really well. The mechanics for stretching and sinking into the ground are a fresh take on platforming action and feel fun, but the experience lets itself down by luring you in with its pretty visuals and kooky presentation before ramping up the difficulty to insane levels. Luckily, you can choose a world to start on, so at least a variety of stages can be tried if you get stuck on one. Any game that has a "one more go" feel about it is always welcome in my book, and this title has bags of charm to boot. – JE

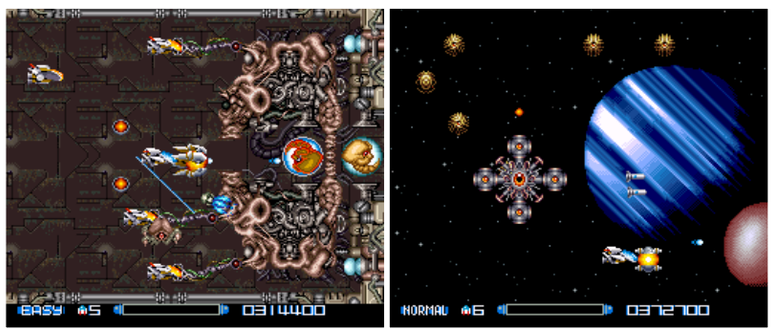
Super R-Type

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Irem
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





Strap into the cockpit of an R-9 fighter and save mankind by battling the evil BYDO empire in this pulse-pounding horizontal shooter. Players start the game with three R-9 ships and must fight their way through seven fairly long stages, each ending with a boss battle. Core gameplay revolves around dodging environmental hazards and enemy fire while collecting missile and laser upgrades from destroyed red and blue Power Armors, respectively. There are a large variety of enhancements that players can experiment with, including lasers that bounce off the environment, tracking missiles, spread shots, and even large walls of flame that travel along the upper and lower portions of the stage. Along with utilizing the R-9's basic mode of fire, players have the ability to charge its weapon by holding down the fire button. Once the beam gauge is filled, the R-9 can produce a strong blast, but if players wait until the meter is red, they can unleash a spiraling shot. In addition to the regular power-ups, a potent weapon called Force can attach itself to the R-9 and improve its weapons and attack patterns. This module can be detached and sent out on its own and reattached to the rear of the R-9 to fire on enemies attacking from behind. Stages are otherworldly in nature and filled with interesting, alien-like enemies. Although some stages can feel too lengthy, the amazing music and epic, screen-filling boss battles make up for it. Even with all of the R-9's capabilities and unlimited continues, some players may find the difficulty unbearable. Major slowdown and a lack of checkpoints will test the most hardened gamer's patience. Shoot 'em up pros shouldn't have too much of a problem, though.



Reflections: If you've played *R-Type II*, you may experience some déjà vu with *Super R-Type*, as it's a partial port of *R-Type II* that spices up the gameplay with some new stages and enemies. This is also why the next game on the Super Nintendo is titled *R-Type III: The Third Lightning*. Most consider *Super R-Type* to be difficult due to its lack of checkpoints. The key to success is to use the game's slowdown to your advantage. When you notice that the action is starting to crawl, take that time to locate a good path to maneuver the R-9 through. This got me through most of the game's tighter spots. – MV

Super R.B.I. Baseball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







The SNES gets its own release in this popular series of baseball games with an MLB Players Association license for real team rosters. A bevy of gameplay modes, including single exhibition games, best-of-seven series, league play, a home run derby, defensive practice, and a unique Game Breakers mode provide plenty of overhead baseball action. The Game Breakers mode is a set of scenarios that players need to work through to lead their teams to victory. These scenarios get progressively more difficult until the final one, which gives players two innings to overcome a nine-run deficit. Defensive practice is both a nice addition and an important one because it allows new players to get used to fielding, which is the game's biggest weakness. Once a ball is put in play, the screen goes dark for a brief moment, and then the fielding camera shows a zoomed-in shot of the ball and the fielder responsible for making the play. While a radar can be used to try and position fielders properly, the action happens too quickly, and the ball often gets by the player unless the computer puts him in the right spot. There are options for assisted and automatic fielding, but even these aren't as helpful as they should be on defense. Pitching and batting fare better. Breaking pitches are tough to lay off of, and players don't hit for much power; this leads to an offense driven by singles and doubles. The game's visuals and sound are generally good. Player animations are smooth, and there's a nice level of detail to be seen, especially having to do with the stadiums. There are familiar visual touches at some stadiums that fans will appreciate. Sound is highlighted by bits of play-by-play commentary and clear umpire calls, but the music is forgettable. In the end, this baseball title features a good array of options with a quality presentation but is undermined by mediocre controls.





Reflections: This isn't the *R.B.I. Baseball* that most people know of. Starting with *R.B.I. Baseball 4* for the Genesis in 1992, the series shifted away from its original roots and development was rebooted. The reboot was a jarring change from the NES games that most players and fans were familiar with. The new fielding engine and closer camera angles were the biggest differences, and this new blueprint is what Time Warner stuck with here. Fans of the R.B.I. games on the NES should seek out *Super Batter Up* instead. Different name, same game. – PS

Super Return of the Jedi

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software, LucasArts
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries (THQ: Rerelease)
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★







The conflict between the Empire and the Rebel Alliance comes to an end in this finale to the high-quality action-platformer trilogy. Players usually choose to control one of several characters per stage. Luke Skywalker strikes foes with his lightsaber and commands several Force Powers to assist, Han Solo carries a blaster and can throw bombs, Chewbacca wields a blaster and a fireball spin attack, and Princess Leia appears in three iterations: wearing her bounty hunter disguise (equipped with a staff), slave bikini (armed with a chain), or Rebel uniform (firing a blaster). Wicket the Ewok takes part in two of his own stages, using a bow and arrow and swinging around tree limbs. As in prior installments, this game follows the film's plot closely, with fights at Jabba the Hutt's palace on Tatooine, in the forest of Endor, and inside the second Death Star. Locales crawl with associated enemies, such as stormtroopers and Jabba's goons, and they feature enjoyable boss battles against villains including Jabba, Darth Vader, and the powerful Emperor. The difficulty strikes a good balance, with lots of enemies to overcome but plenty of pickups/power-ups to acquire (blaster upgrades, hearts, temporary shields, Force Power replenishment, and more). The graphics, sounds, and music are outstanding, and cutscenes again propel the story forward. Returning vehicle stages are very engaging, with a third-person speeder bike ride and the desperate Millenium Falcon tunnel battle inside the Death Star being standouts. The Force is strong in this conclusion to a stellar series.

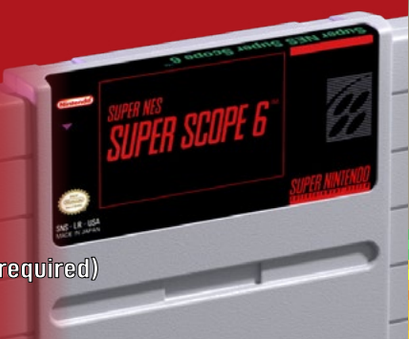




Reflections: While *Return of the Jedi* is my least favorite of the original Star Wars trilogy, this title stands with the previous two SNES games and even surpasses them on a technical level (especially in the improved Mode 7 vehicle sequences). The stages themselves aren't *that* interesting, however, and the game seems to be a little drawn out at times (the Wicket levels, for example, feel tacked on). This is most likely a symptom of the film's plot, which, outside of the "ordinary" forest stages, doesn't provide for environments that look much different from ones seen in the prior games. Still, the ability to play as several different characters is nice, and the excellent technical effort cannot be denied, even if the overall experience at this point is a little tired. That's not totally surprising, seeing as that's the same sort of feeling I get when watching the *Return of the Jedi* film itself. – PC

Super Scope 6
Nintendo Scope 6 (EU)

Genre: Shooting Gallery
Release Date: Feb. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Super Scope (required)
Availability: Very Common
★★







Bundled with the Super Scope accessory, this eclectic collection offers six games to play, split off into two categories: Blastris and LazerBlazer. Blastris's games are a mix of puzzle and arcade, each coming with two modes and three difficulties. Blastris A presents a left-to-right puzzle where the player's limited fire trims down moving pieces to form lines. Blastris B shifts to vertical, with shots changing the color of falling segments to clear aligned groups of three. Mole Patrol mirrors the familiar carnival game with the added wrinkle of avoiding pink moles, which temporarily speed up the round when hit. LazerBlazer's three games, on the other hand, present a more serious sci-fi theme. Type A, Intercept, entails shooting down enemy ships and missiles scrolling side-to-side, requiring finesse with limited ammo and leading shots for distant targets. It can be played in single-player or versus mode. Type B, Engage, requires shooting down pursued enemy craft and incoming missiles with limited time and ammo. Type C, Confront, is a ground turret defense against incoming ships. While ammo is not restricted, bonus points are awarded based on shot accuracy. In all three LaserBlazer modes, a minimap is provided to help locate threats in relation to the player, and there are three difficulties to choose from. For a bundled title, there's enough to enjoy but little in the way of depth or replay value.





Reflections: The Super Scope accessory is a wonderfully impractical device. Its bazooka form factor and plastic viewfinder make playing games with it an experience, provided you are able to shoulder the device. Bundling *Super Scope 6* into the package does the necessary work of adding a tech demo title to the accessory, but it rarely explores the potential of the device it shares a box with. Blastris A and B channel *Tetris*, *Columns*, and *Puyo Puyo*, but these attempts at integrating puzzle and light gun prove plodding and an awkward genre choice for demonstrating the peripheral. Mole Patrol and the LazerBlazer games better fit the bill, though Engage and Confront don't vary enough from each other. Difficulty scaling can feel odd; the jump of 10 levels often works if only because no *Super Scope 6* game feels worth playing for 10 levels. Moreover, with Nintendo's storied lineup of light gun games like *Duck Hunt*, *Hogan's Alley*, and *Wild Gunman* (no, *Gumshoe*, sit down), why not employ a familiar IP to make the title more accessible and marketable? As an opening salvo, *Super Scope 6* misses the mark. – DG

Super Slam Dunk

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Park Place Productions
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Hall of Fame legend Earvin "Magic" Johnson lends his name and analysis skills to this five-on-five basketball simulation. It's surprisingly light on features, offering only single-game exhibition play and a three-round playoff setup. Playoff progress is preserved via a password system, and cumulative statistics are not tracked. On the court, the action takes place from a top-down perspective, with the basket always situated at the top of the screen. When moving the ball from the defensive end of the court to the offensive end, the camera swivels around to follow play; this looks neat but can be disorienting, as players sometimes seem to warp to a spot near or under the basket. This is just the beginning of the game's problems. Shooting is a bit less accurate than it should be, and it's too difficult to position players for rebounds. Even wide-open looks at the basket see poor levels of shot accuracy, at least for human-controlled players. Steal attempts are largely ineffective unless players intercept passes, and blocks happen infrequently. There just isn't enough of a result produced through effort; things feel driven by stats and luck instead of skill, making for a dull experience. The flow of the game is inconsistent; shots seemingly hang up in the air, and jumping for rebounds is a lengthy sequence, feeling almost like a slow-motion event. When not shooting or jumping, though, the action on the court is quick. Visually, there's not much to write about, with dull-looking player models and jittery animation. The sound is the game's best feature, with clear foul calls and commentary delivered by legendary announcer Chick Hearn. All told, this is a pretty poor effort for a basketball title, and even hardcore fans of the sport should just leave it on the bench.





Reflections: I'll give *Super Slam Dunk* this – it's a pretty accurate representation of my personal shooting accuracy. It's a proven fact that I couldn't hit water if I fell out of a boat, let alone hit a shot in basketball. I play sports video games to accomplish things that I can't do in real life – throwing touchdowns, scoring goals, hitting doubles to the opposite field – so playing a video game to shoot enough bricks to build the Three Little Pigs a new house just isn't any fun. I can do that at my local gym. – PS

Super Slap Shot

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Ringler Studios
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★







It's time to lace up those skates and hit the ice in this five-on-five, horizontally scrolling, arcade-style hockey game. In addition to fighting and shootout minigames, players can choose to engage in exhibition games or a tournament, using either international teams or teams based out of North American cities. Team skills are adjustable, but not by the player. Instead, much like "rolling a character" in a fantasy role-playing game, the stats for each team are randomly determined by the computer and can be re-rolled until a desired set of attributes is shown; these can then be maintained by using a password. While the attributes look good on paper, they don't seem to matter all that much on the ice. The gameplay is a bit faster than it should be, making the action feel chaotic. Players streak back and forth with no real play setup. Passing is haphazard, and computer-controlled defenders play shooters tightly to interfere with shooting. Most goals are scored off of rebounds, though too many "soft" goals are given up – even by the highest-rated goaltenders. Fights cut to a close-up of the two combatants, with the loser given an unusual three-minute penalty. The game's look is fine, with lively crowds in the stands and decently animated players on the ice. The close-up views for face-offs and fights stand out. The music is good, with organ interludes during games and peppy themes that play over the menus, but the sound effects could be a bit better. The game's stat tracking is also worth a mention, boasting 14 pages filled with all kinds of numbers and trends for stat fiends; unfortunately, these stats are only tracked per game and are not cumulative through tournaments. This one might be worth a look with its arcade-like approach, but it isn't really a playoff contender.





Reflections: This game disproves the familiar "Genesis does what Nintendon't" advertising slogan, as it's essentially a conversion of *Mario Lemieux Hockey* from Sega's 16-bit platform. Personally, I thought the slogan was catchy, but I know it ticked off a few of my friends who were diehard Nintendo fans. As for me, I never really took sides in the 16-Bit Wars. I owned both the SNES and the Genesis, so I had the best of both worlds. Thankfully, I could afford to buy both consoles because I was still in the early "Bills? What bills?" period of adulthood. I miss those days. – PS

Super Smash T.V.

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Feb. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Williams
Ported by: Beam Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★







In this take on a violent, futuristic game show, players compete in single-screen studio rooms viewed from an overhead perspective by blasting enemies and collecting prizes. One or two participants can move around each room while independently firing a machine gun in different directions via the crosshair-like Y-X-B-A buttons. This allows for a great deal of freedom to attack while constantly dodging the numerous club-wielding thugs, tanks, snakes, droids, orbs, and more that rapidly close in around the player(s) in waves from all four room doors. Based upon the arcade's *Smash T.V.*, this port maintains a high degree of difficulty, with one-hit kills and a limited number of continues to get through the three rounds of room stages. To help, random power-ups frequently appear, including limited weapon upgrades (e.g., spread fire, missiles, and grenades), shields, speed boosts, smart bombs, and much-needed extra lives. After all enemies in a room are destroyed, the player can then walk to the next one, being able to make their own path to the end studio room (based on the stage layout). At the final room of each round, a giant boss, such as Mutoid Man, must be dealt with. Since this is a game show, cash and prize icons for VCRs, cars, luggage, and vacations show up to be grabbed during the rounds. The frantic and nearly unending pace is not for the faint of heart, but with a great control scheme, quality graphics, nice music, super sound effects, and digitized speech, this game show shooter wins the grand prize.





Reflections: Based loosely on the 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger film *The Running Man*, this dystopian game show concept was distinguished in the arcade by having dual joysticks to manage the player's movement and shooting independently, an ingenious control scheme seen before in the classic *Robotron: 2084*. The amount of digitized speech in the game is impressive, from the contestant grunts, yells of "Yeah!", and audience reactions to the host's quotes of "Good luck – you'll need it!", "Big money, big prizes, I love it!", and "I'd buy that for a dollar!" (from the film *RoboCop*). The manic action of *Smash T.V.* is both addicting and fulfilling to me, and this SNES version is the best home port from the era. – PC

Super Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Test your ball-handling skills against teams from across the globe in this action-packed soccer game with two play modes. The first is Exhibition, which offers either a single match or a penalty kick shootout; both can be played cooperatively or competitively with two players. The second is Tournament, with a co-op two-player option, where you control your choice of 16 international teams. The individual players of each team have their own attack, defense, and running stats. You play against every other team gauntlet-style, with matches getting progressively more challenging until you reach your final foe, the Nintendo team. After victories, you are given a password to continue later or to try again if you lose a match. Before each half, you choose from a long list of formations, whether your goalkeeper is controlled automatically or manually, and which 11 players of your roster of 15 play in which position. On the pitch, you're given an angled view vertically up the field as you control the character with the ball. When you don't have possession, the D-pad directs your team as a whole, making it awkward to constantly change your route based on who is closest to the ball. Gameplay is entertaining, and there is great music throughout – even in the menus! Player sprites are cute, albeit the same for teammates. There's a 3D sense to the action with the use of Mode 7 for the field traveling up and down the length. This is a top-tier soccer title on the SNES that is sure to give your thumbs a workout.





Reflections: There are so many aspects to enjoy in this game, and don't you roll your eyes just because it's a sports title. *Super Soccer* has lively music and impressive graphics with high-action gameplay. You have the ability to customize how your team plays by being able to swap players around to different positions in different formations. Not only does this allow you to play the matches in your style but also to respond to the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents. While there is an arrow to assist in targeting the correct player when you pass the ball, the awkward controls can still get in your way. It's a challenge to take down all 16 teams, so get ready for opportunities to head the ball, slide-tackle, and body-check. Anyone up for a yellow card? – KY

Super Soccer Champ
Euro Football Champ (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★⋆





Choose your team, country, and champion player. It's you versus seven other teams in a gauntlet-style soccer tournament. You have just four minutes to score more goals than your opponent, and you'll have to kick, tackle, and even punch your way to victory. Unfortunately, how exactly you do those maneuvers can be a bit of a mystery. Within the options menu, the Play Guide goes through the operation of each of the moves, and it quickly becomes apparent that they involve nearly identical button combinations. Should you not care to master them, the old run-pass-kick works well enough on the horizontal pitch – use the minimap at the top of the screen to help you direct the ball. For every goal you make, you are rewarded with a satisfying cutscene of your hard-working players running past stands full of cheering fans. On the other hand, should your opponents gain a point on you, you will see them celebrating similarly. If you win the match, you move on to play against the next team. Otherwise, you get a game over with the option to try again. Given a tie, the game holds a penalty kick shootout where you alternate between controlling your chosen soccer champ and the goalie through five rounds of shots – winner takes all! After you've bested the computer, you can grab a friend and try a round of either cooperative or competitive soccer, although who's to say whether man or machine has better game mechanics?



Reflections: I can appreciate this title as a port of the 1990 arcade game *Football Champ*, but I wish the control scheme had been expanded for an SNES controller, and while it might seem like they added a lot with the extra game mode, it doesn't actually enhance the experience at all. The new game options are simply mutations of penalty kick practice, whether you want to do it on your own or either cooperatively or competitively with a second player. On the plus side, it's entertaining to mash through the many moves, especially since one of the characters you can knock down is the referee himself. In fact, if your method of play is rougher than the rules generally allow, you'll need to distract the ref in this manner to get away with your actions, but it's not like I'd ever cheat my way to a win. Hey, what's that? Look over there! – KY

Super Solitaire

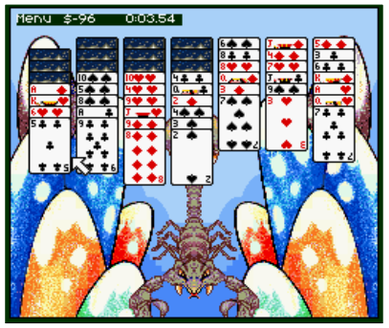
Genre: Gambling, Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Extreme Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





What system is truly complete without a classic compilation of casual card games? This title offers the player 12 solitaire games to choose from: Klondike, Free Cell, Golf, Cruel, Pyramid, Stonewall, Dozen't Matter, Aces Up, Florentine, Poker, Canfield, and Scorpion. Each has its own unique rules, background image, and scoring system. The games can be played individually or in Tournament Mode, where up to 12 games can be chosen and played in a custom or default order, with the scores and times recorded across the event. The cards themselves are clear and distinct, featuring eight different card backings to choose from. A nested menu system provides numerous in-game features; the help section, in particular, provides useful instructions, movement guides, hints, and terminology to give the player knowledge of variations of solitaire they might not have played before. Passwords comprised of six playing cards let the player pick up a game in progress later on. The clunky execution of the D-pad is somewhat mitigated by the welcome support of the SNES Mouse. The options screen allows the player to choose from five languages, three cursor speeds, and stereo/mono sound. While the soundtrack could be better, and backgrounds are of varying quality, there's nothing notably wrong (or right) about this title, making it as mundane an experience as one could hope for from the all-time time-waster.





Reflections: Credit to the court (or "face") cards, which, in so few pixels, manage to recreate images that channel the traditional look of classic decks. Those iconic royals date back to the Victorian era, modified for ease of play themselves from the original source work, Frenchman Pierre Marechal's exported 16th-century cards. Even little details are here, such as Caesar (the King of Diamonds) having his axe and Charlemagne (the King of Hearts, also known as the Suicide King) with a blade through his head. It's amazing how things can change from place to place and over time. Then again, even *Super Solitaire* went through a radical change 18 months after its release, when it appeared in Japan as the thoroughly reskinned *Trump Island*. No, not him – *toranpu*, or trump, refers to Western-style playing cards, as opposed to *hanafuda*, or Japanese-style ones. The cards made it unscathed, but famous artist Takami Akai dolled up the backgrounds, literally and figuratively, mercifully sparing Japanese audiences the haunting, creepy win/lose jack-in-the-box jester found in the US version. Yikes. – DG

Super Star Wars

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software, LucasArts
Publisher: JVC Musical Industries
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★★★





Luke Skywalker and friends battle against Darth Vader and the evil Galactic Empire in this action-platformer. Creatures and Tusken Raiders in the deserts of Tatooine, Jawas and droids in the Sandcrawler, aliens in the Mos Eisley Cantina, and stormtroopers in the Death Star are just some of the many challenges that await. Doing a remarkable job of adapting the film, the game sees Luke wielding an upgradable blaster and a handy but less useful lightsaber a bit later. Han Solo and Chewbacca become selectable characters after they are unlocked at Mos Eisley; each one is armed with a stronger default blaster but no lightsaber. The controls are fantastic, offering the ability to fire in multiple directions to take out foes both above and below, a nimble jump, and a slide/roll to quickly get through tight spots and avoid danger. The constant enemies can be overwhelming, but thankfully, they drop hearts to replenish the health bar, which itself can be elongated via lightsaber pickups. The timed stages feature many spikes, pitfalls, platforms, elevators, and more that must be navigated deftly, and challenging fights with huge bosses lurk ahead. The presentation does the property proud, with nice cutscenes in between stages to propel the story forward, while quality music and sound effects from the film complete the atmosphere. Third-person vehicle stages (in the Landspeeder and in an X-Wing battling TIE fighters) are far from perfect, but they break up the action well, and the final first-person X-Wing cockpit stage in the Death Star trench is very engaging. A classy and worthwhile effort.





Reflections: Sculptured Software/LucasArts knocked it out of the park with this title, as it did justice to the Star Wars franchise while pushing the young SNES to its limits with a highly entertaining game. Filled with care to spare, its popularity would lead to its re-release as a "Players Choice Million Seller" by Nintendo in 1996. At the time, Star Wars video games were making a resurgence, and LucasArts would follow up this game with a run of good-to-excellent PC titles, such as *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter*, *Rebel Assault*, *Dark Forces*, and more. Quality console titles would naturally follow suit as well. With no fresh Star Wars TV/film media being produced, these games did a good job of keeping the franchise fresh for children and adults, and they would help fan the flames until the release of *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* in 1999. – PC

Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★





The popular one-on-one, best-of-three-rounds fighting game returns with new features and upgrades. Combatants still have a bevy of light, medium, and heavy punches and kicks at their disposal while standing, crouching, and in the air. Each fighter has throws/grapple moves as well as at least two special attacks that can be activated by D-pad and button combos. Returning characters have had some attacks tweaked, strengths changed, attack priority rejiggered, and special moves revised and added to better balance the roster. The action is still very smooth, fair, and engaging, with on-screen notices now appearing for first attacks, reversals, combos, and recoveries. The World Warrior tournament has new entries: Hong Kong kung fu master Fei Long, Native American wrestler T. Hawk, British agent Cammy, and Jamaican kickboxer Dee Jay. These four do a nice job filling out the roster of 16. Graphically, the game impresses with colorful and complex backgrounds, fantastic character art, and excellent animations. Music has been slightly altered, as have sound effects and voice samples, but the technical quality is top-notch. Several modes are available: Super Battle (arcade mode), Versus Battle, Group Battle (team versus team), Tournament Battle (up to eight human/CPU players), and Time Challenge (records for quickest KO are tracked). Normal or Turbo game speeds are on offer to customize this stacked fighter experience.





Reflections: This was the third Street Fighter II game on the SNES and the *fourth* overall (*Super Street Fighter II Turbo* was still to come). It's a great addition to the franchise, but by this point, you can feel fatigue starting to set in. Interestingly, this is one of the games that supported multiplayer via the XBAND modem and online network service. Of the four fighters added to the game, Cammy would quickly become a standout fan favorite. *Gee, I wonder why?* Fei Long is an obvious homage to the legendary Bruce Lee. Like Bruce, Fei Long is also a Hong Kong film star and has a similar look, similar mannerisms, similar voice affectations, and similar martial arts moves. As with the life of Bruce Lee, the game ending for Fei Long is bittersweet, as it shows students practicing martial arts in front of his monument, stating that his memory lives on. It also makes reference to both a father and son, which was likely included due to the tragic death of Bruce's son, Brandon, on the set of *The Crow* in 1993. – PC

Super Strike Eagle

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: MicroProse Software
Publisher: MicroProse Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





This F-15 flight simulator pits the player against five unscrupulous enemy forces – Iraq, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and a maniacal isle – in 10 seek-and-destroy missions. This means pummeling ground targets with a litany of weaponry, including Rockeyes (anti-tank cluster bombs) and Paveways (laser-guided explosives), while fending off enemy aircraft with the M61 Vulcan cannon and a suite of missiles (Sidewinder, AMRAAM, and Sparrow). Cleverly, the game alternates between a cockpit view for aerial combat, an overhead perspective for land-based engagements, and a zoomed-out "satellite" mode that unveils both airborne and land-based targets. A color-coded map also helps pilots distinguish between their multiple objectives. And yet, for a game billed as a "realistic flight simulation," the actual dogfighting is almost an afterthought, with brainless barons proving more a distraction than a significant danger. Indeed, missions favor the F-15's lesser known ground-attack capabilities, tasking players to sweep over power plants, terrorist camps, oil refineries, and similar facilities, delivering payloads as the skies ripple with enemy fire. These top-down segments are skillfully depicted using Mode 7 effects to spin a platter of terrain beneath the player's craft, fostering a visceral sense of depth and scale. Unfortunately, this detached third-person perspective makes flying the 40,000-pound warbird feel more akin to controlling a miniature drone, again defying the game's claims of realism. Moreover, the plane can absorb an extreme amount of damage. This final fudging of reality may be a necessary compromise, however, due to constant enemy attacks. Both chaff and flare decoys can be dropped to diminish these threats, but otherwise, would-be pilots can expect a good throttling when entering hostile territory. Worse, death means a thankless game over; players can retreat to friendly stations mid-mission for repair and weapon replenishment, but true defeat means pecking out a password and attempting the stage again. Enthusiasts might appreciate this fly-or-die struggle, but rookies will soon regret their wasted investment.

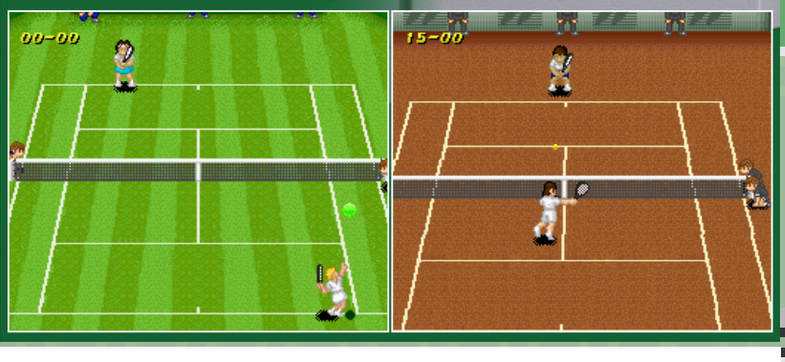




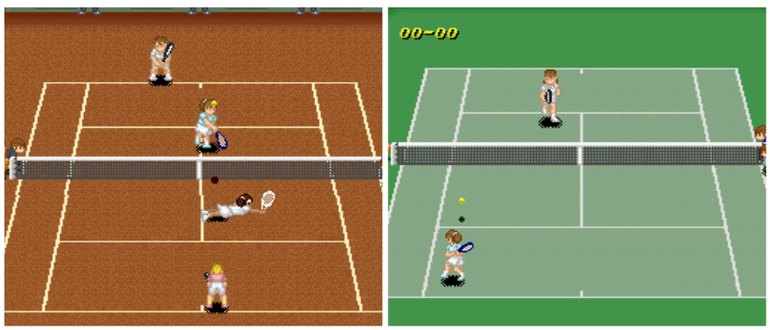
Reflections: Flight simulators are amongst the hardest games to evaluate, especially those of the vintage variety. In *Super Strike Eagle*'s case, does realism matter in this self-purported "simulation"? Without previous F-15 experience, is it possible to determine *Eagle*'s claims of real-world accuracy? How can such standards of realism be applied to a 16-bit depiction of an aging aircraft that today is nearly retired? Such questions are a critic's chagrin, but the game is ambitious enough to at least earn my tepid respect. – DA

Super Tennis

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tokyo Shoseki
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★



This top-down tennis simulation gives players plenty of action and challenge. Singles and doubles exhibition play is here for one or two competitors, while the Circuit Mode gives solo players a chance to work toward the top ranking in the world. Exhibitions can be customized to last for one, three, or five sets. The game has 10 male and 10 female players to choose from, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. A choice of three different playing surfaces – hard, lawn, or clay – dictates ball reaction upon contact. Hard surfaces have more bounce, while clay surfaces tend to dull bounces and can deaden drop shots. The Circuit Mode requires not only tennis skill but also adept player management. Players earn points depending on how they finish in each tournament, but they expend stamina and perform progressively worse unless they take a tournament off to recharge. The level of challenge here is significant, as computer-controlled opponents cover the court well and are smart with their shot selection. This may initially be daunting to rookies, but a bit of practice leads to more positive results over time. Practice in exhibition games is important in order to understand proper positioning for returns, master the game's different shots, and know when to use which shot. Visually, the game has a great look. All of the characters have unique faces and appearances, and they are animated well in play. Line judges on the court signal if a ball is out of bounds, which is a neat touch. Most importantly, the camera follows the action perfectly. The sound quality and music are top-notch, with authentic racket sounds and umpire calls on the court and catchy themes between games. Of the tennis games on the SNES, this one stands alone at center court.



Reflections: Playing this takes me back to high school. Among all the sports we played in gym class, this was the one that got me into the most trouble. I would always swing as hard as I could, often sending balls flying out of the tennis court area and onto the adjacent street. My gym teacher tried to work with me to show me how to swing and strike correctly, but I never learned, and he often disgustedly sent me back inside. At least I can play tennis okay in video game form, Mr. Budness. Thanks for all you did for me. – PS

Super Troll Islands

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Millennium Interactive
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★



Neon-haired trolls have found their colorful land under a gray mist and must bring it to its former state. You control one of four trolls through 50 platforming levels. Every square you touch regains color, and the goal is to do this to all rectangular areas of the level (usually formed by two platforms connected by ladders). Health is represented by the clover in the lower right, which loses a leaf with damage. If your troll loses all its health, it falls asleep back in the troll selection room, and you must continue as one of the others. During the levels, press SELECT to return to the room and swap trolls, since each one has its own health. You replenish the clover by collecting treasure, which can take different forms based on the environment (e.g., fruit in the forest stages and shells in the beach levels). The upper right icon indicates the number of times you can temporarily transform into an invulnerable tornado. This helps on the occasion that you're overwhelmed with enemies, such as slime or bats. You can also throw projectiles, either by using your pie ammo (displayed in the upper left) or by tossing an item you picked up. One of these items is an alarm clock that revives a sleeping troll if you take it into the trolls' room. The look of the game is cute, conveying the appearance of the real-life product it's based on. Unfortunately, the controls are slippery. Your movement is too fast, and you jump like you're on the moon, making precise platforming impossible. If you can get past the controls, the experience is an interesting take on the toy-to-video-game conversion.

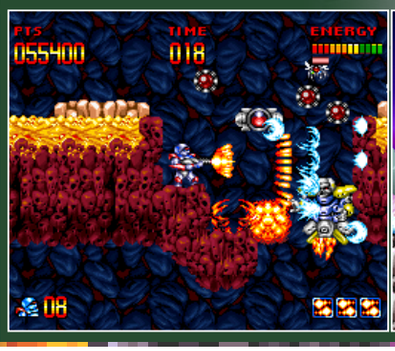


Reflections: For a title that is almost solely focused on moving around and platforming, it bothers me to no end that the controls are such a mess. Maybe the developers intended it to be difficult to jump onto a second nearby platform, so instead, you shoot beyond it. The game's saving grace is the creative level designs. Throughout the stages, you learn how to use objects, such as springs and swinging hooks, to get to the areas you need, which I enjoyed. It's not a game that everyone will get into, but even if you didn't own the little plastic figures with wild hair, you may find yourself being entertained by this cute, colorful platformer anyway. – KY

Super Turrican

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Factor 5
Publisher: Seika
(PAL: Hudson Soft)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Rock the Turrican assault suit and strike back at the attackers of planet Katakis in this crackerjack run and gun shooter. Though short (a level was axed thanks to stingy 4-megabit constraints), it's undeniably sweet – and tough to beat. Four multipart side-scrolling sections supply luscious landscapes to explore – from volcanic crags and icy oceans to toxic factories and visceral caverns – and each is enhanced by Chris Huelsbeck's awesome soundtrack. Sonorous piano, menacing cymbals, chilling bells, and more can be augmented by Dolby Surround as you scout for secret paths, exits, and platforms. The latter are invisible until shot into spitting out temporary shields, screen-clearing Smart Lines, and colorful blast boosters that determine and improve your primary weapon. Grabbing a red one readies the spread gun while blue fuels a serious laser and yellow yields ricocheting rounds. Be sure to snag point-bearing diamonds, extra lives, and healing hearts that stave off death and demoted ammo potency – you need to keep your strength supreme to surmount adversaries and hazards. Mechanized insects, tricky turrets, Xenomorph homages, bosses, and more eagerly eat your life meter, and your main arms only fire left or right. Skillful jumping, ducking, and limited use of the mine-dropping Energy Wheel help you live and lay low your foes, as do incapacitating bolts from the omnidirectional Freeze Beam – its effects are all too brief, however, and unique obstacles are still killers. A lightning storm, a crushing wall, snow boulders, and so on spell doom for the unwary warrior. It all seems like something no one can survive – but Turrican!





Reflections: That omitted level finally achieved retail availability in 2018 via the Analogue Super Nt console, which features the 6-megabit *Super Turrican: Director's Cut* (along with *Super Turrican 2*) in digital form. Even with an old cart, however, it's impossible to miss the overt Alien film imagery, from facehugger facsimiles popping out of pulpy eggs to dripping Xenomorph grins and an Alien Queen (that's its actual name in the German manual). There's also an auto-scrolling sequence with the fiends atop a grotesque train – all aboard the carapace express! But if you get to the final end of the line, you can drop one to Factor 5. The developers provide their mailing address in the credits, and though the *Director's Cut* shows some differences, their post office box number hasn't changed in a quarter century. – AP

Super Turrican 2

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Factor 5
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★★







The maniacal Machine must be dismantled for planets in peril to live in peace, so step anew into your Turrican suit to assault sinister foes in this fantastic, multifaceted sequel. Though mainly a run and gunner, other shooter styles show up to shake the gameplay with Mode 7 mayhem. When you're not weaving vertically above the sun's surface, spiraling forward in a fluid vortex, or evading lasers and bikers in a behind view, however, you have quite a few more moves at your side-scrolling disposal. Your main weapon is selected by collecting floating icons; use their hues and aural cues to know if you've activated/augmented the flamethrower, laser, spread shot, or rebound. Other pickups include homing missiles (to pair with any arm), ephemeral shields, expendable Smart-Bombs, energy-restoring hearts, and diamonds to earn extra lives (also obtainable outright). You can even roll with the Energy Wheel until its meter empties, halt enemies with the Nitrogen Freeze Laser, or hang out with the crucial Cyberfist. This grappling attachment is necessary for traversing everything from city ruins and a war-station's hull to the fang-rimmed maw of a massive sand snake. Indeed, the obstacles and bosses are as diverse as they are deadly, but a Dolby Surround-supporting soundtrack and nifty FMV cutscenes might make it worthwhile to seek Hard mode's (slightly) more elaborate ending. If perforating pirates and cyborgs, outpacing fumes and flames, or riding atop rockets and a submersible craft sound fun, this title should fit you to a T!



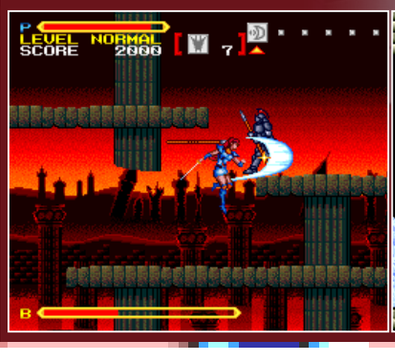


Reflections: I generally prefer Chris Huelsbeck's music in *Super Turrican*, yet his soundtrack here is still excellent, and the piece playing over the credits is a personal fave. What I adore even more, however, are this game's copious speech effects. The feminine voice becomes a lively, encouraging companion throughout your difficult quest, not only reminding you to "Arm your assault suit!" or warning of a "Boss approaching!", but also announcing stage numbers to mark your progress. These friendly intonations are a far cry from my earliest experience with digitized dialogue, which, oddly enough, came from another Turrican title – the one for the Commodore 64. Its opening snarls, "Hello and welcome to *Turrican*. Be my guest! Another day, another try. But remember: Shoot, or die!" before erupting into malevolent laughter. I've never forgotten it, though I can't say if it's because it's so chilling or just so cool. – AP

Super Valis IV

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Laser Soft
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







Evil King Gallagher, would-be conqueror of Dream World, has risen from his crystal prison to strike again! Only Lena Brande, by brandishing the holy Valis Sword, can blunt the villain's attack, assuming she can first defeat his gruesome generals in this routine hack 'n slasher. From the multi-tiered heights of Castle Vanity to the hopeless halls of Valhalla, seven stages of exotic dreamscapes await the crimson warrior – along with a general or other nightmarish creature standing ready at the end. Naturally, Lena's legendary sword is her primary means of attack, with which she can strike her enemies or summon divine intervention with six consumable spells. Searcher, for example, casts a wolf-shaped energy blast that seeks any surface, while Armor decks the maiden in magical battle gear. Once acquired, these godsends can be stored in six selectable slots, allowing Lena to use her default projectile for lesser threats. Not that her enemies are especially dangerous; the Valkyries, guards, and Lena doppelgängers are pushovers compared to the bosses themselves, all of whom possess a different deadly gimmick. Nornil can shapeshift, General Medius has superspeed, King Gallagher can steal his opponent's energy – the game's most memorable moments come from these encounters. Indeed, despite lush backdrops, a punchy soundtrack, responsive controls, and lovely anime-style cutscenes, the game's level design is undeniably bland. Stages tend to flow with rote linearity, shamelessly pitting the same (albeit area-exclusive) enemies against the player. Even the more open-ended environments, with their strange dead ends and inconsequential rewards, give scant reason to venture elsewhere. The game's devious time limit doesn't exactly encourage exploration anyway – bosses actually grow stronger the longer one takes to complete a level, fostering an awkward risk/reward dynamic that never quite justifies itself. No question, Lena deserves better than this purgatorial whirl of sloppy design, but those blessed with low expectations may still find redemption in her troubled journey.





Reflections: The Valis series has a rather complex history, first appearing on the MSX and PC-88 line of computers before finding shelter on various home consoles. Indeed, we SNES owners never received the true prize of the franchise – *Valis III* was originally a Sega and NEC/Hudson exclusive. Heck, we didn't even get the best version of *Valis IV*, as a superior edition exists on the Japan-only PC Engine. And yet, our version does hold one dubious distinction – it stands as the last worthwhile release to a series now long dead. – DA

Super Widget

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atlus
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Both an adaptation of the cartoon and a sequel to the NES game, this platformer features Widget the World Watcher, a shapeshifting purple alien, as he travels the universe fighting evil. The cartoon is well represented with Widget, his spaceship, and his friends appearing as they should. Levels entail moving left to right and finding the exit, but occasionally it's hidden or must be unlocked. They're set on Earth and additional alien planets, having multiple sections and a boss at the end. Most bosses, such as Mega Slank and Ratchet, are from the show, while other enemies are fairly original. They change from stage to stage and include insects, robots, eyeball monsters, and more. Regular Widget dies in one hit and only has a short-range punch, but letter coins transform him into tougher forms. Collecting two coins of the same type transmutes him into an even stronger shape; however, using a different coin can downgrade his form. There are five types: Strong, Leg, Marine, Flying, and Knight, with two transformation levels each. They have different speeds, attacks, and abilities. For instance, Dragon Widget flies and breathes fire, Octo-Widget swims well, and Robo-Widget's gun is powerful. While transforming, Widget also whirls like a tornado, making him momentarily invulnerable. His transformations give the game personality, but constantly switching controls can be confusing. Fortunately, "Widget Coins" are everywhere and grant extra lives per centum. Other items include force fields, keys, and invincibility coins. The difficulty isn't high, and there's a password system, but you're graded after each stage on your time and fighting performance. Getting all As and collecting all the hidden Horsehead Nebula coins could be challenging. The visuals are colorful and diverse but graphically underwhelming, and the music is pleasant but repetitive. The game still has some appeal, but Widget fans might enjoy it more.





Reflections: I remember seeing the cartoon a few times, although I didn't watch it often. Between every couple of levels in the game, a mock commercial bumper animation plays. Somehow, I think I recognize that from the show. For this review I watched some of the cartoon, and it seems fairly standard: not awful, not great. Like *Captain Planet*, it has an environmental message, and the hero usually fights eco-villains, but it has a goofier, cartoonier style. Unlike most SNES boxes, its package even says that it's made from recycled paper and can be recycled – but don't do that! – KN

Suzuka 8 Hours

Genre: Racing
Release Date: May 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Arc System Works
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



This motorcycle racing game is based on Namco's 1992 arcade cabinet of the same name. It offers five tracks, starting with an easy layout and ending with the famed Suzuka Circuit course. The tracks gradually crank up the difficulty, acclimating players to taking turns in the best way. To do this, skills including leaning into turns and understanding timely braking must be learned and executed. There are several gameplay options to choose from, including Practice, Time Trial, and Race Tour modes. While the game does have an arcade-like feel to it, it's not a pushover, and practice on the later tracks is encouraged. The Race Tour mode is the core of the experience here, challenging players to complete all five tracks in top position through three different classes of motorcycles. At the conclusion of each race, players earn points based on finishing positions and advance to the next class if they accumulate the most points by the end of the last race. Each successive class offers bikes with higher top speeds, so faster reflexes and reactions to turns will be needed to succeed. In addition, a head-to-head two-player mode is here for players to take on a friend for bragging rights. It's also worth noting that the game is an endurance racer; variable race lengths, run in either accelerated or real time, can be selected. On the track, there's a definite sense of speed as bikes zoom around, with the camera hovering just behind the player. The courses are a bit pixelated, but the bikes and racers look good. Indicators for turns and track sections also appear as assists, and energetic tunes and the hum of motors accompany each race. Overall, this one's worth at least a test drive.



Reflections: The "8 hours" in the game's title refers to the ability to set a race length of eight hours. That's not eight actual hours, thankfully – this isn't *Desert Bus*. In real time, the length is a little more than an hour and a half – 96 minutes, to be exact. That's the length of some feature films. Here's a fun coincidence: *The Wizard*, everyone's favorite *Super Mario Bros. 3* commercial disguised as a movie, runs for exactly 96 minutes before the credits roll. Now I want a game where you can put Jimmy, Corey, and Haley on a bike to California while outrunning the evil Mr. Putnam. – PS

SWAT Kats: The Radical Squadron

Genre: Action-Platformer, Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: AIM
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★



Mechanics by day, bad-guy hunters by night, the SWAT Kats must save Megakat City from fierce villains through some radical platforming and shooting. Selecting from strong but slow T-Bone (with bazooka) or quick but weak Razor (with jet pack), you can begin in any of the four available areas (called "worlds"). They each cover a different part of the city, including a maniacal carnival and a subway station. At certain points, you take control of your ship, the Turbokat, in shooter segments with an interesting, if dizzying, use of Mode 7. During the platforming portions, your choice of character encounters enemies befitting the stage, such as splitting blobs or bomb-throwing criminals. Each monster you defeat with the shooting power of your Glovatrix gives experience points, which are tracked in the START menu. Eventually, you level up, increasing your health bar in the upper left and raising the potency of your weapon's projectiles, from normal missiles to cement to slicer discs. Throughout the stages, you find helpful pickups, such as chili peppers for health, 1-ups, and question marks for experience. At the end of a world, you receive a password to maintain progress through this surprisingly long and involved game. Defeat all four areas, and a fifth world opens for you to work your way to the big, bad Dark Kat. Good-looking sprites with fluid handling, diverse backgrounds, and changing gameplay styles make this experience enjoyable. Anyone looking for more out of their platformers will surely find something different in this title.



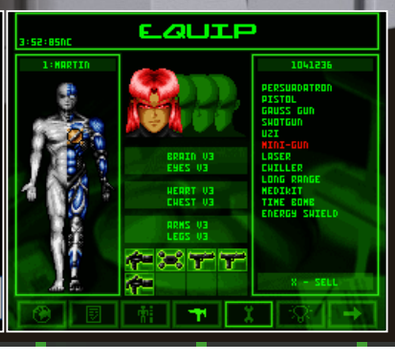
Reflections: I never watched *SWAT Kats* as a kid, but this game makes me want to now! There is something satisfying about the characters' mobility, whether clawing up walls or flying on Razor's jetpack. It's also cool how the rules change, like the way the lives counter only applies to platforming parts or when stages have puzzle elements (e.g., a maze or hidden button). I enjoy the graphical details, such as the mirror effect seen in Mad Kat Land or the spiraling backgrounds of the shooter sections. On the other hand, the font is atrocious. Readable it is not. Fortunately, there's little text, but good luck deciphering your passwords. Being a lengthy game, the action becomes monotonous, especially if you're paranoid like me and have to grind enemies for the boss. I can't speak as to this game's faithfulness to the show or how satisfying it is for fans, but as someone coming in blind, it's kategorically great! – KY

Syndicate

Genre: Action, Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bullfrog Productions
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★







In a dystopian future run by multinational crime corporations, executives work their way to the top by any means! This action-strategy title puts the player in charge of a division of a European syndicate, responsible for deploying cyborg agents worldwide. There are 50 global territories, each with a unique isometric map and objectives for the player's team to carry out, ranging from escort missions to assassinations. Players maneuver their color-coded agents through the zone, eliminating threats and completing tasks. The user interface includes each agent's health, API (Adrenaline, Perception, and Intelligence) gauges, ammo, a minimap, and the current objective. As levels are completed, the player's syndicate pulls in more tax funds from secured regions to invest in acquisitions/research. Agents can be customized with enhanced cybernetics and different equipment from the cache. Research allows up to three levels of cybernetic development for new leg, arm, chest, heart, brain, and eye hardware, improving the performance/survivability of agents. Cybernetics are activated using the API gauges, which wear down, so the player must balance their uptime. Hitting both shoulder buttons maxes out the agents' API and equips their deadliest weapons, which helps in panicked moments. Missions can be repeated if necessary; a helpful trick is to take a careful tact at first. If timed elements cause the mission to fail, it's less costly than losing good men and women. Practice mode lets the player get comfortable with gameplay in a generic level. For added fun, a second player can be enabled in the Options menu.



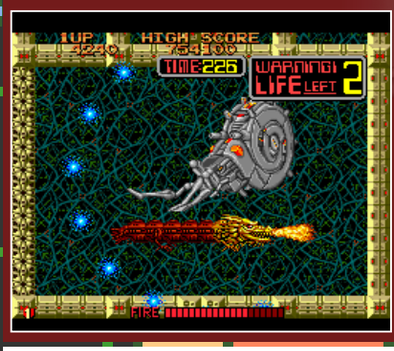


Reflections: *Syndicate* was not so much ported as it was adapted to the SNES. Extremely low-res versions of the original's animated cutscenes are almost incomprehensible, and a modest scrubbing of the grim cyberpunk narrative was necessary to get the game in line with Nintendo's sensibilities. Thankfully, some of these decisions are to the game's benefit, as the larger sprites, wider maps, and brighter colors make control and situation assessment easier. The biggest tragedy is the use of passwords instead of battery saves. Besides being inconvenient, character names and equipment are lost; only cash, research, and level progression are saved. Speaking of inconvenient, entering and exiting buildings is a mess, so expect to backtrack to get your brainwashed mob in order. *Syndicate*, for all its flaws, still somehow persuades you to keep playing and playing… hey, wait a sec… – DG

Syvalion

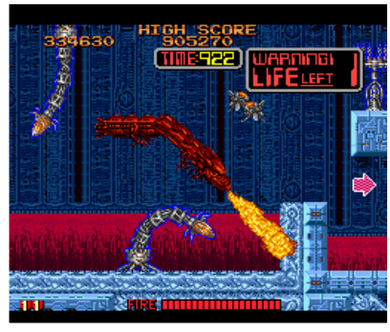
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Taito
Publisher: JVC Digital Studios
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★







What in blazes? A spaceship with a severe case of dragon breath *and* dragon body?! That's Syvalion, a craft you've commandeered to end an alien invasion in this extremely strange shooter. The articulated reptile of legend advances omnidirectionally, with its tail and the screen following its head; flashing arrows indicate the proper path through timed stages. True to form, it spews fire at robots and bosses, but as the on-screen gauge dwindles, the flame grows lame. Fast flight reignites it, but where's the health meter? You're piloting it! Damage changes Syvalion's segments from gilded to vermillion, and warnings blare when little life remains. Avoiding injury sometimes feels impossible thanks to your sluggish speed and huge hitbox, not to mention many enemies materializing almost instantly. You can't even scorch most blue-rimmed baddies; those foes you can fry fling point-bearing orb triangles and health spheres, but explosive death still occurs often. Nonetheless, it's quite forgiving: You restart right where you were, and oddly encouraging words accompany the unlimited continues. There's also other intriguing reading: Prior to the five immutable Basic Series stages, useful advice appears, while weird story bits show up before the Real Combat Series' randomized levels, sometimes bestowing temporary power-ups. Should tales of spoiled meat superpowers or suspicious older sisters overwhelm you, try Time Attack's score-chasing stage. Though the bizarre balance of unfairness and kindness might put a drag on this game, the multiple endings and sheer strangeness could just wyrm their way into your heart.





Reflections: Originally a trackball-controlled arcade title, this offshoot of Taito's Darius series comes from someone already associated with dragons – Fukio Mitsuji of *Bubble Bobble* fame. In fact, a Syvalionized rendition of that beloved game (called *Sybubblun*) appears in that title's X68000 Japanese home computer version. I should probably be annoyed at *Syvalion*'s invincible enemies, its too-short levels, and how there's apparently little correlation between skill and the Real Combat Series' story shreds and endings. However, that very randomness and the speed it takes to see it absorbs my attention, and being able to weave through sinuous stage sections is satisfying. I also can't get mad at a game that commiserates on the continue screen, telling me that I "did improve a lot" after my ship detonated a dozen times. Dragon breath or not, you're one sweet talker, *Syvalion*. – AP

T2: The Arcade Game

Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Probe Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional), Super Scope (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★





In this action-packed and sometimes frustrating arcade port, players fill the boots of the T-800 Terminator to trade gunfire with minions of the evil Skynet supercomputer. Throughout seven scenarios based on both the future and present timelines of the *Terminator 2* film, players can go it alone or help a buddy fight various foes, including T-800s, tank-like Hunter-Killers, SWAT team members, and of course, the T-1000. Stages mostly consist of players killing wave after wave of enemies while the action scrolls horizontally, but a select few are task based, injecting some much-needed variety. Unfortunately, this is where the frustration comes in. Two task-oriented stages require players to protect a vehicle occupied by Resistance leader John Connor. The enemies on these stages come at a breakneck pace, making protecting John's vehicle nearly impossible, especially when playing solo. To add to the difficulty and to keep players on their toes, the T-800's gun overheats when used excessively, decreasing its rate of fire. To combat this, crates and other environmental props can be destroyed to reveal rapid fire coolant and other health and weapon upgrades. The T-800 is also equipped with a rocket launcher or a shotgun (depending on the stage), although the ammo for these weapons is limited. Similar to the arcade game, players can take the fight to Skynet using a light gun (Super Scope), but this console port also supports the Super NES Mouse or a standard controller. The Super Scope will please arcade purists, but the accuracy and speed of the mouse make it the best option. Featuring digitized representations of the film's actors as well as some crystal-clear voice samples, the presentation is stunning. This game is a must for both fans of the film and the arcade cabinet.





Reflections: I still remember the week that this cabinet dropped in the arcades. The crowd that huddled around the screen was immense! I recall a bunch of people commenting on how real the machine guns felt since they had a rumble feature. My parents knew I loved the arcade game and gifted me the SNES version for my birthday. My so-called "buddy" told me that the home port had a "cover feature" that would recognize if I took cover behind my couch while playing – I couldn't wait to test it out! I felt like a fool when I realized that it wasn't true. – MV

Taz-Mania

Genre: Action
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Sunsoft (PAL: THQ)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★



Taz takes his lunch on the run in a simplistic third-person game that resembles racing but is all about chasing evasive Kiwi birds. In 19 timed stages split among five Acts, the toon Tasmanian Devil tracks his prey along highways that proceed up from the screen's base to an ever-receding horizon, his sprinting/springing backside a regular sight amidst the vibrantly varied environments. Indeed, the visuals are the game's most piquant feature, with snowscapes, sunbeams, and Taz's reactions to hazards adding flavor. However, tasting defeat due to obstacles gets cloying. Rocks, trees, signs, etc. line the writhing roadsides and, combined with lolloping elevation changes, prove effective at arresting Taz's pursuit. Furthermore, vehicles mow down the chowhound, who's also slowed by holes, pools, and air-lifting pterodactyls. These time-sapping perils are irksome, but what's worse is how they help Taz's own hunters apprehend him. Encountering the lovestruck She-Devil kisses a continue goodbye, while clingy Wendal T. Wolf obscures the screen until he's flung off with a life-reducing spin. Although help comes courtesy of a Rear View Window and scootering Didgeri Dingo, the latter's ACME packages contain pain as often as power-ups. It's safer to avoid him in favor of flying birds, whose easy capture confers points, health, and/or time. Why Taz doesn't dine on them instead of dashing after required quotas of Kiwis that learn to stop short and disappear is a mystery. Once every challenge is introduced, the novelty evaporates as well, leaving, at best, a sense of determined ennui that even four bonus stages can't shake. Combined with uninspired music, this kooky concoction seasoned with characters from the titular cartoon might not indulge an appetite for fun.



Reflections: Taz should learn to keep his trap shut. At the end of each stage, he falls into an open-jawed slumber, allowing his quarry to escape his insides. I guess his irritability makes sense – consuming a 23-course meal still leaves him running on empty – but there's another reason a closed mouth would be good for this grawlix growler. Before dozing, Taz states his feelings in a characteristic manner. Some of his quotes are cute ("Taz need bicarbonate!"), while others are self-affirming ("Taz really cool!"), but I wish he wouldn't express his exhaustion with "Taz pooped!" It conjures an image that, to borrow another bit of the toon's speech peculiarities, really blows a raspberry from Down Under. – AP

Tecmo Secret of the Stars

Genre: RPG
Release Date: July 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





Earthquakes and monsters plague the land as the evil Homncruse seeks to rule the world, and your destiny is to find other heroes and form the "Aqutallion" to stop him. It's a familiar fantasy story with some sci-fi elements, and JRPG tropes abound. You traverse a world map, enter towns and dungeons, and your characters are super-deformed "chibi" sprites with grid-based movement until a battle occurs. Weapons, armor, and items, which progressively become stronger and more expensive, are sold in generally identical towns. Tiles are recycled throughout, so locations look similar, even to the end. When your party is defeated, you're warped to the closest town and can rest for free in any bed you can reach. A travelling friend, "Uncle Save," can record your game in each town. Battle screen backgrounds are typical, featuring caves, dungeons, woods, etc., and although some enemies are creative, spiders, birds, skeletons, bats, and slimes all make their scheduled appearances. Combat is menu-based, and you can fight, use magic and items, or flee. Later, you gain the ability to use powerful combination spells. Your characters appear in detail when taking actions, but you can deactivate those animations to speed up gameplay. That's preferable because this game doubles the grinding. Along your journey, you meet "Kustera" warriors who join you, but they're in a separate party. Inconveniently, your groups cannot share items until the middle of the game. The story doesn't make the Kusteras' purpose clear, and they're superfluous until the last dungeon. These groups don't interact; when you swap parties from the non-battle menu, the previous group sits inside a tent. Exploring dungeon mazes, fetching hidden items, and solving puzzles add some challenge. Translation errors are rife, and wording is often awkward or puerile, degrading what could've been an interesting tale. Glimmers of potential shine through, but it's gray and overcast.



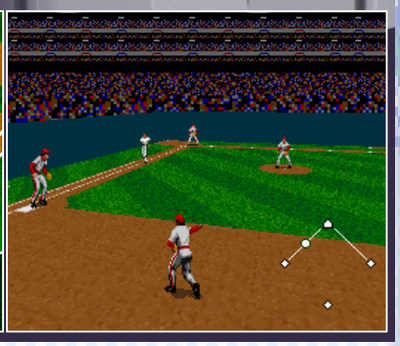


Reflections: It's a two-star game, but if you *love* authentic 16-bit JRPGs, maybe it has secret stars? Games like this aren't made anymore, for worse or for better. I somewhat enjoyed this because I've already played the major SNES RPGS and it's good to know there are more. However, the poor translation ruins everything. It was released in 1993 in Japan but 1995 in America, beyond its shelf life. No wonder everyone forgot it. Also, this technically is titled *Tecmo Secret of the Stars*, probably to look similar to Temco's popular sports titles. – KN

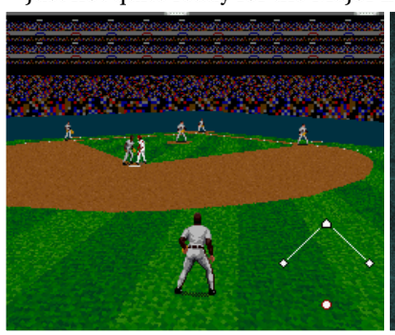
Tecmo Super Baseball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★





The smells of buttery popcorn and grilled hot dogs mingle in the summer air as the crisp crack of the bat snaps every onlooker to attention. An anxious hush descends… then, the spinning ball sails over the center field wall, prompting thousands of celebrating spectators to erupt into a singular, cheering mass! Homerun! Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to America's pastime. Tecmo tries to bring the ballpark into your living room with this ambitious but ultimately average baseball title featuring 700 actual MLBPA pros. Unfortunately, the rights to use real team names and logos weren't secured, so each club is represented by their hometown's name. You can play in various modes, including Preseason, Season, and Super Stars (which is the All-Star Game). Pick a team and play against the computer, simulate and watch a matchup between two computer opponents, coach from the dugout as your team's manager, or invite a friend to the stadium for a head-to-head baseball battle. This game puts a great deal of control and customization at your fingertips. You can choose your lineup, bunt, steal bases, put in a pinch runner, call in a relief pitcher, shift your infield, control the depth of your outfielders, and so on. At the plate, batters can choose to hit for "contact" or "power" as well as walk or get hit by a wild pitch. As in real baseball, reading the pitch and timing your swing are the keys to a solid batting average. On defense, choose from an arsenal of fastballs, curveballs, and changeups, and control the trajectories of your pitches once they're thrown. The sprites in this game are presented at an impressive scale, but pulling out a little further from the action would have allowed you to see more of the game at any given time, which would have been helpful at the plate or while playing the field. The graphics, animation, and sound are all Minor League status – not terrible, but just not quite ready for the Major Leagues.





Reflections: OK, *Tecmo Super Baseball*, three strikes and you're out! Outside of the pitching sequences, the catchers in the game don't wear any catcher's gear and look like every other player on the field. *"Strike one!"* The baserunning controls are extremely slow and cumbersome. *"Strike two!"* There is limited manual defense against base stealing. *"Strike three – you're out!"* Contrary to its title, this game is not, in fact, "Super." – DM

Tecmo Super Bowl

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★





Real players, real NFL teams, real fun! Tecmo's 16-bit port of the legendary NES original delivers the same horizontal football fun factor in an upgraded package. Three play modes are available. Preseason allows a quick match between any two teams. Pro Bowl is the same but with configurable all-star rosters. Season Game offers one or three complete seasons, including bye weeks and a playoff bracket. Numerous statistical categories are tracked for teams/players. Season games can be skipped and team control changed at will, allowing players to focus on the matchups they are interested in. Team Data lets players view rosters and individual player abilities, such as running speed and catching ability. Three control modes exist – player control, computer control, and coaching, where the player makes decisions but does not control on-field play. Each down, players choose a play from the offense's playbook – the more accurate the guess by the defense, the better their positioning. An exact guess results in an all-out blitz. An iconic sideline-to-sideline broadcast perspective fits lots of action on-screen. Controls for running, passing, and tackling are simple and intuitive. Starters and bench players can be adjusted mid-game (and must be if players are lost to injury). Clear, rainy, and snowy conditions look great and impact player performance. Polished cutscenes highlighting key moments, from diving catches to blocked kicks, even take weather into account. Near-misses get the same treatment, keeping these tense moments from becoming spoilers. A quintessential entry in sports gaming.





Reflections: *Tecmo Bowl* (1989) tapped into the heart of what makes an addictive sports video game, hitting the sweet spot between arcade and simulation. The game had flaws but was fun and functioned as a formula for the flawless follow-up, *Tecmo Super Bowl*. The prior entry's shortcomings – league licencing for real teams, accurate seasons with statistics tracking, and expanded playbooks – were resolved. The game's refinements, accessibility, and popularity elevated it to become synonymous with its creators – to say "play Tecmo" implied "play *Tecmo Super Bowl*." The SNES version adds touchbacks, bug fixes, and graphical improvements to the NES masterwork. Diehard fans compete yearly with the Nintendo version, which gets annual league and roster updates courtesy of its loyal community. You cannot go wrong either way. *Tecmo Super Bowl* is arguably the greatest sports video game ever, one whose appeal can make calcified opponents of sportsball question that stance. – DG

Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition

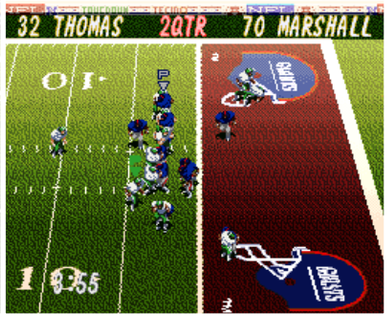
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





The second edition of Tecmo's side-scrolling football series expands on the famous first entry while maintaining the core of the gameplay experience. Rosters and schedules from the 1992, 1993, and 1994 season are all available. In addition, a special Trade Mode, 199X, adds a few weeks of trading players between teams before the start of the season, though not all offers will be accepted by the other team. Other innovations in this version include the second playbook, which allows offenses to choose from 16 plays while still only requiring defenses to guess from eight, and enhanced on-field actions, including spin moves, dragging defenders, and diving to get a key yard's distance. Additional statistical categories have been added to individual players, including Body Balance for position players, Coolness for quarterbacks, and Kicking Power for kickers. Different weather conditions remain, but cutscenes are less frequent and limited primarily to significant plays, such as sacks and touchdowns. The camera angle has been tweaked to more closely mirror traditional television presentation. Optional Hard difficulty gives the pursuit AI an edge, preventing serpentine sprints to the end zone, while Normal difficulty uses one familiar to fans of the series. The game's soundtrack is not bad as a whole, but the primary menu music and in-game tunes both leave something to be desired. Confusing menu design and game balance issues also hold the series' second entry back from matching the trilogy's other titles in excellence.





Reflections: As football fans know, the only thing harder than winning a championship is repeating as champions. *Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition* takes a number of risks. The shift in the presentation camera more realistically depicts broadcast television but impairs discerning the exact position of players on the field and the down distance. Spin moves and dives diversify the offensive toolkit, but deflections and interceptions happen more often than is necessary. There are great innovations, from formations and audibles to Trade Mode, but for each step forward, the game takes two back. The result is a good game, but one that loses some of its precursor's soul in the name of progress. As the rarest of the three Tecmo Super Bowl games for the system, collectors may enjoy hunting down a copy, but when it comes time to actually play, look to the first or third installment instead. – DG

Tecmo Super Bowl III: Final Edition

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







The third and final horizontal football title from Tecmo to grace the Super Nintendo, this edition finely tunes the previous entry while adding welcome new features to the lineup. The broadcast perspective, intuitive control scheme, and simple representation of real teams and players return. Familiar modes are still found – Preseason gives a quick match, Pro Bowl provides the same in an all-star format, Team Data gives players a detailed view of playbooks and rosters for the 30 teams, and Season Game gives players a chance to take control of one or more franchises in pursuit of a championship. Roster management has been expanded. In addition to the three weeks of trading in Trade Mode, a Free Agent turn has been added in which players can be pulled from free agency or dropped into it. Each player has a value in free agency determined by their overall ability, allowing for an additional level of roster customization. Finally, the Superstar Editor allows the player to create their own custom characters at any position, choosing a name, number, skin tone, and various abilities from a randomly generated number of attribute points. These created players overwrite existing players, can be put onto any roster, and can improve based on game-to-game performance, adding a developmental feel. Even small attentions to detail are found, such as the return of first-down markers on the sidelines. Cutscenes have been scaled back further and only occur on scoring plays or to highlight statistical milestones. Season simulators and casual gridiron fans alike will enjoy this swan song.





Reflections: It is not common to see a game refer to itself as *Final Edition*. Given the precarious position Tecmo found themselves in, it was a bold decision. They put ads out in gaming magazines in 1995, apologizing for the availability of *TSB II*. Rather than produce another run of *Special Edition*, the team focused on finishing *Final Edition* and getting it to customers. This was probably a good decision, as the game gets a lot correct, repairing most problems plaguing the series' second entry. While not as large a leap as *Tecmo Super Bowl* was from *Tecmo Bowl*, it is a strong improvement and one that can easily engross players in seasons-long pursuit of the perfect player and unbeatable roster. There are some unpredictabilities with created players gaining attribute points, and the presentation still falls short of the bar set by *Tecmo Super Bowl*, but the added personalizations make this a worthy successor to the Tecmo name. – DG

Tecmo Super NBA Basketball

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Tecmo takes its blend of arcade and simulated sports action to the hardwood with this five-on-five basketball game. All of the real NBA teams are here, with most of the actual players represented – including Michael Jordan. While Preseason and All-Star games offer quick, single-game fun, it's the in-depth Season mode that keeps players coming back. Players can assume control of any number of the 27 teams in the game, while the AI handles the rest. Full season progress and stat tracking, including individual and team stats, league standings, and league leaders, are saved to the cartridge battery. These features are great; however, the gameplay is slightly less so. The action moves horizontally at one of three preset speeds (based on player-selected options), and with 10 players to monitor on the court at once, it feels a bit crowded. Following who has the ball can sometimes be tricky, and ball handlers often don't have a lot of room to move, leading to an abnormally high number of offensive fouls being called. Rebounds and blocks can be hard to judge based on perspective and take some getting used to. Shooting feels a bit too driven by stats instead of release timing – leaning more toward simulation than arcade play – and this can occasionally be frustrating, especially for newer players. The controls are simple to learn, however, so novices can master them after only a few games of practice. Tecmo's trademark presentation is on full display here, with in-game cutscenes to emphasize big plays, along with halftime and postgame shows. The rest of the audiovisual package is fine, with good graphics, appropriate music, and a few voice-sampled referee calls here and there. All told, this is a well above-average hoops game that fans should enjoy despite a few flaws.





Reflections: Getting to play as Michael Jordan here was like playing as Bo Jackson in *Tecmo Super Bowl*, so I naturally played my first season as the Chicago Bulls. The problem was that my girlfriend at the time was a big Celtics fan, so when I fired up the game at her place, it led to arguments about who was better. I played games against her brother and won by 30 or more points consistently. It led to a few "Why don't you just go home?" nights. I hate to admit this, but... no regrets. I guess I'm a bit competitive. – PS

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles IV: Turtles in Time (EU)

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Aug. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Availability: Common
★★★★★







After the Statue of Liberty falls into the hands of sinister supervillains Shredder and Krang, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles launch into action. Chasing the Foot Clan through the streets and sewers of New York, the heroes find themselves face to face with Shredder, who sends them hurtling into the past. Now they must fight through time to defeat the nefarious pair – let's kick shell! Battling the Foot Clan's unforgiving soldiers is an absolute joy thanks to the incredibly faithful nature of this arcade port. Get ready to travel from the harsh plains of a prehistoric wasteland to the glowing streets of a futuristic metropolis as you jump into the lively half-shells of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello, or Raphael for 10 stages. Each pizza-loving protagonist offers a unique and balanced gameplay experience that's accurate to their cartoon portrayal. The coolheaded Leonardo is a proficient swordsman with leveled skills, wisecracking Michelangelo wields his trademark nunchaku to unleash powerful blows, brilliant Donatello moves slowly while dealing devastating ranged damage with his staff, and snarky Raphael suffers from weak defense but strikes swiftly with his twin sai. These different movesets support a variety of play styles, allowing you to defeat Shredder's goons in a number of ways. In addition to your chosen turtle's signature weapon, you're also given the ability to jump kick, charge into, and grab and throw your unsuspecting adversaries as well as deflect incoming projectiles with a swing of your blade. It's also possible to perform an impressive character-specific special attack, but this costs a portion of health, so be on the lookout for replenishing pizza pickups. The spirit of the beloved cartoon has been effortlessly translated to console with vibrant stages, familiar characters, and iconic boss fights that make it feel as though you're playing through an episode of the show. With the inclusion of single-player time trial stages, a one-on-one versus mode, and the option of drop-in campaign multiplayer, you can be sure of a radical time!





Reflections: Konami's brilliant adaptation of *Turtles in Time* gets so many things right, including a wonderfully accurate translation of the fantastic arcade soundtrack. Each stage is accompanied by an energetic melody that serves as the perfect backdrop to the Turtles' time-travelling adventure. With hints of the familiar *Turtles* theme shining through, the only way this could've been better is with Vanilla Ice's "Ninja Rap." – AF

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: Tournament Fighters (EU)

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Availability: Common
★★★★

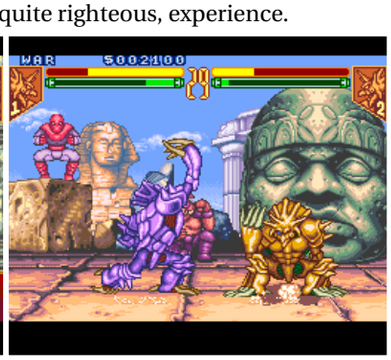






The Turtles swap the shadows for the spotlight in this one-on-one fighting game where they enter a martial arts tourney televised worldwide. At least, that's one version of events; the game lets players choose between Tournament and Story Battle modes, the latter of which flips the plot entirely as the brothers must instead seek and defeat the mysterious Karai, heir apparent to the Shredder's evil empire. Serious players will likely stick to Tournament play, however, as it offers the full roster of 10 contenders and includes the use of "ultimate attacks" – devastating, last ditch maneuvers that can shellshock even the most belligerent of opponents. No doubt, Tournament play is where the game's true heart and shell reside, although its cast of oddball characters is bizarre even by the franchise's wacky standards. Outside the Turtles and a greatly revised "Cyber-Shredder," the lineup offers such toy shop rejects as Armaggon, a bipedal shark from the future; Wingnut, a humanoid bat from a different planet; and War, a hulking beast hailing from the Underworld. Each character boasts a diverse set of techniques, including special moves, throws, grabs, and that aforementioned ultimate attack. Raphael, for instance, can perform the "Power drill," propelling his body like a spinning torpedo should the right button combination be pressed, while Michelangelo can, uh, barf up energy balls at distant foes. Both the Rat King and surprise contestant Karai also appear as final bosses. It's a mutant menagerie that shouldn't work, but the game's versatile four-button attack system saves the day, granting room for various strategies and combo payloads. Graphics are similarly well crafted, featuring colorful backdrops filled with fan service, although the music lacks the infectious vibe enjoyed by earlier Turtles titles. Finally, the game comes stuffed with extras, with three combat speeds, eight difficulty levels, unique character endings, and a spectator-like "Watch" mode that add to the already rich, if not quite righteous, experience.





Reflections: Konami has long been known for its excellent TMNT brawlers, but *Tournament Fighters* shows that the company was willing to try a different formula, if only to capitalize on the *Street Fighter II* craze happening at the time. My younger self didn't approve, disappointed I didn't receive the true sequel to the joyous and raucous *Turtles in Time* that I so desired. My sentiment hasn't changed, but *Tournament Fighters* still survives as one of the better fighters of its era. – DA

The Terminator

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter, Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★




Players take on the role of Kyle Reese as he time-travels back to 1984 Los Angeles to protect Sarah Connor, mother of John Connor, the leader of the worldwide Resistance against the machines. Most of the gameplay is of the side-scrolling platformer variety, wherein Kyle must climb ladders and leap from platform to platform to progress. The early portion of the game is set in the post-apocalyptic future and has Kyle facing off against the iconic T-800 machines and other creations of Skynet. Stages set in 1984 pit Kyle against more basic street thug enemies. Kyle is armed with a plasma rifle while in the future and a machine gun during stages set in 1984. Grenades and Molotov cocktails can also be obtained and are a good alternative when attacking enemies from a distance. However, combat comes with some glaring issues. Enemies throughout the game relentlessly fire upon Kyle as soon as they appear. This results in players having to slowly advance across the screen inch by inch in hopes of attacking enemies before taking any damage of their own. Car chase sequences where Kyle and Sarah are trying to escape the Terminator break up the platforming stages, but they are frustrating due to poor controls and the large amount of inexplicable damage the car takes. Similar to the film, the visuals are dark and dreary, making a lot of the environment and enemies difficult to see. The music in the game is barely noticeable, but the sound effects are extremely obnoxious. Kyle's jump is accompanied by a noise that will have most gamers smashing the mute button. The final battle is ripped straight from the film and almost makes up for all of the poor gameplay before it.




Reflections: I have a soft spot for any video game that features robots, especially the Terminator. When I was a kid, my mom let me purchase the NES version of *The Terminator* while we were on a vacation in South Carolina. Since my NES was hundreds of miles away, I would longingly stare at the box and instruction manual while counting down the minutes to our return home. On the final day of our trip, our van was broken into and my new game was stolen. I cried my eyes out. My awesome mom surprised me with another copy on my birthday. – MV

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

Genre: Action-Platformer, Action
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: B.I.T.S
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★




Take control of the T-800 Terminator in a bid to halt the rise of the machines in this action romp that closely follows the hit movie. The eight stages feature important locales that push the film narrative on from the opening bar scene and the mall to the steelworks for the final showdown with the T-1000. Levels have their own objectives, such as finding John Connor, rescuing his mom, Sarah, from the maximum security asylum, and recovering collectibles. The Terminator has an efficiency percentage for a health meter; it receives a backup 50% when it hits zero, but if this is lost, then it is game over. During most action-platforming stages, the T-1000 randomly appears and relentlessly hunts the T-800 down, as do the police and SWAT teams already present. Enemies can be subdued with a plethora of weapons – pistols, shotguns, and even a gatling gun – which are a joy to shoot because everything explodes. Once all directives have been accomplished, the game switches to an isometric driving section to go onto the next level. The viewpoint, however, doesn't match with the compass indicator, and the controls simply don't work. Add in the constant pursuing police and the whole experience becomes very frustrating. This is a decent movie tie-in at times, but the terrible controls and unfair difficulty spikes, especially during missions with Sarah and John in tow, make it more of a chore to play.




Reflections: Why does Arnie have a jump button? One that isn't required for anything and makes the sprite look ridiculous to boot? I have a childhood affinity for this game because I used to play it relentlessly, but even with my rose-tinted glasses on, I can see the issues present. It is genuinely unnerving having the T-1000 hunting you down, and the game does have some cool ideas, such as shooting the burglar alarm before going inside the Connor residence so the police aren't called, but many others are poorly implemented. I also found an absolute game breaker: If you don't shoot up Enrique's ammo bunker and collect the gatling gun and a mass of ammo, then you may as well stop playing because this is where the difficulty massively spikes, making the proceedings nearly impossible. It is a huge shame overall because this could have been a contender for one of the better movie games out there – if the driving sections weren't some of the worst I have ever had the misfortune to play. – JE

Terranigma

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Quintet
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







Ark must embark on a quest to restore life and humanity in this tremendous top-down role-playing game. After opening Pandora's box and beginning a calamity that freezes the townsfolk of Crysta, Ark sets about making penance and traveling the far reaches of the Earth, from snow-capped mountains to dried-up springs to eerie desert ghost towns, solving the mystery of why the indigenous creatures have vanished. Most places contain dungeon locations that require simple puzzle-solving tasks, such as destroying all enemies or moving switches to open the next area. Combat plays in real time, allowing Ark to level up and increase his hit points, strength, and luck; however, magic is obtained by collecting Magirocks in the wild and using them to craft single-use elemental spell rings and summon medals. Ark has several main attacks, including a standard spear thrust, a running attack, and a jumping spin. These have different results depending on the enemy, and he can also block projectiles for defense. A minor flaw is that he cannot attack diagonally, so a fair bit of combat is spent trying to reposition Ark so he can fight. Finding or purchasing new armor and weapons comes in handy against a bestiary of knights, golems, and zombies. Ark also makes use of objects such as flippers for swimming or claws for climbing rock faces, while standard health items and poison cure potions can also be obtained and used. From the presentation to the story, the game flows excellently, always offering something new to see. Even if the bulk of the experience remains similar, this shines as one of the best RPGs on the system.



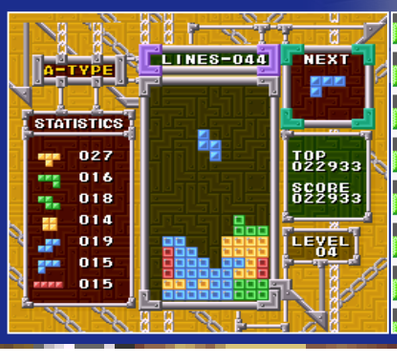


Reflections: This is an engrossing title that should be a mainstay in any RPG collection, particularly those that also contain sister games *Soul Blazer* and *Illusion of Gaia*. It is refreshing not to get caught in an endless loop of random battles, and climbing inside Pandora's box to use it for the inventory menus is a great touch, finally explaining how a character can hold so many weapons. If it weren't released toward the end of the console's life span, then it would have garnered more attention, ranking up there with the likes of *Secret of Mana*. It remains in obscurity because it wasn't released in America, so a whole region of gamers missed out. Then again, here in the UK, I never got *Super Mario RPG* or *EarthBound* growing up. – JE

Tetris & Dr. Mario

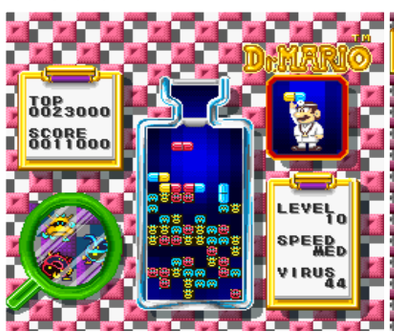
Genre: Puzzle, Compilation
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★★

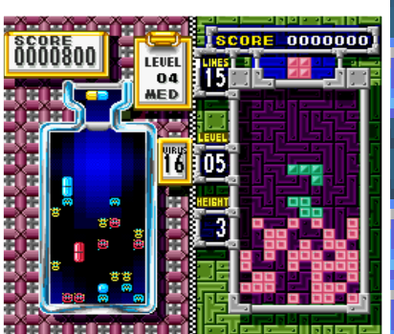






The iconic *Tetris* and *Dr. Mario* make quite a couple in this puzzle game compilation. In both, various game pieces, previewed via a dedicated window, descend singly into a rectangular playfield. They can be shifted laterally, rotated clockwise or counterclockwise, and forced to fall faster. Proper placement causes items in play to vanish, points to flourish, and both the level and difficulty to grow, but beware of overfilling the area – a glut equals game over. *Tetris*, Alexey Pajitnov's masterwork, features seven different Tetriminos (four-square arrays) as pieces to place; you must create unbroken horizontal lines in the playfield to send them away, score, and succeed, whether you begin with a blank board to empty endlessly (A-TYPE) or "garbage" blocks to cramp clearing 25 lines (B-TYPE). In *Dr. Mario*, the plumber-turned-practitioner prescribes solid or bicolor capsules in red, yellow, or blue to combat similarly shaded viruses; four matching pill-parts and/or pests in a row or column eradicate the creatures and capsule halves alike, letting any unused doses drop. Both titles let you go solo or compete against a friend or three echelons of AI; having two participants invites opportunities to set handicaps and assail one another's boards with malicious pieces. You may also select contemplative silence or motivating music to accompany you, but if you can't decide which of the two addictive titles to tackle, try Mixed Match. This special two-person contest features a timed run through each game's modes. Though it feels a bit tacked on, it doesn't detract from the quality of the terrific titles comprising it, so check this cart out – two games in one means twice the fun!





Reflections: I prefer playing *Tetris & Dr. Mario* alone; the games are engrossing and intense enough without having to anticipate encroaching blocks or capsules courtesy of an opponent's superior skills at scoring sequential eradications. Besides, nobody I know wants to play, and the CPU competitors aren't just challenging; they're... odd. *Tetris* offers a trio of monochromatic, clown-nosed opponents, and while I admit I'd like to berate the beret bearer for beating me, even he doesn't strike me as strange as *Dr. Mario*'s AI adversaries – the viruses themselves! Why would they obliterate their own kind? Shouldn't they be multiplying instead? Their gleefully self-destructive presence is just too hard a pill to swallow. – AP

Tetris 2

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo R&D1, TOSE
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★





Colorful Tetriminos, flashing blocks, and chain reactions abound in the sequel to an all-time puzzle classic. Each individual cube of the piece can be a different color now, and it is matching those colors, not forming lines, that removes elements from the board. Aligning six in a row also clears all bricks of that color, giving players in dire situations hope to break free if the blocks fall in their favor. The player can receive non-contiguous pieces, moving part of the piece even after another part of it has anchored to the game board. Learning to maneuver these detached colors to the color-clearing Flash Blocks at the bottom is essential. There are three game modes to choose from. Normal mode has the player destroy all Flash Blocks from 80 randomized but increasingly challenging boards. Bonus bricks stored in quicker runs will eliminate some Fixed Blocks cluttering the following level, encouraging efficient play, though most levels devolve into rote exercises in tunneling to the Flash Blocks. Puzzle mode challenges the player to solve 100 specific layouts with preset pieces. The last, Versus mode, has two players (or a player and the computer) battle it out in a best-of-five match to clear their own board while making the other's more hazardous. Each mode has a menu to choose features such as block speed, starting round, background music, CPU skill level, etc. While it borrows from its namesake and other contemporary puzzle games, it does not smoothly or cleverly integrate their mechanics. This second trip down the well is as disjointed as its broken Tetriminos.





Reflections: *Tetris 2* is a flawed attempt to merge the Tetrimino-positioning gameplay of the original *Tetris* with the color-matching and gravity from *Dr. Mario* and *Puyo Puyo*. While the settings for speed, round, and music clearly come from the former, it's the latter that has "missions" akin to *Tetris 2*'s Puzzle mode. To be fair, it's refreshing for a puzzle game to derive challenge from studying a predictable, repeatable layout to determine the correct moves when most rely on reaction time, random layouts, and/or random pieces. The changing water level mechanic in Versus is also clever for altering the size of the region into which pieces can safely plummet – the tanks themselves hold fish that function as the "victory" markers. Unique backgrounds and borders accompany each mode and keep the visuals fresh. It's these details that make an otherwise mundane muddling of cubes and colors worth trying once, putting it just above its NES version. – DG

Tetris Attack

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★★





Attack! With adorable blocks! This puzzle game lets you play as Yoshi (and others in two-player mode) controlling those colorful squares. Your main focus is to swap the place of two horizontally adjacent panels to create a row or column of three of the same color. Those squares disappear, and all the blocks above them drop, making room for more random colors to come from the bottom of the screen at an increasing pace. If your blocks are pushed past the top of the screen, it's game over, but depending on the mode, you can try again. There are five ways to play: Endless, Time Trial, Stage Clear, Puzzle, and VS. Endless is for achieving a high score, with rows continuously appearing. Time Trial is similar but in two-minute chunks. Stage Clear, Puzzle, and VS. have distinct stages and endings. The first is similar to Endless but with a particular line that must be cleared to move on to another level. Puzzle is a series of stages with a set layout of blocks. You have to clear the screen with a limited number of moves, displayed to the right. The final mode pits you against either a CPU character or a second person. You battle it out to make combos (matching four or more squares) and chains, which means causing multiple matches to occur from either the initial swap, the falling of the blocks above, or even from moving more panels while another match is disappearing. Doing so sends a long garbage block to your opponent, which converts to the regular squares only after a match has been made adjacent to it. Offering so many ways to play and being very cute and animated with lovely music, this game is a must-play.





Reflections: I love love LOVE *Tetris* on the NES, but no amount of skill at that game can prepare you for how *Tetris Attack* works. Rather than worrying about how Tetriminos best slide into each other, you're analyzing the color of the blocks and the many ways you can transpose those squares horizontally. The cuddly, cute characters are pulled from *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, with the same graphical style. Your opponent in the stages determines the animated backgrounds and music, creating a variety of environments for me to ignore as I focus my mind and fingers on getting one more combo to attempt taking down that smug-faced Bowser! – KY

Theme Park

Genre: Simulation
Release Date: June 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Bullfrog Productions
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★







Open the gates to a world of fun! Taking the role of an aspiring amusement entrepreneur, the player must build theme parks from the ground up, making them popular and profitable. A simple grid-positioning system and cursor let the player select and place rides and attractions, hire day-to-day staff, route queues and walking paths, invest in amusement research to develop new build options, etc. It is crucial to build customer interest and happiness while also increasing the overall value of the park, as the goal is to be able to flip the park for enough profit to move on to the next area. The World Map provides details on 24 regions, including their cost of entry and other critical economic numbers. Inflation and interest are key, as they drive decisions on how long the player should remain in business before auctioning the park off. The park staff, advisor, and patrons vary their look from region to region, but the latter also changes how they behave; understanding region-specific customer demands and structuring the park accordingly goes a long way in helping the player raise the park's attractiveness and overall value. In lieu of battery backup, players use passwords to pick up from the last time they sold a park. Dynamic music that subtly changes based on the ride or attraction being focused on at the time is a nice touch, as is Mark Healey's expressive sprite work on the patrons as they partake in the park's pastimes. Unfortunately, the presentation masks ultimately repetitive gameplay and less than intuitive controls. Casual players simply seeking to build a dream park might be off put by the myriad simulation elements.





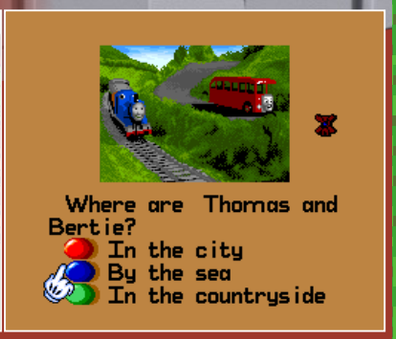
Reflections: *Theme Park* may have been Peter Molyneux's way of trying to create business simulation gaming, but this port left some of the complexities of simulation behind when it came to the Super Nintendo, such as managing stock. The controls are also scattershot, with Y and B functioning to raise and lower settings, A combined with a D-pad direction or shoulder button quick-selecting from different shopping menus, holding SELECT and pressing Y opening and closing the park, and so on. There is no reason for a control scheme this opaque, given the simplistic interface. The one thing I cannot believe remained in the port is the macabre bankruptcy ending; though no longer animated, seeing the still silhouette of a failed executive jumping out a window and leaving a family behind is unusually dark, especially by Nintendo's standards. – DG

Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends

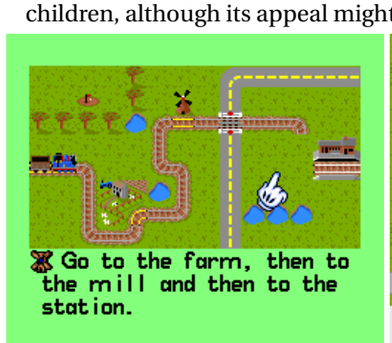
Genre: Educational
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Based on the children's television and book series, this game follows the lives of anthropomorphic trains. Familiar music and characters are used throughout, and the graphics are clear and colorful, featuring large text. Appropriate for the idyllic setting, the gameplay is focused on puzzles and reading. You start by choosing your age range (or difficulty) and then go to the railway map screen, which has minigame icons. With your hand cursor you can select these at will, or press START to do them in order. A staid voice reads aloud the games' titles when you point at them. One is a quiz where you look at a scene and answer multiple choice questions involving concepts such as colors or counting. Two are picture puzzles, and in two you race as Thomas against another vehicle by mashing a button. In two more, you adjust track interchanges or lay rails on a map to help Thomas reach destinations in order (e.g., picking up crops and taking them to the mill). These can be challenging, but there aren't any consequences for failure, and in all activities, a windmill symbol can be used to quit to the main map. The reading activity is a story mode using cutscenes with faithfully rendered still pictures and limited sprite animations, befitting the franchise's storybook origins. When starting one of the three stories, you can choose Thomas to go through reading on your own. You may select a word on the screen to hear it read aloud. Alternatively, you can press "AUTO" at the start for the computer to read to you using the voice samples. They're clear but extremely stilted when strung together (the third story does not include any digitized samples). This game could be fun for small children, although its appeal might be limited by its short tracks.





Reflections: Although I never truly liked it, I watched *Shining Time Station*, the American PBS version of *Thomas & Friends*, as a child. It had original live-action sequences as a framing device for Thomas's stories and featured Ringo Starr and later George Carlin as the station's magical foot-high conductor (very weird, looking back on it). Also, this game is similar to an unreleased NES prototype version. The gameplay and screen text look close, and it has some nicely composed music. I don't know why the 8-bit version wasn't released, but the lack of digitized voices could be the reason. – KN

Thunder Spirits

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: June 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Technosoft
Publisher: Seika
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





In this horizontally scrolling shooter, you control a futuristic spaceship taking on the ORN Empire. Through the eight stages, shoot the many enemies by pressing B. To assist in sending as much firepower as possible, you can collect a pair of orbitals, called CLAWs, that enhance and multiply your weapon of choice. The other pickups across the stages include different weapons (which can be upgraded by collecting duplicates), extra lives, and a shield. Once acquired, each of the five weapon types, such as the wave gun, are utilized when highlighted at the bottom with R. Although orbitals and shields can take damage, your ship dies in one hit. Once it's destroyed, you forfeit a life (displayed in the lower right) but quickly respawn on the same screen; when all lives are gone, you similarly respawn after using a continue. Destruction makes you lose upgrades, including the weapon that was equipped, unless it's the default gun. There will be plenty of deaths since the stages require increasingly tighter movement and quicker reactions. Each environment has a unique element to keep things interesting, such as the third stage's underwater bubbles that can push you upward. This game has great, precise controls (your ship speed can be changed with L), and it is satisfying to shoot down a boss yet not completely devastating to take a death. The different features of each stage keep the action fresh, not that you need a reason to control a spaceship shooting at futuristic structures and making things explode.





Reflections: I really enjoy this shooter! Everything about this game just screams "space," from the giant mech bosses to the mesmerizing backgrounds. The graphics are spot-on, having a wide variety of enemies as well as environments. Controlling a spaceship in the forest of an alien planet? Through floating ruins in a faraway galaxy? In a deep, dark cave full of mysterious forms? Yes, yes, yes! This is a port of the arcade's *Thunder Force AC*, which in turn was derived from *Thunder Force III* on the Genesis. It's lacking some elements (e.g., selectable stages), which some people may find disappointing, but setting that aside, this is a fantastic shooter with a smooth difficulty curve that is sure to captivate you with the visuals and make your heart palpitate with the action! – KY

The Tick

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





The big, blue, nigh-invulnerable superhero must save The City from evildoers in this arcade-style beat 'em up based on the animated series and Ben Edlund comics. Across 16 chapters and three different stories, the Tick battles the Idea Men, ninjas, clowns, and aliens. Punches, kicks, jump kicks, and backhands are available to thwart evil on the streets and even the moon. The Tick can also grab enemies to cartoonishly slap them, smash them around like rag dolls, or flick them with a finger. The game has the look, feel, humor, and tunes of the series; it even has cameos of heroes including Sewer Urchin and the Human Bullet. Boss characters such as Chairface Chippendale and Thrakkorzog show up to battle, although they appear too infrequently. Fist pickups result in a helpful hero who temporarily goes back-to-back with the Tick: Paul the Samurai, Oedipus, American Maid, and the useless Die Fledermaus. Trusty sidekick Arthur shows up in limited fashion when called upon, swooping in and taking out enemies. What looks good and initially plays okay quickly becomes a repetitive drain as the Tick crashes against wave after wave of the same enemies in chapters that go on for far too long. The only respite to the monotony is a few side-scrolling platforming stages where the Tick must jump over pits while avoiding random flying objects, but these are an annoyance more than a break. The number of lives, continues, and Arthur calls may be altered, but there is no two-player mode to be found. While faithful to the property, it's doubtful most will want to play through the entire game to witness it.

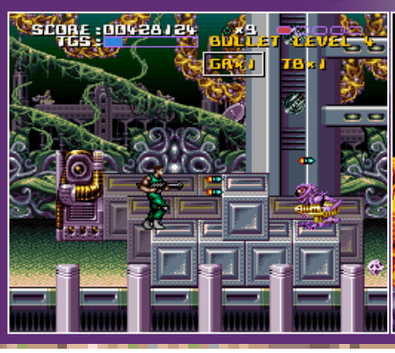




Reflections: Spooooooon! I am a big fan of the Tick franchise, especially the Fox animated TV show. *The Tick* is a humorous parody of the superhero genre, with strange heroes and villains alike, such as the Terror, who is over 100 years old and decrepit, or the Man-Eating Cow. The Tick himself is noble, a little dim, but well-meaning with his over-the-top platitudes about heroics and battling villainy. The secondary heroes are usually semi or totally incompetent, which adds to the amusement. A game featuring the Tick could be a dream if done correctly. However, any beat 'em up that lasts for *three* grueling hours, even if based on a great property, is a bad idea. – PC

Time Slip

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter, Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The Sales Curve
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Aliens are using time travel to take over Earth, and you, Dr. Gilgamesh, must go after them, traversing medieval times, prehistory, Ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire, and beyond. True to the genre, you walk forward and shoot everything with infinite ammunition. Your pace is slow and jumping feels sluggish, but platforming is fortunately de-emphasized. You can lock your aim in multiple directions by shooting with A, and you can shoot while crouching and from ladders. Ammo boxes yield weapon upgrades to increase your "bullet level," granting a higher fire rate and spread bullets. Although there aren't alternative shot types, there are special weapons, such as a bazooka, bombs, and more. Your inventory is at the top of the screen with your score, lives, TGS, and health. The "TGS" bar indicates your ability to survive within the past and must be refilled by picking up crystals or you'll lose a life. Your health has five blocks, and you have nine lives, but there are no continues. That's unfortunate, since the horizontal shooter levels are challenging. Here you ride a flying speeder while shooting aliens and aircraft. These sequences add variety but also introduce new controls; shooting with X changes the direction of your fire as you move, while A locks your aim. There are six stages comprising five eras, and the environments are typical tropes: castle, tomb, city, alien planet, and others. They're varied yet also dull and lacking in graphical flair. The enemies have customized themselves to their new eras, but the dinosaurs, mummies, robots, etc. remain unremarkable. Bosses, such as a knight robot, a dragon, and Roman gods, are frequent and more interesting, while the music and sound are serviceable but not excellent. If you're desperate for another authentic 16-bit run and gun title, this might do.

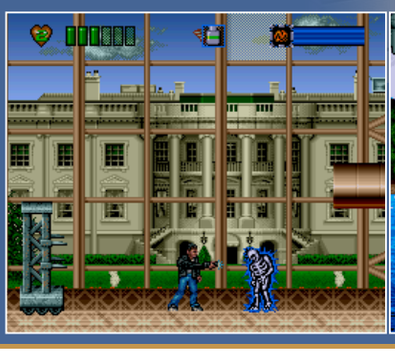




Reflections: The odd thing about this game is that I have zero memory of it. I read every issue of *Game Players* cover to cover in the mid-1990s, and I don't recall anything about its existence. It seems that I'm not the only one; hardly anyone remembers this game, and it's not clear to me why that's the case. Perhaps it wasn't promoted enough. Even now, it's not talked about much, but there's a handful of people who like it. It's certainly a Contra clone, and if you've already burned through that franchise, there's still this. – KN

Time Trax

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Malibu Games
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





This action-platformer stars Fugitive Retrieval Captain Darien Lambert, who time-travels from the year 2193 to 1993 in pursuit of criminals. With silky smooth controls, he traverses stages by leaping, climbing ladders, and jumping on/from railings and pipes. Though armed with a Pellet Projection Tube laser weapon that can stun enemies and take them out with repeated hits, his melee attacks (punches, foot sweeps, and jump kicks) are sometimes more effective. His enemies aren't too memorable, but they change based upon the stage and can be challenging, especially the bomb-dropping ones and the difficult sentry guns that must be eliminated. Hidden rooms can be found in stages for bonuses and even shortcuts. The standard difficulty is high, with only a few lives and a limited health bar, but scattered boxes contain replenishing items and more. Discovering letters that spell SELMA (the name of Lambert's computer) or EXTRA results in extending the health meter or gaining an extra life, respectively. The boss battles are a little interesting, but the main highlight of the game is the Time Stalling ability, which works on a charging meter and slows down events around Lambert, giving him a temporary advantage. This skill, combined with nice side-scrolling motorcycle and jet-ski stages, raises the action stakes above the typical bar. The levels are varied and include a laboratory, a forest, a construction site, and the eye-popping Smithsonian Institute with the White House scrolling past in the background. The sounds and music are both a bit disappointing but don't undermine the totality of the time-traveling experience.





Reflections: The Time Stalling mechanic is a unique gameplay device that hasn't been seen in many other games, and it really stands out. The long preamble before playing *Time Trax* details Lambert's impressive but over-the-top resume of having an IQ of 204, a standing heartbeat of 35 BPM, and a life expectancy of 120 years along with being able to run 100 meters in 8.6 seconds. Way to make me feel better about myself! *Time Trax* was a syndicated television show that was fairly popular for its time (it lasted two seasons), but it's still an unlikely choice for a licensed SNES game. It's strange that a show such as this received a video game, but a much more popular syndicated show at the time based on a movie franchise – *Highlander: The Series* – wouldn't receive one on any console. – PC

Timecop

Genre: Action
Release Date: Apr. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Cryo Interactive
Publisher: JVC
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★







To stop Dr. Hans Kleindast from manipulating different eras via time travel, Time Enforcement Commission officer Max Walker must awkwardly attack and platform his way through futuristic, dystopian Los Angeles, 1929 New York, World War II Europe, and more. Walker has a punch, a weird, semi-effective kick, a crouching kick, a jump kick, and a slow uppercut at his disposal, as well as a limited supply of pistol ammo and bombs. Enemies consist of only a few different kinds per stage, but they are tailored to each time period, with cyberpunks in future LA, gangsters in 1929 NY, and German soldiers in WWII. The timed stages make Walker's weak melee attacks a detriment, and far too little ammo comes up, although every other enemy killed drops a health pickup. Hazards such as sentry guns, mortars, and droids must be dealt with, but the stage design is simplistic, usually featuring either flat side-scrolling to the end or multitiered environments with elevators that must be taken up or down to find the exit. There are a few bosses to battle, including a mech, a giant octopus, and a tank. The digitized graphics look alright, but the lack of different enemy types hurts, and Walker's movements and attacks seem off. A nice change from the mundaneness is the 1945 San Andreas Fault underwater stage that puts Walker in a diving suit and in a submarine shooter segment. The final jetpack duel against Kleindast is also a decent idea, but it falls flat in its execution. The electro and synthpop-inspired soundtrack is varied and interesting, but it's sometimes obnoxious, with copious cowbell or "FBI! Get on it!" repeating. Overall, this is an oddity more so than a fun time.





Reflections: Based on the Dark Horse Comics limited series and 1994 Van Damme movie, this licensed property is a strange one to see on the Super Nintendo. A time-traveling cop certainly works as a video game concept, but one based on an R-rated movie? Surprising. It's also surprising to see the digitized graphics modeled after real people. At the time, this technique was still somewhat cutting edge, but I think that traditional sprite-based graphics would have allowed for more varied enemies. A bit amusing is the model for Dr. Kleindast that appears in between stages for plot exposition. I wonder which one of the Cryo developers drew the short straw to dye their hair and don that goofy outfit for what would become a derided game? – PC

Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games (Disney's)

Genre: Action, Variety
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: 7th Level
Ported by: Tiertex Design Studios
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







The comedic twosome from *The Lion King* stars in four insect-infested games. With a cursor, select a title from the lively menu – a top-down view of a jungle arcade – but before that, try poking the pointer around the screen to elicit reactions from resident animals. These seem tame compared to Burper, a shooter that plops Pumbaa beneath a tree from which bugs, fruits, and more plummet. To defend himself and eradicate items, the pig scoots side to side and belches upwards, venting green gut smog. Nuking produce replenishes his burp meter, while missed insects can be swatted with his tail. For more of Pumbaa's posterior, play Jungle Pinball. The warthog's hind end, ostriches, and other creatures pop up from trap doors in the playfield's center. Use the spring-like snake to fire the pill-bug pinball, the flippers to smack it, and the wheel to earn extra chances. If tilting becomes tiresome, try Sling Shooter, a sylvan shooting gallery where you avoid friendly creatures while directing a cursor at hyena mock-ups, reptiles, insects, etc. Try not to deplete your ammo or time, or else you'll be sunk, a state you must also avoid in Hippo Hop. Here you have Timon collect food and vertically traverse a horizontally flowing river by leaping on moving logs, crocodiles, turtles, and more – the meerkat's varied jumps make staying dry a tricky task. All told, these games are simple diversions that provide a moment or two of wacky, challenging fun.





Reflections: Do you think Pumbaa should see a specialist about those noxious clouds he's coughing up? Like someone from the Environmental Protection Agency? Or a gastro… entomologist? It would bug me to be able to see the ghosts of dinners past, but maybe he has a lucrative side gig as a skywriter. He's certainly got guts enough to control the size of his belches, offering "regular," "big," and "mondo" ones on demand like some sort of burp barista, but I would think emitting fluorescent fumes indicates something more significant than simple indigestion. Then again, I can't even figure out what kind of tree he's sitting under. It's in a jungle, so spiders and beetles bailing from its boughs don't baffle me, but oranges? Eggs? Entire bunches of bananas? What is it, a pan-tree? I might have believed that, but since so many things dropping from it can hurt poor Pumbaa, it's more of an unpleasan-tree. – AP

Tin Star

Genre: Shooting Gallery
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (Optional), Super Scope (Optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





This jack-of-all-trades shooter puts players in control of Tin Star, a newly appointed robot sheriff who's looking to rid East Driftwood of its dangerous robot outlaws. The story is told throughout a week-long period, with each day acting as a level. Days are broken down into scenes that offer four different gameplay types. There are first-person training sequences where the player must juggle a jug by shooting it before it hits the ground. Several different action scenes, which are presented in both first and third-person views, require the player to survive shootouts in bar brawls, jailbreaks, rail cars, and other wacky settings. Of course, there are classic Old West showdowns, where Tin Star faces off against dangerous outlaws in quick-draw matches. Finally, there are bonus scenes that test the player's accuracy by having them shoot stars off of a spinning wheel that has a robotic buxom beauty attached to it. Since this can be played by using the Super Scope, the Super NES Mouse, or a plain old SNES controller, it is accessible to everyone. That's not to say each accessory offers the same results, though. Moving the aiming reticle with the SNES D-pad is slow and cumbersome. This makes things difficult when dealing with enemies that are on opposite sides of the screen. The Super Scope is the most fun way to play, but it can be inaccurate at times. The mouse offers the perfect blend of precision and speed. The story is lengthy and full of humor, although some jokes can come across as too childish. The visuals give off a Saturday morning cartoon vibe and fit the story beautifully. Light gun fans (even if they don't own a light gun) will likely enjoy this game.



Reflections: I had to dust off our two-ton CRT TV so I could play this one with the Super Scope. My wife and kid laugh whenever I pull that TV out of storage, but once they have the light gun in their hands, I can't get them to stop playing! My daughter loved *Tin Star* since it "looks like a cartoon," and my wife and I enjoyed it because of its challenge. The three of us ended up liking it so much that I decided to leave the CRT out for a week. This was perfect because my back needed about that long to heal! – MV

Tintin in Tibet

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Infogrames
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Tintin is a young explorer searching for his friend, Chang, who has disappeared in the Himalayas. In this platformer, Tintin travels through various locations, such as a hotel, snowy mountainside, and Tibetan temple, doing his best to avoid injury from environmental hazards (such as swinging jars and craggy boulders), projectiles (such as falling snow piles), and pesky characters (such as yappy dogs and squeaking bats). If Tintin does take damage, his portrait in the upper left disappears in segments with each hit; the number within represents his lives. If he runs out of health, Tintin restarts the level, but if he runs out of lives, he either restarts the game or uses one of the three set passwords that are provided every few levels. Unfortunately, being slow and methodical doesn't always work, as there is a timer in the upper right, and Tintin must complete the stage before it elapses. To assist him in his dodging game, there are health-restoring apples as well as 1-ups. The graphics match the art style of Tintin's creator, Hergé, very well. The developers did a wonderful job of translating the comic into a video game without resorting to strapping Tintin with a weapon for shooting down bad guys. The biggest issue is the difficulty; some sequences, such as running from the Yeti at the end, demand quick reflexes (or sheer memorization) to beat. Tintin and the hazards all have sizable hitboxes that require precise movements and adjustments to avoid collision. Nonetheless, it's an adventure that's rewarding to take, with visuals that even people who've never read Hergé's work can appreciate.



Reflections: I find the graphics truly satisfying. It's not just the sprites but also the backgrounds; even with so many stages in the mountains, each area looks and feels distinct. Despite being a platformer at heart, there is a variety of gameplay types, including climbing, swimming, and small puzzles to solve. I normally hate timers in games, and boy, did I not enjoy them here! Sure, you can adjust the length of the timer through the three difficulties, but it can still feel unfair, especially when you're figuring out which way to go or how exactly to get past that yak. This is a great example of a platformer that places less emphasis on action but is still an exciting experience. With the advice of avoidance guru Patches O'Houlihan, get ready to dodge, duck, dip, dive, and dodge your way through Tibet! – KY

Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!

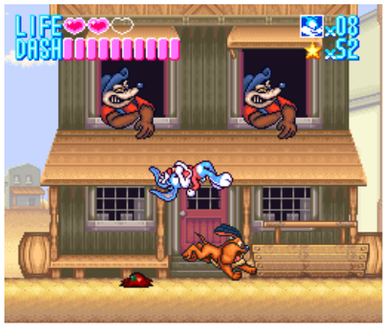
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Common
★★★⋆

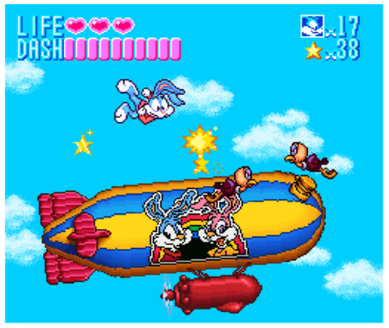






Tiny Toon Buster Bunny is invading your SNES with six stages of side-scrolling shenanigans as he goes from ACME Looniversity to a *Star Wars*-inspired "Space Opera," passing through the Old West, Spook Mansion, a football game, and the sky along the way. His cartoon contemporaries, such as Babs Bunny (no relation), appear throughout the journey; some, such as Plucky Duck and Dizzy Devil, act as bosses. Regular enemies range from vultures and rodents to monsters and robots. To withstand their assaults, Buster's health meter benefits from a dose of carotene – various carrot trophies replenish and extend it. Furthermore, grabbing a Buster Bunny doll or 100 stars bestows one extra life, while bonus games between levels might award several. Having a stock of 1-ups helps because the "normal" and "challenge" difficulties only offer limited continues. However, the "children" setting provides passwords and lets Buster use his dash to deal damage. Otherwise, this move allows for speedy traversal, scaling walls, and striking with a slide or flying leap, though Buster often attacks with a delayed drop kick. Skillful use of the dash, including refilling its meter by waiting or grabbing silver Gogo Dodo trophies, is crucial, as is managing challenges such as finding keys, reversing gravity, jumping rope, scoring a touchdown, and surviving auto-scrolling sequences. Buster's obstacles and abilities can take a little time to master, but there's a variety of things to see and do as this Tiny Toon adventures. Come and join the fun – and now this part is done!





Reflections: After each of the first five stages, a whirl of a wheel chooses one of the following bonus games to play: a top-down maze, a tile-moving puzzle, bingo, squash, and a weigh-in that pits characters against each other to see who's the heaviest. These provide a respite from both platforming and Buster, who doesn't really figure into them outside of the initial selection. Perhaps that means they're a break for him, too. Even though the title is *Buster Busts Loose!*, by engaging in the game's wacky hijinks, he's… doing what's expected of a toon. Being zany is another day at the office for many animated characters, and Buster literally attends school to study the fine art of being funny. That's the opposite of "busting loose" from an accepted norm, so absence might be the only alternative to cartoon conformity. It's either that, or these notions are all a little looney. – AP

Tiny Toon Adventures: Wacky Sports Challenge

Tiny Toon Adventures: Wild and Wacky Sports (EU)

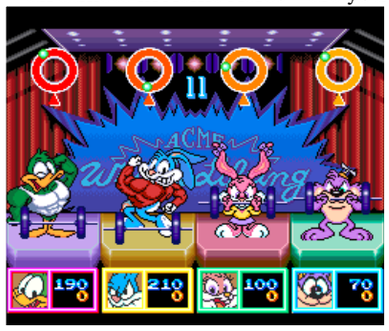
Genre: Sports, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







Limber up your athletic thumbs for some not-so-serious sports action starring the Tiny Toons! You and up to three friends choose from functionally identical Buster Bunny, Babs Bunny, Plucky Duck, and Dizzy Devil to tackle 12 digit-blistering challenges in pursuit of a million dollar prize. You won't be able to do the dozen immediately, however, as the game is divided into four courses – Easy (six events), Normal (eight events), Hard (10 events), and Super (12 events). Completing a course by meeting a qualifying score for every competition therein provides a password and unlocks the next, usually upping the points needed to proceed (any failure costs a limited continue). You therefore repeat some of the following a few times: Birdman Contest, Bungee Jump, Chicken Dash, Freestyle Skiing, Hammer Bash, Ice Cream Throw, Log Cutting, Obstacle Course, Pole Vault, Saucer Throw, Swimming, and Weightlifting. Fortunately, these offer creative play, fun music, various perspectives, and in-game instructions to elucidate goals and controls. The majority also permit simultaneous participation of all contenders (human or AI), and many, such as Hammer Bash and Log Cutting, make use of button-tapping-fueled meters that test timing while taxing tendons. Slinging sugar cones in a shooting gallery, zipping up to a side-scrolling precipice, and snagging gems, coins, carrots, and meat in a top-down vertical race are just a few examples of what it takes to be an athlete in Acme Acres – are you wacky enough for the challenge?



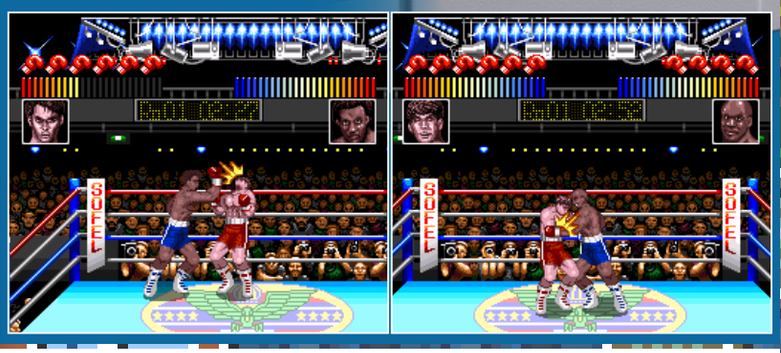


Reflections: After chopping, vaulting, sliding, lifting, and smashing through 36 competitions across all four courses, I received a special password (consisting of Babs, Montana Max, and Bookworm) that unlocks Marathon, a left-to-right running event lasting up to 42,195 meters – the distance covered in the real-life race. Just the thought of that much button-mashing makes my thumbs hurt and my controller run away yelping with its cord between its legs. The password also permits any other event to be played at will. Why this menu is not available from the start to allow for practice is baffling. I would have appreciated the help with Bungee Jump, as I found it difficult to collect points and avoid dangerous icons in the short ground-level intervals. I also would've loved spending more time with Birdman Contest's exhilarating over-the-shoulder flight sequence, though I can't get behind Babs riding a broom. She's not a witch; she's assertive. – AP

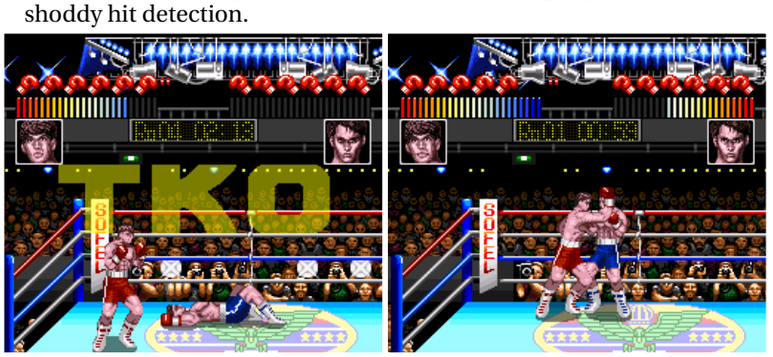
TKO Super Championship Boxing

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sting
Publisher: SOFEL
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





In this boxing game, players pick one of eight fictitious pugilists and must defeat the remaining seven to become the world champion. During matches, players are given a side view of the boxing ring and are able to move freely wherever they choose. The top of the screen displays information such as round time, boxer energy, and a punch power meter, which is represented by boxing gloves. This meter decreases as the boxer throws consecutive punches and returns to normal after a few seconds of rest. This action greatly reduces button mashing and promotes strategic thinking. Boxers have several types of punches that can be pulled off with specific D-pad and button presses. Both ducking and dodging are accomplished by timing incoming punches with presses of the right shoulder button. Having the ability to roam around the ring is a nice feature, but in order for punches to connect, the boxers need to be directly across from one another. Because of this, every match becomes a test of patience as the boxers try to figure out where they need to position themselves to land a blow. Following a victory, the player is able to increase their boxer's punch power, speed, and stamina abilities by choosing what type of training they should focus on (skip rope, bench press, etc.). Losing a fight results in a game over, but players wanting a rematch can do so with a password. When not fighting for the championship, players can compete against any of the boxers in an exhibition match or battle a friend in a two-player bout. The colorful visuals and large boxer sprites are impressive, but the actual boxing is poor due to the shoddy hit detection.

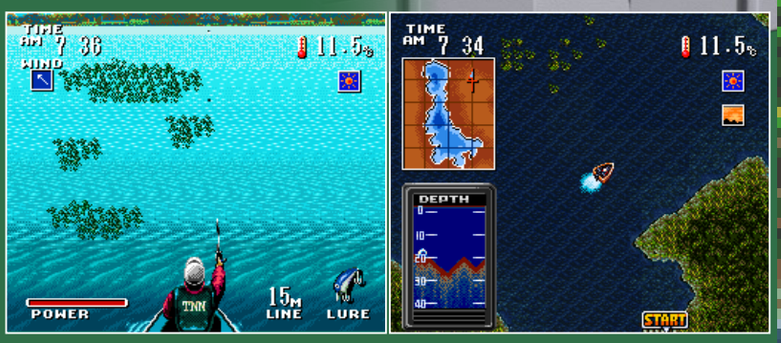


Reflections: The ability to move freely about the ring was surprising to me at first, and it took me a while to get used to it. The majority of boxing games at the time had either a behind-the-back view (à la *Super Punch-Out!!*) or a view from the side. One of the more boring aspects of this game is the training mode, which is simply choosing what type of training you want your boxer to focus on. This seems kind of lazy. Including a few minigames in there would not only have been more interesting but also would have allowed you to form a stronger connection with your boxer. – MV

TNN Bass Tournament of Champions

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: GAPS
Publisher: American Softworks
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





A rod and reel are all you need to start this adventure in bass fishing. Explore the game through Free Fishing, where you can visit six lakes in your choice of weather conditions, or jump into Tournament, consisting of three competitions. Place in the top three of each tourney to advance. Your ranking is determined by the total weight of the bass in your livewell. To start, you take your boat around the lake. Use the fish finder in the lower left to choose a casting spot with Y, changing to an angled view behind your character. Access the tackle box with SELECT, and cast your line with A. Now you get a top-down view of your lure in the water as it snakes past various fish. When you get a bite, a tension meter appears at the bottom, showing the two forces (you and the fish), with color-coding to indicate how close the line is to snapping. Caught bass are measured and weighed (in metric, strangely), and if above the minimums, they're added to the livewell. If you get a satisfactory collection of catches or run out of time, head back to the start for the weigh-in. The fish in this game are fickle, being particular about what kind of lure they like based on weather, water depth, and seemingly personal preference. With going back and forth between the tackle box and casting, the longish (roughly five-second) black transition screen becomes an annoyance. Additionally, little guidance or information is given, forcing trial and error. While the game is a decent fishing experience, gathering the knowledge to enjoy it is like paddling upstream.

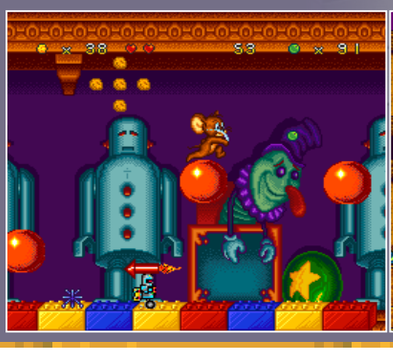


Reflections: Here's another bass fishing game on the SNES, although if it's your first, don't fret – there are better ones out there! This isn't necessarily a bad game, but it can be tedious, from the long transition screens (the manual even warns about them) to puzzling out which of the dozens of lures work best in which situation. On the plus side, once you've figured out the bait, the game does a good job of emulating the zen element of fishing, allowing you to take your time. Unfortunately, I thought it was a misstep to have measurements in metric. When players like me are forced to step out of the experience to convert units in their head, it detracts from any immersion in the game. And now I can't remember – is 18°C warm or cold? – KY

Tom and Jerry

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Riedel Software Productions
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★

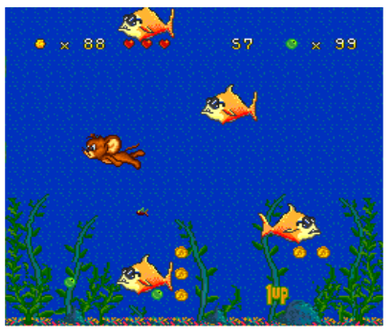






When the cat's not away, the mice still play in this short and sweet side-scroller. Classic cartoon mouse Jerry, alternating with nephew Tuffy in two-player games, must brave four multistage locations, battling fractious feline Tom at the end of each one. The theater, junkyard, toy store, and house provide interesting settings that include an illuminated movie marquee, trash heaps, colorful building bricks, and oversized furniture. These places also present many obstacles. To complete their quest, the mice have to use an awkward double jump, avoid steep drops, spring from coils and toaster ovens, swim through an aquarium, glide on filmstrip conveyor belts, and evade falling fires, fishbones, forks, and more. In between dodging spilt popcorn and super balls, Jerry and Tuffy tussle with respawning enemies, such as bipedal peppers, toy tanks, Frankenstein's monsters, literal dust bunnies, and nearly ubiquitous cockroaches. Though foes can be subdued with several stomps, the mice amass green marbles in almost every timed stage, maxing out at a count of 99; they can toss these readily available projectiles forward or at a slightly upward angle, dealing more damage than head-hopping does. The marbles are particularly crucial to defeating Tom, whether the cat is clawing through drywall or dispatching bomb-laden bots. Jerry and Tuffy can also collect 100 cheese bits for a 1-up, while cheese wedges help replenish their four-heart health meters. Though simple, shockingly brief, and saddled with slightly slippery controls, this title is all right for a bit of Tom-foolery.





Reflections: *Tom and Jerry: The Movie* came out roughly around the time that this game did, but the two seem to share little in common aside from the eponymous pair and references to the film's name in the manual and first level. Still, a cinematic slant shoots through the proceedings. It's obviously most overt in the theater, where Jerry (or Tuffy) teeters on marquee light bulbs, slips around a projector's sprockets, and skates a ticket stub across a sticky seat aisle, but there's also a countdown before the title screen, and perforations adorn the edges of level summaries – Tom even foreshadows stages with frames from a filmstrip. He looks positively happy pawing these prints from negatives, but by the end, the feline failure fumes in a heap of film stock. Most cats I know would be overjoyed having that much snaky stuff to play with. They realize what Tom doesn't – that's entertainment! – AP

Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme: Skiing and Snowboarding
Val d'Isère Championship (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Loriciel
Publisher: Electro Brain (PAL: Mindscape)
Players: 1-2
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Be it board or ski, this game has you covered in your extreme wintering. There are three modes: freeride, compete, and training. Of them, freeride is the closest to an actual day at a ski resort. There are a series of timed checkpoints to reach as well as a confusing array of routes to take. Once at the bottom, you ride a lift to the following peak for the next course until you reach the finish at the bottom of the fourth peak. In compete mode, you choose from slalom, giant, or downhill. While each has its own features, the basic premise (traveling down the course between the flags) is the same. If you finish the race in the allotted time, you'll be treated to a leaderboard with your name flashing in green above a cheering crowd and a banner of actual logos, such as Nastar and Butterfinger. Finally, training allows you to practice the races in each of the three styles, giving you your only chance to see the basic layout of the course on a map. Throughout the game, you have the option of either skis or snowboards. Unfortunately, your choice only affects the visuals, including your sprite, the shape of the flags on the courses, and the jump animation. Also, you encounter various obstacles expected on a mountain as well as a gamut of environmental changes, such as the whiteout of a snowstorm or the darkening of a shaded path. It is a complete, if lackluster, experience.





Reflections: Endorsed by Val-d'Isère, a location of the 1992 Winter Olympics, as well as US Olympic skier Tommy Moe (whose name strangely never appears in the game), *Winter Extreme* has some wintery clout. The gameplay itself is fun, and the controls are solid and responsive. While I don't agree with the "realism" of the lack of music during races, I was caught off guard by my response to the thumping heartbeat before each race. If Loriciel was hoping the player would feel the pressure of the starting line, it worked on me swimmingly… err, skiingly? The most disappointing feature is the two-player mode, which allows each player to work through a selected set of races individually. You'll both appear on the same leaderboard after the first section, but if someone misses the cut-off time and has to redo that race, you're then simply taking turns going through your respective courses. If you're no longer grouped together during the game, what's the point of two players? – KY

Tony Meola's Sidekicks Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



This soccer game offers a hybrid of arcade and simulation elements that is accessible both to casual and to more serious fans of the sport. The swooping camera, which is situated just above the possessor of the ball, is the most notable trait of the game. The offensive goal is always at the top of the screen, so the camera rotates 180 degrees around when possession changes, which is a fine display of the console's scaling and rotation capabilities. Rapid possession changes and camera swivels can get annoying, though. On the pitch, play controls for passing and shooting are simple. The action is fast, too; in fact, it's considerably faster than most soccer games, giving the experience more of an arcade feel. Fouls are called on a seemingly arbitrary basis, often to change momentum if one team has been dominating. Red cards are issued, so it will be necessary to rotate new players in when carded players are ejected. The simulation aspect comes in the form of formation management and play-calling strategy. Players more familiar with the sport will appreciate the inclusion of these features, but casual fans can skip these and have success without using them. Getting to the game action is more complicated than it should be, thanks to a menu system driven purely by symbols that don't always make sense. Friendly matches, league play, and tournament play are available, but players need to know the symbols for each to start them. It's very strange. The visuals, aside from the camera, are a mixed bag. Players look the same, but the pitch looks good, and the gameplay is smooth. The music is kind of like guitar rock and sounds okay; it covers up the meager sound effects. All told, this game is surprisingly fun. Give it a try!



Reflections: Unlike *NCAA Basketball* and *NHL Stanley Cup*, this Sculptured Software effort wasn't picked up by Nintendo for publishing. The decision not to do so is strange. Maybe it's because soccer wasn't yet the popular sport in the United States that it is today, but with the 1994 World Cup approaching at the time, it seems like a miscalculation. With Nintendo's publishing might behind it, *Sidekicks Soccer* could have received a boost. It's also worth noting that this is one of the rare soccer games that didn't get a European release. That's too bad; I think it could have sold well there. – PS

Top Gear

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★



Race against cars across the globe and be the first to cross the finish line in this arcade racing game. While being treated to some extremely memorable tunes, players compete against 19 opponents on a whopping 32 tracks that are spread throughout eight countries. Each track has a distinct look; for instance, San Francisco's background contains the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Eiffel Tower can be seen in Paris. There are even tracks in rural areas that mix things up and require some off-road driving. To begin a career, players are given a choice of four cars (each available in automatic or manual) with different attributes (e.g., top speed, tire grip, fuel consumption) to consider. The player's perspective is located behind the vehicle, giving them a good view of the road, opponents' cars, and upcoming obstacles. Oddly enough, the screen is always split horizontally, even during single-player races, but this is to give players a constant view of their rival. Players begin each race at the back of the pack and must place in the top five to continue their career. During races, barricades, signage, and even stray rocks must be avoided since hitting these objects brings the car to a screeching halt. Ramming opponent cars from behind also results in a loss of speed, and worse yet, gives the opponent car a boost. Pit stops are available for refueling, but risk-taking players may choose to go "just one more lap" before stopping. After a country's fourth and final race, the player's world ranking must be in the top three to move on to the next country, or it's game over. Great visuals, catchy music, and simple controls really make this an outstanding title.



Reflections: The first time I played *Top Gear*, I thought I had accidentally started a two-player race, so I broke out the manual to figure out why I was getting a split screen. I get that the car on the bottom half is supposed to be my "rival," but still I don't understand why. He's always right behind me or in front of me, constantly giving me a bump or keeping me from passing. What did I do to that guy? Was I secretly dating his sister? Did I borrow his *Turtles in Time* and forget to return it? Back off, dude! – MV

Top Gear 2

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★




Players get behind the wheel and trade paint with 19 opponents in this arcade racing sequel. Races take place throughout 16 countries (doubling the original game's amount) that include four tracks each for a total of 64 (also doubling the original's quantity). Tracks are fictitious but contain real-life landmarks. For instance, Niagara Falls can be seen while racing in Canada, and the Sydney Opera House is in Australia. Players must finish each race within the top 10 to continue, and a password is given after every fourth race. Only one car is available to choose from (it can be automatic or manual), but players who finish sixth or better earn cash to improve their vehicle by purchasing engine, tire, gearbox, nitro, and armor upgrades. The racing itself is fast, arcadey fun, with the majority of races taking place on clear, sunny days. However, players also burn rubber on pitch-black roads during night races and deal with inclement weather, such as rain, snow, and even thick fog. Opponent cars, speed bumps, and traffic barricades decelerate players if struck; the slowdown isn't as drastic as in the first game, although the car's top speed will be slower if it takes too much damage. Power-up items in the form of nitro, speed-ups, and money are littered throughout some tracks and can be collected by simply driving over them. Similar to the first game, the player's perspective is directly behind their vehicle, but the split-screen rival view is now gone, giving a full representation of the action. Of course, two-player races still get the split-screen treatment. More tracks, a new upgrade system, and an amazing soundtrack make this one of the console's best racing games.




Reflections: *Top Gear 2* could have just gotten rid of the split-screen view of the first *Top Gear* and I would have been happy, but the developers took it several steps further and improved upon almost every aspect of the original. My biggest gripe with *Top Gear* (besides the split screen) was how much my car would slow down if I barely grazed a barricade or opponent car. Oftentimes, my car would stop completely. This is supposed to be arcade racing, right? Although *Top Gear 2* still penalized me, it didn't have me going from first to dead last in a matter of seconds. – MV

Top Gear 3000

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★★




Set in the year 2962, this final game of the SNES Top Gear trilogy puts players behind the wheel of a race car to compete with 19 opponents on 48 tracks throughout the galaxy. Two modes are available to choose from: VS (for up to four players) and Championship (for one or two players). To begin the Championship, the player's vehicle is outfitted with basic car parts, but racers who complete certain secret tasks (such as avoiding collisions) and finish within the top nine are awarded credits for engine, tire, gearbox, armor, and boost upgrades. Finishing outside of the top 10 in a single race yields a game over. Racers who place below sixth in a star system (set of races) are not able to go to the next system. As the Championship progresses, amusing upgrades are unlocked, and by the final race, cars sport infrared vision for night races, a jump ability, a warp ability, and an attractor that pulls the car up to a vehicle that's ahead. Races take place in a behind-the-car perspective on fascinating planets with various visuals and weather effects. For instance, hot planets are hazy, cold planets are icy, and damp planets are foggy. The tracks have forks, hairpin turns, and straightaways, but since this is the future, they have been outfitted with ramps, warp zones, and charging and repair strips. Players must drive over these strips to keep the car in good working order. A depleted battery or damaged body results in slower top speeds, which almost guarantees a loss. The futuristic tunes are catchy and fit in perfectly with the game's aesthetic. Plenty of tracks, a co-op Championship mode, and four-player races give this entertaining game plenty of replayability.




Reflections: I've got to hand it to the developers of *Top Gear 3000*. Instead of simply delivering a sequel with miniscule upgrades, they went all out and made this as crazy and off the wall as they could. Jumping cars, warp zones, recharging strips?! You can tell they had a lot of fun creating this. Speaking of fun, here's a little more in the form of a fact: This is the only game in the SNES library to have the DSP-4 enhancement chip; it's instrumental to drawing the forks in the racetracks. – MV

Total Carnage

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Black Pearl Software
Publisher: Malibu Games
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



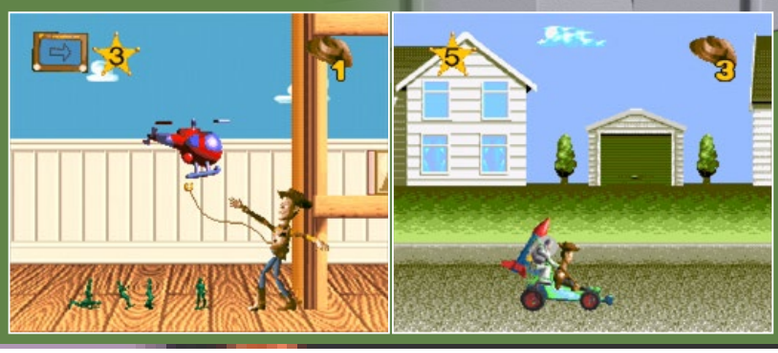
This goofy but violent top-down shooter consists of one or two players (as Captain Carnage and/or Major Mayhem) trying to take down dictator General Akhboob in Kookistan. Gameplay takes place on a map that usually scrolls slowly while players move with the D-pad, firing their weapons in independent directions via the Y-X-B-A face buttons. Mutant soldiers, demons, android spiders, machine gun nests, and more must be dealt with, often in amounts that can quickly overwhelm. Players begin with a weak machine gun, but copious short-term pickups are available: grenade launchers, rocket launchers, plasma guns, flamethrowers, spread rifles, and smart bombs. Defensive shields and running shoes can be captured to help stay alive, and time bombs can be collected and dropped. The players' default speed is often insufficient to avoid death, especially from large vehicles and the frequent lack of wiggle room during neverending assaults. Boss battles can seem like a respite from the normal havoc, but they are very difficult and drawn out. A gruesome and frantic challenge awaits players, as the one-hit deaths can bring lives down quickly, and continues are limited. Still, there are nice offerings here, such as bonus areas, warps to move around stage sections, great arcade-quality graphics and sound effects, and a bizarre sense of humor. Recommended for two players to truly experience the insane carnage together.



Reflections: This is the spiritual successor and semi-sequel to *Smash T.V.*, as it plays the same, has similar style, sound design, and weapons, and also features an over-the-top tone (I should mention that the same Bally/Midway team worked on both). There are even direct references, such as the "I'd buy that for a dollar!" phrase and (spoilers) a cameo appearance from the *Smash T.V.* contestants themselves at the finale. That all said, this is quite a case of diminishing returns because the gameplay isn't as well balanced as the original outing's and the military theme isn't nearly as fun as the violent, futuristic game show one. *Total Carnage* wasn't close to being as big an arcade hit as *Smash T.V.* was, which reportedly caused lead designer Mark Turmell of Midway to turn to an entirely new venture that would become *NBA Jam*. I'd suggest checking out *Total Carnage*'s SNES manual if you get a chance – it's genuinely funny and even states that you are "required" to eat the manual if captured by enemy forces. – PC

Toy Story (Disney's)

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Travellers Tales
Publisher: Disney Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★



Follow the exploits of Andy's toys in this platformer adaptation of the hit computer-animated movie. The player controls Woody, a cowboy sheriff doll who can use his speech pull-string as a whip to temporarily stun an assortment of toys. This helpful string also functions as a rope for swinging across large gaps as Woody traverses each multistage level to fulfill a myriad of objectives. The variety of tasks to complete include returning toys to the toy chest before Andy arrives, saving spaceman rival Buzz Lightyear from a claw grabber machine, and even navigating top-down remote control car courses. The digitized sprites look great mixed with the pseudo-3D locales, and the voices of the cast really hammer the aesthetic of the movie home. However, the game can become frustrating to proceed through due to the poor hit detection and enemies rapidly appearing from off-screen, allowing for little reaction time. Woody has a sheriff's-badge-shaped hit meter which helps even the odds, and collecting stars can earn precious continues – these are essential on some of the harder stages, especially when fighting Buzz. Though this game is a faithful adaptation of a movie license that adds in a few nice touches to complement the subject matter, it is a shame that something essentially made for children is so difficult from start to finish.



Reflections: More of a set of minigames shoehorned into a platformer, this is quite a fun title if you want to see something relatively fresh on each stage. Some levels exaggerate the license somewhat, such as the stage set inside a claw grabber machine that sees Woody dodging mechanisms and jumping along moving ledges, but nothing is really out of the ordinary in the context of the movie. Levels are seldom left to guesswork, as the objectives are specified at the start of each board, but the difficulty hampers the fun. Given the state of movie license cash-ins during the 16-bit era, this is one of the better ones, as Disney seldom faulted on their franchises. It is a credit to the game designers who crammed so many features into it instead of leaving it as a bog-standard platform romp (which is likely all it would have been otherwise). There are much better platformers out there, but for sheer variety, this one does the job admirably. – JE

Toys

Genre: Action
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Based on the mediocre 1992 film, this exasperating action game puts players in control of Leslie Zevo as he tries to reclaim the Zevo Toy Factory from his dangerous uncle, Lieutenant General Leland Zevo. From an isometric viewpoint, the player must navigate Leslie throughout several areas of the factory while avoiding miniature tanks, evil troll dolls, hazardous slime, and other "war" toys that his uncle has sent after him. Luckily for Leslie, "Good Toys," such as bowling balls, wind-up race cars, and miniature football players, can be obtained from the factory's conveyor belts and used against the evil toys. It's too bad that using these Good Toys can be frustrating since they are a chore to aim. To complete most stages, Leslie must take out all of the security cameras (disguised as elephant heads) in the area by first defeating all of the enemy toys that surround them. Once that task is complete, the camera can be destroyed by squirting water at specific parts of the elephant in a carnival-like minigame. The final stage has players guiding a plane through a side-scrolling city model of Manhattan while avoiding buildings and incoming aircraft. Since the airplane's energy constantly depletes, the player must fly it through recharge stations located at the bottom of the screen. This portion of the game drags on and will test many gamers' patience. The dreary carnival music is fitting but ultimately forgettable, and the sound effects, which include slide whistles, bells, and other toy-like noises, are also bland. Similar to the music and sound effects, the visuals are weak; in particular, Leslie's walking animation is laughable. Like the movie, it's best to avoid this game.





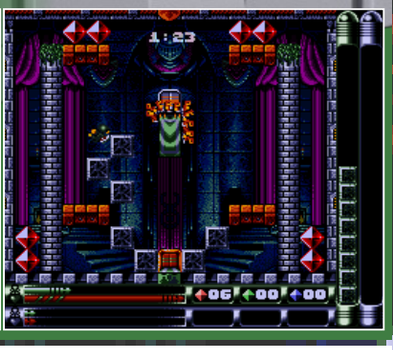
Reflections: When I was a kid, I was excited to watch *Toys* (the film). Its trailer had a Tim Burton feel to it; it looked bright and colorful, but the story seemed to have a darker tone. The day the film was available on Pay-Per-View, I begged my dad to rent it. Overall, we were both disappointed, but it had its memorable scenes. Unlike many movie-licensed games at the time, this one at least *tries* to replicate some of the more notable parts of the film, such as the airplane in Manhattan scene – it just does so really poorly. – MV

Troddlers

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atod
Ported by: The Sales Curve
Publisher: Seika (PAL: Storm)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★

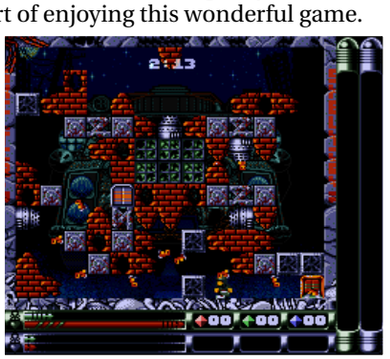






The mischievous Hokus and Pokus have released their master's Troddlers, tiny mindless creatures. You control Hokus (and Pokus, with a second player) as he tries to gather them. They appear from any number of doors, and you jump around, creating and destroying blocks to direct them safely to the exit. They blindly follow the edges of the single-screen levels, climbing up and around walls, blocks, and other obstacles. Before each stage, you are given its requirements, often how many Troddlers to save, although the demands can include collecting colorful gems and/or killing foes (gray zombie Troddlers who are labeled either lethal or harmless beforehand). A tube on the right shows your inventory of blocks, which fluctuates as you place and destroy them. The block at the bottom is the next one used, and erased ones are put up top. This interaction becomes important as you encounter different varieties, such as frozen blocks that Troddlers won't climb. There are also hazards that they won't touch, including boulders, and some, such as grinders, are deadly. A green bar at the bottom increases to show your progress, with the level ending when it's full. The red bar below it displays your energy, which is depleted by enemies, such as lethal foes or birds. There is a timer for each level, and as you get further through the 100 stages of solo mode, a few trial-and-error attempts may be necessary to get actions done quickly enough. The options for two-player mode are what help elevate the fun, offering both cooperative (Team) and competitive (War) play. They have different stage layouts and objectives and are an essential part of enjoying this wonderful game.





Reflections: I wasn't sure about *Troddlers* when I saw the overly busy title screen, but this is actually a game with pleasing, detailed backgrounds, which I attribute to it being a port of a well-made computer game. As a title with Super NES Mouse compatibility, the controls work fairly well, although you must click the precise square you want to move your character to and not just the general direction. This game is a great marriage of the puzzling of *Lemmings* and the action from *Solomon's Key*. It has enjoyable music and levels to explore, and I recommend playing it both with and without a friend, or heck, when was the last time you invited a stranger to play a Super NES game? – KY

Troy Aikman NFL Football

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Leland Interactive Media
Publisher: Tradewest
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★★★



This three-quarter view football game leans more toward the arcade side. The title sports an NFL team license and player/positional analysis from the titular Dallas quarterback to add authenticity. Players can elect to play or coach a single game, or they can undertake two different season setups. The first of these plays through the 1993-94 NFL season, when Dallas took home the trophy. The second and more interesting setup lets players customize a season, allowing for some intriguing matchups that weren't otherwise seen at the time. In either case, season progress and accumulated user statistics are saved to the cartridge battery. Unfortunately, individual player stats and league leaders are not calculated. Positions can be upgraded with money earned during gameplay, adding a sense of player management to the experience. On the field, gameplay is quite friendly to newcomers. While manual control of wide receivers is possible, AI-controlled pass catchers generally do a nice job of running their routes and breaking to the ball. They also react to deflected passes and can turn apparent incompletions into big gains. Runners juke and hurdle for extra yardage, and even the quarterback is a rushing threat. Pitches and handoffs to running backs are not automatic, however, and require an extra button press to execute. Defense doesn't fare as well as offense; the controls aren't as intuitive, and it's often hard to see which player is being controlled. AI teams don't offer much resistance except when playing at the hardest difficulty. Visually, the venues look good and there are some nice post-play animations, but the players themselves are rather small and lacking in details. Sound is mixed, with solid effects and clear voice samples contrasting with forgettable music and organ ditties. All in all, this one's a first-round draft choice.



Reflections: After the disaster that was *Pro Quarterback*, this game earns Leland my fictional *Comeback Developer of the 16-Bit Era* award. There's a lot to like here, especially for newer or more casual football fans. The AI is generally a good teammate, especially on offense, and can bail out lesser-skilled players during certain plays. Since computer-controlled teams are fairly weak on lower difficulties, it's also a nice way for rookie players to feel like they're accomplishing something before bumping up the difficulty. The game isn't a looker in the graphics department by any stretch, but sometimes... you're gonna win ugly. – PS

True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: T&E Soft
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★



This is the second game in the True Golf Classics series on the SNES, and it looks and plays identically to the first release, *Waialae Country Club*. There are a few changes of note, aside from the new course featured here. Skins play has been added as a mode of gameplay. The four selectable caddies have changed and now have names: Casey, D.Q., Michael, and Dawg. Finally, there's new music to be heard. Aside from these tweaks, the review of the first game applies here and should be referred to for more detail.



Reflections: Of the three True Golf Classics offerings for the SNES, this is the one I recommend the most. It retains the same easy-to-learn play mechanics of the first game, it offers the most recognizable (and fair) course, and it provides a nice variety of gameplay modes. The pacing is still a bit slow, but this is golf, after all. As for Dawg the Caddie, I can't say for sure that he isn't the origin story of an infamous internet meme, but I can tell you that his advice on the course is no different than what the other caddies give. – PS

True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1991
Region: NA
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: T&E Soft
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This golf simulation takes virtual duffers to Honolulu for open access to the popular Waialae Country Club. While having only one course to choose from may be a detractor for some, it will challenge players of any skill level. Palm trees and sandy beaches surround these 18 holes, which offer hazards of trees, sand, and water to capture wayward shots. The view is from a third-person perspective as drives and approaches fade into the distance after being struck. The golf swing is executed with three button presses – one starts the power meter, the next stops it at the desired strength, and the last chooses an impact point on the ball. It's possible to hook or slice a shot with bad timing, but it's also possible (and at times, necessary) to add topspin or backspin by stopping the impact point higher or lower on the ball, respectively. Wind can be a player's biggest enemy, as shots are severely affected by it; players can combat this through adjusting aim and executing draw or fade shots by shifting their stance. Tournament, stroke, and match play are all included here for extra replay value. The game's biggest flaw is that it's rather slow, as rendering the graphics and green grids takes extra time; however, it's a more than capable golf experience that is a nice warm-weather trip for those cold winter months.





Reflections: This game offers a fairly authentic Waialae feel that appeals to the more serious golfer. It's not at all an arcade-style experience, and new players may become discouraged after consistently carding bogeys and worse on most of the holes. With some practice, however, scores do improve as players learn the layout of the course and how to best handle what is a steady and challenging breeze. Birdies are not given at Waialae Country Club; they are earned, and there's a definite feeling of accomplishment when you sink one. The deliberate pacing of each round is also pretty realistic; after all, why would you want to rush through an 18-hole round at one of the most beautiful courses out there? This game is an acquired taste, with the intrinsic payoff of seeing scores improve as skill and familiarity increase... kind of like real golf. Unlike real golf, however, none of my hooked drives in this game have struck any bystanders. That's a major plus. – PS

True Golf: Wicked 18

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★







The title of this golf simulation doesn't lie – these 18 holes are an incredibly difficult challenge, especially the first time playing through them. The course design is devious. One hole has golfers trying to attack a green on top of a mountain. Another one has a green littered with pits and rises, along with a sand trap in the middle. Some holes have copious water hazards, while others have obstacles that must be accounted for when striking the golf ball. Elevation plays a big role sometimes, while wind hampers golfers at others. It's basically golf's version of a perfect storm. Some players, especially veterans of the earlier games in the series, may find the challenge worthwhile; however, many other would-be virtual duffers will slam their controllers against the floor with frustration. The good news is that the gameplay is fairly simple to learn. Swinging the club is as easy as pressing the B button twice – once for power and again to determine the impact point on the ball. The game also has adjustable stances to add fade or draw to shots. Putting is a bit of a mess, though, as it's tough to judge the right amount of power. This leads to putts missing short or jumping over the hole. There are quite a few modes to try, including stroke play, tournament play, and match or skins play. The visuals are decent, with trees, traps, fairways, and water all represented. The animation is fine, featuring a view from behind the golfer. Elevation is hard to judge, however, especially with uphill shots. The music is catchy, with serviceable sound effects. All told, this game will test the mettle of anyone daring enough to accept the challenge. The first tee awaits!





Reflections: I am glad that I played the first two games in this series before trying this one because it's brutal. Each successive hole had me questioning how much longer I could hold out before giving up while wondering just how high the score could go. *Waialae* and *Pebble Beach* are challenging games, but they're designed as fair challenges. Here, T&E Soft is hurling its worst original designs at you. The game is called *Devil's Course* in Japan for a reason, and I guarantee that it won't be long before anyone else who hasn't played it before will find out why – the hard way. – PS

True Lies

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







You're Harry, a secret agent played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the titular film, and you must stop terrorists from using nuclear weapons. The game follows only the movie's action scenes – Harry's wife, an important character, isn't mentioned. Otherwise, it uses film stills and portraits and has locations from the movie, such as a snowy hill, park, and office building (although these settings look generic). From an overhead view, you walk around and shoot, moving in the usual directions plus diagonally and strafing by holding Y. To avoid enemy gunfire, you can dodge-roll, but it's not guaranteed. Your pistol has infinite ammunition, but it takes time to reload. Better weapons and ammunition appear throughout the levels and include a shotgun, machine gun, grenades, and more. There are also medkits, extra lives, and key items needed to progress. Such items add complexity to the bullet-fest, but this sometimes involves backtracking, which can be annoying when Harry can't run. Levels are labyrinthine, some have hidden passages, and some have hazards such as train tracks or civilians you can't shoot. A HUD at the screen's bottom displays your health and weapons. It occasionally shows Albert (Tom Arnold), Harry's co-worker, when he contacts you. He makes some jokes but primarily keeps track of objectives and gives hints. There is blood when you shoot someone or get shot, which is satisfying. Enemies are numerous and get stronger weapons as you progress. However, they themselves are stale: After the suit-clad foes in level one, the terrorists just wear different shirts indicating their attack abilities, with a few exceptions, such as the flamethrower wielders who wear bulky gear. Together they are tough, so getting a level password after every stage helps. Like in the movie, Harry flies a plane at some point, briefly making this an aerial shooter. If you've ever wished for a decent Schwarzenegger game, this works.





Reflections: I recently rewatched the *True Lies* movie, and it's legitimately good. Until now, I was unaware that it was directed by James Cameron. I saw it in the '90s when my parents rented it from the video store. It's rated R, so who's the game for? Many R-rated movies became games to be played by adults and kids, but *True Lies*? The one that's 50% romance? Somehow, it turned out OK, even if Jamie Lee Curtis is absent (except for a still at the end). – KN

Tuff E Nuff

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







After a war reduces the Earth to a wasteland and a tyrannical leader reigns supreme, it's up to you to fight your way towards the freedom of mankind. You're placed in the shoes of Syoh, Zazi, Kotono, or Vortz – warriors who've been tasked with defeating evil fighting king Jade after overcoming an increasingly difficult gauntlet of enemy brawls. To ensure success, you must take advantage of your arsenal of kicks, punches, grabs, and special attacks. You're given 99 seconds to defeat each foe in two of three or fewer rounds of one-on-one combat. If neither you nor the CPU manages a knockout during a round, the one with the most damage dealt wins. This title does a fantastic job of making it feel as though you're becoming more powerful as you progress. Certain special moves evolve into more impressive versions over time – a simple blue fireball becomes a flaming dragon by the end of the game – rendering the entire journey more rewarding. The sluggish movement of each character, however, makes the game feel slower and less responsive than other, more well-established fighting franchises. This also leads to an occasionally frustrating difficulty spike that can be attributed to poor controls rather than clever design. While a much-needed password save feature allows you to resume your last battle if this ever hinders progression, it's disappointing that it's a feature to be relied upon rather than an added bonus. Overall, this has the makings of a great fighting game but lacks the polish to keep you coming back for more.





Reflections: It would have been fantastic to see a slightly larger roster in *Tuff E Nuff*'s story mode, especially considering that two of the four existing characters (Zazi and Syoh) are just re-skins of one another. It's such a simple oversight, but it severely limits the game's replayability. There is, however, a cheat code that unlocks every enemy fighter in the VS. CPU mode. This adds another seven characters to the roster but only within that particular mode. Maybe Jaleco was too busy developing the slow-motion replay feature that runs at the end of every fight. Well, I might not have playable characters, but you better believe I'll be reliving all of my failures, one frame at a time. – AF

Turbo Toons (Hanna Barbera's)

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Empire Interactive
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★




Tighten up those running shoes and go up against a roster of iconic Hanna-Barbera characters in this overhead racing game. Yogi Bear, Top Cat, Snagglepuss, Quick Draw McGraw, Hong Kong Phooey, and Huckleberry Hound are the six selectable competitors. The three circuits to choose from comprise five tracks apiece; each is based on a location from a Hanna-Barbera show. During races, you are given a single-screen view of the action. Running is accomplished by pressing the D-pad in the desired direction. This may sound simple enough, but the racers seldom react to your commands. To make matters worse, competitors can jump into your toon, causing him to spin in circles for several seconds – this happens more often than it should. The racers can also sprint, although this drains their energy gauges. These can be replenished by grabbing hearts that randomly appear on the track, while diamonds obtained in this manner are used to raise several stats prior to the following race. However, black diamonds render characters incapable of picking up any other items. While this title is graphically appealing, the gameplay feels sloppily executed. The first hint of this is the lack of a proper start screen. Pressing START at the main screen only allows you to compete in a single race. In order to get into the full game, your must press SELECT. Well, not really. The game options do appear for a split second but then get covered up with a mess of character portraits. This makes setting up a race a guessing game. If you do somehow manage to decipher the options screen, you'll find, among other things, a five-race championship mode and Atom Ant's Crazy Challenge, a simple diamond-collecting minigame. How this title made it to store shelves in this state is a mystery.




Reflections: *Turbo Toons* only got a PAL release, so American gamers never got to experience its awfulnes. Having to press the Select button to access different game types is somewhat odd, but why would the developers decide to cover up those options with character portraits?! The player gets almost no time to see what options are available before the portraits come flying across the screen to cover everything up. Trying to decipher the option screen is more challenging than the actual racing. – MV

Turn and Burn: No-Fly Zone

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineering
Publisher: Absolute Entertainment
(PAL: Absolute Entertainment, Sony Electronic Publishing)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




In this jet fighter simulation game, players are tasked with piloting an F-14 Tomcat and defending a no-fly zone mandated by the President. One of the nations in the area has decided to ignore the President's mandate by sending several advanced military aircraft into this zone. Missions begin with the player taking off from a carrier and, once in the air, eliminating any unauthorized aircraft. Once all enemies are eradicated, a surface target may have to be destroyed, and then players can return to the carrier to complete the mission. The Tomcat is equipped with a limited supply of firepower that consists of a 20 mm cannon and both infrared and radar-guided missiles. Long range air-to-air missiles become available toward the end of the 16-mission campaign. A visually impressive first-person cockpit view grants the player a look at all the action. The bottom portion of the screen is the computer display, which is full of vital information such as jet status, radar, fuel, and ammo. An insane amount of additional jet information can be cycled through on the display and must be utilized if playing on the game's Ace difficulty. Pressing the shoulder buttons brings up an over-the-shoulder view and, more importantly, allows players to fire flares to deter heat-seeking missiles. During certain missions, submarines armed with surface-to-air missiles will fire at jets in their vicinity, ultimately requiring players to rethink their routes. For cooperative play, a copilot can jump in at any time to control the weapons and cockpit computer display. Overall, the soundtrack is lacking, but the incredible jet and missile sound effects make up for it. Even though the game is fun, the mission structure never changes, which makes things feel immensely repetitive around the campaign's halfway point.




Reflections: Upon destroying the final target of my first mission, I was asked to return to the carrier for landing. Flashbacks of *Top Gun* for the NES quickly filled my brain. The fact that the visuals of the landing sequence look *exactly* the same as *Top Gun*'s had me gripping my controller tight and sweating bullets. The words "Too Fast" flashed on the screen. I thought I knew what was coming next. To my surprise, I landed the aircraft beautifully! Thank the video game gods! I'm thinking 99% of the people playing this had the same flashback while finishing their first mission. – MV

The Twisted Tales of Spike McFang

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: RED
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Rare
★★★★







Ladies and gentlemen, step right up into a vivid vampiric marvel of madcap magic tricks and cute capering captured in an action-packed top-down perspective! Recoil in good-humored horror from villainous Von Hesler, seemingly evil usurper of Vampra and Dracuman's kingdoms, and thrill to the reclamation quest of Dracuman's son, magician Spike McFang. He needs a volunteer from the audience – you – to help him conjure up victory against roving garlic cloves, ghosts, mummies, and more malevolent minions. Fortunately, he's well dressed for this act – his upgradeable top hat becomes a returning projectile after charging, and he spins to strike close foes with his cape. Beware overclocking this cloak attack, however – too much twirling sends Spike reeling. Want him to reel in extra powers instead? Pick a card! These purchased items function as single-use offensive, healing, and support spells. They bolster the fighting abilities of Spike's lovely assistants (autonomous companions Rudy and Camelia), spirit you to ally Professor Steam, cast elemental blasts, etc. Enemies defeated with these or regular moves bestow experience to raise Spike's level, upping his strength and hit points. They also drop gold coins and tomatoes which, oddly enough, both indicate a fine performance. In fact, the latter are vampire Spike's lifeblood – instead of typical hearts, tomatoes make up his health meter. Conversely, garlic bulbs comprise baddies' life bars, and it's particularly helpful to see them at the top of the screen when battling bosses, such as Felina and Hydra. Those charlatans aren't the only major obstacles to mystical success; icy floors, perilous jumps, a jungle maze, and more are no illusion, but thankfully, neither are the save statues that enable an encore upon expiring. You'll want Spike's show to go on – it's fun, funny, and just right for a little presto change-o from the ordinary.





Reflections: *Spike McFang has no Reflections – he's a vampire. So long, bloodsuckers!* ...oh, wait. That's just tomato juice he's drinking. While standing in broad daylight. And he only goes into a coffin when he dies. Great Stoker's ghost! He's definitely not a Bram vampire, and let's not mince words: If giant garlics were coming for *me* with spears, I'd become a bulb buster myself. No, it'd probably be safe to invite Spike to dinner – if he were running late and wanted to know what to do and what you're serving, you'd have a perfect answer for both: "Ketchup." – AP

U.N. Squadron

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★







Take to the skies in a fighter jet to save the Aslan kingdom from Project 4 mercenaries in this side-scrolling shooter. You begin by selecting one of three pilots to control: Shin (power level increases quickest), Mickey (access to better special weapons), and Greg (recovers from plane damage quickest). Starting with the default F8E Crusader, you can purchase secondary weapons before hitting an overhead map to select a mission from a choice of stationary base targets or moving enemy squads. These sorties are set in varied environments, such as a forest, desert, mountain, cavern, and high in the clouds. Enemy planes, jets, and copters must be taken out while avoiding fire, and ground targets such as tanks, SAM artillery, and gun batteries must also be dealt with. Your jet is armed with a Vulcan cannon that can be leveled up by collecting power-ups, and special weapons can be purchased with earned cash before each mission. The fuel/energy tank depletes with each hit, and you'll be destroyed if hit again during recovery time. It will be necessary to buy more powerful jets in order to unlock and use special weapon upgrades, such as Napalm bombs and Phoenix missiles. These are crucial for later missions, especially when facing complex bosses including a battleship, oversized jets, giant tanks, an air fortress, and massive bases. If low on cash, you can grind base-bombing missions to earn more. Quality production values shine with high-level graphics, creative stages, nice cutscenes, and an enjoyable soundtrack. The gameplay is silky smooth, even when a plethora of enemies fills the screen. It might only be for one player, but there's enough variety and unique traits to make this a standout shooter on the SNES.





Reflections: In Japan, this is titled *Area 88*, based upon the manga of the same name. The SNES port of the 1989 arcade game is mostly the same, albeit with only a single-player mode and the addition of the map with selectable missions. In the arcade, the three characters were tied to a specific plane, but this was altered for the home console with the ability to purchase and upgrade your own. Out of the six planes offered, five are real combat jets or prototypes, with only the top F200 Efreet being fictional. *U.N. Squadron* was another showpiece for the power of the 16-bit game system, and despite being an early release, it's still one of the genre's best on the console. – PC

Ultima VII: The Black Gate

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Origin
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





200 years after *Ultima VI: The False Prophet*, you are transported back to Britannia, where magic is waning. In this RPG, you continue the Avatar's unending task of saving the land, but unlike the previous installment, you do so solo. To carry out this adventure, you walk across the world map, which seamlessly integrates the cities as well. You encounter many NPCs throughout your travels and interact with them using Y. This is also how you open doors, search containers, activate levers, and do other basic actions. For battling the enemies in the wilderness and dungeons, press A or B to wield the weapons you have assigned to those buttons from the inventory screen (accessed by pressing START). From this menu, you can also use items or equip/cast your choice of 16 spells earned by gaining experience from defeating enemies. Monsters can also drop items or gold that you walk over to add to your inventory. The gameplay moves along by completing quests, many of which are based around a divisive group called the Fellowship. At various points, an ominous red figure offers questionable guidance and is somehow related to the group. This game has awkward controls for facing the correct direction to hit enemies. The hitboxes also come into play, causing you to search an item when you intend to talk to an NPC or vice versa. Many aspects of gameplay, such as having a party or hunger, are lost from the previous title, making this feel rather simplified. The game is still entertaining, with good music and an intriguing storyline, but it may be disappointing if you have experience with *Ultima VI*.





Reflections: It's difficult to judge this port objectively when the original PC version is widely considered the best game of the series. Because of how much had to be cut in order to fit the game onto an SNES cartridge, it feels like the kiddie version. No party, no reagents for spells, over 70 spells cut to less than 20, time doesn't affect NPC activity, no hunger – the list goes on. I can't fault the game for not standing up to the original, but even compared to the previous SNES release, it is lacking. Nevertheless, I would recommend this title to RPG fans, but if you have played *The False Prophet* or the original version, keep an open mind… a very open mind. – KY

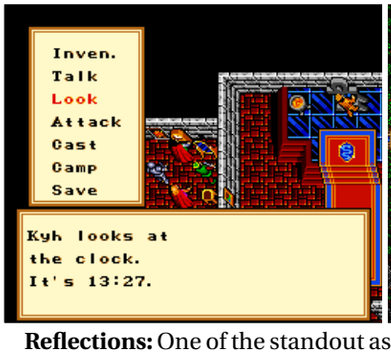
Ultima: The False Prophet
Ultima VI: The False Prophet (alt.)

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Origin Systems
Ported by: Infinity
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





As Avatar of Britannia, you return to the magical land, for swarms of gargoyles threaten its sacred shrines. In this RPG, you revisit your role from the three Ultima games on the NES alongside your old friends Shamino, Iolo, and Dupre. From the start, nearly all of Britannia is accessible through the use of the moon orb, which opens a teleportation gate to set locations based on where it is positionally used in relation to you. For example, using the moon orb two squares down and one left from where you stand always opens a gate to the Shrine of Honor. Towns and other places are integrated with the world map, creating a seamless top-down traveling experience if you choose the more conventional methods. Pressing A opens a menu with a list of actions, including accessing the inventories, talking, looking (used to open chests or obtain items), and casting spells, which require a spellbook and ingredients. Fighting enemies is done on the all-encompassing world map, the turn-based action being activated when either side makes an attack. As with previous Ultima games, experience is awarded to the character who deals the killing blow to a unit. With enough experience points, talking to a freed shrine allows a character to level up, the specific shrine determining which stats increase. With so many locations available from the start and a decent amount of freedom in the order you complete quests, this game offers many ways to experience this interesting adventure. While learning all the game mechanics may seem daunting, it's worth the effort, whether or not you're a veteran of the series.





Reflections: One of the standout aspects of this title is how it presents an experience that is meaningful for players who are faithful to the series while also offering an enjoyable game for those new to this fantastical world. The inclusion of the continuous cycle of day and night and the way the NPCs carry out their daily activities accordingly adds a (perhaps unnecessary) layer of realism on top of already having to feed characters and worry about the effects ("karma") resulting from actions such as taking goods from people's homes. I enjoyed the storytelling throughout the game, from the in-depth conversation trees with NPCs to the twist in the storyline halfway through. Sure, some mechanics are convoluted, but if you're looking for 100+ hours of gameplay, *The False Prophet* is a solid choice. – KY

Ultima: Runes of Virtue II

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Origin
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





In this sequel to the Game Boy action-adventure title, the Black Knight returns to kidnap the mayors of Britannia cities, so Lord British calls you, the Avatar, to save the land. Playing as one of four characters (such as Mariah the mage, who has high intelligence for better magic usage), you travel in a top-down view of the world map, visiting towns and dungeons. While you're free to explore a sizable area, Lord British sends you toward the location that advances the story. To fight goblins, cyclopes, and others, each character starts with one of a handful of weapons, such as Iolo's longbow, although all weapons eventually become available to everyone. Two weapons/items can be equipped in the inventory screen for use in the action screen. For other real-time maneuvers, touch an object for interaction; for instance, bump an NPC to talk or a switch to flip it. Aside from enemies, dungeons have a hefty puzzle element, featuring hidden doors, timed switches, and other obstacles. To help out, there are items to buy in town or find in dungeons, such as burgers that refill your health (shown as hearts in the lower right). Once you've reached the captured mayor, take them back to their hometown for a rune that increases some of your stats before returning to Lord British for your next move. Solving all the areas and saving the land from the Black Knight is entertaining in this Ultima title, although there's not much depth or strategy to fighting or exploring. Despite the simplicity, it's a game that can easily occupy numerous hours, and fans of the series will enjoy seeing the familiar characters and locations.



Reflections: When a series has a rich and deep universe established, I love to see developers spin it into a new form for a different experience (yes, I am one of those people who reads books based on the world of a TV show or movie). Ported from the Game Boy, this has improved graphics (color!) and sound, although I do wish there were more of the fantastic music from the title screen. Lost in the porting was the multiplayer option, which, if done well, would have vastly elevated this game. As it is, this Ultima entry is a fun title that presents a different look for the series. Now you can take on the role of the Avatar even if you don't like RPGs! – KY

Ultimate Fighter

Genre: Beat 'em Up, Fighting
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





This beat 'em up has four game modes to choose from. In Story Mode, you play as Rick, a martial artist and member of the Flying Warriors, who is out to stop the demon Dargon. Punch and kick your way through waves of enemies, filling your KO Gauge as you defeat opponents. Once this meter is at capacity, you'll power up with 10 blazing fireballs to hurl at your foes. Challenging boss characters appear frequently along the way, so make sure you find plenty of Magic Water to restore your health. The sprites in this game are quite large and appealing, but the animation is extremely jerky and limited, with few frames to smooth out the action. The controls feel sluggish, and the hit detection is off by a mile. VS Tournament Mode plays like a one-on-one fighting game, allowing up to eight players to battle in a bracketed competition using one of 12 selectable warriors; each brawler uses a distinctive fighting technique and style. Battle Mode simply allows you to select and face off against a single boss character from the game. Animation Mode actually makes the animation look smooth and the controls feel fluid! Just kidding; it's the same as Story Mode but with turn-based boss battles, injecting a few RPG elements into the mix. This is an inventive touch, but slowing down the pace doesn't feel appropriate for a beat 'em up. Unfortunately, the clunky controls stop this game from being fun. Ultimately, even the eight different difficulty settings don't add enough replay value.



Reflections: Just for a little added context, here's an actual account of how the first five minutes of this game went for me (yes, I was talking to myself – this game will do that to you!): "Why is my jump kick so late? … Why does my punch become a kick when I crouch? … I can throw fireballs! ... Wait, now I can't throw fireballs? … OK, first boss fight: Hold on, why are my fighting moves all different now?! … Just a second; I can block all of a sudden? … Okay, now I can't block again? … Maybe I should get into modern gaming." True story. – DM

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Avalanche Software
Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★★





Shao Kahn's eternal thirst for power has brought him to Earth with a sinister plan to overthrow humanity, putting you face to face with Scorpion, Kitana, Rain, and more of the fiercest champions from the Outworld and Earthrealm alike. Expanding upon and adjusting the abilities of the roster originally introduced in *Mortal Kombat 3*, this definitive version of the one-on-one fighting game sees you battling your way through a tournament of ruthless opponents in the best of three rounds, with punches, kicks, jump attacks, blocks and the devastating uppercut. Your competition attacks with alarming ferocity, demanding absolute concentration during each tense moment of the 99-second bouts. If neither you nor your adversary manages to defeat the other in any one of these rounds, then the kombatant with the most remaining health wins. Making a triumphant return to the series are the signature Fatalities, which allow you to punctuate each fight with a lethal final strike. The kinder Babality and Friendship finishers also return, along with the newly introduced Mercies, which see you reviving your opponent with a tiny portion of their health. Although Animalities are absent, difficult-to-perform Brutalities that end the brawl in a spectacular flurry of attacks make their debut here. Other features come in the form of a run meter, allowing you to charge forward and close the distance between you and your adversary in the blink of an eye, as well this version's unforgiving versus modes. 4 Player 2 on 2 Kombat has you fighting your friends in a fast-paced tag-team match, while 8 Player Tournament mode sees you battling for bragging rights as you compete in a single-round knockout tournament. With a deep kombat system, satisfying finishers, and an extensive roster of powerful champions (lacking only the prior incarnation's Sheeva), this challenging fighter has earned itself a flawless victory.

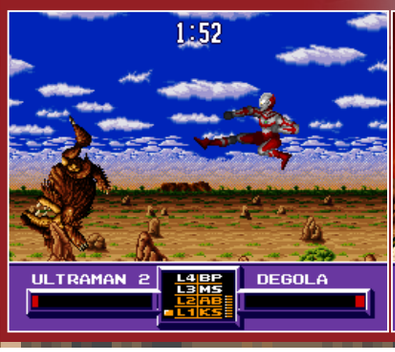




Reflections: Despite being ported to home consoles, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* manages to retain much of its arcade roots – the beautiful sprites, wonderfully detailed locations, and oftentimes brutal spikes in difficulty. After successfully fighting your way past an opponent, the game has this undeniable tendency to ramp up the challenge for the next fight. Enemies suddenly gain the extraordinary ability to know where you're going to be and how you're going to attack, and they begin to react to each of your movements with suspicious speed and accuracy. I'm not going to lie; I could really use one of those Mercies right about now. – AF

Ultraman: Towards the Future

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1991
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: BEC
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★





When giant aliens show up, it takes a giant hero to stop them! The conflicts in this single-player fighting game loosely track the story of its revered *daikaiju* television namesake, as nine giant monsters plague Earth. Battles occur on backdrops reflecting ruined cities or desolate wastes, with the player taking the role of Ultraman. Ultraman's Color Timer only affords him three minutes to remain in his form, so the player must balance being cautious and charging up energy with getting enough punches and kicks in to put the enemy into a finishable state. The combatant sprites are solid recreations of the show's cast, the audio is thematic, and the need to use a fully charged Burning Plasma as a finisher captures the feel of the program. Unfortunately, this is where the praise ends. The early battles are mercifully simplistic, allowing the player a chance to build comfort with the egregiously poor way Ultraman handles but also heralding how uninteresting most of the monsters' combat scripts are. Health regeneration only draws fights out to prevent evasive strategies. A hidden Options menu can be accessed by holding SELECT and pressing START at the title screen, offering three difficulties, a level select, and a music/sound test. While novel for being the first fighter released on the SNES, the poor handling, total lack of multiplayer, and stilted combat design all drag this otherwise well-intentioned game down. Fans of the genre are better off turning their attention towards the future of the system, where better options await.





Reflections: *Ultraman: Towards the Future* does a bang-up job of mirroring the show, even if it never bothers to say so. From the initial battle with Gudis on Mars to the repeat battle at the midway mark and the later confrontations with Kodalar and Kilazee, the fights follow the tenth entry in the Ultra Series nicely. It doesn't address the pollution or virus plotlines (or how the Earth itself considers eliminating the human race for its abusive behavior), but opportunities for exposition are pretty far down on this game's list of shortcomings. It is a bold decision to make a single-player fighting game; then again, inviting a friend to play this is an unkind act all its own. I could forgive it for trying to simulate the slow-motion backflips and plodding punches of its source material if it felt intentional, but it does not. The variant endings are only available on different difficulties, which, I reiterate, are set in a hidden menu. – DG

Uncharted Waters

Genre: Simulation, Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







During the Age of Exploration, there was nothing like the life of a trader, sailing around the world on a ship laden with goods. This game offers a simulation of that experience, casting you as a youth intent on earning fame and fortune to gain noble status. You begin in Lisbon, Portugal with a small ship that's only capable of traveling around Europe. While in port, you move your sprite to the handful of buildings where you take various actions, such as buying/selling goods, hiring crewmen, or purchasing new ships. On the water, a ship icon, which represents your entire fleet, is steered with the D-pad through oceans of screens that mostly reproduce global geography. Discover new ports by sailing nearby (your sight range is enhanced by purchasing a telescope). Each port sells several goods, including sugar, firearms, and artwork. The prices of those goods, as well as your cargo, are determined by both their general value and the condition of the country's economy, which you can check in the town's lodge. As you become more established, you are given tasks, such as collecting specific goods or running errands for your king, which can earn you a noble ranking. While the game offers a complex strategy experience, the action moves at a snail's pace. Traveling to another port on the same continent takes minutes, and doing your business in town is constantly interrupted because your daily actions are limited in number. Fans of exploration should want to set sail, but the slow pace may sink the game's interesting premise for others.





Reflections: I wanted to love this game. Keeping track of prices, completing tasks, earning titles, fighting pirates… there's plenty here. Sitting through a 10-minute trek across the Atlantic worried me, but then came the trouble to carry out actions in every single port, with me being sent back to the lodge at the start of each day. Aside from the crawling pace, the game is entertaining. It has a complex economic system with well over 50 ports to find and explore. The graphics are better than the NES version but are lacking and simplistic for the SNES. *Uncharted Waters* offers an open experience, from earning high noble ranking and the hand of a princess to throwing caution to the wind (and other natural disasters) and adopting the life of a pirate, attacking and pillaging fleets. Are you attracted to a royal lifestyle or arrrrr ye itching to fight some landlubbers? – KY

Uncharted Waters: New Horizons

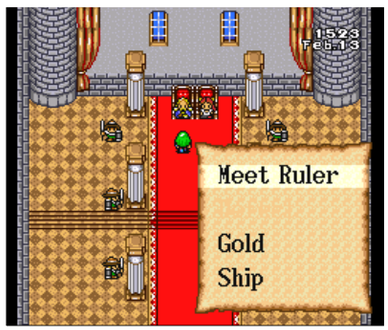
Genre: Simulation, Strategy
Release Date: Oct. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Koei
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







A sequel to the Koei seafaring simulation, this game takes place decades later, when the Age of Exploration was well underway. There are six characters to choose from, each with a story and a tendency toward one of three play styles: merchant, pirate, or adventurer. To begin, you control your captain in a top-down view inside their hometown. From the prologue, you're directed toward your next action, whether that's to set off for unmapped land, attack particular ships, or simply begin buying low and selling high. As you achieve goals and increase your fame in the three play styles, you gain noble titles from your ruler. Through these activities, you also advance the story, encountering new NPCs or receiving additional information. You control all aspects of your fleet, including how much food and water you carry for the crew, whom you assign to various stations. While sailing, you discover new ports in your vicinity. There are a variety of buildings in each town, such as a cafe for hiring men and impressing the local waitress, a market for buying and selling goods, and a guild for accepting paid side missions. Each character is encouraged to play in a particular way, and while the game is still as open-world as its predecessor, not following the prescribed style limits the story progression. The graphics are colorful and cute, despite small sprites, while the music is hit-or-miss. It's a title that allows the seadog in you to live life however you like, from a galley full of traded riches to a galley full of plundered riches. The choice is yours.

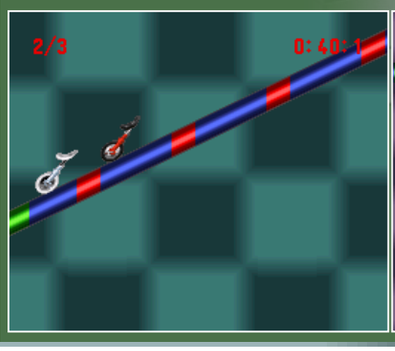




Reflections: I was impressed with how much more I enjoyed *New Horizons* over the original *Uncharted Waters*. The way the action is constructed with preset characters and particular methods for each to achieve fame and nobility made it a clearer, more accessible game for me. Whether I was playing as Catalina the Spanish pirate or Ernst the Dutch cartographer, I connected to the character, their story, and their goals. There is good direction at the beginning, from the opening scene sending you around town to the shop proprietors offering advice on your first visit. I still found sea travel a painstakingly slow affair and the sudden storms and other disasters unfairly devastating, but this is otherwise an improved experience with excellent replayability. In my next playthrough, I'm determined to have a nap in every lodge in the world! – KY

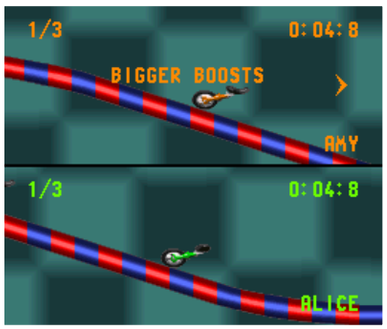
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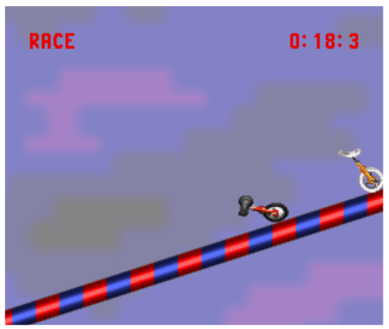
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: DMA Design
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





In this unique side-view racing title, players control living unicycles called Uniracers that were created by a god for the sole purpose of impressing a young goddess. In order to entertain the goddess, the Uniracers must go head to head against one another in assorted events. There are three different types of tracks for them to compete on – race, circuit (same as race but with laps), and stunt. The race and circuit tracks follow the same rule set – the first to cross the finish line wins. The stunt tracks require the player to perform as many tricks as possible to earn points in a set amount of time. All three types of track have several sections that will force the Uniracer to jump, bounce, and reverse direction at any time. While the Uniracer is in the air, players can use different button combinations to make it perform various stunts. The successful completion of a stunt gives the Uniracer a boost in speed – the bigger the stunt, the larger the speed boost. Since the Uniracers travel insanely fast, sections of the track are color-coded to alert the player of upcoming changes. For instance, a blue/yellow track is a straightaway, and a red/yellow track indicates that there is speed-reducing slime up ahead. Even though these colors do help, some races are simply too fast, meaning track memorization is the only way to win. The Uniracers animate beautifully, especially when performing a trick, but the track backgrounds are dull and boring. A variety of thrash/rock music fits nicely with the fast-paced action. With nine total tours (five unlockable) that contain five courses each and two-player head-to-head duels, there is a whole lot of gameplay packed into this title.





Reflections: If you're a fan of Pixar, you might remember a short film of theirs called *Red's Dream*. For those unfamiliar, it's about a red unicycle that is collecting dust in a store's clearance section. The unicycle has a dream that it is part of a grand circus act, but it awakens only to realize that it's still in a clearance pile. Pixar believed that *Uniracers*' lifelike unicycles were too similar to their unicycle in *Red's Dream*, so they filed a lawsuit against developer DMA Design and won, forcing them to stop production of the game. The more you know! – MV

The Untouchables

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter, Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Someone needs to take down Al Capone, the Chicago mobster, and Eliot Ness is ready to do it in this game comprised of several varieties of shooting action. There are five assignments, which can be played in any order, except the fifth, which must be last. In each stage, you shoot down Capone's goons, bullets flying everywhere. The first assignment has a third-person view where you battle criminals with your shotgun. L and R move you horizontally, with barrels and piles of crates available for protection. Move the crosshairs with the D-pad, shoot with Y/X, and reload your weapon with A/B. At the top, your health is the green bar, and the blue bar represents how many more enemies you need to kill to complete the section. The time and ammo remaining are shown in the upper right. Occasionally, mobsters drop pickups for health, time, an extra life, or ammo upgrades (in certain stages) that you collect by walking over. The other assignments have differing shooter play modes: side-view run and gun, third-person rail-style shooter, top-down run and gun rescuing hostages, and a first-person shoot-out with Capone himself. While this game stays interesting by constantly changing format, it is unfortunately slow and awkward aiming with the D-pad. Missed shots often result in damage, with death causing you to restart the section (especially painful in the single, long area of assignment three, albeit less so in assignment four, where rescue progress is retained). There are no continues, so once your lives are gone, it's *finito*. Fortunately, having access to most of the assignments from the beginning lets you experience much of the game without becoming a master with the crosshairs. If you've got the resilience, though, then jump into Ness's shoes and face Capone one-on-one!





Reflections: If you play the NES version, you'll notice similarities in the level layouts and gameplay. While both titles follow the story of Eliot Ness, this version is based on the 1993 TV series of the same name rather than the 1987 film. I enjoyed this game and all the action variety it offers, but I'm baffled at why they didn't make it compatible with the Super Scope, which could have vastly improved the experience. Still, I love some good mob-themed fun! If you do, too, and you're interested in charging a big-time crime boss with some scandalous tax evasion, then you have no choice but to play this game! *Capisce*? – KY

Urban Strike

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Foley Hi-Tech Systems, Granite Bay Software
Ported by: Solid Software
Publisher: Black Pearl Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★







This third installment of the popular strategic shooter series sees the player piloting a cutting-edge attack chopper in a bid to thwart H. R. Malone, an evil media mogul bent on overthrowing the United States government. Set in locales as diverse as Hawaii, Mexico, and Alcatraz Island, the 10 isometric missions each offer multiple objectives, ranging from saving people from a sinking ship to infiltrating an enemy base and laying waste to its forces. Players will pilot choppers to take out out enemy air units, ground units, structures, and more with machine guns and missiles. Night missions now take place, and at times, the action also happens on foot in run and gun shooter mode as the player traverses environments while completing the objectives laid out on the Watchcom Information Console's Mission Data Screen, accessed by pausing. Presentation-wise, this title is top-notch, with the story played out via excellent cutscenes that push the narrative on. The gameplay is also enjoyable; however, it stumbles to keep up the pace during heated battles against enemy aircraft, tanks, and turrets, affecting the overall fluidity of the control. For what is essentially the same game as the series' previous installments, it does a good job in changing up the experience and objectives just enough to keep things feeling new and exciting. The difficulty will put some players off, but with a bit of perseverance, there is another good title here worthy of being in any library of games.

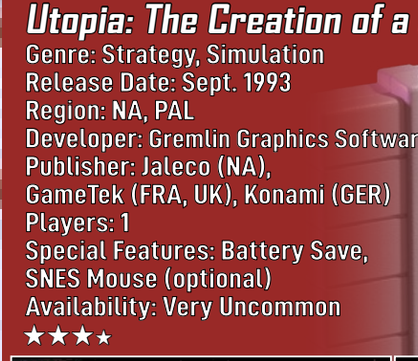




Reflections: Immediately, this game feels more difficult than its predecessors – the on-foot sections especially – but even those parts are a welcome addition to the action on offer. The mantra of "not broke – don't fix" seriously applies here, but the game physically can't keep up with the pace. If it ran at full speed, it would be an absolute firecracker. It is great to have a large variety of locations and vehicles to tear around in (including a Ground Assault Vehicle (GAV)), and the cutscenes aren't far off from the cheese that full-motion video would bring to the table in the years to come. It is a sad testament, though, because I remember a time (insert getting old jibe here) when EA pumped out quality games – and frequently. From the Strike series to *Road Rash* to *Rolo to the Rescue*, these were the titles many growing up in the '90s had as their gaming backbone. – JE

Utopia: The Creation of a Nation

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: Jaleco (NA), GameTek (FRA, UK), Konami (GER)
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★

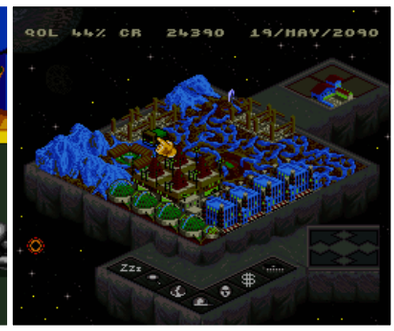






A new world. A blank slate. An opportunity to build Utopia! Seek out the perfect quality of life and defy otherworldly antagonists in this real-time isometric strategy sim. There are 10 planet-themed levels to begin play on as well as a practice level. Players build and manage colonies across an alien landscape using a simple cursor interface. Each of the 23 buildings players can construct serves a unique function, from expanding legal construction areas and radar details to extracting resources from the world and constructing military units. Developing the planet is not the player's only concern, however. The threat of alien attacks lurks from afar and must be scouted before the player can command their air and ground assets to eliminate them. This is done through the use of Markers, which players place on the map to specify locations for troop movement. Each world has a unique alien race to be discovered and ultimately defeated. Events such as eclipses can prevent energy generation, while envoys from Earth offer exchanges. Funds must be allocated to intelligence, researching advanced structures, and constructing the firepower needed to survive. A council of advisors is available to provide statistics on development and suggest courses of action. Industry veteran Barry Leitch brings some nice musical compositions, ranging from ambient to aggressive, alongside classical reprisals. Most blend into the background, though some feel more extreme than the gameplay they accompany... until aliens start wrecking things. Optional SNES Mouse support gives the player a slightly smoother and more intuitive control scheme. Only one save slot exists, so players must personalize their planets one at a time in pursuit of perfection.



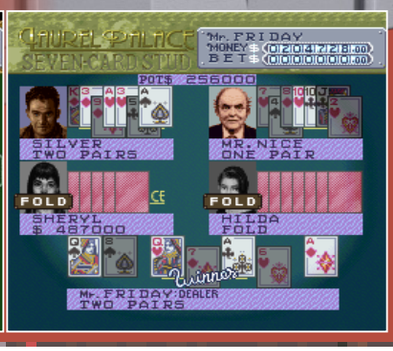


Reflections: It is hard to ignore the similarity that *Utopia* bears to *Populous*, from the cursor's angled off-screen menu to the small-scale isometric projection of the land. That said, having the antagonists off-screen and the construction player-driven takes this farther from Bullfrog's god game and closer to *SimCity*-like simulation. That is not to say the competition is not real. Practice helps teach the basic building pattern of expanding, identifying resources, and balancing economic and research needs. When aliens start getting aggressive, the pattern gets disrupted, and making both proactive and reactive decisions to remove the threat is what gives *Utopia* its tension. While it lacks some of the audiovisual appeal of other simulations, its quasi-real-time strategy elements married to civic management make for a very fun game. – DG

Vegas Stakes

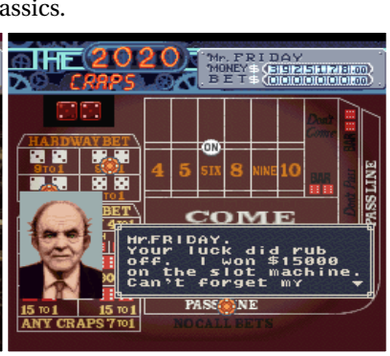
Genre: Gambling
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory, Dice
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Very Common
★★★★





Will you parlay $1,000 into your target $10 million or see your pockets stripped 'til they flip inside out? It all depends on fortune and friends in this title's first-person Vegas Adventure, so sign in at the Golden Paradise Hotel before phoning a crony. Your choice of Cliff, Maria, Isabelle, or Richard will doff their Vegas Dream (incidentally, the name of this game's NES predecessor) in deference to yours as you shuffle between four casinos (a fancy fifth one gifts your high-rolling self a suite should you garner $100 grand). The sound and decor differ at each establishment, but The 2020's futuristic feel and Buffalo Head's cowboy cachet prove novel only briefly. What matters more are their varied wager limits because all feature the same well-depicted games: Blackjack, Slots, Roulette, Craps, and Seven-Card Stud Poker. As you bet your first buck at The Hideaway or your firstborn at Laurel Palace, you can ask your sidekick for general guidelines or personal tips; the latter range from useful to clueless, but you needn't heed them. Conversely, interruptions from fellow casino patrons demand your attention and actually constitute an additional form of gambling – their urgent requests or genial gestures (e.g., appeals for medical assistance, dodgy diamond sales) could see you stiffed or spiffed thousands of dollars according to the actions and integrity of all involved. If you'd rather eschew potential windfalls or fraud from 16-bit bettors, try Multi-Player, where you only deal with your selected associate and up to three other human players. Here, much may be shared: controllers, funds, and hopefully, the simple enjoyment found in these adequate casino classics.





Reflections: If you start Multi-Player with at least one extra person, Poker is pointedly missing, as there's no provision for hiding your hand – not even a "look the other way" honor system. It's a shame that a quintessential group gambling game is a no-go here, and I find it especially interesting that you're expected to engage with all manner of shifty strangers in Vegas Adventure, but people you know well enough to sit with on a couch? Can't trust 'em! What's really unreliable, however, is Maria's Blackjack advice – 18, 19, and even 20 all result in a resounding "HIT" from that risk-taker. After listening to her a few times, the only thing I can afford to hit is the parody fast-food restaurant at the foot of The 2020 casino – see that upside-down, yellow "M"? Think I'll order some WcNuggets. – AP

Venom • Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

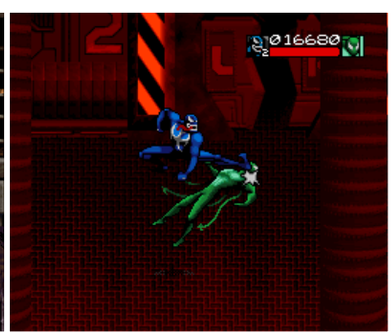
Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





In this beat 'em up sequel to *Spider-Man & Venom: Maximum Carnage*, the archrivals team up again, this time to take out the Life Foundation and the alien symbiote offspring of Venom. Spider-Man or Venom (or both in two-player mode) must combat waves of enemies and bosses across environments such as New York City, a bridge, a forest, a mall, and the Life Foundation's headquarters. Both characters are equipped with a melee combo attack, grab attacks, a web grab attack, a throw, a web shield, jump kicks, and web-swinging kicks. They can also jump or climb on many backgrounds to avoid danger. Handy health items, extra lives, and ally-summoning Super Hero Icons show up randomly from defeated foes; the latter pickups provide temporary assists from Captain America, Ghost Rider, Hawkeye, or Daredevil that can damage baddies and bosses, mitigating the grinding difficulty. The variety of enemies isn't that great, and bosses are often repeated, making the standard action more ho-hum than it should be. It doesn't help that regular enemies are given a somewhat large health bar and take multiple knockdowns before dying. Accurately striking foes consecutively to unleash a Power Hit is essential to clear them efficiently, but that potential is not enough to keep the game from dragging. Several Trap Room stages sprinkled throughout whisk Spider-Man and Venom away to a jail area to face generic Jury mercenaries and probes, artificially extending the experience while stopping the game's momentum. Though the soundtrack is lively and jumpy and the graphics are serviceable, this definitely feels like a letdown, even in two-player mode.





Reflections: Built upon the *Maximum Carnage* engine with minimal changes (mostly graphical), this sequel is a disappointment in comparison to that original. Although the difficulty is smoothed out a bit, the lack of branching storylines and nice cutscenes makes the proceedings feel a bit cheaper in terms of production, with nothing truly new standing out. Like *Maximum Carnage*, *Separation Anxiety* is loosely based upon the comics storyline of the same name, but with Spider-Man added here to boost the potential interest. At the time of its release, Venom and alien symbiote fever in the '90s was already starting to wane a little, and I feel like that dispirited energy permeated this title's lackluster development. – PC

Virtual Bart

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Feel free to have a cow, man – you've got to overcome six tough trials to save Bart Simpson from a virtual reality experiment. The challenges commence with the cartoon kid spinning in the middle of seven icons, one of which alters the number of chances to complete the entire game. If Bart lands on any other symbol, he enters its corresponding VR program. These all provide interesting settings and requirements, but many suffer from unfair gameplay. "Dino Bart" transforms him into a lizard beset with an unwieldy tail strike and prehistoric obstacles, including lava, crumbling platforms, and difficult-to-defeat caveman versions of his family. In "Baby Bart," the infant swings in trees, pilots a carriage, and joins a circus, but he's stifled by stiff controls. "Pork Factory Pig Bart" sees the porcine hero facing conveyor belts, clowns, locks, freon, and flames. "Virtual Class Picture" gives Bart limited time, ammo, and aiming ability to splatter his classmates with tomatoes or eggs. Everything flies by unnervingly fast in the "Mount Splashmore" water slide, so unless you pause frequently, it's hard to avoid collisions, collect time-increasing clocks, and follow the crucial arrows on Mr. Burns's swimsuit. Finally, after a nuclear meltdown, Bart rides a motorcycle and carries a pathetic balloon shotgun as he avoids Jimbo and Kearney's annoyingly incessant attacks in "Doomsday Bart." This title requires such persistent perfection that it offers a practice mode to master its idiosyncrasies, but it would be easier to do what Bart says and eat his shorts.





Reflections: There's a through line in all but one of this game's worlds, connecting each experience like sausage links. In fact, it *is* a sort of sausage link, dipped in batter, fried, and served on a stick – the ubiquitous corn dog. This carnival treat provides Bart with a health boost, but I question the merits of assigning it this ability. It might be humorously ironic that a pork lollipop laced with nitrates and bathed in grease can bolster Bart's well-being, but it still doesn't seem to take into account any of the settings in which it appears. Would a soggy dog soaked in chlorinated water make *you* feel better? No, and you probably wouldn't want one from a radioactive, post-apocalyptic foe either. It's a choking hazard for a baby, and for a pig, it's cannibalism. Besides, had corn even been domesticated in caveman days? Doggone if I know. – AP

Virtual Soccer

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: PAL
Developer: Probe Software
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Common
★★







Take to the pitch with one of 24 world teams or a squad of your own creation in this soccer sim game that has knockout tournaments, leagues, exhibition matches, and practice sessions. The game plays from a top-down, vertical perspective by default, but interestingly, it can be switched to a top-down side view or a purely overhead one. These options may be a nice idea, but the gameplay is turgid. Sprites look the part, but they are all identical to one another, and at times they jitter about on the screen or unforgivably disregard your controller inputs, breaking up any fluidity. When the ball is high in the air, the camera zooms out; this is a cool touch, but in doing this, the frame rate grinds to a halt until it drops back down. Keeping possession is as much of a chore as passing and shooting are, and the opponent team tends to dodge or ignore your slide tackles at random while theirs mostly connect. A variety of weather effects is a neat little feature, as is the way each referee has his own degree of strictness when it comes to turning a blind eye to a foul, but with awful crowd sound effects, goal posts randomly changing color, and "hit and hope" gameplay, there isn't really much to be had from this poor soccer effort.





Reflections: The problem with this game is that it tries to nail the presentation over the gameplay, but it doesn't really achieve that either. The option to change the pitch orientation is unique, but even that turns into a mess when the camera spins around violently as the ball goes out of play for a throw-in. For whatever reason, there are two pass buttons, but neither one does the job 100%, and the shoot button is more like a lob than anything with power behind it, so going for the goal always feels underwhelming. Oh, and I never knew that the choice between stereo or mono sound is actually a weather option, but that is bafflingly where the setting lives! There are several playable soccer games worth your time over this, and that's before you even get to the great ones. Avoid! – JE

Vortex

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: Electro Brain
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





Hop into the Morphing Battle System (MBS), recover the Core, and thwart the villainous Aki-Do! A cinematic intro provides narration and guidance on how to play this explorative action/vehicular shooter hybrid, describing the various modes of the MBS and their strengths and weaknesses. The Walker form can interact with items and has an array of weapons, but it's slow. The Sonic Jet flies at high speed but burns fuel and cannot stop. The Land Burner form brings ground speed at a lower cost. Finally, the Hard Shell provides screen-clearing bombs, defends with energy instead of shields, and has little mobility. An interactive control system test allows the player to walk through each ability of each form, which is critical, as the learning curve for mastering the complex and myriad controls is steep. They are controlled in a third-person perspective until entering elevators; the camera then zooms in for a first-person traversal of underground tunnels. The game itself has seven levels: the opening travel through the Vortex, the five worlds the A.I. Core has been scattered to, and the final level. Despite the potential for an arcade-style experience, the game's exceptionally challenging nature requires a slow and methodical approach from enemy to enemy. Thankfully, the player can flee the immediate area, receiving a supply pickup to restore them. The Defense Droid, if found, will help by following and taking shots at enemies. Creative, but one of the system's most challenging titles.





Reflections: As the developers of the Super FX chip, Argonaut has never had difficulty getting the most out of their unique hardware. Like *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*, the 3D world of *Vortex* is visually appealing. The freedom of movement afforded in this space is only improved by the variety of forms the MBS has. The first-person segments are tight and exciting and contrast against the open-air freedom of the main areas. Unfortunately, the technical wizardry and intense music are overshadowed by the game's design decisions. The complex controls and difficulty will chase off newer players, and those dedicated enough to work at it will find the optimal pattern of play requires frequent shifting and extremely conservative exploration. I find this glacial pace frustrating, as the engine handles rapid play just fine but punishes it with hazards and enemy design. *Vortex* has some deep ideas and ambitious aims but stumbles severely in their execution. – DG

War 2410

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Advanced Productions
Publisher: Advanced Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Rare
★★





When will people learn that sentient war creations *always* turn on their makers? In this turn-based strategy game, you control an army setting out to defeat these rogue battle constructs. Each of the 20 missions begins with units for each side in set formations on the map. On your turn, you can either "move" or "battle" (attack) with each squad. The various types of battalions have their own limits on movement and weapon range. Not all units can attack each other, especially when there's a difference in air or land medium. When the battle command is used, both units involved attack simultaneously, allowing a nearly dead tank to take a revenge kill on its way down. Many maps also have bases that can be used to add defense to a stationed unit as well as replenish missing health. In addition, the terrain (mountains, forests, roads, etc.) affects a unit's stats. For example, a mech in the forest has added defense due to the coverage of the environment. The goal for each mission is given in a briefing before the level and mainly involves total destruction of the enemy, although there are sometimes optional victory conditions, such as capturing your opponent's base. While it's neat that there are many different units of varying sizes and types, this is a no-frills strategy game. There are animations for the attacks, but the action shown is basic and lacks excitement. The sprites are too small to easily differentiate the long list of troops, adding to the mediocrity of the graphics. This game is bland and boring, and unfortunately, it doesn't have a lot going for it.

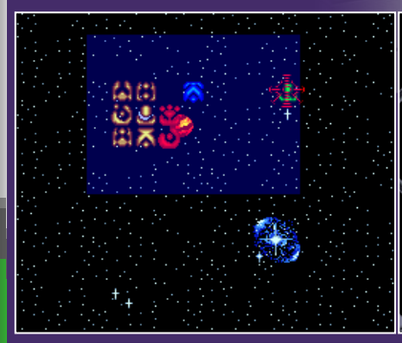




Reflections: For me, much of the excitement of a strategy game centers around all the data to consider: a unit's attack power, defense, range, health, etc. *War 2410* only gives a general idea of what these are (low/medium/high and a health bar without numbers). Plus, with limited actions to take, I felt less involved and invested in the gameplay compared to other strategy titles. Even a simple board game such as *Risk* allows you to combine or split armies as well as rewards you for controlling territory. This doesn't mean that I think all strategy games need to be complicated with a plethora of actions, but it isn't satisfying to play this game well. The graphics, the music, the gameplay – everything is mediocre at best. – KY

War 3010: The Revolution

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA
Developer: Advanced Productions
Publisher: Advanced Productions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★





Taking place centuries after *War 2410*, this game sends the strategy action into space as humans fight the Kyllen alien force. Each of the 16 levels starts with a set map and layout of units. There is a wide variety of ships with different stats in max shields, movement range, and attack damage. There are also ships with special abilities, such as scouts that can search for upgrades (available starting with the fourth level). Before each stage, you are briefed on your mission, which always includes destroying the enemy but can also require protecting a particular location. During play, you control a yellow indicator, and pressing B brings up a menu of nine different actions. Some provide information, such as data on the highlighted ship or a zoomed-out view of the entire level map. The most common actions are moving an indicated unit or using one to attack an enemy ship. To help keep track of what ship has done what, your yellow units turn blue when they've moved, red when they've attacked, and gray after both. When a ship attacks, the other unit counterattacks if it was not destroyed and is within range. As you progress, space stations that allow you to build new units when controlled by two ships and refineries that refill shield power become available. This game is an involved strategy title with several stats for each type of ship as well as a variety of ways to play, including attacking the enemy head on or hunkering down defensively. Unfortunately, the graphics are disappointing, with static images gliding across the screen and unimpressive explosions. While the developers improved on the previous experience, it still lacks the gameplay that would make this worth playing for anyone but a hardcore strategy fan.





Reflections: When I saw that this sequel changes its environment to space, I got excited and hopeful that it would satisfy me more than the first game. What a letdown when it turned out to be the same gameplay in a different wrapper. Sure, it addresses some of the issues I had, such as offering more information about the exact strength and range of units, but it is, at its core, the same game. I appreciate the addition of the ability to upgrade units and build more ships with a space station, but it's not enough to make up for the fact that this is a disappointing offering for a late release on the SNES. – KY

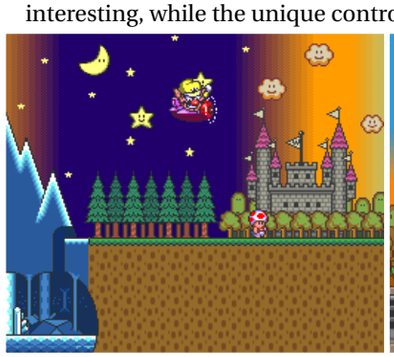
Wario's Woods

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players:1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★





Toad must free the woods from Wario and his cute, evil minions in what is both a tile-matching and a falling block game with platformer-esque controls – the platforms are the puzzle tiles, and you control Toad himself to lift and move them. The menu includes versus modes for play against a computer or human, a solo "round game" with ascending difficulty, a "time race," tutorials, and options. The playfield is a vertical rectangle framed by a colorful background that changes style as you progress. In round games, you begin with a set monster pile which you must clear to win the round. At first, Birdo, another Mario character, sits in a box in the upper right corner of the screen while fairies ("sprites") drop bombs in from the top. Bombs eradicate monsters if you line up at least two monsters and one bomb of the same color. Four or more monsters and a bomb make diamonds that eliminate more. Dispatching multiple lines at once drains a progress bar, which fills constantly. When it's full, Wario replaces Birdo. His minion drops monsters, and he sometimes lowers the ceiling. You lose a life if the screen fills up completely! Fortunately, the bar empties and Birdo eventually returns. Gravity behaves normally, so you walk, climb, and fall over the stacks of monsters to pick up and arrange matching colors and bombs. You can kick things across the screen and instantly move from the bottom of a stack to the top, but not vice versa. Some monsters can only be removed in diagonal lines or require more bombs, and the drop speed increases incrementally. In versus games, there are two adjacent fields where players' successes harm their opponents. Playing alone, you fight original CPU characters, such as Aqualea the mermaid and Caltron the knight, culminating with Wario. The overall presentation is bright and pleasing, with adequately energetic music that varies by mode and situation. The enemy designs, largely unused in subsequent Nintendo titles, are interesting, while the unique controls remain the defining feature.

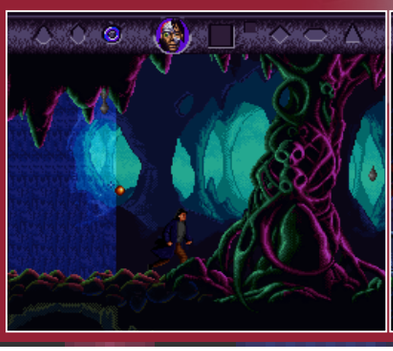




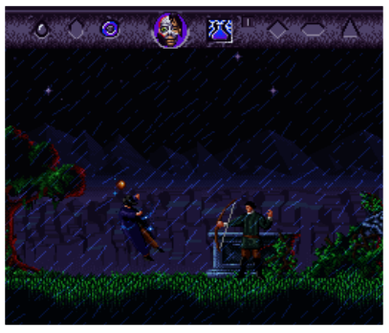
Reflections: This is a fairly forgotten Nintendo title, which is a shame because it's enjoyable. There's a good NES release, too, but the SNES version is more robust. On the SNES, it's possible to move diamonds like bombs, but on the NES they're immobile. The NES version doesn't have CPU versus opponents, but it has different boss battles fought inside the puzzle area. – KN

Warlock

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: LJN, Trimark Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★




The Warlock seeks to summon Satan, and as a modern druid warrior, you must prevent this from happening by traveling through locations and time to collect six sacred runestones. The stages take you through dark environments, such as castles and cemeteries, where you encounter a variety of enemies, including zombies and gargoyles. The A button fires a shot of magic at them, while Y + D-pad controls the orange orb that follows you around. This orb not only damages enemies but can also collect out-of-reach spells throughout the stages. These spells assist you in many ways, from the potions that replenish some health (indicated by the portrait at the top) to the pyramid that produces two objects that orbit and shield you. The goal of each area is to get to the exit, but if it contains the runestone, the portal to move on doesn't appear until you've found said artifact. Sometimes the stone is in plain sight; other times it is guarded by a boss or even buried in an alcove past a hidden passageway. These paths aren't the only puzzle element because there are also switches that you must activate or screens where you need to cast a certain spell. The game mainly consists of firing the same blue magic bolts at enemies, with an occasional puzzle blocking your way. The controls are slow to respond, if at all. There's no spamming shots at enemies unless you want to stunlock yourself in place as they creep closer. It's a mediocre title that unfortunately has little to offer in gameplay.

Reflections: I didn't have high expectations from a title based on a 1993 sequel to a movie that flopped. I was willing to give the storyline a pass (the sun and moon align a couple times a year, not once every 1,000 years), but the movement in the game is beyond help. When most of your time on a stage is spent trying to aim at enemies, the game should make that a fluid experience. Instead, you are constantly stutter-stepping as your sprite ducks every time he shoots forward. On the plus side, the game is relatively easy, with several spells that can damage all enemies on the screen or at least help make up for poor aiming, but whether that's a personal fault or a game issue remains to be seen. – KY

WarpSpeed

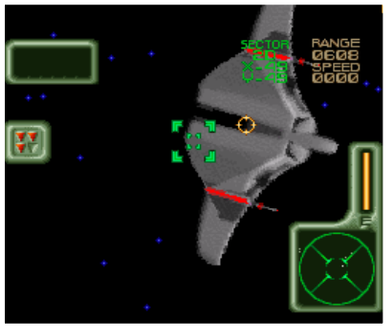
Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Ballistic
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★





In this spacecraft dogfighting game, players take on the role of a rookie starfighter pilot battling a vicious alien horde that is threatening the galaxy. There are seven different missions to perform and a campaign that includes four missions in itself. Most missions require the player to obliterate every enemy spacecraft on a map, but some are more involved and task the player with retrieving an item, protecting a base, or destroying a minefield. On occasion, the player will receive an incoming message from the enemy, challenging them to a dogfight, but these don't impact missions and are primarily for score chasers. During the action, players are given a cockpit view that contains information regarding fuel level, missile count, sector coordinates, and radar. Flying the starfighter is easy enough; both accelerating and decelerating get their own dedicated buttons, the D-pad is used to control the flight path, and the L/R buttons are used to fire missiles/cannons. Dogfights are very basic and simply require the player to shoot at the enemy while avoiding incoming fire. Oftentimes, this becomes a boring process, especially when the enemy remains close to the player but still somehow manages to stay out of the aiming reticule. The Y button brings up a map of the current sector. While viewing the map, the player can plan their flight path, check their starcraft's status, and pick a location on the map to warp to, although warping does consume the starship's fuel. As the game progresses, players get upgraded starships with new missiles and enhanced armor, but these upgrades feel no different than the starting ship. There are several different types of enemy aircraft, but they are all unimaginative, and the music and sound effects are just as boring as the visuals.





Reflections: I spent way too much time in this title flying around in circles while seeking out the enemy. Because of this, I experienced tons of downtime and saw very little action. The thrilling moments of finally locating an enemy ship were few and far between, and even after finding one, the excitement would never last long since I'd end up firing hundreds of rounds without hitting anything. After that quick moment (and inexplicably missing all of my shots), I would reluctantly begin the search again. Fly in circles, get excited for a second, fire and miss. Rinse and repeat. That's *WarpSpeed*. – MV

Waterworld

Genre: Shooter, Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







This flop movie tie-in is a shooter/platformer where the player takes control of the Mariner. The majority of the game plays out in four looping stage types. First up is a top-down shooter where the player pilots a trimaran boat and has to clear the area of enemy Smoker boats, jet skis, and seaplanes before following the guiding arrow to reach the diving buoy. The next level is an undersea bonus stage where the Mariner must obtain treasure while avoiding all manner of creatures. If the red gauge depletes before he surfaces, then all collected treasures are forfeited. Back on the boat, the player must stop the Smokers from kidnapping people from floating villages ("Atolls"); losing 50 Atollers results in a game over. Lastly, a platforming section sees the Mariner entering the village, armed with a knife and guns, to remove any remaining enemies. Once the village is safe, the game loops around to rinse and repeat at a higher difficulty before the eventual showdown with Smoker leader Deacon. Any treasure collected can be used at an item shop to repair ship damage and buy boat weapons, such as gatling guns and mines. This is initially a fun title that is let down by its harsh difficulty in later sections; it also tries to do too much instead of focusing on one core element of gameplay.





Reflections: I didn't mind the film aside from its insane running time of six days and three hours, but the game is a bit of a mixed bag. Ocean was the master of the minigame-movie-games for the best part of 15 years, but they struggled to add enough content on 16-bit consoles – and this title shows it. The shooting sections are solid and fun, as are the platformer parts (if a little floaty in the controls), but there isn't enough of either for a prolonged period of time. The bonus diving stage is a cool feature in that all the plundered booty can be used to upgrade the trimaran, but if you don't collect enough treasure, then the later stages become a mountain to overcome thanks to numerous and extra ruthless enemies. If the experience stayed with the boating section the entire way through or let the player stop at villages at random to get supplies and explore à la the game *Outlander*, then this could've been a massive hit. – JE

Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Semi Logic Entertainments
Ported by: Sculptured Software, Cygnus Multimedia Productions
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★







Wayne Gretzky attaches his name to this later-era, horizontally scrolling hockey entry for the SNES. Just Play mode is just that, instantly starting a game between two teams. Exhibition adds the ability to choose from six international teams and 26 North American franchises. Shootout and Faceoff Practices each offer a best-of-five contest at their respective skills. Players can also jump into an all-star tournament, pro tournament, 84-game season, or best-of-seven playoffs. Slow-motion live-action videos accompany goals scored or penalties taken. Players tap their stick rapidly on the ice to call for passes when they are in a good shooting position, and they either cut into turns or skid-stop based on movement directions. The player's team can be tweaked to play aggressively, defensively, or rough. An arcade/simulation mode setting controls whether rules such as offsides are called. Other options include three difficulties, playing five or three skaters a side, period length, toggles for fighting and realistic skate physics, etc. Thanks to the NHLPA license, real players with unique statistics make up each team's roster. Teams are not represented, but cities are, and team names and colors can be customized. Players can also be traded between franchises. However, the side-scrolling broadcast perspective and high player speed combine to create a small-feeling rink, which results in gameplay with less finesse and more body checking. There is scant strategy to play, which frequently devolves into end-to-end rushes. It may have his name on it, but this is not the Great One's brand of hockey.





Reflections: Wayne Gretzky is famously quoted as saying "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." The part often forgotten is the next line, "Even though there is only a one to five percent chance of scoring." This axiom is a lot like the game's actual engine, as *Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars* takes a whole lot of shots in the hope that something hits the net. Faceoffs look absolutely stunning. Skating over the world map to select international teams or over the icons of faux franchises for league teams makes for one of the most creative team select menus I can remember. Renditions of classic tunes including "La Cucaracha," "Frère Jacques," "Yankee Doodle," and "Funiculì, Funiculà" only add to the oddity of the experience. Meanwhile, fighters take inordinate punches to go down. Penalties are both inconsistent and frequent. No icing option. No multiplayer support. Simply too many misses to ignore. – DG

Wayne's World

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gray Matter
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★







Based on the iconic 1992 movie (itself based on the beloved *Saturday Night Live* skits), this action-platformer sees Wayne and Garth sucked into a strange video game at Noah's Arcade. To make matters worse, the fiendish gelatinous cube known as Zantar abducts poor Garth! Equipped with his trusty guitar, Wayne must do battle with a vast variety of baddies while collecting vital power-ups and items in order to reunite with his best bud. Colorful but nasty foes, including brawling bagpipes, combative coffee cups, belligerent bouncers, and deadly disco balls, try their best to thwart Wayne's progress. Wayne can upgrade the strength of his mighty guitar licks by finding amp, chorus, distortion, and other power-ups. Each one enhances his guitar projectiles in a different way. Helpful "Schwing Items" that instantly wipe out enemies and hearts that earn extra lives can also be picked up during the journey. Rock out through four bizarre and dangerous levels, including Kramer's Music Store, Stan Mikita's Donut Shop, the GasWorks nightclub, and Suburbia. Digitized cutscenes help flesh out the storyline between levels. The music is unique for each stage, but the sound effects and voice snippets throughout the game are extremely repetitive. Platforming can be a fairly frustrating affair as well; the poor level design hampers any attempts at fluid gameplay. Enemies and obstacles just seem scattered randomly and thoughtlessly, and it's often difficult to decipher attacking adversaries against the busy backgrounds. The whole presentation feels so messy and chaotic that it might be better to leave Garth engulfed inside that purple blob monster and find a better game to play.





Reflections: Apparently, the developers think *we're not worthy* of a better *Wayne's World* game. Well, maybe we should just be positive and hope it improves as we *party on! Shyeah right, and monkeys might fly out of my butt!* I told my friend this was the worst game I ever played, and he said *"No way!"* And I said *"Way!"* This game is so awful, *I think I'm gonna hurl!* Just kidding, this game is *excellent! NOT!* If this game were a President, it would be *Lamebraham Stinkin'!* It's definitely not *Party Time* when you pop this cartridge into your SNES! You won't need an *Extreme Close-up* to see how horrible this game is; it once ranked #19 in an official "Top 25 Worst Video Games of All Time" list. *I was not aware of that.* – DM

WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: FCI
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







12 wrestlers from World Championship Wrestling slam each other around in an isometric ring. Game types for one or two participants include one-on-one or tag team competitions in single matches or a tournament; the Ultimate Challenge (championship mode) tests one player only. Sting, Ric Flair, and the other wrestlers have their own attributes and meter-fueled special move, such as Rick Rude's Rude Awakening or Scott Steiner's Frankensteiner. Characters share the same moveset, but a good variety of suplexes, slams, running attacks, ground attacks, and aerial maneuvers help matters. The AI reflects the wrestlers' personalities; for example, big Vader focuses on power moves, while "Flyin'" Brian Pillman favors running and top-rope techniques. Gameplay mechanics work but are unrefined, as it can be tough to position wrestlers for throws/grapple attacks (performed by being close to a foe and pressing a button combination). A strength meter affects incurred damage; it decreases but gradually rebuilds. There are welcome inclusions uncommon to wrestling games, such as sunset flip pin attempts and throwing wrestlers off the top turnbuckle, but several negatives undercut the positives: The ref counts to 10 for submissions, health regenerates too quickly (especially in tag team matches), and wrestlers get up from the mat too fast. Perhaps worst of all, pinfalls can happen when grapplers still have a fair amount of health. The graphics are decent at distinguishing the characters, but the animation is rather stiff. Droning crowd noises are broken up by a handful of announcer calls and wrestlers' catchphrases following signature moves. Despite nice options and details in this simulation, the experience is shaky overall.





Reflections: "Flat on the mat!" Tony Schiavone's announcing may stand out, but it's the wrestlers' samples that are bizarrely memorable – the character selection screen spouts them randomly every few seconds. "Show me respect!" from Ron Simmons and "I'm Baaad!" from Johnny B. Badd will be ingrained in my head forever. WCW at this time was a regional wrestling promotion (Southeast and Mid-Atlantic US), but its popularity more than merited an SNES game (they had one on the NES). It's just a shame that this was the final result. There is a kernel of quality, but I feel that focusing too much on the "realistic" side of pro wrestling hurt the game's chances by eschewing the "entertainment" factor that the more prominent WWF was known for. A little glitz can go a long way. – PC

We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1-2
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



Rex, a *Tyrannosaurus* who was transported to modern-day New York City, must save his human friends from Professor Screweyes. To do this, he runs, jumps, and attacks his way through five areas comprising three platforming stages apiece followed by a fight against one of Screweyes's robotic creations. While some of the levels, set in places such as the subway and Central Park, are straightforward, others are maze-like, requiring Rex to make leaps of faith or drop down into unknown danger. Fortunately, some of the crazier stages have arrows to give direction, and Rex can collect icons of his dinosaur friends. Pressing SELECT then summons their assistance; for example, Elsa the *Pteranodon* can carry him further along in the stage. Hazards abound, ranging from spikes and fire to pits and enemies (mainly the humans who are out to get Rex). While his basic attack is throwing rocks with A, collecting enough "Brain Grain" (yellow light bulbs) grants him the ability to do a powerful stomp or swing his tail with X. Rex also jumps onto enemies to damage them, which is the main attack for bosses, but with his large hitbox, it is easy for him to get hurt instead. After each fight, a cutscene directs Rex to his next location, adding a nice story element, although it's not the same as the eponymous movie. This game would be an enjoyable experience if not for the confusing level layouts and cumbersome movement. On the plus side, the colors are bright and the dinosaurs are cute, so if that's interesting enough to garner a playthrough, go for it!



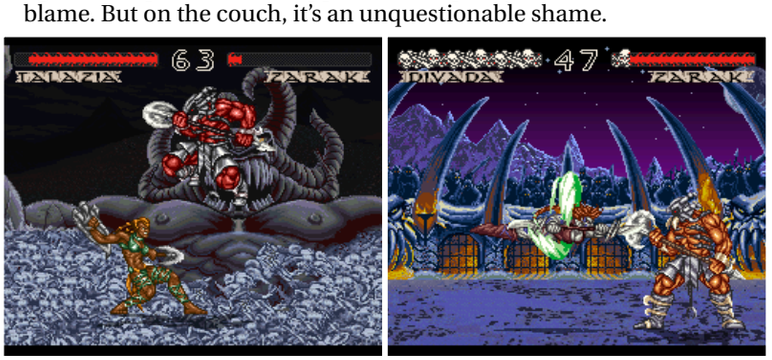
Reflections: I know Rex is a *Tyrannosaurus*, but why does he move around so slowly? Also, some of the triggers and hitboxes are confusing. At one point, I was stuck in a stage only to discover that Rex can climb certain objects (e.g., ropes) if he's standing at the correct pixel! Maybe it's more than one pixel, but it sure felt that precise. It's not all bad, though, as I enjoyed figuring out how Rex's friends would help in a particular level amid colorful, fun graphics. The game not strictly following the storyline of the movie doesn't bother me; I thought the developers did a good job of adapting it to best fit the medium. But I wouldn't mind taking a frying pan to whoever made the awful movement, shouting "Not the momma!" Oh wait... that's from that other dinosaur show. – KY

WeaponLord

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



Prophecy speaks of a coming savior chosen to overthrow the evil DemonLord. Six would-be liberators are ready to test their destiny against the current demon king, a vile despot known as Zarak. The roster is thin but mighty, with each blade-wielding barbarian enjoying their own Conanian influences. Indeed, this weapon-based gameplay distinguishes the title from other vintage fighters, its layered combat both intense and substantial. Warrior Korr boasts a broadsword, the bestial Bane favors his massive Rock Warhammer, arena master Jen-Tai uses a falchion/spiked shield combo, the devious Divada prefers a twin-bladed staff, the talented Talazia specializes in both the Claw Shield and Talon Blade, and the unscrupulous Zorn wields his Ivory Axe and Skull Shield. The game's story mode restricts the selection to these six, but the Arcade option skips the script and adds Zarak, giving players command of his Guillotine death blade. But the fighting system is the real demon, requiring extensive practice to be properly understood, let alone mastered. Founded on a six-button control scheme, moves are unleashed not when a button is pressed, but when it's released, setting up an unusual inverted dynamic. At the very least, players must master three fundamentals: Hold-Down Moves (hold a button, then complete a D-pad motion), Charge Moves (hold one direction, then press the opposite), and Instant-Motion Moves (complete a D-pad motion, then attack). Thrust Blocks are similarly crucial, allowing players to parry and counter-strike. Deeper tactics include breaking an opponent's weapon, juggling enemies midair for combos, and even committing some nasty fatalities. The apocalyptic artwork, inspired character designs, and progress-saving password also lend meat to the grim proceedings. The esoteric gameplay, unfortunately, will likely discourage the merely curious, but the game suffers a more crippling weakness – animation so choppy, the characters move as if caught beneath a perpetual strobe light. Perhaps this title's support for the pokey XBAND Modem is to blame. But on the couch, it's an unquestionable shame.



Reflections: *WeaponLord*'s animation is wanting, yet its fighting system is a mountain of nuance. But does complexity equal fun? Can those choppy swings and blows be overlooked in light of the game's greater virtues? The hardcore gamer might say "yes," the casual, "no," leaving me to split the difference. If you're the former, add a half-star. If you're the latter, then subtract the same. – DA

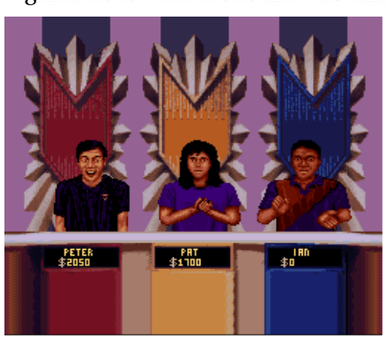
Wheel of Fortune (Featuring Vanna White)

Genre: Game Show, Puzzle
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Imagitec Design
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★





This conversion of the popular game show does an adequate job of replicating the television experience. Up to three live or computer-controlled competitors can play, and it's nice that human players can pass the controller around instead of needing extras. Once the game starts, the format is similar to the show. Players spin the wheel and earn money if they guess correct consonants to fill in each round's word/phrase puzzle; vowels must be purchased with accumulated money. The wheel spaces mostly contain dollar values, but there are spaces where players can lose a turn or even lose all of the money gained in a round if the wheel stops on the dreaded Bankrupt. The player who solves the puzzle keeps the cash earned in that round; after three rounds, the player who has the most money goes on to the bonus game to try for an extra prize. Winning that bonus prize, unfortunately, isn't exciting, and the winner's total earnings aren't even tallied up at the end. Visually, the game looks fine, with a nicely done puzzle board and smooth spins of the colorful wheel. The audio is a bit lacking, with sparse applause and generic sound effects, but Vanna White's digitized speech samples are nice to hear. All told, this game does what it should – nothing more and nothing less.

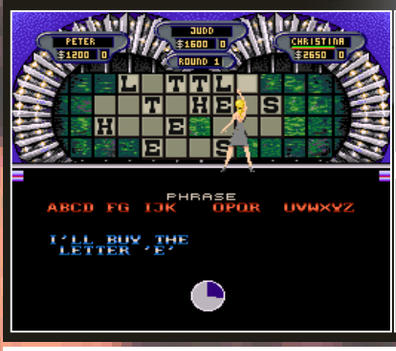


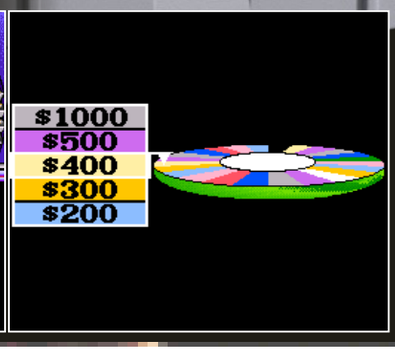


Reflections: Unlike *Jeopardy!*, luck plays a significant role when it comes to being successful at *Wheel of Fortune*. I often know what a puzzle solution is after correctly identifying a few consonants, so my gut instinct is to keep spinning the wheel and earning more money with each correct letter. The problem with that strategy, as I found out a few times when playing this game, is that bad luck can strike, and landing on Lose A Turn or Bankrupt can mess things up in a hurry. Even with fake Super Nintendo dollars on the line, it's crushing to lose it all with only a couple of letters to go. This version of *Wheel of Fortune* also yields more Bankrupt spins than any other that I have played, past or present. Let that be a warning to you, fellow game show fans. Gordon Gekko once said that greed is good, but rumor has it that he took his whole speech back after losing $5500 on a Bankrupt spin back in 1993. Or maybe I made that up. You decide. – PS

Wheel of Fortune Deluxe Edition

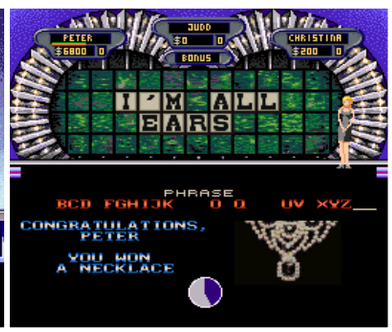
Genre: Game Show, Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Imagitec Design
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★★





This game show conversion is essentially an update to the 1992 release of *Wheel of Fortune*, with 4,000 new puzzles and a few minor aesthetic changes, including more photorealistic contestant models. The spinning wheel animation has also been condensed a bit. Aside from these adjustments, the *Wheel of Fortune* review applies to this release; please refer to it for more detail.





Reflections: There's not much "deluxe" about this *Deluxe Edition*. The new puzzles extend the Wheel experience, but other improvements never made the cut. The game's pacing is still far too slow, the bonus round is still generally unrewarding, and the new wheel animation is a step back from the original game's. The Wheel games ultimately fall behind the Jeopardy! ones on the SNES instead of both series being equally enjoyable as they've been on other platforms. Pat Sajak must have known this, because he's nowhere to be found here – or maybe GameTek didn't feel like paying for his appearance. Either way, only dedicated Wheel Watchers need to own both versions; one is enough for most libraries. Be sure to play with friends for the optimal experience; I also recommend having one player assume the role of Pat Sajak to inject a bit of personality. (I may or may not have done this myself.) – PS

This is one of the only SNES games released to have a major label variant, with the original cart's label resembling the first game and featuring Vanna White, while the more common label is a plain black one featuring only the game's name. Interestingly enough, the box art for both cart versions is very similar, but the box art of the black label cart features a Vanna with a darker skin tone and hair versus the Vanna on the original cart's box. – PC

Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?

Genre: Educational, Adventure
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Brøderbund Software
Ported by: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



When the world's artifacts are swiped by sinister agents of a former spy, it is up to the ACME Detective Agency to apprehend the antagonists! The player must visit various world locations, amassing clues through interviews with locals to get details on the thief's whereabouts and personal characteristics. V.I.L.E. agents roam the area if the player is on the right track. With enough info, a warrant can be issued, and if the player catches up to the correct thief with one in time, an arrest will occur. These decisions are made with the ACME Comlink crime computer, a simple menu system the player uses to fly to other cities, visit notable locations in their current city, compile warrant details, or view the dossiers of V.I.L.E. agents. The difficulty ramps up as the player advances in rank, with the criminals becoming more elusive and the time window between crime and arrest shrinking. Wrong turns can cause the trail to go cold, making it very tough to reach the crook quickly enough. Thankfully, a failed arrest, whether due to warrant issues or simply not reaching the thief, simply means the player must try again with a new crime. Five ranks are earned over a number of completed missions, with the trail of thefts eventually leading to the storied gentlewoman thief herself, Carmen Sandiego. Five language settings are available, and progress can be saved with passwords awarded at the end of each mission. While this edition was released almost a decade after the PC original, it faithfully recreates the experience, all the way down to the bundled almanac. An international trip through gaming history well worth taking.



Reflections: When *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* was released in 1985, the game was a revelation among educators. Paired with *The World Almanac*, gameplay often required pouring through details in that text and pairing them to clues. Selling millions of copies and becoming a staple of primary education throughout the United States, few games have influenced a generation as strongly. Often, "edutainment" efforts fail because they attempt to put an entertaining veneer on rote exercise or memorization. What makes *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* work is that its mechanics, a mix of reference and pursuit, engross the player while contributing to geographic knowledge. Of course, all these years later, we have instant access to endless information, which proves very helpful if picking up a cart-only version of the game! – DG

Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?

Genre: Educational, Adventure
Release Date: May 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Brøderbund Software
Ported by: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



Will time-travelling crook Carmen Sandiego and her 15 slimy subordinates successfully ransack the past for precious artifacts? Not on your watch! As a member of ACME Detective Agency, you wield the Chronoskimmer 325i dual-screen time machine/crime-solving device to pursue a perpetrator across continents and centuries during each assignment. After learning whether a man or woman lifted a particular valuable from a specific country and year, you're sent into the past with limited hours to identify and apprehend the culprit. Clicking a cursor on the Search button lets you spend time interrogating a witness or informant, possibly discovering personal details about the thief. Use the Data button to put this information into Evidence (for eventually securing a warrant) or to read criminal Dossiers. Talking to people and scanning the area for clues also provide hints to the robber's whereabouts by referencing historical figures and events. You should research unfamiliar names in the physically included *New American Desk Encyclopedia* before using the Travel button to select a location because making mistakes wastes time and risks failure. However, seeing a Villains International League of Evil (V.I.L.E.) operative means you've chosen the correct destination. After searching and traveling several times, you're able to nab the crook with the Chronoskimmer's Capture Robot, and after completing many cases, your rank and the assignments' length both rise. Though the experience becomes repetitive, the notion of looking outside the game for knowledge is a creative way to inspire self-directed study.



Reflections: I wasn't kidding about the repetitive bit; I had to recover a Kyoto teahouse pilfered from 1740 Japan *three times* within 20 assignments. Each crook was pretty tea'd off, but they met their matcha with me. Speaking of terrible puns, check out the names of the various V.I.L.E. agents: Molly Coddle? Justin Case? Sharon Sharalike? Ima Mused!* And although the thieves take the treasures, some of the treasures take the cake in terms of sheer strangeness. Don't get me wrong; many of the looted goods, such as the Taj Mahal and Osaka Castle, are important landmarks, and others, such as the camera obscura and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, are simply fascinating. But why steal Salvador Dalí's mustache? Couldn't he just... grow another one? And as for lifting Lady Godiva's long, blond wig... well, they really *are* VILE, aren't they? *That last one is mine. I should be Sue A. Shamed... – AP

Whirlo

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Region: PAL
Developer: Nova Games
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Rare
★★★★★







The fiend Malix has spread a plague across the land, so the cute, green Whirlo volunteers to hunt the seven light crystals that will produce a cure. To help him through the platforming levels, he has his pitchfork, which can be used to attack enemies in several ways, including a spinning strike and a downward thrust. He also has a super jump and a "Whirlowind" punch where he leaps straight into the air and shoots forward with his weapon out. Many of Whirlo's moves depend on his forward momentum to get the most distance, but it's not all hopping, skipping, and jumping through the various locations, such as a haunted forest and pirate ship. Whirlo also encounters clever puzzles ranging from a logic problem to using his special abilities to kill hard-to-reach enemies. He occasionally goes through a boss fight against foes such as Anaconda and a pirate captain, but they neither signify an impending light crystal nor the end of an area, as the game is free of traditional level structure. Additionally, the many characters he interacts with (both good and evil) and the way they continue the story keep the entire experience refreshing. Unfortunately, this game is high in difficulty. Whirlo is taken out with a single hit and sent back to the beginning of the screen, which could be the entire level. This is often frustrating, but after losing all his lives and getting a bad ending, Whirlo can continue with a password, restarting at the same spot. This game has cute, well-animated graphics and a structure that is more an adventure than a traditional platformer. While it is tough, getting through it is rewarding!





Reflections: Playing through this title, I quickly fell in love. It has a great balance of puzzle solving and platforming that requires you to develop a full understanding of little Whirlo's capabilities. You are punished for missing attacks or doing special moves unnecessarily by briefly losing control of movement. For example, a missed downward attack means his pitchfork gets stuck in the ground, or if a Whirlowind doesn't connect, he will be stunned by the impact, eyes spinning. Thanks to the unlimited continues, I don't mind the challenge too much, although a checkpoint during the longer screens would have been nice. Despite occasional grammatical errors, *Whirlo* is a creative game with an adorable look that is worth the effort to complete. – KY

Whizz

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Flair Software
Ported by: Titus
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★







Whizz the bunny wizard is racing his nemesis, Ratty, by working his way through four worlds of crazy isometric platforming stages. The goal of each level is for Whizz to reach his hot air balloon at the finish line, and as he's moving about, there are two actions he can take: jumping and spinning. Spinning can kill enemies, such as snowballs and crabs, and break barriers after he has collected the right block. The barriers are made of an assortment of materials that are ranked in strength from ice to metal. The strongest block Whizz has collected is shown at the bottom and allows him to break the matching barrier and weaker ones as well. Strewn throughout the platforms are pickups, such as hourglasses that add to his time limit in the upper left and potions that fill his health (represented as a tall mushroom in the lower right). Defeated enemies can drop small mushrooms that either add to it (red) or poison him (blue). To aid in his running, jumping, and spinning are objects such as springs to jump higher and buttons to activate moving platforms. Some of the items Whizz can collect (flags, gems, and rockets) are strictly for points, which eventually earn him extra lives. If his chances do run out, he can continue in that world, restarting at its first stage. This game offers colorful, fun graphics with cute creatures to encounter at every turn. While it can be frustrating having to worry about the timer, health, and where to go, the entertaining experience within well outweighs the bad.





Reflections: I know some people complain about isometric games, but I'm okay with them. So what if UP doesn't exactly make you go up? *Whizz* seems like a simplistic game, but as you start exploring the worlds (not too slowly – remember your time limit), you can see the variety the developers put into it. Your bunny legs aren't your only propulsion system – you eventually get to ride sleds and rafts and even a chess piece! The graphics are fantastic and help create lush environments for just a handful of worlds. The background parallax effect makes the areas seem larger and might serve to distract you, but don't let it – you'll need all your concentration to complete every last twisting and winding level! – KY

Wild Guns

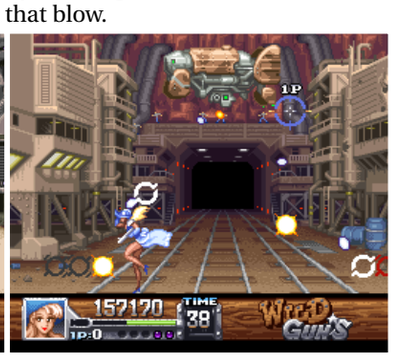
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: July 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Natsume
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★★★





Annie and bounty hunter Clint team up to take down the Kid family in this sci-fi Western shooter. Play occurs in a third-person perspective, with the ability to move left/right and slightly scroll on a fixed screen. Armed with a blaster, one or two players have to take out waves of cowboys, robots, turrets, and more, aiming with a target on the screen. Limited bombs (dynamite or mortar) are available to clear the screen of enemies, and a lasso can be used by double-tapping the attack button to freeze foes in place. However, this is more trouble than it's worth. The six detailed stages are varied and include locations such as a town, canyon, ammunition depot, train, and gold mine. Timed rounds must be survived before moving on to a possible miniboss and the next stage location. Each stage's climax is a very challenging boss, usually in the form of a gigantic mechanical creature. Gameplay is frantic, with constant moving and shooting necessary to have a chance of surviving the onslaught. Incoming shots are indicated with a "Look out!" speech bubble and must be dodged with a roll move, jump, or double jump. Flying orbs can be shot to reveal point items, additional bombs, or power-ups in the form of a machine gun, shotgun, grenade gun, or useless popgun. A green meter builds during play, and when full, it results in the vulcan gun and invincibility for a limited time. Great details and touches can be seen throughout, including destructible environments, four selectable outfit colors per player, and the ability to throw back tossed dynamite. Rollicking music sets the Western mood nicely, the graphics/animation are top notch, and there's a bonus target practice mode thrown in for good measure. Shortcomings are limited to uncommon but awkward melee attacks and the overall punishing difficulty, although unlimited continues and fluid controls help to cushion that blow.





Reflections: *Wild Guns* took the fixed third-person shooter genre, popularized by *Cabal*, to the next level with this supremely polished game. The sci-fi Western setting is terrific, with the risk/reward structure for taking out enemies versus dodging fire almost perfectly balanced. A remastered version, *Wild Guns: Reloaded*, was released on both PlayStation 4 and the PC. Annie Oakley (Old West sharpshooter) and Clint Eastwood (movie star) were likely the inspirations for the protagonists... I wonder what grumpy old Clint would think of this. Has he ever played a video game? – PC

WildC.A.T.S: Covert Action Teams (Jim Lee's)

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★★





A powerful group of humanoid-alien hybrids, the WildC.A.T.S must stop the Daemonites from activating the spaceship *Behemoth* and seizing the powerful Orb. Based on the cartoon incarnation of the comic book of the same name, this beat 'em up leads you through 10 side-scrolling levels of futuristic brawling. You start as the leader, Spartan, but later have a choice of three mission areas with Spartan and companions Maul and Warblade. Each of their levels have several sections, some of which can only be accessed once you've played out someone else's stage. For example, Maul cannot enter the second part of his area until Spartan destroys the computers in his first part. Your precious health bar and lives counter (which is shared by all characters) is in the upper left while your enemy's health is on the right. When your bar runs out, you immediately respawn if you have an extra life left. If you don't, use a continue to try over again. The characters have a short set of combos as well as special moves, such as Spartan's charged laser attack or Warblade's wall climbing and double jumping. They also wield a limited screen-clearing attack, activated by the Select button. Upon death, enemies occasionally drop items, most often health packs, that are picked up with the attack button. This is a fun experience that shakes things up every now and then with less linear gameplay. In addition, each of the characters handles differently, (e.g., Maul's gigantic sprite moves with ground-shaking footsteps). Whether or not you're familiar with the *WildC.A.T.S* cartoon, this title is a good time.

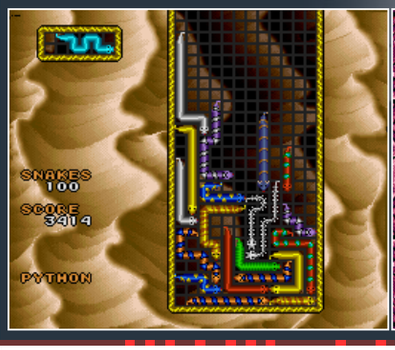


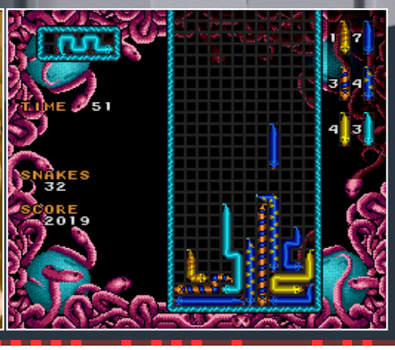


Reflections: I never watched the *WildC.A.T.S* as a kid, which is not surprising considering the show lasted all of eight months and was cancelled before this game even came out. I have a difficult time not comparing this ragtag group to the wildly popular X-Men. Unlike either of the X-Men games on the SNES (not counting the solo *Wolverine* game), none of the female characters are playable, which is an unfortunate oversight. As far as gameplay, though, the controls are clear and fairly intuitive, and Tommy Tallarico's music is rocking and fitting to the grungy, futuristic setting. Now, if someone could please explain to me where the "cats" are... – KY

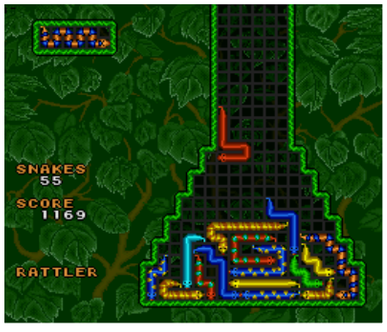
WildSnake

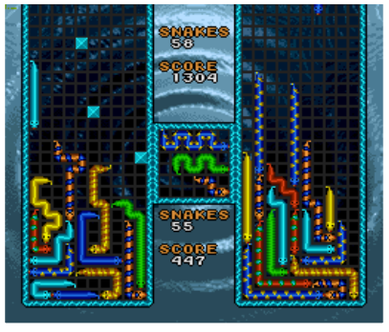
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: J.S.C. Gamos
Ported by: Manley & Associates
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





In this snake-eat-snake world, serpents of varying colors, patterns, and lengths plunge headlong into a playfield pit, one after another, with those upcoming revealed in an optional preview rectangle. Pressing DOWN hastens their descent, while hitting LEFT or RIGHT bends their heads at a 90-degree angle in relation to their bodies, allowing you to direct and kink them as they drop; they can continue to undulate into available space until their snouts find a dead end. When a falling snake touches one of its similarly scaled siblings, it devours it, creating an area into which itself and surrounding snakes can slide, potentially causing more like serpents to meet and eat. Periodically, a Wild Snake or King Cobra appears to remove many snakes at once, which helps keep serpents from overloading the pit and ending any of the three game types. In single-player mode, you select the difficulty, accompanying music/visuals, and one of seven playfields, ranging from the standard rectangle to the constricting X design. Clearing reptiles raises the score, level, and variety/speed of incoming snakes. The two-player game forks the screen into dual rectangles where expelling multiple serpents from one side besets the other with temporary obstructions. Lastly, the King Cobra Challenge offers nine untimed preliminary rounds intertwined with nine clocked trials that require things such as consuming eggs or predetermined numbers of specific serpents. Ultimately, wrangling snakes in this puzzler is fun, and though it's not as addictive as the genre's best, it's still quite charming.





Reflections: This game made me think of a twist on the classic peanut butter cup commercial: "Hey, you got *Snake* in my *Tetris*!" "You got *Tetris* in my *Snake*!" Then I realized that that sounded… uncomfortable… but the comparison still stands. Alexey Pajitnov himself bestowed his blessing on this title that trades Tetriminos for everyone's favorite Nokia phone game icon. However, despite boasting boas, the game's grip on play isn't perfectly tight. I like that the single-player levels are named for increasingly threatening serpents, progressing from Garter Snake to Mamba and more, but it rattles me that I can reach at least level three (Black Snake) without doing *anything*. On easy, the game plays itself pretty competently, so I wonder how much strategy is involved over mere chance. After all, even though I'm decent at puzzles, I have to admit that when I tried two-player mode by myself, I lost to *nobody*. – AP

Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits

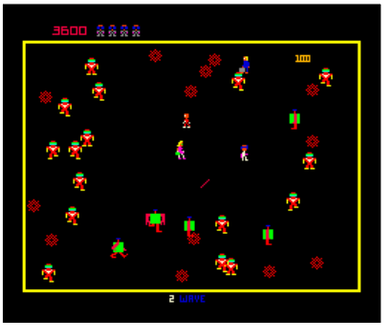
Genre: Compilation
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Williams Electronics, Vid Kidz
Ported by: Digital Eclipse Software
Publisher: Midway Games
Players: 1-2 (alternating, simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





This arcade compilation consists of five titles published by Williams Electronics in the early 1980s. *Defender* and its sequel, *Defender II* (AKA *Stargate*), are challenging side-scrolling space shooters where you have to save humanoids on a planet from dastardly aliens, with lasers, smart bombs, and hyperspace function at your disposal. *Joust* is a single-screen, ostrich-riding actionfest (for one or two players simultaneously) where you have to flap and fly around to bop other ostrich riders off their steeds by knocking into them from above. *Robotron: 2084* is a bright and intense dual-joystick multidirectional shooter where you must move around single-screen rooms and take down an army of swarming robots. Finally, *Sinistar* is a very difficult free-roaming multidirectional space shooter where you have to blast alien ships and contend with the frightening, roaring Sinistar, who yells out warnings such as "Run, coward!" The games have been ported faithfully from their arcade counterparts, with their respective control schemes admirably adapted to the SNES controller. Each title independently features the ability to alter game options, such as the starting difficulty, number of lives, points needed for bonus lives, and more. If you're looking to enjoy a good array of arcade classics, this package is a worthwhile choice.





Reflections: Williams may not be the first name that comes to mind when thinking of classic arcade hits, but they published a nice run of unique, memorable games that managed to stand out, including not only this compilation's titles but also *Bubbles*, *Make Trax*, *Moon Patrol*, and later *NARC* and *Smash T.V.* If there's one thing to be said for Williams arcade games, they are tough. Arcade operators must have loved the amount of coins plopped into their *Defender* and *Sinistar* machines every other minute. *Robotron: 2084* is particularly ruthless, with almost no gradual increase in difficulty before throwing you to the wolves (robots). While it had some success in the arcade, Williams is perhaps best known for its decades' worth of excellent pinball games, which the Chicago-based company produced from the 1940s up until 1999. Some of their most famous machines include *Black Knight* (1980), *Pin*Bot* (1986), *The Addams Family* (1992), and *Medieval Madness* (1997). Today, Williams is still in business but mainly producing games and machines that are used in casinos. – PC

Wing Commander

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Origin
Ported by: Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★




Origin's smash-hit spacefaring combat sim sets a waypoint for the Super Nintendo! As a fresh-faced pilot stationed to the TCS *Tiger's Claw*, the player must work alongside fellow Terran Confederation soldiers to fight the Kilrathi, anthropomorphic lions out to destroy humanity. Play begins in the officer's club, where the player can check the chalkboard for pilot scores or talk with other pilots and the bartender to learn more information about the crew or tips on enemy behavior. A training simulator in the club allows the player to practice dogfighting with four types of Kilrathi fighter craft. When ready to go on a mission, the player can pass through the barracks and to the briefing room, where mission parameters are provided. Once in the cockpit, the player pilots one of four ship types in a first-person pseudo-3D environment. Each ship has varying armaments, such as the Rapier's close-quarters neutron guns and longer-range lasers. Ships also vary in maneuverability, durability, and cockpit appearance. Missions include patrols, escorts, and strikes. If the player is assigned a wingman, they can be given strategic commands mid-flight. Dogfighting is tough but fair, requiring careful speed manipulation, keen aim, and tactical awareness of the radar. Promotions occur at set points in the plot, while other medals and awards can be achieved based on flight performance. Life on and off the TCS *Tiger's Claw* feels intertwined. Losing a wing is not only a gameplay matter; watching their casket sent into space in a military funeral ceremony hammers home the experience as something larger than life. Additional plot branches and events occur naturally based on player performance but are not revealed to the player, granting any given playthrough a continuous, cinematic feel.




Reflections: *Wing Commander* is a critical touchstone in gaming history. It leverages gorgeous animated sprite work, music, and dialogue to create a film-like experience while providing a competent and engaging sci-fi flight sim. Enthusiastic lead designer and co-producer Chris Roberts has become known for his ambitious project management. His desire to eschew abstract game concepts for cinematic storytelling melded with fellow producer and industry icon Warren Spector's penchant for branching narrative. Throw in George Sanger's compositions, and the all-star underpinnings for this influential artifact become clear. Besides some system-familiar frame rate issues, there's one consternation I kept running into, literally – asteroid and mine collisions appear far more likely in the SNES version. Even a masterwork like *Wing Commander* is going to run into the occasional rock. – DG

Wing Commander: The Secret Missions

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Origin
Ported by: Mindscape
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★




A faction of the feline Kilrathi have developed the Graviton Weapon, a deadly device capable of destabilizing planets to the point of obliteration. It is up to the pilots of the TCS *Tiger's Claw* to again battle the furball menace, this time directly into Kilrathi space! The familiar mix of crew interaction and first-person space combat sim from the original game returns, with the player receiving a briefing from Colonel Halcyon before flying assigned missions in one of four Terran Confederation ships (the Hornet, Scimitar, Raptor, or Rapier) to accomplish set goals while dogfighting with Kilrathi strike craft. Ship combat feels just as smooth as before; missions often require players to dogfight with Kilrathi forces while patrolling areas, escorting allies, and/or striking at enemy assets. The branching narrative of the original returns but is greatly simplified, with any mission branch failure sending the player's forces into retreat. A Rookie difficulty is added to the main menu, allowing players to battle against less durable Kilrathi ships and opening up the game's narrative to less skilled pilots. Other changes include replacing the barracks with a direct door to the briefing room and adding medal checking to the kill tracker in the officer's club. Some of the cutscenes are revamped as well, including Mode 7 versions of the ship takeoff and landing. Oddly, the player's character has been inexplicably demoted back to 2nd Lieutenant. It might have been nice to maintain some continuity and progress onward, if at all, but it is only a small immersion breaker. Overall, this game falls a little short of the lofty standards set by the first entry.





Reflections: From the opening curtain and the crowd in the theater to the rolling of the credits, *Wing Commander: The Secret Missions* is essentially yelling what is subtly stated in the design of the original – you are playing a movie. Though it was designed as an expansion pack for the PC, this sci-fi flight-sim follow-up functions well enough as a standalone title for the Super Nintendo. Though the path is narrower, the relative amount of gameplay is comparable to one direct playthrough of *Wing Commander*. There's a sense of scale projected by the plot, and while the do-or-die nature of the linear tree is not as mechanically impressive, it effectively matches the pursuit narrative. – DG

Wings 2: Aces High
Blazing Skies (EU)

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Oct. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★

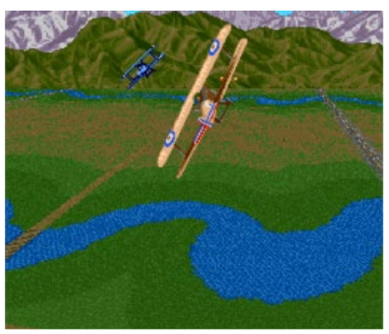






This World War I biplane fighter sim offers a series of tactical missions before a final encounter with the Red Baron. The experience consists of three main types of minigame: overhead bombing runs, behind-the-plane strafing missions, and all-out dogfights against enemy planes. The player can select from five different pilots, each with their own name, portrait, and backstory, and after each successful task, they have different attributes that can be leveled up, including flying, shooting, mechanics, and stamina. Failing to carry out objectives can lead to reprimands and dishonorable discharges, but airmen can also lose their lives – when there are no pilots left in the barracks, the game is over. The dogfights make up the bulk of play, offering tense maneuvering and machine gun shootouts. Bombing runs use a recon photo to show a specific target to destroy before the player hits the end of the trail; if the building or unit isn't blown up, then the stage is repeated. Strafing missions are the most difficult; they feature ground targets that must be destroyed, but the enemies come and go so fast, it is hard to complete them. This is a decent title, but it is let down by occasional unresponsive controls and an overall lack of content.





Reflections: In the PAL region, this is called *Blazing Skies*, while in Japan, it's *Sky Mission*. The game is fun, and although there isn't really enough content to maintain interest for long, what is here is a good mix of styles. Dodging enemy ground fire can get tricky in later bombing runs, and the dogfights in their Mode 7 glory are entertaining. However, you need pinpoint accuracy for the strafing sections, and the game controls can't deliver it – over-edging the plane just a tiny bit results in a mission failure. Simply flying the plane feels like an ongoing battle before you even get to try and blast something from the sky. I suppose this lends to the whole simulation aspect, but it detracts from the overall enjoyment – sometimes all you want to do is shoot stuff! If you want superior pilot wars with character to boot, stick to *Wing Commander*. – JE

Winter Gold

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Funcom Oslo A/S
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Snow sprays everywhere as you fly past waves of astonished spectators, the freezing wind whipping all around you. But you don't even feel the cold. Your mind is set upon just two things – a place in the record books and a shiny medal to go along with it! In this PAL-exclusive title, you have the chance to compete in six pulse-pounding winter sports. The competition is ferocious, and the judges are even meaner, so a top-tier finish won't be easy. Up to eight players can share a couch and pit their skills against each other in Compete mode, choosing a name, outfit colors, and nationality for their athletes. Circuit mode allows one or two players to fight it out against a group of rival athletes to be rated as the best in selected events. Competitions take place in three different locales, each famous for their winter sports pedigree: Albertville, France; Lillehammer, Norway; and Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. In Snowboarding, take to the half-pipe and show off your latest ground moves, air moves, and combos, being careful not to repeat tricks. Five different judges determine your score for distance and style in the Ski Jump event. Bobsledding challenges you with getting to the bottom of the winding course in the fastest time. Maneuver your way down a treacherous track of ice in the one-man Luge competition. Blast into the snowy air and perform your coolest tricks and combos in the Aerial Skiing event. In Downhill, strap on your skis and explode from the starting gate to reach the bottom of the hill as quickly as you can! That steaming cup of hot cocoa with extra marshmallows will have to wait a little bit longer. You need to earn it first by etching a place in the record books!





Reflections: *Winter Gold* was a later release for the SNES, featuring the final iteration of the renowned Super FX chip. The fancy coprocessor component helps enable this title's 3D polygonal graphics and effects. The style and dimension of the visuals make this game feel immersive, even if the controls for the various events are often dubious. *Winter Gold* feels very much like a Winter Olympics game without the official endorsement of the giant sports federations and committees. We still get the storied locations, the events, the medals, and the competitors hailing from countries around the world. Those five interlocking rings *are* indeed missing, but we still get it. Wink, wink. – DM

Winter Olympic Games: Lillehammer '94

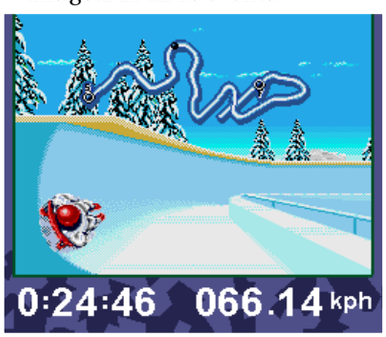
Winter Olympics: Lillehammer '94 (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tiertex
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1-4 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





With 10 events and 16 countries, this game presents the experience of the Winter Olympics without the tight, stretchy, polyurethane fabric. You can practice, participate in a "Mini" Olympics made up of your own selection of events, or do the full experience with all of them plus the brief opening and closing ceremonies. The sports list includes the biathlon, speed skating, skiing (downhill, slalom, etc.), and two on the ice track (luge and bobsleigh). The controls work differently in the various events. For example, when skiing, the D-pad changes your direction, while forward momentum in the biathlon and speed skating (called Short Track) requires you to alternatively tap Y and A or Y and X, respectively. If you place on the podium (i.e., in the top three), you get a cute cutscene with the Olympic mascots presenting your medal. It takes a bit of work to see one of these scenes, with many of the events' uncommon controls requiring the manual's guidance. The game allows for four athletes, whose performance it tracks. Two can play simultaneously but only if "Head to head" has been selected in the options and just in Short Track, where the person listed at the top uses controller one and the one at the bottom uses controller two. The game's graphics are nice, and if you can struggle with the controls long enough to win an event, standing on the podium is quite satisfying. Much patience to you should you decide to go for this goal in all 10 events.





Reflections: The Winter Olympics is only my second favorite of the multisport international competitions, but I enjoy it enough to be disappointed that this game fails at what seems to be a simple task of giving the player an easy way to control actions. Several times I thought I had the hang of maneuvering my skier only for him to run into trees or hit a flag. BAM! He fell down, and my run was over. Strangely, I found what I thought would be a more difficult event (biathlon) to be the easiest to figure out since it had clear visual indications that my button pressing was doing something, both with the moving bar for the skiing portion and the crosshairs while shooting. Having so many different sports, this game is ambitious in its content but doesn't impress in any part of it. – KY

The Wizard of Oz

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Manley & Associates
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★





As Dorothy, you must take Glinda's wand and the ruby slippers to Oz the Great and Powerful, but it feels off to see the wizard or to do most anything in this disappointing side-scroller that reimagines the classic film. Oh, what a world of visual and musical delight awaits, but you'll struggle to enjoy it thanks to awkward, sluggish controls and unforgiving platforming. To reach Emerald City, follow the yellow, red, blue, and purple brick roads through four corresponding multistage countries. Instead of lions, tigers, or bears therein, birds, flying monkeys, and the Wicked Witch of the West attack, but you needn't face enemies alone – defeating a boss in each of the first three realms unlocks an iconic companion. Once the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion join, switch to them to use their individualized health meters and skills, such as the Lion's climbing ability. All but the Tin Man can duck and jump, but he can attack and throw collected gems like the rest. Additionally, power-ups allow Dorothy to float or shoot temporarily, and all characters have unique 1-ups and health replenishers. Unfortunately, the journey requires other items – you must obtain six tickets per country to enter Emerald City, and tons of bricks are required to create paths between regions. Having too few of either instigates tedious backtracking, and some tickets are only available in minigames featuring frustrating designs and your little dog, too. Sadly, the many flaws keep the overall experience from making it over the rainbow.





Reflections: If I could talk to this title, I'd say, "I don't get you, my pretty." With its gigantic poppies, crystalline caverns, and lush topiaries, it truly is beautiful, but I don't understand why the controls are so strangely mapped. For example, Dorothy's basic strike is a kick achieved by pressing X, but the same button does nothing for the Scarecrow or Lion – they fight using A. Such discrepancies make it difficult to get comfortable exchanging heroes while exploring the Amethyst Mountains, Indigo Palace, and other colorful locales. It's also disconcerting to deal with tiresome door puzzles, blind leaps, and easy-to-fall-through platforms. If I only had a brain, I'd call the gameplay morally, ethically, spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably dead, but instead, I suggest you take heart, have a little courage, and try it! If you soon want to leave Oz, just think to yourself, "There's no place like home." – AP

Wizardry V: Heart of the Maelstrom

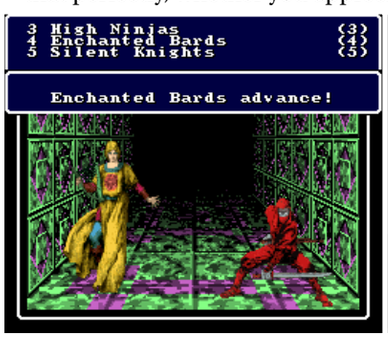
Genre: RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sir-Tech Software
Ported by: ASCII, GAME STUDIO
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Disasters plague Llylgamyn after its magical Orb is compromised by a vortex, the Heart of the Maelstrom. Can you close it before it consumes all? At Llylgamyn Castle, you organize a party of up to six members. The game is text-oriented, so your characters are unseen. You create and imagine them, choosing their race, class, and moral alignment. The four basic classes (fighter, mage, cleric, and thief) can be upgraded, but some classes require or prohibit certain alignments, and some alignments won't work together. The menus are abstruse; you make characters in the Training Grounds but organize your group in Gilgamesh's Tavern, and you load saves with "Restart an 'Out' Party." Adventurer's Inn allows leveling up and restoration, but the efficacy depends on the room's price; to revive dead characters and cure ailments, you visit the Temple of Cant. Dungeons are in first-person pseudo-3D. Frames move step-by-step, and you're always looking straight ahead. Wall textures are the same in most areas, so getting lost is guaranteed. Mapping with paper is necessary since although you could cast DUMAPIC to show a map, you may only cast a set number of spells per spell level. Cryptic without a manual, spells include DIOS (for healing), MILWA (to light dark areas), MADALTO (to attack with ice), etc. In random battles, static sprites of humanoids, insects, slimes, or other foes appear, and you select combat actions from the menu. Winning yields experience, gold, and sometimes chests. They're often trapped, and disarming them is complicated, but that's how the best equipment is obtained. To progress, you must find special items and people in the Maze, solve puzzles, and locate hidden doors. NPCs have sprites, but dialogue and flavor text tell the story. The options even let you make dungeons textureless as in previous Wizardry games, exemplifying the port's aim. It achieves that perfectly, whether you appreciate it or not.



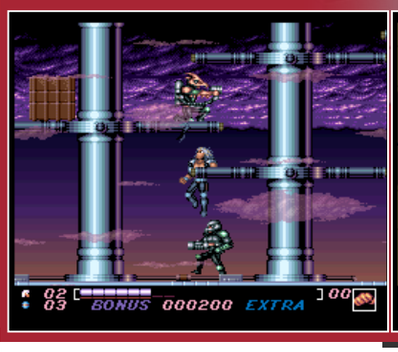


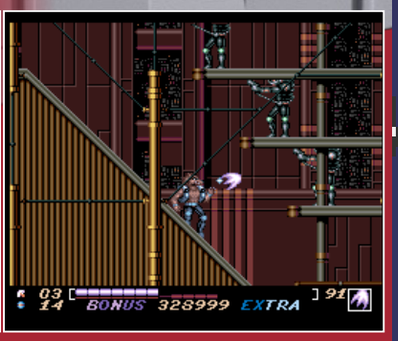
Reflections: Wizardry is a seminal series of RPGs, beginning in 1981. Its titles were ported to umpteen PCs and consoles, including Apple II, NES, DOS, and more. This SNES port is possibly one of the best versions of *V* (released for computers in 1988), and you'll probably like it if you enjoyed any of its predecessors. The eighth and last series installment was released in 2001, and Sir-Tech itself was gone by 2003. However, the influence of Wizardry lives on. Fun fact: Series co-creator Robert Woodhead also runs Japanese anime distributor AnimEigo, making him a pioneer of the gamer geek stereotype. – KN

Wolfchild

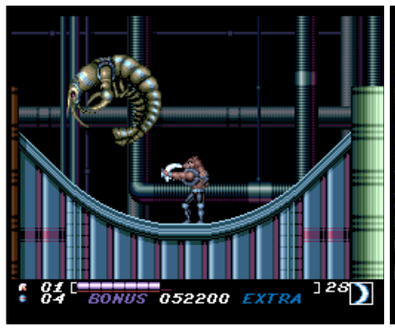
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA
Developer: Core Design
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







Saul must wolf down terrorist group CHIMERA's bioengineered baddies to save his kidnapped father, geneticist Kal Morrow. Though he's initially a man who can jump, duck, set smart bombs, and punch, his father's technology allows him to change into a lycanthrope (man-wolf) when he raises his vitality with lightning icons. In this form, he eschews punches for psychic energy attacks, beginning with a blue fireball with infinite rounds. He eventually obtains seven other weapons, such as the Arc Shot, Three Way, and Flamer. Most of these are less potent than his human punches, but they extend his range and let him attack at different angles. However, the fact that these all share the same limited ammo frequently renders the use of the weaker attacks pointless. When Saul's health meter drops low enough, he becomes human again; fortunately, he can find orbs to lengthen his overall life bar. With these abilities, he faces five side-scrolling levels: an airship, a jungle, a bug-filled temple, and two parts of CHIMERA's base. These are filled with human-animal hybrid enemies, spikes, rolling boulders, harmful pendulums, false floors, destructible blocks, alternate paths, hidden bonus locations, etc. Although there's much to see and a great soundtrack to hear, blind leaps with spikes below and areas where attackers spring out with little warning impede gameplay with a cheap, "gotcha" feel, and boss battles are too simple to be interesting. It's not a bad game, but it might be best to throw it to the wolves.





Reflections: A pack of other platforms (including the Amiga, Atari ST, and several Sega systems) have versions of this game, and I can't blame them since its premise seems cool – Saul's strong enough for a man but on a quest made for a wolf-man. But is he really? Try as I might, I can't claw out a good reason why he has to be a wolf to save his dad (or why he has to wear cybernetic swimmies to be a wolf, for that matter). Aside from howling when he mutates, he doesn't do anything especially lupine, like using fangs to fight. In fact, his attacks become *less* physical, and what does being a wolf have to do with psychic powers anyway? CHIMERA's head honcho, Karl Draxx, uses energy attacks whether he's in human or lycanthrope form, so Saul's fur suit seems superfluous. It's like he's just some creep in wolf's clothing. – AP

Wolfenstein 3D

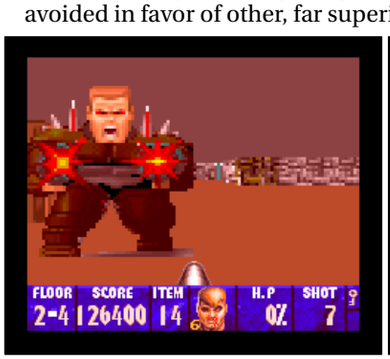
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: id Software
Ported by: Imagineer
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save, SNES Mouse (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
★★







Republic spy B.J. Blazkowicz must take down the Staatmeister by battling through waves of enemies in this port of the classic PC first-person shooter. Starting with a pistol (and downgrading to a knife if all ammo is gone), players traverse each floor and gun down soldiers, mutants, guards, and the odd rat along the way to finding an elevator to advance to the next stage. One or two keys must be obtained in most levels to unlock doors, and hidden rooms containing ammo, health packs, treasure, and more may be opened by pushing on random walls. Additional weapons may be found in the form of the machine gun and chain gun, but each of these upgrades prevents the previous firearm from being selected. The player's HUD displays the floor, health, keys, score, ammo, and items (collecting 50 results in an extra life). Improvements over the PC version include two additional, more powerful weapons, the flamethrower and rocket launcher, as well as a decent map that can be accessed via START. The game controls smoothly, with the ability to turn, strafe, run, and open doors, and the optional mouse control is nice. Sounds and music are all okay, but the game suffers visually, with inexplicably redrawn weapons in the HUD and poor textures for walls and enemies creating a veritable eyesore. The heavy censorship also makes for an underwhelming and nonsensical story, with any semblance of World War II, Germany, Hitler, and Nazis gutted from the experience. Even the German Shepherds are gone, and blood is almost nowhere to be found. Although it's fairly unique for the SNES, overall this should be avoided in favor of other, far superior versions.





Reflections: The revolutionary PC title lands with a dramatic thud on the SNES. By 1994, *Wolfenstein 3D* had been out for nearly two years and had already spawned other first-person shooters, including the even more popular follow-up from id Software, a little game called *Doom*. The fact that this title pales so much in comparison to not only the original PC version but also other console ports is a crying shame, since this important game deserved a much better representation. This port is so poorly thought of that an urban legend developed that an upset id Software gave their engine code to Wisdom Tree to develop *Super 3D Noah's Ark* in retaliation. This isn't true, but if it were, you could understand why. – PC

Wolverine: Adamantium Rage

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bits Corporation
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







An X-Man and mutant whose bones have been replaced with adamantium, an exceptionally hard metal, Wolverine has found himself in the midst of a mystery involving his past. On a solo mission, he faces his biggest foes in hand-to-claw combat. Each level has a counter at the bottom to show how many unique enemies Wolverine must defeat to move on to the next section. Occasionally, he also needs to carry out actions such as destroying an object or slashing a switch to advance. In the upper left is Wolverine's health percentage, which acts like his mutant power and regenerates over time. Don't take too long getting lost health back, though, because Elsie-Dee, a killer android in a girl's body, shows up to chase down Wolverine after an extended period in a level. Infinite continues are available either by starting back up from the main menu or using the most recent password given at a checkpoint. Make your way through the depths of the Hand base to receive your happy (or as close as Wolverine gets) ending. Despite a worthy premise and storyline fitting to the character, this title suffers from loose controls and movement. The jumps are floaty and fight against precise platforming. While the graphics are good looking and suit Wolverine's world, the music often clashes with the mood, sounding weirdly jazzy. This game would have had the foundation to excel in the saturated genre of action-platforming if it weren't for the controls. Nonetheless, it's still an enjoyable adventure through the personal struggles of an X-Man.





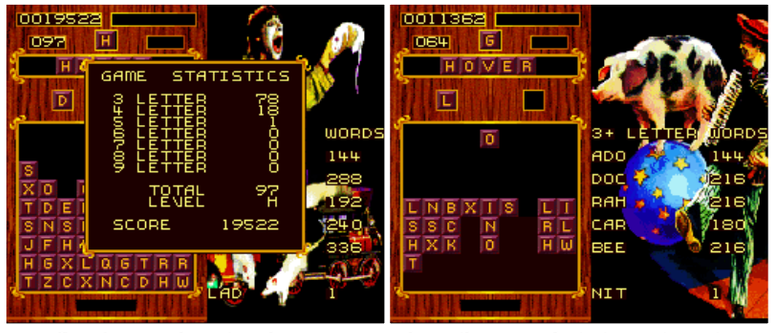
Reflections: Maybe I went into this with too many expectations or too strong a love for the universe, but *Wolverine* was a disappointment. My concerns arose the moment the seemingly inappropriate title music came on, so I should have been better prepared! For the gameplay itself, I was in a constant battle with the controls. Even after I began to feel comfortable with moves and attacks, I still performed them incorrectly more than I would've liked. I mean, of course I wanted him to dive towards the adjacent wall instead of claw up it! It was really neat to see an implementation of Wolverine's health regeneration, and I appreciated having that safety net of backing off for a minute to recharge. Now if only poor Logan could have a break, too. – KY

Wordtris

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Armenica
Ported by: Sphere
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Players: 1-4 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★



Join the New Word Order! The player must assemble words from falling letter tiles within a divided square tank. Initially, tiles float at the dividing line, but those set upon other tiles sink below the line until there is no room left to sink, at which point they begin piling up. Any letters aligning orthogonally to form a word disappear, earning points based on word length and letter rarity. Grainy recreations of various carnival staff lurk to the right, behind recently scored words and their values. Occasionally, bombs and dynamite descend, allowing the player to blow up one or four tiles, respectively. Mystery "?" tiles can be cycled to any letter or dropped as is to become a random letter. Scoring larger words awards the player an acid potion that can be used to clear a column of letters, while scoring the key Magic Word on the screen clears the board entirely. There are four difficulty settings and 10 levels (lettered A to J) to choose from, and the "next tile" preview can be turned on or off. Rounds can be set to one of four limited times or unlimited time. The player can also decide if words can be repeated or not. Cooperative play allows two people to work together placing letters for a shared score, while Competitive mode does the same with two separate scores to see which player scores higher. Tournament mode allows up to four participants to take turns competing for the highest score. A fun challenge, especially for fans of word puzzles.



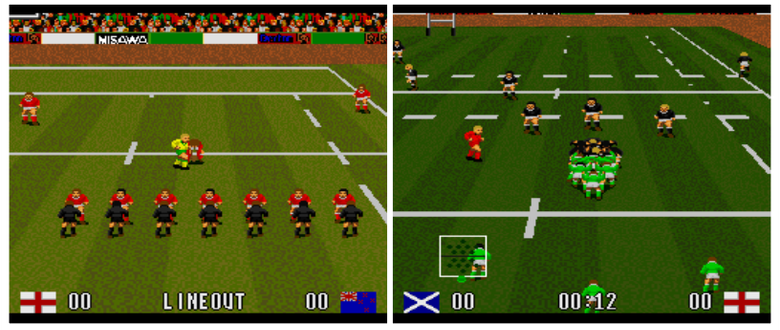
Reflections: The simplest way to describe *Wordtris* is to imagine someone lazily tossing baby letter blocks into a half-filled aquarium. It is novel and entertaining but not the deepest experience. The physics of the playfield, distributing downward before upward, are crucial to the game's mechanics; once the player is confined to the upper half of the board, things quickly spiral out of control, as the lack of column shifts reduces potential scoring. The freneticism introduced by the multiplayer action being on one shared playfield is a nice touch that is oft overlooked by developers. Sadly, the only difference between Competitive and Cooperative modes is the scores, which tally individually or collectively. With leaderboards for each mode, Tournament feels extraneous, serving only to prevent each player's individual rounds from appearing on the single-player leaderboard. Strategy hint – if the block speed becomes unreasonable and you need time to think where to place a piece... pause the game! – DG

World Class Rugby
Blanco World Class Rugby (FRA)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1993
Region: PAL
Developer: Denton Designs
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★



There's nothing quite like 30 men on a pitch passing around a rugby ball. This game offers you that experience with adorable cutscenes included! There are three modes of play with one or two players available: friendly match, league tournament with a number of teams of your choosing, and world cup tournament with each of the 16 international teams. You have the ability to change a wide number of options, from the length of a match to editing each team's roster, including names, abilities, and appearances. On the pitch, you're given a slanted top-down vertical view of the field. When you have possession of the ball, your player can pass it with Y/B/A or dive forward with X. This title follows union rules, so whenever the player with the ball is tackled, the teams scrum for possession. Before a set piece, such as a lineout, you are offered a selection of plays for your team to execute. If you win your test match, you'll move on to the next game in the tournament after receiving a password in the form of 12 clock faces set to different times. This title does well at offering a complete experience to satisfy your rugby-playing needs, from responsive controls to mounds of customization. Unfortunately, it suffers from a common issue with the field perspective – you have a deeper view "up" the field than "down" – and it is made more difficult by not indicating where off-screen teammates are. This does negatively impact gameplay, but hopefully it's not enough to stop you from trying your hand at getting the rugby ball over that goal line!



Reflections: I try not to judge a book by its cover, but *World Class Rugby* had me at the cute graphics of the title screen. You get to see this style of images in scenes during halftime, after the match is over, and even for each of the players' portraits. It's too bad this doesn't carry over to the gameplay, as each person looks disappointingly similar. Considering the low interest in the sport in the US, it's not surprising this game wasn't released in North America, although both Canada and USA are included teams. Even if you don't know rugby, this is a game worth trying, and you may even enjoy learning about the other-other football game that isn't American football. – KY

World Cup USA '94

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tiertex
Publisher: U.S. Gold
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★



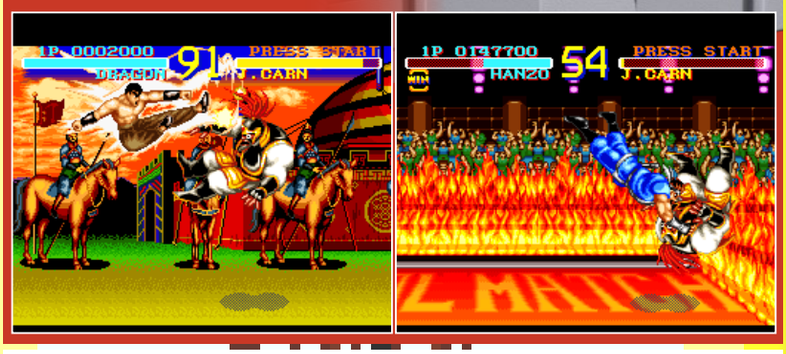
In this top-down soccer game, fight your way to win the 1994 World Cup! Being a truly international game for a truly international event, you can select from eight languages, although the menus are all cryptic pictographs anyway. There are three different game modes: the World Cup with 24 teams as it was originally organized, a customized World Cup (swapping the teams around, additionally substituting some with eight other teams), and a single exhibition match. There is also an extensive practice mode where you can play around with or without another team to perfect the many moves, such as kicking the ball backward. In-game, your players zip to and fro, ultimately aiming to sink the ball into the goal. While the sprites are small and lack details, the players are identified with numbers above them, which are tinted if they have a yellow card. What stands out is the range of customization you have. It's not only moving the teams between the groups for the tournament, but also it's being able to alter the colors of a team's uniform, what team to control in a given match, or even how individual players act in formations! There is also the ability to change who controls each side in all head-to-heads, allowing a second controller to jump in at a whim without committing to an entire tournament. Despite tiny player sprites and confusing menus, this game offers a great ball-kicking experience for soccer fans everywhere!



Reflections: This title grabbed me from the moment I laid eyes on the adorable canine mascot from the '94 World Cup, Striker. Why, yes, I will come on this magical soccer ride! I enjoyed zooming my players around the field as they kicked, lobbed, and passed the ball. Even if you don't have the time to play through the entire World Cup, you can set each half to three minutes and just play through a quick match. You can also set the time to the realistic 45 minutes (yeesh!), but that's assuming you can find your way into the options menu since the icons aren't explicit. I still can't remember if the arrow is to play a match or to skip straight to the final score. Well, only one way to find out… – KY

World Heroes

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: ADK
Ported by: Sunsoft
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★



Pulled from various points in human history, eight fighters have been gathered by a scientist with access to time travel in the hopes of discovering the strongest one; he or she must then defend Earth from an alien invader named Geegus. In this traditional fighting game, one or two players select from combatants such as ninja Hanzo, fencer Janne, or magician Rasputin and battle it out in best-of-three brawls. Besides punches, kicks, and throws, each fighter has a handful of special moves, ranging from fiery projectiles to flying fists. Choosing Start begins the normal single-player story mode, though a second player can interrupt and play a match by pressing START. VS Mode pits two players against each other, providing additional settings for handicaps and a stage select. VS Mode also tracks results over time for each participant. In both game types, a Mode Select prompts the player to choose either Normal or Fatal Match, the latter of which trades regular stages for a battle ring with environmental hazards and features not found in the former. Option Mode offers eight CPU difficulty levels, variable round time, and most interestingly, two remappable control types, one mirroring the arcade's three-button layout with press-sensitive punches and kicks and the other using a five-button layout that conveniently separates light and heavy attacks. While the visual presentation ports over respectably and the added buttons of the SNES controller afford a better experience in correctly inputting light or heavy attacks, a somewhat sluggish frame rate and mediocre input detection on special moves hold this game back from standing out, be it in the past or present.



Reflections: The premise for *World Heroes* is sound, if not playfully absurd: Assemble the best fighters from across history and have them duke it out with an alien invader. As this is a fighting game, they have to beat each other first instead of teaming up, but the setup allows for characters based on Bruce Lee, Jeanne d'Arc, Hattori Hanzo, Genghis Khan, Hulk Hogan, Fūma Kotarō, and Rasputin. Adding in the level hazards of Fatal Match and the occasional Hair Match, where the loser's post-fight portrait is bald, makes for additional wrinkles that help set this title apart somewhat. Sadly, this is where the creativity ends, as the remainder of the game is a highly derivative *Street Fighter II* clone that lacks the tight gameplay of its template. – DG

World Heroes 2

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: ADK
Ported by: Saurus
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★

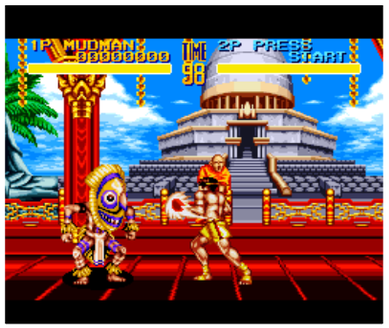






When no absolute winner emerges from the first battle across time, a second challenge must be held to award the title of world's greatest warrior. Six newcomers are added to the previous eight to form this sequel's impressive roster of 14, including viking Erik, pirate Captain Kidd, and kickboxer Shura. The player sprites are condensed from the arcade, but the stylish sprite art for the anachronistic combatants is on point. There are also welcome mechanical updates and aesthetic improvements, including mirror matches, multiple character palettes, expanded move lists, and the abilities to counter throws and reflect projectiles. This results in a more robust, more technical, and more responsive feel to the otherwise traditional best-of-three fighter. 1P Game Mode challenges the player to defeat foes old and new, while VS Battle Mode pits two players against each other. Both modes come in Normal Game or Survival Match flavors; the former offers typical fighting, while the latter puts players into one of eight perilous stages decorated with mines, spikes, and other hazards. Besides eight CPU difficulties, Options include three speed settings, a mask to hide or show player health, and a life gauge setting that changes the traditional health bars to a Seesaw meter system, where the fighters share one bar that shifts, tug-of-war style, based on damage dealt until one player is knocked out. Two button configurations (Arcade and SNES modes, with the latter assigning heavy and light attacks to different buttons) with per-player remapping are also available. In all, this is a solid competitor in the SNES's library of fighting games.





Reflections: Most of the troubles found in *World Heroes* for the Super Nintendo are remedied in this sequel. The controls, while still imperfect, feel more responsive than in the previous iteration. Moreover, the port seems less lethargic, even before kicking up the speed in the Options menu. While a bit of the arcade's dynamism in the backgrounds was lost, some yet remains, including the thundering arrival of the panzer in the middle of Brocken's stage and the devastation rained upon the Neo Geegus coliseum by Dio. The destruction bonus games were also left on the cutting room floor but are not missed. Not to be overlooked, the fighters added in *World Heroes 2* are again a mix of past and present, with characters based on Japanese manga, Erik the Red, Captain Kidd, Nai Khanomtom, and a version of Joe Montana that probably needs to be tested for performance-enhancing substances. – DG

World League Soccer

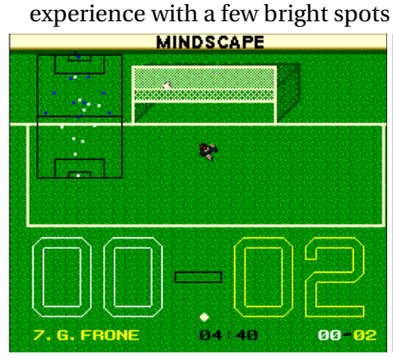
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Anco
Ported by: C-Lab.
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-8 (1-2 simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







24 international teams face off in the World Match, the ultimate soccer tournament. You can manage a 15-person roster throughout that grand tourney or during other smaller events, such as single games. The look and feel of the field changes with each match, as there are different kinds of pitch. In-game, a numbered arrow indicates your current player, automatically updating who that is while you're chasing the ball. When you have possession, you can pass or kick, and on defense, you can also slide-kick, although that risks incurring a foul. If the match ends in a tie, a shoot-out lets each side take turns at penalty shots, using a moving arrow to time the kicks. The game allows two people to play simultaneously, and the League mode encourages up to eight players to pass the controllers amongst themselves to fight for the number one spot. If solo games are your style, you have the ability to change which teams are computer/player-controlled at any point in a tourney, which is a great way to stay included in the event even if you lose a match. Controls are fairly fluid, with a couple of kicks in your arsenal, although the computer seems to have a distinct advantage when stutter-stepping under the landing spot of a lobbed ball from a goal kick. The player sprites are small and appear drowned in the top-down view of the fields of green. On the other hand, the music is fantastic, from the title screen to the menus and especially during matches! It's a mediocre soccer experience with a few bright spots that may make it worth trying.





Reflections: This is a port of *Kick Off 2*, a 1990 Amiga game that hadn't been released in North America. I'm disappointed with the lack of visual diversity in the game, not just in the green-washed background of the pitch, but also in the uniforms, which are barely spots of color on the field. While I enjoyed having the option to jump into a World Match game on a whim, a more traditional runthrough with a single team results in dozens of menus as you are slowly taken through the final score screens of every other match. I do appreciate the minimap during matches as well as the rocking music, which is easily the most memorable part of the game for me. It's not bad, but there are better early-release soccer games on the SNES. – KY

World Masters Golf

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: PAL
Developer: Arc Developments
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1-8
Special Features: Edit Mode, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★





Four courses await in this fun golfing title – Marston Beach, Aldan Forest, Cranfield Lakes, and Victoria Plains – and each offers its own holes, bunkers, and water traps. In addition to practice, there are two gameplay modes: the standard one-on-one match where the victor is the player who has the lowest score after 18 holes, and a challenge mode where the player is given a set par number to be under before the end of the game. A golfer character can be made from scratch with his or her own set of chosen clubs, or several ready-made players are selectable. Clubs can be cycled through with a touch of the shoulder buttons, depending on which is required for a particular grass type or wind speed, and the ball is struck by pressing a button to pick points on a power bar. Presentation-wise, the game is a mixed bag. The courses look vibrant, and the sounds are sparse but pleasant, but the golfers are poorly digitized in the typical third-person view for swinging (the perspective changes to above the golfer for putting). When the ball is struck, a neat overhead camera shows where the ball has gone up the fairway, but sometimes, an ugly Mode 7 3D camera appears instead. Practice is required because the AI provides a tough challenge, but this is still a very playable and relaxing round of golf.





Reflections: A very charming title that is marred by silly presentation choices. Why Mode 7 has to be rammed into every SNES game type imaginable is beyond me, as the replay camera is one of the worst uses of it I have seen on the console. The ambient sound during the game is a nice touch and makes everything serene – until you get to the end of an 18-hole course only to see that the computer opponent has nailed every hole on the scoreboard. If the AI were fairer, then the experience would be more fun, but it is up to you to practice enough to beat the par score and win. The game is casually accessible for all with its simple controls, but it will take time to master its mechanics, such as wind and ball slice. At least you're not bogged down with stats and choices; if you don't want them, you can just hit the ball towards the hole. – JE

World Soccer '94: Road to Glory

Eric Cantona Football Challenge (FRA)

Striker (EU)

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rage Software
Publisher: Atlus (PAL: Elite)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Edit Mode
Availability: Rare
★★★★





With options galore, this soccer game has you controlling a team of sprites out on the green (or brown, if playing indoors). There are many modes to try, such as a single friendly game and a knockout tournament. You can also select the match length, rules that apply to tied games, if the goalie is auto-controlled, and more. Then, pick your team from a list of 64 countries, or edit an existing team's name and appearance to your liking. Depending on the game format, you are also able to choose your opponents and whether they are controlled by a player or computer. A face-off between two player-controlled teams means, of course, that you'll need a second person. Before the game, you can adjust your roster to get the best men on the field. You can also set the starting formation, which is easily changed during the match by pressing X + L/R. There are three passing distances you perform, from shortest to longest, with Y, A, and B. B is also used for a sliding tackle while defending. The player sprites are rather small, but it works considering their speediness around the field. The game has a vertically angled perspective, resulting in a disadvantaged view when your team is kicking toward the bottom of the screen. Whether you only have time for a quick, one-minute match or want to win the Super Cup (and unlock two secret opponents), this game has a soccer experience to fit your needs.



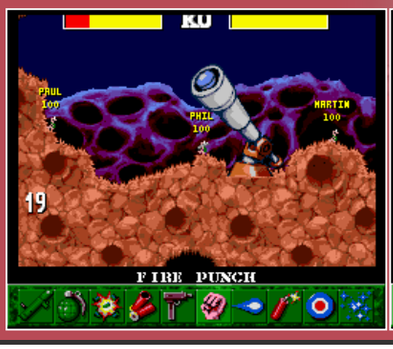


Reflections: Before I jumped into a match, I found myself spending a bit of time within the various menus, checking out all the ways to customize my game. As boring as this sounds, the developers actually made that experience pleasant! There are a variety of neat monochrome backgrounds depicting soccer action scenes in the menus as well as a great track to get you pumped for the competition ahead. While there's no music on the field, there's the static of the crowd; the rising and falling of the cheering auditorily puts you in the environment. If you're finding the action more than you can handle, press START to take a break. No, it doesn't pause the game; instead, it plays a video of the last few moments on the field. When you're done reveling in the past, get back to it because there are nets hungry for some synthetic leather balls! – KY

Worms

Genre: Strategy, Action
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: PAL
Developer: Team17 Software
Ported by: East Point Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-4
Special Features: Edit Mode
Availability: Uncommon
★★★







INCOMING! Militant, weaponized worms seek to level the terrain – and each other – in this turn-based artillery game. Up to four human or computerized players field four-worm teams and do battle on randomly-generated side-perspective stages ranging from prickly deserts to frozen ice floes. Players take turns moving a single worm from their team, selecting a weapon or tool from their arsenal, and directing it to do maximum damage to foes, propel them off-screen, destroy terrain around them, or drop them into watery depths. Weapons range from the practical bazooka and grenades to sufficiently generic dragon punches and deployable sheep. The last team with at least one living worm wins the round. League mode allows up to four teams to be selected for tracked rounds, while Friendly pits them in a one-time battle for supremacy. There are eight teams, each with its own theme and members, though the player is free to rename teams and worms to their liking. Teams can also be toggled for human or CPU control and can be set at one of three starting health levels to provide a handicap or challenge. Timers, rounds, and worm placement can be adjusted in the options menu. The available weapons and tools can also be customized, with configurable ammo and availability. Certain weapons are only available as randomly dropped supply crates that fall as the battle progresses. Mouse support is only missed a little, as the controls are solid enough as is. The sound design is poor to nonexistent, but the core visual stylings and gameplay are close enough to the PC source material that it modestly captures the quintessential basics of worm warfare.





Reflections: Team17 had success as Amiga developers, creating hits that made them a household name in the United Kingdom. The overwhelming prosperity of *Worms*, their thirteenth effort, came just as their preferred platform was starting to fade out. Fortunately, the franchise it spawned carried Team17 for decades before their modern restructuring. The exciting tune in the main menu is the only music to be found, the explosions are watered down, and the sound effects are a far cry from the boisterous falsetto taunts and exclamations that give the worms themselves so much personality. Though there are better editions elsewhere, the friendly confines of the console still make this edition of *Worms* a solid choice for a party game. – DG

WWF RAW

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Availability: Common
★★★★







The final title in the LJN WWF trilogy brings back most of the match types from the two previous games: One-on-One, Tag Team, four-on-four Survivor Series elimination, and the Royal Rumble elimination match. Bedlam, a "tornado" tag match with four wrestlers fighting at once, has been added along with Raw Endurance Match, where a team of up to six fights another team, one-at-a-time elimination style. One-on-One, Tag Team, and Bedlam matches can be chosen for one-fall exhibition, Brawl (no rules or ref), or Tournament mode. Built upon the engine of the previous title, this game adds more basic wrestling moves into the standard mix, such as fallaway slams, DDTs, extra suplexes, back body drops, and even the ability to repeatedly punch a poor soul stuck in a turnbuckle corner. The "tug of war" lockup scheme remains the same, although it seems a momentum system is now in place, as one wrestler can gain a decided advantage for several grapples in a row. The 12 eclectic wrestlers have semi-unique movesets, and signature finishing moves return, such as Diesel's Jackknife powerbomb and Bret and Owen Hart's Sharpshooter submission. Four different attributes for each grappler (speed, strength, stamina, and weight) increase their individuality. However, poorly documented MegaMoves are questionable, as the button combos and required situations make them iffy to perform, and their over-the-top nature does not fit the game's tone. Other improvements, such as enhanced crowd visuals, better weapon attacks, and the ability for up to four friends to battle, round out a fun experience in the squared circle.





Reflections: This series ends on a much higher mark than where it started with *WWF Super WrestleMania*. Even if it comes across as merely a minor upgrade to *WWF Royal Rumble*, there's just enough that's fresh here to recommend it on its own. Of special note is that the twisted Luna Vachon is on the roster, a surprising choice since she was the first female wrestler to appear on a console game in North America. The weird MegaMoves are likely a response to the secret move/code wave that was happening thanks largely to Midway's Mortal Kombat games and *NBA Jam*. Coincidentally (or not), the SNES ports of those arcade titles were published by Acclaim Entertainment, parent company to LJN. Acclaim made the most of this license, with *WWF RAW* also appearing on the Sega Genesis, 32X, Game Gear, and Game Boy. – PC

WWF Royal Rumble

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★



This significant update to *WWF Super WrestleMania* adds new modes, new moves, and more features for an enjoyable rasslin' experience. One-on-One, Tag Team, and Triple Tag Team modes comprise single matches for one or two players (co-op or versus in Tag Team) that are won by either a Single Fall (refereed three-count pin) or in a Brawl (unrefereed depletion of an opponent's health, with illegal moves permitted). The first two modes also offer a Tournament to beat all other wrestlers. Gameplay in the ring is fairly smooth, with each character sharing the same moves, such as body slams, suplexes, punches, kicks, etc. However, the moveset has been expanded with more ground attacks and two new grapple moves (atomic drop and backbreaker). The back-and-forth lockup mechanic has returned, but an on-screen meter indicates who is winning the button-mash battle. Other gameplay improvements include a better experience outside the ring (a usable steel chair!), the ability for tag partners to grab and hold opponents, and the potential for eye gouging and choking (in Brawl or if the referee gets knocked down). Bret Hart, Yokozuna, and the other 10 wrestlers look nice dropping elbows in the ring, and thankfully, each has his signature finishing move to unleash when opponents are worn down, such as Ric Flair's Figure-Four Leglock or Undertaker's Tombstone piledriver. The highlight of this title is the namesake Royal Rumble, where one wrestler must survive being tossed from the ring while going through all 11 others. It's a blast, especially when the maximum of six wrestlers are battling in the ring together.



Reflections: Not having signature moves or championship modes is unforgivable for wrestling games, so it's nice to see them in place here. I will say, though, that I miss the wrestlers' heights being different (they vary in the previous game), but maybe that had to be sacrificed to add in more moves? Continuing the tradition of these WWF game releases, there are different rosters for the SNES and Genesis versions. Most conspicuous by his absence here is the iconic Hulk Hogan, who had appeared in every WWF console, handheld, and arcade game up to this point. He is likewise missing from the 20-man roster in the Sega CD version, *WWF Rage in the Cage* (Dec. 1993). Hogan would show up in the Genesis version released later in the year, which is even stranger because he was leaving WWF by that point and hadn't appeared on television since the summer. – PC

WWF Super WrestleMania

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Mar. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: LJN
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Common
★★



The first SNES pro wrestling game lands with a WWF license and an underwhelming THUD on the mat. Featuring 10 WWF superstars, such as Hulk Hogan, Jake "The Snake" Roberts, and Randy "Macho Man" Savage, this title offers one-on-one, tag team, and four-on-four Survivor Series elimination matches for one or two players. The action in the ring is a little rough, as wrestlers' movements are choppy, and although each character is easily identifiable, they all act the same and have the same limited moveset. A punch, kick, dropkick, clothesline, foot stomp, hip toss, elbow drop, and turnbuckle elbow are all standard. Only three grapple moves are available: a headbutt, a body slam, and a vertical suplex. These can be initiated via copious button mashing in a "tug of war" for control, which quickly gets tiresome. At times, it can be difficult to win a lockup battle with an opponent, even on the medium difficulty. The absence of specific signature wrestling moves makes matches relatively boring, and the fact that there are only single matches available, with no tournament or even arcade modes, renders the experience somewhat shallow. The lack of in-ring music and the limited sound effects don't add much atmosphere, although the ring looks decent, and it's nice to see a ref and background commentators Vince McMahon and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan. A subpar effort for what could have been a more enjoyable title.



Reflections: This was an important release for the Super NES, so much so that it was the featured title on the cover of *Nintendo Power* Vol. 35, with Hulk Hogan performing a leg drop on his nemesis, Earthquake. Unfortunately, it was a disappointing release, especially to a certain young WWF fan who ended up with a lackluster weekend rental. The omission of unique wrestling moves for each character is perplexing, especially given the overall paucity of moves that can be performed and the fact that almost every wrestling game that came before on a console had some form of individualized moves. Interestingly, the Sega Genesis version of *WWF Super WrestleMania* does feature a signature move for each wrestler, as well as a WWF Championship mode that is sorely missing from this release. It also has a smaller roster (only eight), but it's almost entirely different from the SNES one, with only three wrestlers that overlap. It's strange that there was such a roster change when both versions were released in the same year. – PC

WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game

Genre: Fighting, Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway
Ported by: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★★





Six WWF wrestlers wreak havoc in the ring in this arcade game adaptation featuring digitized motion-capture graphics. In single-player mode, you can fight in one-on-one and two-on-one matches for the Intercontinental Title or two-on-one and three-on-one matches for the World Wrestling Federation Title; a two-player mode allows for co-op or versus play. Matches are normally two-out-of-three rounds of depleting the energy of opponent(s) and then jumping on them for an academic pinfall. More reflective of fighting games than pure wrestling, the standard strikes consist of normal and "Super" punches and kicks, running attacks, and special moves unique to each wrestler, although you can still perform turnbuckle attacks and whip opponents into the ropes. Defensively, blocking and pushing are available. Grapple attacks can be initiated for small combos and wrestling maneuvers, such as exaggerated powerbombs and suplexes. Zany antics and frenzied action are at the forefront, with the Undertaker throwing demons, Doink the Clown using a joy buzzer, Lex Luger bashing opponents with a medieval mace, etc. Once the COMBO! meter is full, attacks become devastating, and over-the-top strikes and wrestling moves can be chained, with 20 to 30-hit combos easily attainable once discovered. A fun atmosphere permeates the wild experience, accentuated by commentary from Vince McMahon and Jerry "The King" Lawler. Technical limitations hamper play, however, with slowdown common when three wrestlers are in the ring, and three-on-one battles are in name only since the third opponent waits to come in after a teammate is defeated. Two wrestlers from the arcade are also missing, which is a letdown. Even so, this wacky wrestling ring is worth spending some time in.





Reflections: After a string of mediocre and bad WWF games on consoles (*WWF WrestleMania* and the other three NES WWF games are *not* good), this port of the arcade title must have been a happy surprise to wrestling fans, despite being a somewhat diminished experience. This was the third WWF arcade game, but the decent *WWF SuperStars* (1989) and excellent *WWF WrestleFest* (1991) never appeared on consoles. I owned the MS-DOS port of *The Arcade Game*, and I had a lot of fun with it, as the PC's power allowed for a more faithful arcade translation than the console. My favorite wrestler to use was Razor Ramon, who had a razor hand-slash attack and great grappling combos, including a super piledriver that capped one off. – PC

X-Kaliber 2097

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Fupac, Winds
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





In the year 2097, Neo New York finds itself under the control of mob boss Raptor. Standing in his way of total power is Special Forces Agent Slash and his trusty sword, X-Kaliber. Slash will have to fight his way through six areas of the city, killing goons and robotic defenses before going toe-to-toe with the boss of that area. The sword mechanics work well; Slash has five different attacks, including jump combinations, as well as a block. The attacks each have varying strengths, and the more powerful an attack, the longer the recovery time. Movement and fighting are smooth, and the dark backgrounds and music by electronica group Psykosonik present a good sense of the cyberpunk setting. Unfortunately, the difficulty curve spikes drastically halfway through the game, with enemies whose hits seem unavoidable and bosses with strongly defensive AI. There is an interesting twist in the storyline toward the end, making it worth taking Slash through his adventure. For a complete experience, there is also a duel feature where two players can battle it out as either Slash or one of the six main bosses. After running through the whole game with nothing but a sword, it is entertaining to have other weapons available. But at the heart of it, Slash and X-Kaliber always await the next brave soul to carry out their challenging but quality futuristic story.





Reflections: Psykosonik did a great job of creating tracks that come together like an album, working with each other to set the game's mood. As for the gameplay, the first two levels are a breeze, so it's unsettling when you're suddenly taking constant damage from jetpack bombers that require lightning reflexes to jump-slash and kill. Certainly, you can block, but attacks still push you back, sometimes off a platform. The pinnacle of unavoidable damage comes from the bosses themselves! They quickly become defensive, crouching in a corner and waiting for you to approach so they can attack and retreat before you can return the favor. I'm not ashamed to admit I sometimes spammed the long-range super attack (L/R) until they died. However, the final boss, who turns out (Spoilers!) to be an alien, is comparatively simple to take down. I love a surprising turn of events in a story, so despite my troubles with the difficulty, in the end, I found the experience satisfying. – KY

X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★

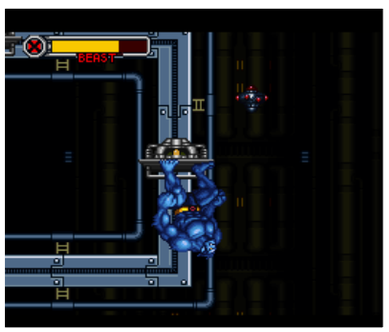






The island of Genosha is enslaving mutants, so Dr. Xavier sends five of his X-Men to investigate. In this beat 'em up, you guide Beast, Cyclops, Gambit, Psylocke, and Wolverine in turn through different stages, including a Sentinel factory and a train transport. Each hero has a variety of moves, some matching their mutant powers, such as Wolverine's ability to climb walls with his adamantium claws. Most stages involve platforming through hordes of enemies that sometimes must be defeated before advancing. At the end of every level is a boss, and you must beat it before your health meter in the upper left runs out due to damage; otherwise, you lose a life and return to the menu. Along the way, there are canister pickups for health as well as X-plates that grant an extra life if all three in a level are collected. Each mutant has their own life counter, which is helpful in the later stages when you freely choose which character to control, providing you more chances to overcome these difficult levels. To balance their brutality and lack of checkpoints, the stages are fairly short, the controls are tight, and the combos are easy to learn, with the most complex ones involving a quarter-circle on the D-pad. The graphics and sound are also well done, putting you into diverse environments befitting the storyline. A game that uses its license adeptly, this should be something that both X-Men and beat 'em up fans will enjoy.





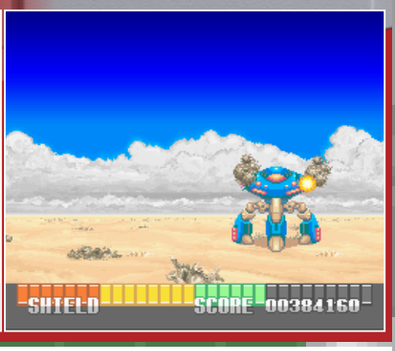
Reflections: I'm not going to complain about my favorite X-Men being absent; it's not an appropriate thing to storm about here. Let this instead be a jubilee for a fantastic game that had me enjoying my time, even though I occasionally struggle with this genre. I loved how the first stages cater to the particular skills of the mutant you are forced to play, such as Beast, who walks on ceilings. This teaches you to approach later stages in different ways, whether you want to get into enemies' faces or be a rogue and fire from afar. The main aspect that irked me was the difficulty, but it's no colossus of a game, so ample use of the password system helps. After learning the ropes through the Training Mode, you'll be all set to make your way through this challenging and satisfying beat 'em up. It'll have you purring like a kitty… pryde. – KY

X-Zone

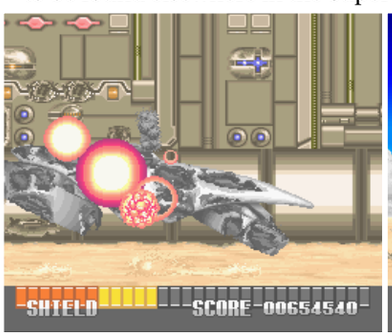
Genre: First-Person Rail Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: Super Scope (required)
Availability: Uncommon
★★

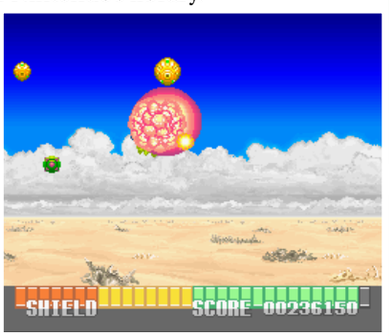






The world is in crisis. X-TRA, the bio-computer responsible for identifying external threats, has gone haywire, and the resulting escalation of forces is set to "X-tinguish" all life! This traditional first-person rail shooter takes the player through four zones of increasing dangers. The first level offers a unique falling-from-the-sky perspective using Mode 7, and each builds from there, going from descending upon the area to traversing the desert nearby, approaching the fortress, and finally infiltrating. Enemies ranging from various floating pods to walkers and tanks can be eliminated with Plasma Energy Launcher shots. They fire at the player with machine guns and missiles; the former only stop when the enemy is killed, while the latter can be warded off with defensive shots. In addition, players should watch for shield-refreshing "P" icons that may drop from some foes. The player can also hold the CURSOR button to produce an on-screen reticle for locking on enemies. Overseer encounters await at level endpoints to provide some unique mechanics that are otherwise missing from the levels themselves. Higher difficulties escalate a challenging title to maddening, particularly with the player only having three continues. The visuals and sound are standard fare, but the short length of the game seems to be counteracted solely by its difficulty, only adding to the repetitiveness of the experience. Serious light gun fans may find something in the frenetic, defense-oriented gameplay, but for most, there are more enjoyable shooters to be found elsewhere in the Super Nintendo's library.



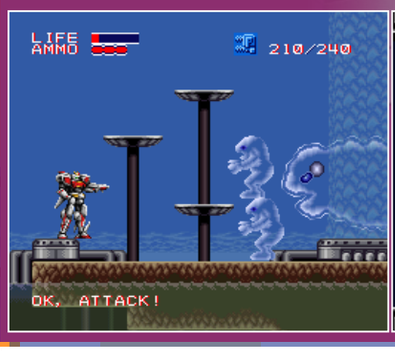


Reflections: *X-Zone* is a cruel title; do not X-pect to beat it right away, even on its easy difficulty. Most of the time, shots are spent simply deflecting the X-cessive onslaught of missiles that come from various forces. Trying to simultaneously spray the screen clear of oncoming fire while also locking on and knocking out targets is X-hausting. What limited joy might be X-trapolated from the chore is further eroded by the repetitive nature of the X-perience; short of the boss encounters, the only thing levels seem to change is the sheer X-cess of incoming fire. Instead of X-ploring the interplay of offense and defense, *X-Zone* opts for chaos. Piling up the challenge may help a game with so little content feel more X-pansive, but it robs this title of much of its depth. Overall, it's an X-aspirating entry in the Super Scope's limited lineup. – DG

Xardion

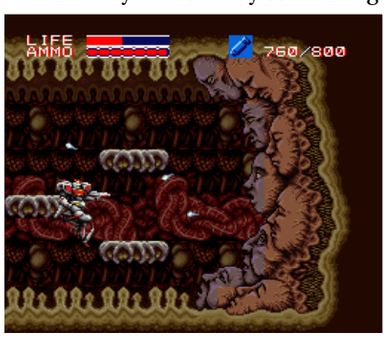
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Jorudan
Publisher: Asmik
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
★★★

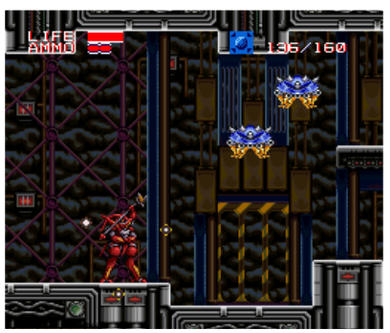






Amidst an interplanetary war, three battling factions put aside their differences and unite to face a much larger intergalactic threat. Robotic eliminators Triton, Alcedes, and Panthera are deployed to neutralize the invaders, annihilate their power source, and search for legendary destroyer Xardion. Piloting all three of these colossal warriors, it's up to you to save the citizens of star system Alpha 1! While you initially find yourself at the helm of Triton upon entering the first side-scrolling base, you're able to switch between all three robotic soldiers at any point throughout your journey. Each mech has slightly different abilities that are suited to slightly different situations. Triton has hard-hitting special attacks and is the only robot capable of firing overhead, Alcedes is able to freeze and destroy all enemies on the screen, and Panthera can launch an assault against adversaries close to the ground. The switching mechanic can be incredibly convenient at times, especially if you find yourself with little to no health and facing a boss. All three allies possess their own individual life and special attack bars, so switching at an opportune moment can help to ensure success. However unusual for an action-platformer, it's also possible to raise the level of each mech. Defeating enemy combatants rewards you with experience points that work towards increasing your life and special attack bars, but what they fail to improve is the most frustrating part of the entire experience: The painfully slow movement of Triton, Alcedes, Panthera, and even Xardion – once you unlock him – detracts from what could've been a brilliant adventure. It's a shame that a title with so much promise is ultimately let down by something so trivial.





Reflections: If video games have taught me anything, it's that giant robots are incredibly cool. There's nothing quite like towering above the world in a monstrous mech while your enemies cower below. Frustratingly, however, *Xardion* doesn't quite achieve this sense of scale. The environments that you explore and even the enemies you face are all proportionate to the size of your robotic companions. It's not until stage five – where you find yourself overshadowing tiny soldiers – that you finally get a feeling for how huge these mechanical titans truly are. Unfortunately, this also causes everything else to seem comically large, with fish as big as buses and monsters the size of trees... I don't want to live on this planet anymore. – AF

Yoshi's Cookie

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: June 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Bullet-Proof Software
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★

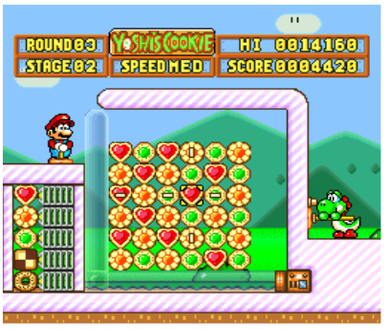






Eating isn't the way to make cookies disappear in this game's three modes – matching them up is! In 100 Action stages, you're given a batch of cookies in rows and columns in a playfield. Selecting one with a cursor allows you to shift the entire line it's in horizontally or vertically, with the cookies wrapping around as they go. Rearrange a row or column into a single type (Check, Circle, Diamond, Flower, or Heart) to send it away, and receive a wild card Yoshi cookie by removing fives lines of the same flavor. You must clear all cookies quickly, as more appear from the top and right – if they reach the edges, you lose. For a more contemplative experience, try the Alexey Pajitnov-designed Puzzle stages, where you've a finite number of moves to empty the screen of a set cookie array. Sandwiched between these modes is the VS challenge, where you and an opponent (real or AI) play as Mario, Yoshi, Peach, or Bowser and race to eliminate 25 lines. You get Yoshi cookies for removing regular ones, and clearing Yoshi cookies causes whatever effect is currently shown under your character, ranging from raising your score to hijacking your opponent's controls. You can't wait for a desired result to be displayed, however, as a round-ending fuse burns down if you clear nothing. This game is cute and colorful but ultimately tedious and even boring. It's like its namesake: sweet in small amounts, but likely to cause upset if consumed too heavily.





Reflections: The cookies in this game are singularly unappetizing. If you had told me that they were Yoshi rhinestones or Yoshi chew toys, I probably would've believed you. Nobody aside from Yoshi eats them, and even that's a rare occurrence. As I played the Action game, however, I was jarred by a shocking cookie revelation that crumbled everything I knew about the confection. After every 10 stages, a cutscene plays in which a large cookie falls off a mushroom house and rolls away, with Mario in hot pursuit. Most are mildly comical and forgettable vignettes, but in one, the cookie careens off a cliff and *dies*, complete with an angelic image of itself rising to the sky. Cookies are a heavenly treat, to be sure, but does this mean they have souls in Mario World? I don't know, but I don't think I'll ever look at snickerdoodles the same way again. – AP

Yoshi's Safari

Genre: Shooting Gallery
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: TOSE
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features:
Super Scope (required)
Availability: Common
★★★





Mario and Yoshi team up for the only Super Scope title to feature Nintendo's flagship property. Rather than the victim this go-round, Princess Peach serves as dispatcher, sending Mario and Yoshi to Jewelry Land to rescue King Fret and Prince Pine from Bowser and the Koopalings, who have used that land's 12 magic gems to split it in half. Armed with a Super Scope, the duo must clear 12 levels that await across two worlds. Despite the numbering, each world's levels can be completed in any order. They are filled with waves of familiar enemies from the Mario series that must be shot before they can reach and damage Yoshi, as well as an end-of-stage boss with special attacks and weak points that guards one of the 12 gems. Shooting enemies nearer to Yoshi can net coins, and every 60 collected are worth an extra life. Be careful, though, as errant friendly fire damages Yoshi! Branching pathways, jumps, and speed boosts mix up the ride. There are also items to be obtained along the way, including life-restoring mushrooms, POWER Gauge-increasing flowers, extra lives, and defense-raising nuts. Familiar yellow blocks yield automatic items, while blue blocks provide items for use on the stage boss. 2P Mode allows a second player to control Yoshi's dodging, jumping, and braking. A score based on performance is awarded for clearing a level, and each level has a leaderboard. The game is neither terribly varied nor very long, but it is an enjoyable experience for the limited time one spends with it.





Reflections: There are four distinct experiences in *Yoshi's Safari*, depending on whether or not you utilize the Turbo setting and/or bring a friend along for the journey. The former setting almost trivializes gameplay but spares your fingers the exhaustion of endless button mashing. The latter gives you someone to socialize with during your lighthearted, automated stroll through Mode 7 stages of varying appeal; some, such as the open castles, are beautiful, and others, such as the ghost house, do not quite capture the feeling of their source material. It's novel to see Mario equipped with a rapid-fire racquetball bazooka, particularly on the scoreboard, where he demonstrates a rather cavalier, almost adversarial attitude toward Yoshi's well-being. Still, those plain projectiles and the predictable flow of play over time keep this otherwise fun trip to Jewelry Land from being a true Super Nintendo gem. – DG

Young Merlin

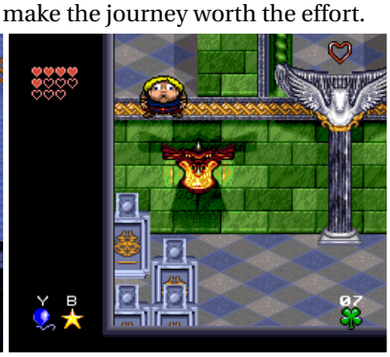
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Westwood Studios
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
★★★★





Well before wizardry wizened and wisened him, Merlin was bold, buff, and blond. Become that heroic youth to defeat the Shadow King and his Meanies during top-down travels through mines, mermaid-laden flooded caves, huge flower beds, and more. Along the way, you acquire mystical weapons that include star-shaped projectiles, the chilling Snow Flake, and the fiery Match; map your choice of these to the B button to battle porcine Oinkmers, Dark Dwarves, and bosses such as the gelatinous Bloop. Combat is not the main thrust of your quirky quest, however – you must find items and decipher their purpose (sometimes using hints from cutscenes and pictographic thought/speech bubbles) to open new areas and aid friendly folks, such as the senile sorcerer Casolari. From a mirror and comb that beguile baddies to a balloon that inflates you, the objects inspire exploration while gently testing ingenuity. Unfortunately, they often entail backtracking. For example, colorful jewels must be taken to the Lady of the Lake's pond to be made useful. The mythical maiden also provides passwords, while her pond and other marked water sources can be used to fill bottles for healing or invincibility drinks (you can extend your health with heart containers and replenish it with hearts or perhaps a dozen shamrocks). Puzzling through pillar-pushing sequences, careening on minecart rides, gasping for breath underwater, and wending through bug burrows can be tricky, but this game's whimsy and creativity make the journey worth the effort.





Reflections: With the way he traipses about in a bicep-baring blue jerkin and tight, tomato-red slacks, young Merlin clearly thinks he's hot stuff. To be fair, he's not the only one of this opinion; his flagrant preening practically charms the petals off of a bevy of Vile-ette flower foes, while his dramatic heroism enchants Melody, the sweet daughter of stern miner Sterm. However, the aged wizard Casolari provides a portent of Merlin's future that neither his ego nor his insouciant minecart moves can mitigate. Although the game's manual states that "Casolari is astounded as Merlin is able to perform magic due to his youthful enthusiasm," many depictions of adult Merlin resemble Casolari with his white beard, pointy hat, and celestial nightie. Thus, that strapping, self-important lad might just go from having lovely mermaids deliver life-saving air to him via kisses to being a lonesome elder whose only aquatic attentions come from a herring. – AP

Ys III: Wanderers from Ys

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Jan. 1992
Region: NA
Developer: Nihon Falcom
Ported by: Advance Communication
Publisher: American Sammy
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Availability: Common
★★★★







Something is rotten in Redmont – monsters overrunning nearby Tigray Quarry and the imminent release of beastly Galbalan to serve Lord McGaya's wicked ambitions are a taste of the town's trials. Only Adol, a noble swordsman and friend of Redmont native Dogi, can fight the overwhelming evil in this side-scrolling quest through the volcanic Ilvern Ruins, snowy Eldam Mountains, trap-laced Ballacetine Castle, and more. During his journey, he helps allies (such as town elder Edgar and damsel Ellena) and clashes with foes (such as Ellena's scheming brother, Chester). These episodes develop the simple yet compelling story with dialogue, and crucial artifacts open new areas to explore. Getting lost is rarely a problem, but combat can be – though Adol ducks, jumps, and strikes foes rapidly, his reach is short and he's easily injured. Fortunately, fighting ogres, insects, knights, and bosses ranging from dragons to sorcerers bestows experience, raising his hit points, strength, and defense as he levels up. Adol also earns gold to buy better swords, armor, and shields; these are occasionally found in chests or elsewhere, as are five magic rings, including Power and Protection. Like all equipment, such adornments are selectable in a menu, but their benefits are limited by a dwindling counter that's usually replenished in battle or at a shop that sells healing herbs and more. Although it constitutes a departure from its predecessors' top-down ramming attack mechanics, this Japanese computer port has stirring music, decent pacing, and an admirable protagonist, yielding an enjoyable experience.





Reflections: Level grinding is a must in *Wanderers from Ys* (pronounced like "east" minus the "t"), but getting the maximum of 65,535 experience points is not that daunting – *if* you use a little ingenuity and a lot of help from a controller with autofire capabilities. Holding Y makes Adol attack repeatedly, so all you have to do is take him to a place where one-hit enemies continuously respawn (making sure to keep him out of their strike range), flip that autofire switch, and let the points and gold roll in while you fold towels or change the cat litter. Being manipulable like this does not mean Adol's addle-headed, however. Both his thoughtfully humble heroism and this title's truly awesome closing text impart the uplifting message that "in everyone there is the ability to excel." And it's true! I excelled at gaming the system! – AP

Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel

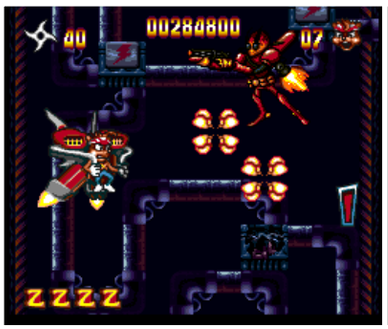
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Rare
★★★







Zero, nemesis of another Sunsoft star – Aero the Acro-Bat – gets the "good guy with 'tude" treatment in his own colorful platformer. Here, the squirrel must save his homeland forest threatened by Jacques Le Sheets, an unscrupulous lumberjack hoping to use those trees to print counterfeit currency. But Zero is no ordinary varmint; along with unwieldy swooping, gliding, and dive-bombing skills, the furball can fling expendable shuriken, whip out nunchaku, and perform a spinning double-jump attack. And these aren't just for show – from crustacean-laden beaches to a lethal papermill, the game's seven locales encourage, and sometimes require, mastery of at least one ability. For instance, one stage might need Zero to dive down a long shaft, using the momentum gained to propel him over the next obstacle, while another demands Zero's swoop attack to slip beneath a set of hydraulic presses. Indeed, the rodent's repertoire relies largely on momentum, resulting in some counterintuitive, *squirrelly* controls; double jumps are more effective when the button is pressed twice in quick succession (versus waiting until the apex of the leap), and slinging ninja stars is stalled when sprinting forward (often resulting in baddies getting the upper hand). And those enemies are vicious; old men with buzz saw helmets tear out of nowhere, hazmat defenders hurl grenades off-screen, and robot assassins leap like sharks from solid ground. Couple these with blind leaps, insta-kill platforming challenges, and questionable hit detection, and the word "unfair" is always in the air. Perhaps to compensate, the game provides generous checkpoints, infinite continues, frequent energy refills, and sporadic extra lives. Nevertheless, the overall sloppy design undermines the title's truer virtues – detailed graphics, expressive animation, decent music, dynamic bosses, hidden secrets, and varied gameplay all signify a well-meaning game… destabilized, again, by that shaky foundation.





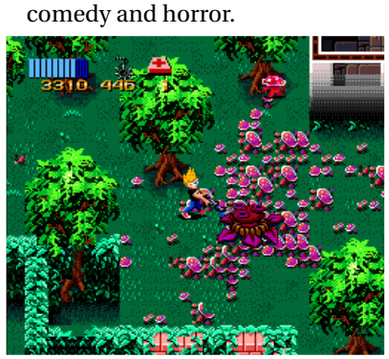
Reflections: From zero to hero? In the Aero the Acro-Bat series, Zero lives up to his namesake as the forever foil to Aero's heroics. But here, he performs a righteous 180, trumping his jolly, circus-themed rival with a game far more in tune with the edgier trends and humor of the era. With Sonic's speed, Shinobi's moves, and the 'tude of a Ninja Turtle, the wannabe star spares no shame in cribbing from his mascot contemporaries. And yet, no one likes a copycat – a fact that could explain why the squirrel still languishes in Aero's shadow decades later. – DA

Zombies Ate My Neighbors
Zombies (EU)

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: LucasArts
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Availability: Common
★★★★




Zeke and Julie find their neighborhood in danger from zombies and their ilk, so choose between these characters (or both in two-player mode) to save cheerleaders, babies, and others. There are 48 regular and seven optional bonus stages set in environments including the streets, mall, and warehouse. They present top-down, maze-like layouts for getting to the humans before the monsters do. You have a multitude of weapons (water gun, bazooka, fire extinguisher, etc.) and helpful items (distracting clowns, speed shoes, etc.) to collect. Occasionally, you encounter a boss that must be defeated to rescue a victim. If you have trouble finding a neighbor, press either shoulder button to open a radar that displays your proximity to them and the number remaining. Once all available victims are saved, an exit appears. If you take too much damage, you lose a life, but if all neighbors are killed, it's instantly game over. After every four stages, you receive a password, although all previously gathered resources are lost when you use this feature to pick up where you left off. The difficulty of the game ramps up nicely, and later stages teem with tougher enemies, such as Martians that can briefly incapacitate you. The two-player mode enhances the experience by rewarding whoever collects more victims, combining co-op and competitive play. This game has a fun premise, responsive controls, and a wonderful mix of comedy and horror.




Reflections: This title lives up to its hype as a cult classic. Each stage has a thematic moniker that often plays off of pop culture references that I enjoyed figuring out ("Weird Kids on the Block," "Nightmare on Terror Street," "The Day the Earth Ran Away," etc.). It's great to have a game that doesn't take itself too seriously but still has a focus on gameplay! Not only do you have a large array of tools and weapons to utilize, but also they have unique characteristics, such as the bazooka being able to knock you backwards or take down doors or weak barriers. A game over is hard to deal with because losing your stash of weapons results in later stages causing even more trouble. This title isn't perfect, as I find the music hit-or-miss and the gameplay stale after a while. Nevertheless, it has elements to please everyone and is a great way to spend a few mindless hours, especially with a friend! – KY

Zool: Ninja of the "Nth" Dimension

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software
Publisher: GameTek
(PAL: Gremlin Graphics Software)
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
★★★



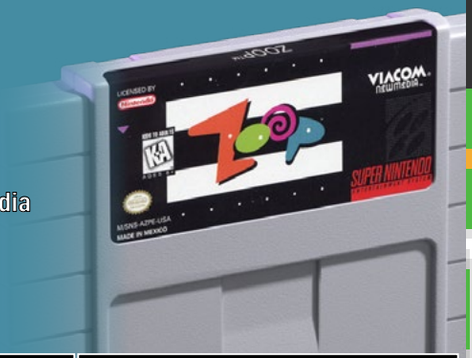

Zool crash-lands on Earth and must travel at breakneck speed through seven multistage worlds in order to become a prestigious ninja in this colorful platformer. Each world has its own unique theme, such as candy, music, a playroom, tools, a circus big top, etc., and Zool must collect a defined number of pickups before being allowed to leave the level. A changing arrow marker points towards the exit's location; this becomes helpful on some of the more maze-like stages. Zool has lots of moves at his disposal, ranging from shooting fireballs and doing air spin attacks to wall climbing and sliding through foes. Adversaries each pertain to the stage they are in, from walking drums in the music stages to wobbly jellies in the candy levels, and bosses, such as a spike-collared banana and a giant jackhammer, round out each world. Gameplay is fast and frenetic; Zool moves too rapidly and is constantly ambushed by off-screen enemies. Luckily, he has a health bar and can pick up hearts from dispatched foes, but avoiding pitfalls and perils soon becomes repetitive due to the constant trial and error lurking all around. Exploring stages is fun, however, and finding secret invincibility power-ups or higher jump icons helps progress. If this game weren't trying to focus on competing with a certain blue hedgehog, it would have been its own lovable monster.

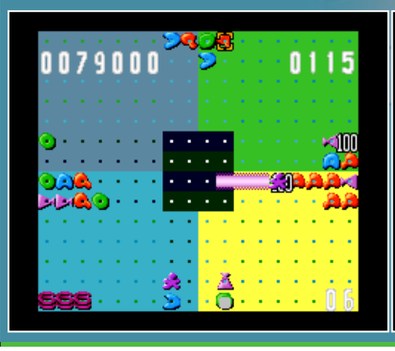



Reflections: This title was massive in the UK on the Amiga back in the day, but if you talk to anyone who was into the game back then, they'll probably struggle to name any of the stages past the memorable candyland ones (with all that Chupa Chups lollipop branding) and, at a push, the musical stages that followed. *Zool* wants to be fun, but the speed seriously lets it down; if the game had more of a steady pace, then it would be a solid platformer. Its large, chunky sprites and wonderfully colorful stages look great, but it has an air of "computer hardness" about it. Games on home computers were notorious for being impossible or too hard, and *Zool* falls into the latter category. There is fun to find here, but the novelty soon wears off when the stages become less interesting – the candy advertising sure did a number on the opening sections such that the rest really didn't matter. – JE

Zoop

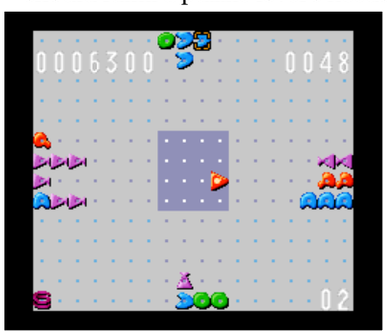
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Jan. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Hookstone
Ported by: PanelComp
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Common
★★★⋆







It's just you and a board of colorful shapes in this fast-paced puzzle game. You control an arrow inside a four-by-four grid in the middle of a larger playfield. Along each of the outer edges, objects appear over time (indicated by a flashing outline). If a new shape is set to appear where one already is, it will push its predecessor along the column/row toward the center. Your job is to eliminate them by matching colors before they enter your grid. Shoot your arrow at a column/row to make blocks of the same shade disappear. Once it hits a differently colored object, the colors swap. For example, if you shoot a purple arrow at a column of purple blocks, they all disappear, but if there was a green block at the bottom, after the purple ones are "zooped," your arrow exchanges hues with the green one. You would then be left with a single purple block and a green arrow. There are two modes of play: Level, which erases the board when you've zooped the required number of blocks (counted down in the upper right), and Continual, which keeps the board layout between levels. In both modes, the rate at which shapes appear increases for more hectic color-matching fun. Mixed in with the blocks, different power-ups materialize, such as the multicolored blob that gets rid of all shapes of the targeted shade in that sector and the purple springs that clear the board after collecting five of them. While this game presents an eye-straining color scheme and mediocre music, the gameplay is entertaining and should fulfill a puzzle lover's needs.





Reflections: I love a puzzle game that requires you to meld quick thinking and fast reflexes. *Zoop* is just that, although it's lacking in an important facet: precise movement. You are not only moving in a four-by-four grid but also facing a particular direction. The scramble to get the orientation correct with limited time left me feeling like the controls were more of a challenge than an aid. This is perhaps an unfortunate side effect of being ported from the original DOS version, where a single keystroke is easier to input than pressing a D-pad for a number of frames. Despite the control issue, this game is a hoot to play, and while it won't replace *Tetris* in my heart, it's certainly a title I will return to again. – KY

Special and Promo Cartridges

The following cartridges were either not available in retail stores, were only included with a peripheral intended for its use, or were special competition cartridges not intended for wide public release.

Donkey Kong Country Competition Cartridge

Genre: Competition
Release Date: Nov. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Rare





This modified version of *Donkey Kong Country* was created specially for the Nintendo PowerFest '94 championship finals and later used as a qualifier for the Blockbuster World Video Game Championships II in 1995. It is a five-minute timed game where the object is to collect as many points as possible in several stages. At the conclusion of five minutes, the game freezes. 2,500 cartridges were produced, with some being sold through Nintendo's *Super Power Supplies Catalog* sent to *Nintendo Power* magazine subscribers.

The Miracle Piano Teaching System

Genre: Creativity, Educational
Release Date: 1991
Region: NA
Developer: The Software Toolworks
Publisher: The Software Toolworks
Players: 1
Special Features: Miracle Piano (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon



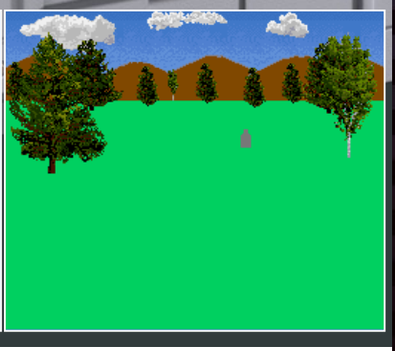


This educational music title was included with the Miracle Piano keyboard along with a foot pedal, keyboard power supply, headphones, and a MIDI controller cable to connect the keyboard to the SNES. With the teaching system, prospective musicians can learn to play classical piano, rock piano, or show tunes through lessons. Several games/activities are also included to help users hone their musical talents.

MACS Basic Rifle Marksmanship Program (1994)
MACS Moving Target Simulator (1993)
MACS Multipurpose Arcade Combat Simulator (1993)

Genre: Shooting Gallery
Release Date: 1993-1994
Region: NA
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: U.S. Army
Players: 1
Special Features: M.A.C.S. M16 Rifle (required)
Availability: Very Rare



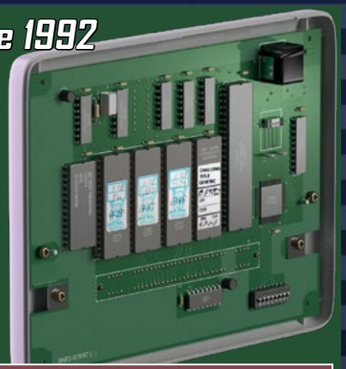


These three shooting gallery title variants were part of a training program produced in conjunction with the U.S. Army for use with the M.A.C.S. M16 light gun rifle. Users shoot at targets on a firing range at different distances and are rated on performance in several categories. These advanced target programs are customizable (changing starting and ending level, wind speed, shot grouping, etc.). Reportedly, about 600 of each were produced.



Nintendo Campus Challenge 1992

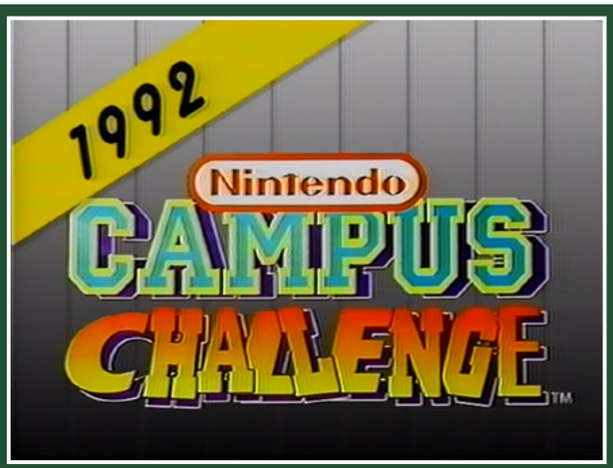
Genre: Competition
Release Date: 1992
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Extremely Rare







This oversized competition cart is a PCB board with four ROM chips. It consists of three games to be played in six minutes: *Super Mario World* (player must collect 50 coins), *F-Zero* (player must complete two laps), and *Pilotwings* (player must land on ground targets until the time is up). The total score is tallied by adding together the following: *Super Mario World* score, *F-Zero* score times 100, and Pilotwings score times 10,000. The Nintendo Campus Challenge 1992 competition was held across 35 U.S. colleges while Nintendo previewed new SNES games. The winner at each location was awarded a Super NES console along with the three games used in the competition, while runners-up received small cash prizes. The grand prize winner received $10,000 while all location winners were put into a drawing for $5,000. Only two known cart copies are confirmed to still exist.





Nintendo Power Previews Program Cartridge

Genre: Other
Release Date: 1991-1997
Region: NA
Developer: Technovision
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: None
Special Features: Nintendo Power Previews kiosk (required)
Availability: Extremely Rare

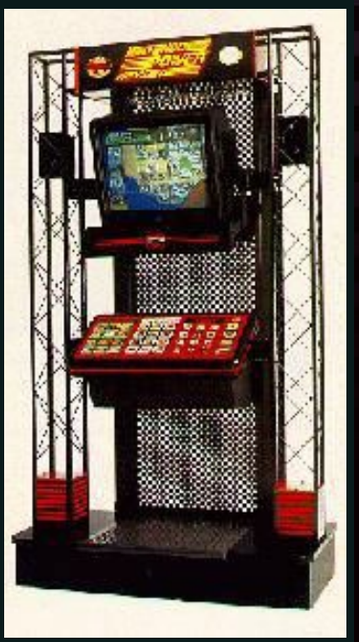






As stated on the cartridge label, this is not a game cartridge! This cart functioned as a programming controller for retail display kiosks designed to preview upcoming Nintendo games and accessories. An interactive keypad was used by customers to play a video preview via laserdisc video on the display monitor. Several versions were created over the years to accommodate changes in Nintendo's retail lineup.





Nintendo PowerFest '94

Genre: Competition
Release Date: Mar. 1994
Region: NA
Developer: Nintendo, Software Creations
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Extremely Rare







This competition title consists of an oversized PCB board with four ROM chips. In six minutes, players are tasked to play the first level of *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*, the first track of the Mushroom Cup in *Super Mario Kart*, and finally participate in the Home Run Derby of *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball* until the time is up. The final game score is calculated by adding the following: the score from *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*, *Super Mario Kart* coins times 1,000 plus finishing position score, and *Ken Griffey Jr.* home runs times 10,000 plus total home run distance times 100. Preliminary PowerFest '94 competitions took place outside department stores throughout the U.S. The finals – "Nintendo World Championships II" – took place in San Diego, CA and had the town champions grouped into four teams to compete. There were reportedly around 33 carts created, but only two are confirmed to still exist today.





Super Star Fox Weekend Starwing Competition (EU)

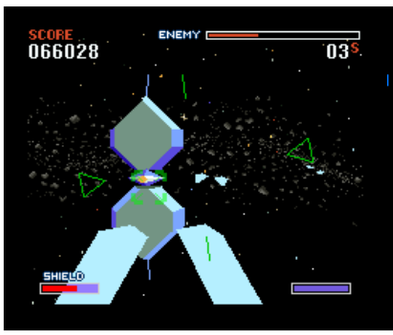
Genre: Competition
Release Date: Apr. 1993
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD, Argonaut Software
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Availability: Very Rare







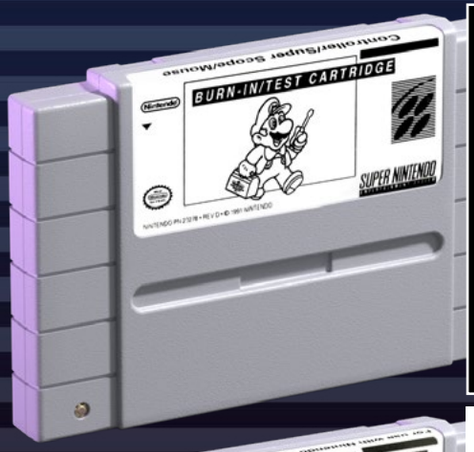
This competition cartridge consists of two altered stages of *Star Fox* and a bonus stage; the objective is to wrack up as many points as possible in a four-minute gameplay time limit. It was created for the Super Star Fox Weekend Competition held April 30th – May 2nd, 1993 at 1,500-2,000 stores and locations throughout the U.S. All participants received a Star Fox pin while higher scorers could also earn a T-shirt. The highest scorer at each location received a Super Star Fox Weekend jacket. Location/store high score winners were entered into a random drawing to win a vacation package or $15,000 cash (the winner took the cash). *Super Star Fox Weekend* was later used at the National Nintendo Championships in Canada, and competitions also took place in Europe using *Starwing Competition*. Remaining carts from the competition were offered for sale to *Nintendo Power* subscribers through the Fall/Winter 1993 edition of *Super Power Supplies Catalog*. There were an estimated 2,000 carts produced.







Test Cartridges











Burn-In Cassette (With Controller Test)
Burn-In/Test Cartridge
NTF 2.5 Test Cartridge
Super Scope Test Cartridge

Genre: Test
Release Date: 1991-1994
Region: NA
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Availability: Very Rare

Like for the NES, Nintendo produced several different test cartridges to test and diagnose Super NES consoles and accessories at authorized Nintendo repair Centers. Cartridges included functionality tests for the SNES controller, system audio, Super Scope, Super NES Mouse, and an extensive burn-in test to put the console components through their paces.









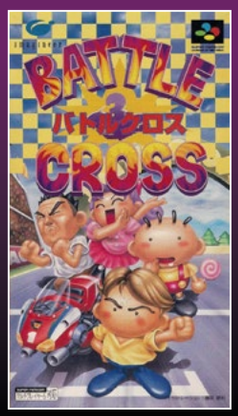


Super Famicom Spotlight

The Super Famicom library of games in Japan was gigantic, with over 1,400 titles released for the SNES sister system. While hundreds of games made their way to the North American and European markets, there were still around 1,000 games that never did. The following are some notable Super Famicom game releases.

Battle Cross

Genre: Racing, Action
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: A-Max
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)





This single-screen top-down action-racer has hoverbikes blasting each other while trying to avoid obstacles.

Battle Pinball

Genre: Pinball
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Developer: Banpresto
Publisher: Banpresto
Players: 1
Special Features: None

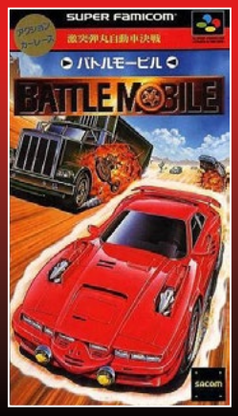




Part of the Compati Hero Series, this pinball story title features several tables with licenses from Ultraman, Kamen Rider, and Gundam.

Breakthrough Bullet: Final Car Fight: Battle Mobile

Genre: Action, Racing
Release Date: June 1993
Developer: System Sacom
Publisher: System Sacom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This vertically scrolling vehicular combat title has the protagonist trying to avenge the death of his wife by taking out enemies on land and in the air.

Captain Tsubasa 3: Kaiser's Challenge

Genre: Sports, RPG
Release Date: July 1992
Developer: Tecmo
Publisher: Tecmo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This third entry in the sports-RPG hybrid series uses a turn-based menu-command format to decide what soccer players do on the pitch on both offense and defense.

Chatty Commentary Parodius

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1–2
Special Features: Battery Save





The comedic horizontal shooter series featuring Konami characters from several games returns with voice clips accompanying the action.

Clock Tower

Genre: Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Human Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





Players take control of orphan Jennifer Simpson who explores a mansion and must avoid the murderous Scissorman in this adventure-horror title with multiple endings.

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1996
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save





Milon returns in this sequel to *Milon's Secret Castle* (NES) to save the fairy Alis from the evil Amon by conquering seven colorful themed worlds.

Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1992
Developer: Chunsoft
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save

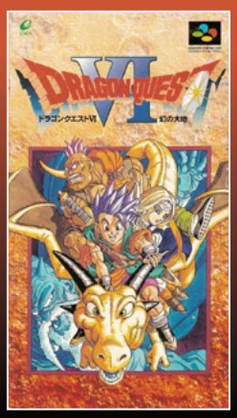




The fifth installment in the popular turn-based RPG series follows the main character's life for roughly 30 years and has a new feature where some monsters in random battles will ask to join the player's party.

Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Developer: Heartbeat
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save

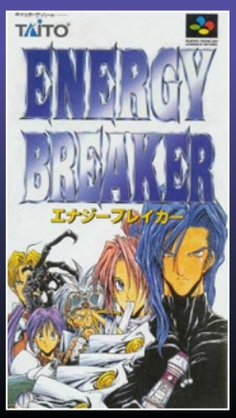




The sixth Dragon Quest RPG title allows the player's party of four to assume several starter classes and hybrid classes to take on monsters in turn-based battles in a "Phantom World."

Energy Breaker

Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release: July 1996
Developer: Neverland
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





Set on the small island Zamlia, this graphically impressive isometric RPG starts with Myra seeking to learn her identity. Turn-based battles take place on a grid in the same environment where enemies are encountered.

Final Fantasy V

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Developer: Square
Publisher: Square
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





The fifth Final Fantasy title uses the Active Time Battle system during combat and has a job system that allows characters to garner special abilities.

Fire Emblem: Genealogy of the Holy War

Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release Date: May 1996
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This installment of the tactical-RPG series introduces a character relationship system where members of the player's party can form relationships, fall in love, and even have children who become usable characters.

Fire Emblem: Mystery of the Emblem

Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1994
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This partial remake of the original *Fire Emblem* has the player control Marth and his army on the continent of Archanea.

Fire Emblem: Thracia 776

Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





The last Fire Emblem title released on the Super Famicom stars Leif and his private army taking on the Grannvale Empire in tactical battles.

Genocide 2

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Developer: Bits Studios
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Special Features: None





Players control a robotic ninja mech to take down the CONEX corporation in this action-platformer.

Ghost Chaser Densei

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1994
Developer: Winkysoft
Publisher: Banpresto
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This beat 'em up arcade port features three playable characters: Makai (a man with a cybernetic arm implant), Iyo (a woman with monkey-like physical qualities), and Belva (a robot with rocket-propelled legs).

Godzilla: Strange Beast Great War

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: Alfa System
Publisher: Toho
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This one-on-one fighter features monsters from the Godzilla patheon including Gigan, Mothra, Megalon, Mechagodzilla, and more.

Gourmet Squad: Rose Jerks

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Winds
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This beat 'em up features three buff fighters who can perform muscular poses. At the end of stages, the brawlers sit down at a table and chow down on a meal prepared by an android to regain health.

The Great Battle IV

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: Sun L
Publisher: Banpresto
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save





This lively action-platformer is part of the Compati Hero Series and includes the switchable characters Ultraman, Gundam, and Kamen Rider.

GS Mikami: The Master Exorcist with the Nice Body

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1993
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Banalex
Players: 1
Special Features: None





Based on the manga and anime series *Ghost Sweeper Mikami*, this action-platformer has players control Reiko Mikami, who can attack and use several magic spells.

Iron Commando

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Feb. 1995
Developer: Arcade Zone
Publisher: Poppo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This brawler tasks the player to destroy a radioactive meteorite and combines standard beat 'em up stages with action ones where the player rides and shoots from a motorcycle, jeep, or minecart.

It's Kunio's Dodgeball: Assemble Everyone!

Genre: Sports, Action
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Developer: Technōs Japan
Publisher: Technōs Japan
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)



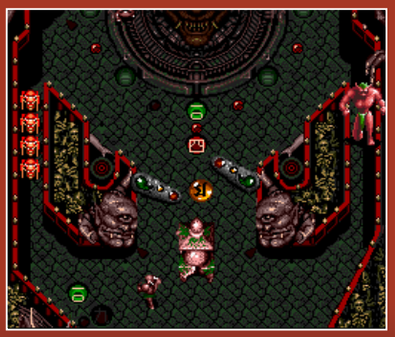


Part of the Kunio-kun series, this dodgeball title is a sequel to *Super Dodge Ball* on the Famicom/NES. International squads of four (with three outside helpers) take to the court to bludgeon their adversaries to death.

Jaki Crush

Genre: Pinball
Release Date: Dec. 1992
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Naxat
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save

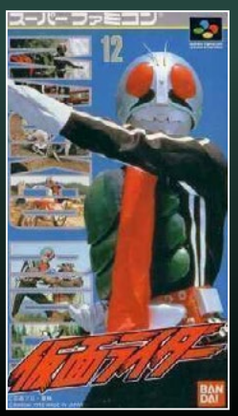




This pinball game is the third in the Crush Pinball series, following *Alien Crush* and *Devil's Crush*. It features a three-level table with a theme of Jaki, a Japanese mythological demon.

Kamen Rider

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Nov. 1993
Developer: Sun L
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save





Based on the tokusatsu television show, one or two players can take control of the heroic Kamen Rider to bring down the Shocker organization in this brawler.

King of Demons

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1995
Developer: KSS
Publisher: KSS
Players: 1
Special Features: None





This action-platformer has gun-wielding Abel traveling through Hell to rescue his daughter. After defeating enemy bosses, Abel can acquire an orb to transform into different demonic forms.

Magical Pop'n

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Developer: Polestar
Publisher: Pack-In-Video
Players: 1
Special Features: None





Princess must use her magical powers to take down the Demon Lord's minions in this cute and colorful action-platformer with branching stages.

Maka Maka

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1992
Developer: Office Koukan
Publisher: Sigma
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This absurdist comedic RPG is based on Japanese "gag manga" and features bizarre characters and settings. The story has the protagonist trying to find his girlfriend's scientist father to have him transform his parents back into humans from water fleas.

Märchen Adventure Cotton 100%

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Apr. 1994
Developer: Success
Publisher: Datam Polystar
Players: 1
Special Features: None





This fantastical horizontal shooter is a sequel/remake of *Cotton: Fantastic Night Dreams*. Players take control of the titular witch Cotton, who is assisted by her fairy friend.

Mario & Wario

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1993
Developer: Game Freak
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (required)

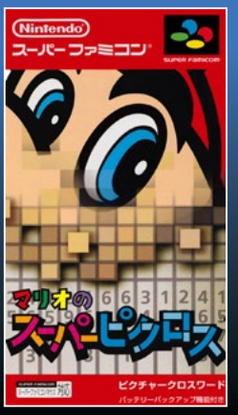




Using the SNES mouse, players control the fairy Wanda to guide a blinded Mario, Princess, or Yoshi to the end of each level by influencing his/her movement and destroying enemies and obstacles in his/her path.

Mario's Super Picross

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Ape, Jupiter
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)





A sequel to *Mario's Picross* on Game Boy, this timed puzzle game has the player chisel out stone tiles from a square grid using a cursor. Number clues on the row and column headers indicate which tiles should be destroyed to reveal a symbol or picture.

Marvelous: Another Treasure Island

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 1996
Developer: Nintendo R&D2
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This top-down title has the player take control of three boys going on an adventure to find the "Marvelous" treasure on an island.

Meet Tonosama! Bravo! Number One!

Genre: Action
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Developer: Tokyo Design Center
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This comedic top-down action title for one or two simultaneous players features two selectable characters: the stronger, slower, fan-wielding Baka-dono, and the faster, rose-throwing Baka-ouji.

Mickey's Great Adventure in Tokyo Disneyland

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: GRC
Publisher: Tomy
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save

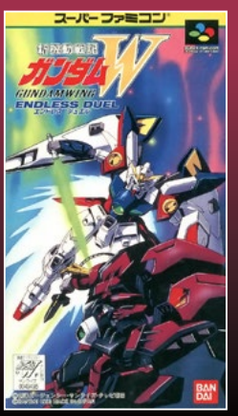




Players control Mickey Mouse in Tokyo Disneyland to rescue his friends from surly Pete. Using a backpack, Mickey fills and uses water and gas balloons to attack or to help traverse side-scrolling levels.

Mobile Suit Gundam Wing: Endless Duel

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Mar. 1996
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This one-on-one mech fighting game based upon the Gundam series includes mechanics such as combos, dashing, air blocking, and metered special attacks.

Modified Superhuman Schbibinman Zero

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Developer: Masaya
Publisher: NCS
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Satellaview (required)





Released exclusively as a download for the Satellaview satellite modem service, this side-scrolling action-platformer features two characters; Raita uses boxing attacks while Azuki wields a sword. Raita and Azuki can work together for combo attacks.

Pokonyan! Henpokorin Adventure

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: Toho
Publisher: Toho
Players: 1
Special Features: None





Based on an anime series, this title has the little furry cat/raccoon Pokonyan collect fruit in platforming stages. Pokonyan can transform into a kangaroo to pounce around or a bird to fly.

Popeye: The Tale of Sea Hag the Wicked Witch

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Developer: Technōs Japan
Publisher: Technōs Japan
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





The famous sailor man Popeye has to save his friends, who have been turned to stone by the evil Sea Hag. This title combines platforming and minigames framed in a board game structure.

Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon: Another Story

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Arc System Works
Publisher: Angel
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





Based upon the popular *Sailor Moon* anime, this RPG acts as a side story that features cutscenes and character/plot developments involving villains unique to the game along with familiar series foes.

Rendering Ranger: R2

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter, Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1995
Developer: Rainbow Arts Software
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save



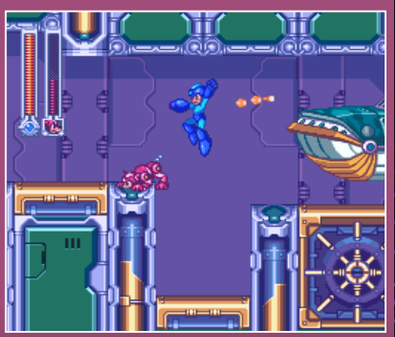


This graphically impressive title combines both run and gun shooter and traditional horizontal shoot 'em up stages.

Rockman & Forte

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





A spinoff from the original *Rockman/Mega Man* series, this action-platformer was eventually released in North America for the Game Boy Advance as *Mega Man & Bass*.

Sanrio World Smash Ball!

Genre: Sports, Action
Release Date: July 1993
Developer: Tomcat System
Publisher: Character Soft
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save



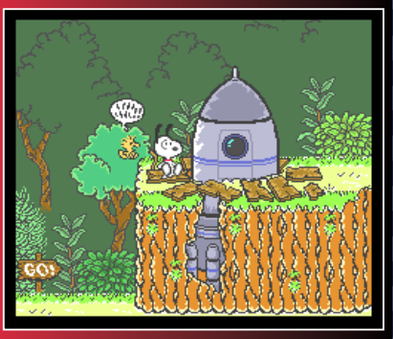


This competitive sports game is an overhead one-on-one table tennis clone featuring four characters from the Sanrio catalog, with Hello Kitty acting as the referee. Table layouts include obstacles such as walls, breakable blocks, carousels, and more.

Snoopy Concert

Genre: Action
Release Date: May 1995
Developer: Nintendo R&D1, Pax Softnica
Publisher: Mitsui Fudosan
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (optional)





Starring the characters from the *Peanuts* comic strip, this action title features Snoopy and Woodstock in different minigames and modes including platforming, adventure, puzzles, flying, and more!

Space Race: Astro Go! Go!

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1994
Developer: KAZe
Publisher: Meldac
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This third-person futuristic racer features five selectable hovercraft vehicles and a Grand Prix of 15 courses with various obstacles. The game's camera is fixed and does not change orientation with the craft and course turns.

Star Ocean

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: July 1996
Developer: tri-Ace
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





The first in this action-RPG series follows a young boy named Ratix and his friends who set out to discover the roots of a strange disease that has hit his town's inhabitants. It features real-time combat and an Approval Rating that affects characters' behavior.

Super Air Diver 2

Genre: Shooter, Simulation
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Developer: Copya System
Publisher: Asmik
Players: 1–2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save





The sequel to *Lock On*, this third-person flight combat simulator has the player/pilot dogfight with enemy fighters and take out ground targets in warzones.

Super Back to the Future II

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: July 1993
Developer: Daft
Publisher: Toshiba EMI
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save





In this somewhat bizarre action-platformer that loosely follows the film, Marty must save his kids and stop bully Biff Tannen with the help of his hoverboard.

Super Bomberman 5

Genre: Action
Release Date: Feb. 1997
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-5 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Multitap (optional), Battery Save, Edit Mode





The fifth top-down bombastic title on the Super Famicom contains a story mode for one or two players as well as a Battle Game for up to five.

Super Dimension Fortress Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 1993
Developer: Winkysoft
Publisher: Zamuse
Players: 1
Special Features: None





This horizontal shooter based on the Macross anime franchise allows the player to choose between three characters who each have three switchable forms: Fighter, GERWALK, and Battroid.

Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Mar. 1996
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Human Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save, Edit Mode, Multitap (optional)





The final Fire Pro wrestling game on the Super Famicom features over 150 wrestlers of all different styles from several worldwide wrestling organizations. It also features an extremely robust Wrestler Edit mode with the ability to create and store up to 80 grapplers.

Super Ninja-kun

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Developer: Jaleco
Publisher: Jaleco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





Based on the Ninja-kun arcade games, this cutesy action-platformer includes a story mode and two-player cooperative action.

Taekwon-Do

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Aug. 1994
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: Human Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save, Edit Mode





This one-on-one fighting game features 19 different Taekwondo martial artists taking each other on in a tournament environment utilizing a point system.

Tales of Phantasia

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1995
Developer: Wolf Team
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save





This action-RPG takes place in the fantasy world of Aselia and has the player control Cress Albane and his allies out to destroy demon king Dhaos. During 2D battles, the player controls the main character while party members are CPU controlled.

Tetris Battle Gaiden

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Developer: Bullet-Proof Software
Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This variant of the classic puzzle game *Tetris* is a two-player battle against the computer in story mode or against a human opponent in versus mode. Both players share the same bank of three upcoming Tetriminos to play from.

Trials of Mana

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Squaresoft
Publisher: Squaresoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Battery Save





This action-RPG is the third in the "Mana" series. It has a three-party system and features real-time combat,an interesting calendar system, and a day/night cycle that affects enemies and magic use.

Umihara Kawase

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1993
Developer: TNN, NHK SC
Publisher: TNN
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save

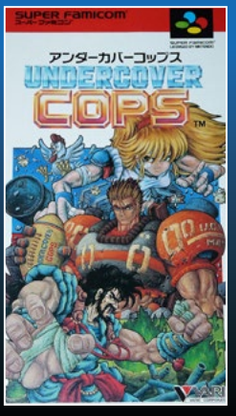




Players take control of the titular character who must navigate levels to reach the exit using her fishing line to swing through the air across gaps and rappel above/below to reach areas.

Undercover Cops

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Mar. 1995
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Varie
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None





This brawler for one to two players features three playable characters known as "city sweepers" in a futuristic New York City in 2043.

Violinist of Hameln

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1995
Developer: Daft
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: None





In this action-platformer Based on the manga *Hameln no Violin Hiki*, the player controls Hamel with accompanying friends Oboe and Flute. Hamel attacks with violin music notes, while Flute can be transformed into different creatures or objects to assist.

Wonder Project J: Mechanical Boy Pino

Genre: Simulation, Adventure
Release Date: Dec. 1994
Developer: Almanic
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save, SNES Mouse (optional)





This point-and-click title involves shaping the destiny of Pino, a mechanical boy. The player controls robotic pixie Tinker with the goal to educate and train Pino to make him act like a human boy.

Unreleased SNES Games

My name is Evan Gowan, and I have been running *SNES Central* (snescentral.com) since 2001. At first, it was merely a place where I posted short reviews and screenshots, but over time, it has morphed to focus almost purely on technical documentation, prototypes, and unreleased games. If you would like to keep up with my quest to document the SNES, you can follow me on Twitter: **@snescentral**.

Unreleased Games for the SNES

Hundreds of games were announced for the SNES but for various reasons were never released. The majority of these games are probably lost – it is unlikely that their binaries (compiled program code) will ever be found because the companies did not save them. For these, the only remnants are references in contemporary media or advertisements handed out by companies at trade shows.

There are four main ways in which unreleased games get leaked out:

1) **Scene Releases**: The "scene" was basically a bunch of groups who shared games on BBSs (bulletin board systems). The groups competed against each other for the prestige of being the first to release the games. As a result, they sometimes leaked out prototypes of games months before they were commercially available. Many of the scene releases are hacked by the scene group to advertise themselves or to fix the internal header to show the game name when loaded in a copier.

2) **Physical Prototypes**: Companies often sent out copies of games on development boards to media outlets to review them. In general, they were supposed to send the prototypes back to the companies, but this practice was obviously not followed all the time. The prototypes later found their way into the hands of collectors and were usually preserved.

3) **Developer Leaks**: Leaks of unreleased games from the people that developed them are not common, mainly because they are still working in the industry and do not want to get themselves in trouble.

4) **Bootlegs**: Here, a bootleg (also called a "repro" or "reproduction") is defined as any game available for sale that is not officially approved by Nintendo, regardless of whether or not the release has the blessing of the original developers. The carts often use flash chips that are rated at a voltage that is incompatible with the SNES and could damage the system. A few unreleased games listed here are only available from bootlegs, and they may be hacked.

To date, there are about 60 unreleased SNES games for which binaries have been found. In this section, I have highlighted about half of them. These games are either fairly playable or have a certain notoriety. Even though some games listed here may be completable to the end, they all lack the polish of a title that went through Nintendo's approval stage.

Apocalypse II

Genre: Shooter
Developer: Psygnosis
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Multitap (optional)
Region: NA, PAL

This is a single-screen shooter à la *Asteroids* where giant planets come after your ship… very quickly. The game looks like it is complete, although playing it in single player is difficult. Interestingly, the game was leaked out by programmer Simon Nicol.





Atmosfear

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Beam Software
Publisher: Unknown
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA, PAL

This action-platformer is inspired by the popular board game that used a VHS tape, also known as *Nightmare*. As in the board game, the Gatekeeper pops up every once in a while to disrupt your game, doing things such as reversing your controls. Several levels appear to be related to figures from various editions of the board game, such as Anne de Chantraine, Baron Samedi, and Elizabeth Báthory.





Barbie Vacation Adventure

Genre: Action, Variety
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Hi Tech Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This is a simplistic set of minigames designed for a younger audience. There are five stages, each with unique settings and activities (e.g., horse riding in Texas, beach volleyball in Florida, carnival games in Iowa). The game was supposed to be released in late 1994 but was canceled for unknown reasons. The leaked version appears to be complete.





Batman (Untitled)

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Unknown
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: Unknown

Leaked in August 1994, this crude beat 'em up demo is infamously known as "Real Shitty Batman" because the original scene release group hacked the internal header to say this. Some of the enemies in the game are ripped from the Genesis version of *Double Dragon 3*. It is likely that this was a mock-up made by the Seattle division of Software Creations as a pitch.





Batman: Revenge of the Joker

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Icom Simulations
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

A port of the NES game *Batman: Return of the Joker*, most of the levels feature side-scrolling action, but there are a few shooter stages in between. Although this is a 16-bit game, the controls, sound, and even the graphics seem better in the NES version. The game is almost finished, and it was supposed to come out in late 1992 or early 1993 but was canceled for unknown reasons.





Bobby's World

Genre: Platformer, Shooter
Developer: Riedel Software Productions
Publisher: Hi Tech Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

Based on the Howie Mandel cartoon of the same name, in this title Bobby is supposed to be cleaning his room but gets sucked into daydreaming when he encounters various things (e.g., a toy rocket, an aquarium). Most levels involve simple platforming, but the final section of each stage is a shooter (sometimes with a boss). The game appears complete, but it's unsure why it was not released.



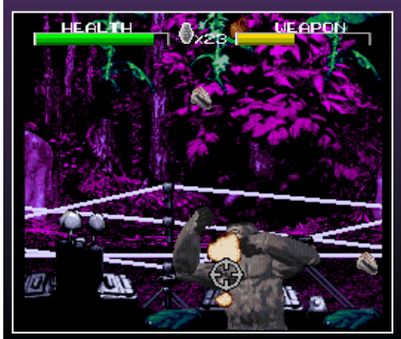


Congo: The Movie – Secret of Zinj

Genre: Action, Variety
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

This game has a variety of stages, including a rafting level, a few shooting gallery levels, a slide level, an auto-scrolling mine cart level, and an overhead platformer. Everything fits with the film, but the story of this game's development is one of tragedy: The team was told after 14 months of intense work that the game would be canceled due to the poor audience reception of the film.





Corn Buster

Genre: Paddle and Ball
Developer: Engine Software
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Region: NA, PAL

This game takes the brick-breaking concept and expands it to be sort of like a maze game where you must navigate through barriers to advance upwards. Its prototype was posted by the developers on their website in the mid-2000s. It is not complete and is stuck in a debug mode. This game met its end due to the decline of the SNES after the release of the Sony PlayStation.

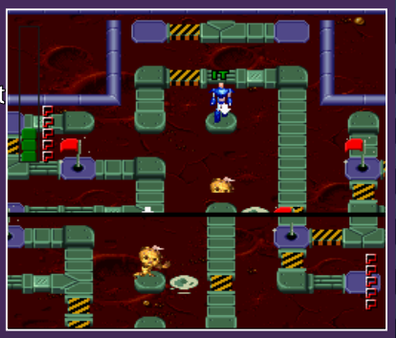


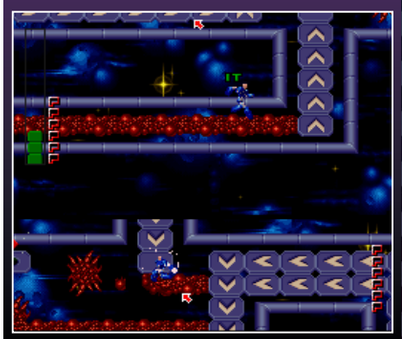


Eurit

Genre: Action
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: N/A
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

This is a unique combination of Tag and Capture the Flag. The playfield is in a grid where you must create (or destroy!) paths to find your way towards flags. At the same time, your opponent (whom you can always see thanks to the split-screen perspective) can tag you, which prevents you from capturing flags. A publisher could not be found. However, the concept was eventually used in *Grid Runner*, released on PC and 32-bit consoles.





Fireteam Rogue

Genre: Action, Shooter
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

Accolade attempted to create an ambitious sci-fi side-scrolling action game with a fleshed-out story and multiple characters and worlds, including shooter stages. A lot of promotional art is available for this game, as the late Betty Cunningham created an extensive archive of her work. Much of the game's budget was blown on promo materials, and there may not have been enough left to finish development.



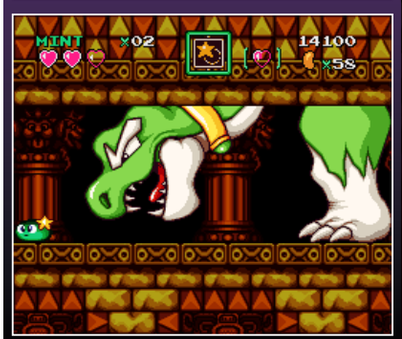


Jelly Boy 2

Genre: Platformer
Developer: Game Freak
Publisher: Sony Music Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Region: NA

This sequel to *Smart Ball* in North America was planned for release in late 1994. This charming platformer is playable to the end but it is definitely not finished, as evidenced by the fact that one of the characters does not have her special move programmed yet. It is unknown why the game was canceled, but it likely had to do with Sony releasing the PlayStation at the end of 1994.





Lobo

Genre: Fighting
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This DC Comics-based fighting game was developed using Silicon Graphics workstations. There aren't a wide variety of characters/moves, and the single-player mode only allows you to play as Lobo. This was leaked as a poor-quality reproduction in 2014. The game was supposed to be released in 1996, but declining SNES sales coupled with a below-average game likely led to its demise.





Mick & Mack as the Global Gladiators

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Virgin Games
Publisher: Virgin Games
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This environmentally themed action-platformer has a McDonald's license, a concept that seems incredibly bizarre. Much like other early 16-bit platform titles by Virgin, this game probably would have been a quality release. Alas, this prototype (leaked and hacked by a scene group) is in a debug state, and you cannot interact with enemies. If you want to play it, there was a Sega Genesis release.



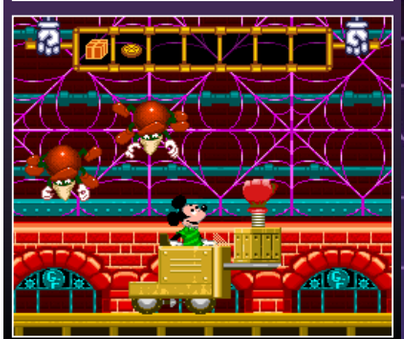


Mickey's Playtown Adventure: A Day of Discovery!

Genre: Educational, Action
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Hi Tech Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This apparently complete prototype is aimed at young children, and therefore the challenge is pretty low (although it is surprisingly text heavy). The graphics and animation are excellent, and the gameplay is akin to a point-and-click style – you touch various objects, and things happen. For instance, if you touch a flower pot, flowers bloom. It was set for an early 1995 release but was canceled.

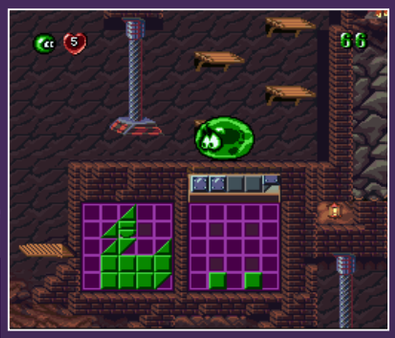




Mr. Bloopy Saves the World

Genre: Platformer
Developer: Compedia
Publisher: Rare-Compedia
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

This title with a blob-like character is aimed at young children and has an environmental theme. You must traverse through multiple locations around the world, solving simple picture-matching puzzles and platforming mainly to avoid traps. Rare was apparently involved in this game, possibly as a publisher.





Mr. Tuff

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Sales Curve Interactive
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: PAL

This action-platformer stars a heroic demolition robot. The graphics are smooth, and the play control is competent. There are two known prototypes, but even the one that is nearly final is missing features, such as a working password system. In its current state, the game is extremely challenging because health is not recovered between stages.





NFL Football (Untitled)

Genre: Sports
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Unknown
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This game featuring 1994 NFL teams uses the same Mode 7 engine as other Sculptured Software sports titles, such as *NCAA Basketball* and *NHL Stanley Cup*. Although it is clearly not finished (the menu system is extremely clunky), it is one of the more advanced and playable football games for the SNES.





Nightmare Busters

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Developer: Arcade Zone
Publisher: Nichibutsu
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Region: PAL

Join Flynn as he shoots his way through a fantasy world of goblins, ravens, and giant beasts using an array of cards and other projectiles. The graphics and sound are amazing, but the game lacks the polish of a finished title. When mother company Sony decided to abandon Nintendo, developer Arcade Zone was forced to shut down, even though the game was close to being complete.





Prime

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Developer: Malibu Interactive
Publisher: Unknown
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Special Features: None
Region: NA

Based on its own Malibu Comics property, the Sega CD version of this game was panned, but this incomplete SNES version is not a bad beat 'em up. However, the lack of music, the presence of debugging features, and the fact that you can't beat it indicates the leaked version was still deep in development.





Quik The Thunder Rabbit

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Stywox
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: PAL

This is an absolutely bizarre SNES version of the kids-oriented Amiga action-platformer. The enemies in this prototype are a bit horrifying, and you would have to wonder if they were just placeholders. The prototype is not really close to completion. It clearly was not going to be a port of the computer game, and what this game would actually have been named is uncertain.





Rally: The Final Round of the World Rally Championship

Genre:Racing
Developer: Europress Software, ARC
Publisher: JVC
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA, PAL

Get the experience of rapidly swerving side to side to avoid bales, barrels, and signs in this first-person racing game. There are a total of 12 courses, with five officially licensed car brands. It was sponsored by used car dealership Network Q, so it is also known as *Network Q Rally*. The game appears to be complete, and why it was not released is unknown.





The Shadow

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Developer: Ocean Software
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This standard beat 'em up is based on the 1994 box-office bomb. Its main gimmick is that the Shadow will pull out his revolvers whenever an enemy also brings out the guns, which is very awkward in practice. The leaked version of the game appears to be complete. If it had come out, it would have been over half a year after the movie's release, so it is not surprising that it was canceled.





Shadowhawk

Genre: Action-Platformer, Fighting
Developer: Studio e
Publisher: N/A
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

Bootleg maker Rose Colored Gaming produced a 100-copy run only to be shut down by *Shadowhawk* creator Jim Valentino in 2015. The prototype leaked out to me, first as a hacked version that improves playability and later as the unaltered version. Featuring both beat 'em up elements and one-on-one boss fights, the game is incomplete; it was never finished because a publisher could not be found.





Socks the Cat Rocks the Hill

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: Kaneko
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This crazy concept has Bill Clinton's cat fighting against enemies such as Ross Perot. It's cute but very average. Ultimately, Kaneko USA was shut down before the game came out. A prototype of a near-final version was found; it was hacked to fix some bugs and put out as a bootleg by Second Dimension.





Sound Fantasy

Genre: Creativity
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: SNES Mouse (required), Battery Save
Region: NA, PAL

This follow-up to *Mario Paint* was intended to allow you to combine visual cues with music creation. An early version with a working title of *Sound Factory* was discovered and leaked in 2015, while the final version has been shown off at museum events in Japan. The main "game" is Beat Hopper, where you move a bouncing insect with your mouse to remove disks from the playfield.





Spot Goes to Hollywood

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: Magnin & Associates, Virgin Interactive
Publisher: Virgin Interactive, Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA, PAL

Starring 7 Up's mascot, this action-platformer has an isometric perspective. Its two prototypes are both incomplete. Virgin sold the game's publishing rights to Acclaim in late 1995 after deciding to get out of the 16-bit market. According to programmer Ed Magnin, the game was complete but was canceled by Virgin (or Acclaim) because they didn't think they could sell the minimum order.





Star Fox 2

Genre: Shooter, Strategy
Developer: Nintendo EAD, Argonaut Software
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Special Features: Battery Save
Region: NA, PAL

This famous unreleased SNES game finally was released on the Super NES Classic Edition mini console in 2017. Nintendo took strides to create a fully 3D space shooter. It also has strategic elements, as you must balance protecting Corneria from attacks and recapturing planets occupied by Andross. Nintendo canceled this game because they wanted a clean break from the SNES to focus on the new N64 console.





Steven Seagal is The Final Option

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Developer: Riedel Software Productions
Publisher: TecMagik Entertainment
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

Kick, punch, and shoot your way through some sewers with a digitized guy who looks like Steven Seagal (TecMagik did not pay the money for Seagal to be digitized and may not have even had the rights to his name). The enemies comically look like they are wearing Devo "Whip It" hats. An early version of the game exists, but it is a long way from completion.





Super Shadow of the Beast

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: IGS
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This was planned as an enhanced version of the technically impressive Amiga action-platformer. You must closely monitor the patterns of the enemies and traps to have any chance of winning. The leaked prototype is clearly not finished – the level design is rough compared to the original, and it is missing the final boss. The prototype was leaked by a scene group in late 1993.





Tinhead

Genre: Action-Platformer
Developer: MicroProse
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA, PAL

This character action-platformer has dull graphics and loose controls. Players control a droid who takes out enemies with a Bounce Blaster. It appears to be complete and is essentially the same as the Genesis version that did come out. It apparently was canceled when MicroProse ran out of money.





Universal Soldier

Genre: Run and Gun Shooter
Developer: The Code Monkeys
Publisher: Accolade
Players: 1
Special Features: Password Save
Region: NA

This is a rebranded version of *Turrican II* with several sprites changed and a few extra levels included to tie it in with the eponymous movie. According to developer Mark Kirkby, the leaked version is a pre-release alpha, but the final version did get fully evaluated by Nintendo. The game was apparently canceled because it would have required too much memory to fit all the levels, and Accolade decided it was not worth the cost.





Wile E's Revenge

Genre:Action-Platformer
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Sunsoft
Players: 1
Special Features: None
Region: NA

This game subverts convention by having you play as the villain, Wile E. Coyote, as he chases after the Road Runner. A one-level demo prototype of this game was leaked by a scene group in mid-1995. Producer René Boutin sent me screenshots of a much more complete version, which can be seen here. The bankruptcy of Sunsoft USA ultimately caused the cancellation of this game before it was finished.





Super NES & Notable Accessories

Super Nintendo Entertainment System

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: Aug. 1991

The Super Nintendo Entertainment System, more commonly referred to as the SNES or Super NES, was Nintendo's follow-up to the extremely popular Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). This successor console was originally released as the Super Famicom in Japan in November 1990. The Super Famicom was physically redesigned and released in North America in August 1991 but kept its original design for its European debut in 1992. The North American SNES cartridge design was altered for that market, while the European and most PAL-region cartridges retained their Japanese Super Famicom design. In North America, the SNES originally came bundled with two controllers and the outstanding *Super Mario World*, an excellent title that took full advantage of the power and features of the new 16-bit console, such as superior audio, visuals, and effects and the ability to display up to 256 simultaneous colors. Although not the market juggernaut that the original NES was, the SNES/Super Famicom still sold over 49 million units worldwide while competing against consoles that had been released years before, like the Sega Genesis and TurboGrafx-16 by NEC. The SNES managed to perform well into the mid 1990s in the face of newer, technically more powerful systems and console add-ons, including the Sega CD, Sega 32X, Atari Jaguar, Sony PlayStation, and Sega Saturn. Nintendo would continue to produce the SNES until 1999, three years after their successor Nintendo 64 console was released.



North American Console



European Console

Super NES Controller

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: Aug. 1991

The gamepad for Nintendo's 16-bit console was upgraded from the NES controller with some marked improvements. While the NES controller only featured Nintendo's iconic D-pad, A-B buttons, and Start and Select buttons, the SNES controller added X-Y face buttons and L-R shoulder buttons, increasing the total button count to allow for more gameplay flexibility and complexity. The European controller matched the original Super Famicom in design and color. However, the North American controller color scheme was updated to match the purple tone of the console as well as the Y and X buttons altered to be concave in shape to feel different from the convex B and A buttons.



North American Controller



European Controller

New-Style Super NES (SNES Model 2)

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: Oct. 1997

Much like Nintendo released a smaller NES late in its life (NES-101), Nintendo produced a slimmed-down budget version of the SNES in North America in 1997 (SNS-101). This model 2 or SNES Jr. reduced costs by eliminating features such as the expansion port, RF connector port, cartridge ejector, and power light. The AV multi-out port was also altered to support only composite output but not RGB or S-Video signals. Only a single controller was included, with slight alterations from the original controller. While the default sets did not contain a pack-in game, there were box bundles released with a game pak included, such as *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* or *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*.





Exertainment System LifeCycle

Manufacturer: Life Fitness
Release Date: Oct. 1994

The Life Fitness LifeCycle was developed in collaboration with Nintendo, with two different models produced, one with a built-in monitor and one without. There were only two games published for use with this exercise bike: *Mountain Bike Rally* and the *Mountain Bike Rally / Speed Racer* combo cart. For more information and a thorough history of the LifeCycle, please refer to the supplemental article by Kelsey Lewin later on in this guide.



Game Genie

Developer: Codemasters
Manufacturer: Galoob
Release Date: 1992

Codemasters/Galoob followed up their very successful Game Genie for the NES with a similar peripheral for the Super NES. Like its predecessor, the unlicensed Game Genie is a passthrough device where games can be attached before inserting it into the console. A menu was provided for users to enter game-specific codes via an included booklet to unlock power-ups and cheats during their game experience. It is incompatible with certain SNES games that use special enhancement chips.



Justifier

Manufacturer: Konami
Release Date: Jan. 1994

The Justifier was a light gun developed by Konami specifically for the home port of their arcade hit *Lethal Enforcers*. This blue revolver-style gun accessory came bundled with that title and was not available separately since it was the only SNES game the Justifier was compatible with. A pink Justifier for Player 2 was available for purchase for $11.95 plus shipping via mail order from an ad inside the *Lethal Enforcers* manual.



M.A.C.S. M16 Rifle

Manufacturer: U.S. Army
Release Date: 1993

The Multi-Purpose Arcade Combat Simulator (M.A.C.S.) was a training program developed for the U.S. military. This light gun is a replica of an M16A2 rifle with an aiming scope; the barrel holds the light sensor. It is reportedly far more accurate than Nintendo's Super Scope. Three titles were produced for its use: *MACS Multipurpose Arcade Combat Simulator*, *MACS Moving Target Simulator*, and *MACS Basic Rifle Marksmanship Program*.

Miracle Piano Keyboard

Manufacturer: The Software Toolworks
Release Date: 1991

The Miracle Piano Teaching System was released for computer platforms, NES, SNES, and Sega Genesis. The bundled package contained the MIDI keyboard, connector cables, power supply, foot pedal, instructions, and software. With the use of the cartridge, aspiring musicians could learn to play the piano through various programs.



Super Advantage

Manufacturer: Asciiware
Release Date: Aug. 1992

Taking inspiration from the NES Advantage, the Super Advantage by Asciiware is likewise an eight-way arcade-style joystick controller with some extra features, such as independent turbo button toggles (adjusted by sliders) and variable speed slow motion. However, the button layout isn't suitable for all game types. Players looking for a more traditional six-button layout should choose an option like the Fighter Stick SN (also by Asciiware) or the Capcom Fighter Power Stick.



Super Game Boy

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: June 1994

The Super Game Boy is a cartridge adapter that allows play of Game Boy and Game Boy-compatible Game Boy Color games on the SNES. The Super Game Boy offers the ability to alter the monochrome games' color schemes to limited color palettes and change the screen borders. Some later Game Boy games were developed with Super Game Boy bonus features in mind, including supporting additional colors, displaying a custom graphical border, displaying exclusive background sprites, upgrading audio, and allowing multiplayer via a second SNES controller or more with an SNES multitap.

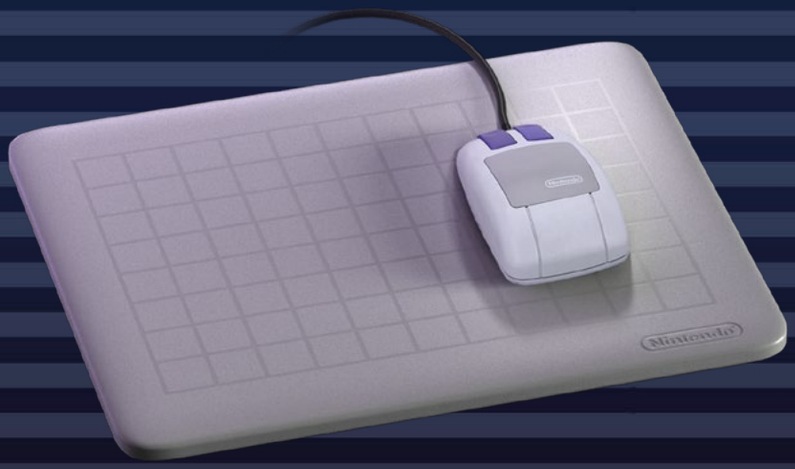


Super Multitap

Manufacturer: Hudson Soft
Release Date: Sept. 1993

Hudson Soft initially released the Super Multitap bundled with *Super Bomberman*; it was also sold as a standalone peripheral afterwards. It is a four-player SNES controller adapter that can be plugged into the second controller port of the console. With its use (and additional controllers), supported games can allow for up to five players. Dozens of SNES games would eventually take advantage of permitting three to five simultaneous players, both in straightforward and in creative ways. The Super Multitap was the first and most popular multi-controller adapter, but it would soon be followed by several other third-party offerings, such as the Tribal Tap by Naki, the Super 5-Play by Performance, and Bullet-Proof Software's Super Link (designed by Hori).





Super NES Mouse

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: Aug. 1992

The Super NES Mouse is a two-button trackball mouse controller usable with a flat surface or the included plastic gray mouse pad. Nintendo bundled the Super NES Mouse with their creativity title *Mario Paint*. While that title would be the only SNES game that requires its use, nearly 40 other games were released with the Super NES Mouse as a controller option, such as strategy and first-person-shooter titles.



Super Scope

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: Feb. 1992

The first light gun developed for the SNES, the Super Scope is a bazooka-shaped peripheral designed to be used while it rests on one's shoulder. The Super Scope has two fire/action buttons, a pause button, a power switch, and an eyepiece sight to look/aim through. It transmits information wirelessly to a small infrared receiver box attached to the SNES and placed on top of a television, and aim can be calibrated from within game. The Super Scope is powered by six AA batteries and came bundled with a collection of light gun games called *Super Scope 6*. The following games support the Super Scope:

Battle Clash
Bazooka Blitzkrieg
The Hunt for Red October (bonus games)
Lamborghini American Challenge (bonus mode)
Lemmings 2: The Tribes (bonus feature)
Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge
Operation Thunderbolt
Super Scope 6
T2: The Arcade Game
Tin Star
X-Zone
Yoshi's Safari



XBAND

Manufacturer: Catapult Entertainment
Release Date: June 1995

The XBAND is a modem cartridge that was released with an accompanying paid online service for the Sega Genesis, SNES, and Sega Saturn. The service allowed for playing multiplayer games online, storing friend lists, saving high scores, and sending emails to friends. The network was taken offline on April 30th, 1997 due to a lack of support and new games being made compatible with the service. The XBAND service supported the following 15 SNES games:

Doom
Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball
Killer Instinct
Kirby's Avalanche
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (XBAND maze game)
Madden NFL '95
Madden NFL '96
Mortal Kombat II
Mortal Kombat 3
NBA Jam Tournament Edition
NHL '95
NHL '96
Super Mario Kart
Super Street Fighter II
WeaponLord

The Console Wars: SNES vs. Sega Genesis

by James Rolfe



SNES vs. Genesis. One of the best pairs of words that "vs." has ever come between. Everybody was talking about it 20 years ago, and we're still talking about it today. What was the best 16-bit system? Which was better? The correct answer is TurboGrafx-16. But no, it was all about SNES vs. Genesis.

It was one of the first times my generation can remember a war between two consoles – truly a nostalgic battle. And no matter who you are, it comes down to a matter of preference and personal opinion, not to mention that few people owned both systems at the time and had a chance to play every game on each one. Even now, I feel there are a lot of games I haven't played that might need to be brought into the equation, but I'm not gonna do that. I'm just gonna talk about what it was like growing up in this time and take you back to the past.

As a kid, the famous "Genesis Does What Nintendon't" commercial was the bane of my existence. How dare they talk about Nintendo like that? What a cheap shot! I took it personally – it felt like my best friend got bullied. Sega's marketing team was feeding all those arguments in the school cafeteria with new words to use. I remember being on the school bus, trying to tell one of my friends that Super Nintendo was better, and they kept saying "Blast Processing." It worked! The term caught on like wildfire. It worked so well that even to this day, we're still talking about it. The internet is a new playground to continue this old argument. It picked up just like before, with everyone debating whether or not Blast Processing is real. I've seen it on message boards. It's real. It's not real. It's real… What's the story? Well, I looked into it.

According to the technical specs, the Genesis is faster. I can't find many great side-by-side comparisons to prove it. Nevertheless, it seems to be a fact. The term "Blast Processing" was made up for the commercial because that sounds way cooler than just pointing out the facts. Imagine if the commercial said, "The Sega Genesis has a 7.6 Mhz processor, the SNES… only 3.6." That's not catchy. Commercials aren't about the facts; they're about what people are going to remember. Say "Blast Processing," and you get every kid to say it even if they don't know what it means. I never knew what "bits" meant as a kid, and I'd say it all the time. It's hilarious – if you look at the rest of the specs, the SNES outshines the Genesis in almost every technical detail, but they found one thing to exploit, and that's the nature of marketing.

Also, the game they choose to make fun of in the commercial is *Super Mario Kart*. Have you played *Super Mario Kart*? That's a great, fun game. They compared it to *Sonic the Hedgehog* just to show how much faster the Genesis is. What were they really comparing? Vertical speed vs. straight-on racing. No, the screen doesn't scroll as fast, but that's because it's a totally different kind of game. It's another marketing strategy: make the competitor look bad. With the right techniques, you can make anything look as good or as awful as you want. I think that's why the commercials ticked me off back then. I felt they were brainwashing other kids and manipulating them to think whatever they wanted them to think.

The whole Blast Processing thing was almost like an act of desperation; Sega was using anything they could to hammer home the point that the Genesis was better. But I'm gonna take the most objective stance I can. Let's do it. SNES vs. Genesis. Let the throwdown begin.

Console Design

Let's start with the most obvious: the look of the consoles. The Genesis has a more modern shape. It's cool. The SNES looks like a blocky kid's toy with purple switches, and for some reason, lots of SNES consoles turn yellow over time. The Genesis just seems more slick (I'm not counting all of the different models, just the original).
Winner: Genesis

Controllers

The Genesis controller is straightforward and simple – four buttons if you count START. The SNES controller has eight if you count START and SELECT. That makes it way easier to play fighting games, such as *Mortal Kombat*. On the Genesis, there are not enough buttons. You have to hit START to block, and both High Punch and Low Punch are on the A button. With games such as *Street Fighter II* requiring six buttons, you pretty much have to buy another controller – but we're comparing the basic controllers that came with the console. The SNES has all the buttons you need in all the right places. I can easily hold down the L or R triggers, and both thumbs are still free to hit other buttons. In a Mario-type game, I can hold down Y to run and push the rest of my thumb onto B to jump. It helps that the buttons are on an angle. On the Genesis, the buttons are in a straight line – I have to hop my thumb back and forth. The SNES controller feels more comfortable with that rounded dog-bone shape that fits in your hands perfectly. I guess one plus about the Genesis is that you can plug in an Atari controller. That's pretty cool, right?
Winner: SNES

Game Boxes

This may seem like a minor thing, but isn't it nice to have something to put your game in? The SNES games had standard cardboard boxes, but the Genesis boxes weren't boxes at all. They were plastic cases that snap open. That's a good idea. In retrospect, it's great for collecting. It's much easier to find a Genesis game complete in the box. With the SNES, the boxes had no function, especially when the games came with their own protective covering, so most people threw them away. The Genesis idea was progressive, and it's now what every game console uses.
Winner: Genesis

Backwards Compatibility

Being able to play your old games on your new console is a great feature to have. The SNES has the Super Game Boy, which allows you to play Game Boy games on your TV. The Genesis has no such adapter for the Game Gear, although it does have the Power Base Converter, which is for playing Master System games. This is an official contraption from Sega, but the SNES has an unlicensed

version of the same thing called the Super 8, which plays NES and Super Famicom games. That makes things pretty even, but thanks to the Super Game Boy…
Winner: SNES

Graphics

This is a difficult one. I've already mentioned that the SNES is technically superior, with a greater color palette and whatnot, and it makes sense that a newer console would be more advanced. But they both look pretty good to me. Does one really stand out from the other? I'm not sure. It really depends on which games you're comparing. Some games look better on the Genesis. Some look better on the SNES. One thing that pushes the SNES over the line is the Super FX chip, used in games such as *Doom* and *Star Fox*, which helps to render three-dimensional shapes. This was a new achievement later in the SNES's lifespan, which made it exciting that our 16-bit console could improve itself. The Genesis, on the other hand, started using hardware add-ons, such as the Sega CD and 32X, just to accomplish the same thing the SNES already could – it's much wiser that the SNES's enhancements come inside the cartridges.
Winner: SNES

Sound

SNES! No question about it. The sound effects on the SNES are far superior. The music, however, is distinct on both consoles. It's like comparing an orchestra to a synth guitar – they're quite different. I will say the Genesis has its own unique style that sounds better on some games – *Earthworm Jim*, for example. And *The Adventures of Batman & Robin* just blows the SNES version away. So there are exceptions, but most of the time, the SNES rocks the competition. It's the first console I ever heard that crossed the line of video game music and just started to sound like real music. To this day, the SNES has some of the greatest video game themes ever!
Winner: SNES

Games

Both consoles have a great library of games. The Genesis has *Altered Beast*, *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*, the Shinobi games, *Strider*, *ToeJam & Earl*, and the best version of *Ghostbusters* for the time. The SNES has *Pilotwings*, the Mega Man X games, and the best version of *SimCity* around. A lot of the same games that crossed over to both consoles came out almost the same and are hard to compare. *Aladdin* is an example where both versions are completely different from each other. In that case, the Genesis version is way better.

The Konami games are different, such as *TMNT*. The Genesis got *The Hyperstone Heist*; the SNES got *Turtles in Time*. These games are similar, but you can't beat *Turtles in Time*. Genesis got *Contra: Hard Corps* while SNES got *Contra III*. Again, both are similar, but on the Genesis version you can choose to play as different characters, including a wolf, and it doesn't have that annoying overhead stage like in the SNES version. What were they thinking? Genesis got *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, while SNES got *Super Castlevania IV*. Both are great, but *Super Castlevania IV* blows my mind with its smooth control and creepy graphics – it's one of my favorite games of all time.

Both versions of *The Adventures of Batman & Robin* have awesome graphics that resemble the animated TV series, but the Genesis version just nails it this time! It has the cutscenes that the SNES version is missing, and the stage graphics have a lot of three-dimensional depth.

There seems to be a myth that the Genesis is more of an adult console. It may be true that Nintendo seems to target younger audiences, but it's not all rainbows and flowers. All the hubbub comes from the first *Mortal Kombat*. The SNES took out the blood and altered some of the fatalities, and that's where all the criticism comes from. The Genesis version also doesn't have the blood, but you can turn it on with a secret code. With *Mortal Kombat II*, the SNES brought the blood back, so it's now a moot point anyway. The SNES has blood in *Doom Troopers* and in *Doom*, so there's no way you can say it's just a kiddie console. Even Nintendo's own branded game *Super Metroid* was dark in tone (and awesome overall).

Both consoles had their share of fighting games, but *Killer Instinct*, c'mon. It wasn't the same as the arcade, but it's still the best exclusive 16-bit fighter by far.

The beat 'em up genre. The Genesis has the Golden Axe games, *Alien Storm*, and *Streets of Rage*. Everyone talks about the Streets of Rage series, but the SNES has the Final Fight games. The first one doesn't have a two-player option like the arcade, but they rectified that with the sequels. I don't know what it is, but beat 'em up games always feel more fun on the SNES. On the Genesis, they're a little bit clunky. On SNES, the action is smooth, and it just feels right when you hit people.

The Genesis has more sports games. I'll give you that any day. You can keep your sports games.

In the RPG department, SNES just kills it! *Final Fantasy III*, which is actually *VI*, is one of the best games ever made. You can't compete with that. That's not to say Genesis doesn't have its share of RPGs – there are the Phantasy Star games, of course – but the SNES also has *Chrono Trigger*, another masterpiece! That's a one-two punch. And then there's *Super Mario RPG*. It may seem gimmicky to make an RPG just to include Nintendo characters, but it's a really fun game and much better than what people may expect.

Both consoles do have their share of bad games. The SNES has *The Wizard of Oz*, the Genesis has *Action 52*, and both consoles are unfortunate enough to have *Shaq Fu*.

Then, of course, there's *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Super Mario World*. Which is better? It's all a matter of preference. I will say *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* is the game that made me buy a Genesis. But even with all the Sonic games, I still could never live without *Super Mario World*. It may not have the fast-paced action, but it has lots of power-ups, a fun challenge, and an incredible world to explore. After all, it is *Super Mario WORLD*. I love Sonic, but I feel a good Mario game has just a little bit more to it. And if any platformers can top even *Super Mario World*, the Donkey Kong Country games can. They're so addicting that, in trying to record footage of them, I had trouble turning them off. I just wanted to keep playing.

Between the SNES and Genesis, it all depends on what kinds of games are your favorite. Possibly, my favorite game of all time is *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. The puzzle solving, storyline, and action that goes on in that game are so phenomenal, I'm at a loss for words. It never gets old. I can still play it any day. I think this game just nukes the entire competition. If you ask me, "Why do you like SNES better?" my answer is *A Link to the Past*. And wait, as if that's not enough… *Super Metroid*. I recommend it hardcore. This is a must-play game. It's a giant maze that you can't stop playing until it's finished. It has a foreboding atmosphere that keeps you tense the whole time. Running around blowing stuff up has never been so much fun. Take your pick, but **the winner for me is the SNES**.

Maybe I just fulfilled my 11-year-old self's mission. I made a case for the SNES, but that's only if fetching for an honest answer. I grew up a Nintendo fanboy, but in hindsight, I'm glad my choice was justified. It wasn't total fanboyism either; I had access to a Genesis. My next-door neighbors owned one, so I was able to go over there and play it. I had the best of both worlds, which not everyone was fortunate enough to experience.

I really just wanted to bring you back to a simpler time when there wasn't a care in the world. Nothing was more important than defending your favorite console. Today, there are always problems going on, political issues and stuff like that. But back then, all we cared about was what's better – SNES or Genesis? The one thing I know is that the world is not complete without either one. The SNES and Genesis both live on.

James Rolfe is a filmmaker and content creator who runs Cinemassacre. He is best known for the Angry Video Game Nerd video series and others like Rental Reviews, Board James, and Monster Madness.

Other Reasons Why You Should Absolutely Revisit *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*

by Roger Barr

When Pat got down on his knees and begged me to write an article for this Super Nintendo book, I was more than happy to help him out… as soon as his paltry check $10,000 cleared. After I donated the proceeds to Sega, I realized I was now contractually obligated to write a piece about a video game on the SNES. But what game? At first, I noticed a cartridge was wedged underneath one of the legs of a nearby table, but it was just a copy of *Pit-Fighter*, so I decided it was best left there to keep the table balanced. Then I remembered a wonderful game I revisit every year during the Halloween season about a bearded fellow who is somehow able to perform absurdly acrobatic movements in a full suit of plate armor – that game is none other than *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*.

Now, given that there are 800 games in this beast of a book, I knew I had to do something to get you – the person who stole it from a struggling local bookstore – to pay attention to my game selection instead of all the others. So with that in mind, I've decided to break down some other reasons why you should revisit *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* and then set this book on fire since it's the only SNES game you'll ever need to play. Actually, don't set the book on fire… please return it to that local bookshop you stole it from, you monster.
Anyway, let's begin...

Fulfill Your Fantasy of Running Through a Graveyard in Your Underwear



Okay, let's face the facts here, shall we? You know you're sick... I know you're sick... the entire world knows you're sick. Fortunately, a game like *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* will allow you to live out your sick fantasy of stripping down to your skivvies and running through a graveyard. It's a good thing, too, because doing such an act in the real world like you were planning has some *major* legal ramifications. Seriously, once you've been arrested for dancing among the dead in your polka dot boxers, your life goes through some huge changes. I mean, forget about finding a decent job. You think it's easy to explain to a potential employer that you were busted for cemetery streaking? Nope. Trust me; you do NOT want to go down that road. I mean… at least, that's what my friend told me.

Experience the Thrill of a Major Earthquake



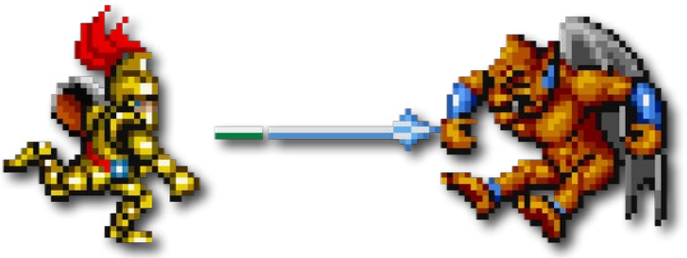
I've been living in California for over a decade now, and while I've certainly experienced my share of earthquakes that make everybody hop on social media to scream "OMG!!! DID YOU FEEL THAT?!?!" in perfect unison as if an apocalyptic asteroid just landed a few blocks away, I haven't felt any that made me want to run for cover under a table. *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* manages to fill that void quite nicely on the first stage, with its ever-shifting landscape impeding Arthur's progress. We're talking about some serious tectonic plate shifts taking place here, folks. Where is a good seismologist when you need one? People out here on the west coast are always talking about when "The Big One" is gonna happen, but maybe if scientists studied this classic action-platformer, they'd be able to take some real preventative measures.

Gririan and Woo



Sure, upon seeing the larger enemies Gririan and Woo, you could easily brush them off as a lazy palette swap. However, I see something more. I see these two fire-and-ice-breathing brutes as the video game version of the Miser Brothers. Yes, I'm talking about the Heat Miser and Snow Miser from the 1974 stop-motion film *The Year Without a Santa Claus*. Just imagine these two behemoths singing a show tune together, and the game instantly becomes more enjoyable. Besides, just because *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* is more of a Halloweeny game, that doesn't mean it can't be enjoyed during the holiday season every year as well.

Killing Red Arremer Ace



If I were to conduct a poll of people who've played any of the games in the Ghosts 'n Goblins/Ghouls 'n Ghosts series, asking them to name a single enemy that drove them crazy, it would undoubtedly be the Red Arremer. This flying twit relentlessly stalks Arthur until you're either able to kill him or to outrun him. I've seen so many people rage-quit due to this fella, and it's a shame because the only thing equal to how frustrating he can be is the satisfaction one derives from killing him. And if you ask me, of all the games in the GnG series, this Red Arremer is by far the most satisfying to kill. Why? Because his name in *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* is "Red Arremer Ace". Ace? ACE?! Listen up, you red devil jerk... just because you fly around and swoop down out of the sky doesn't mean you're a character in *Top Gun* or *Iron Eagle*, okay? Just writing about him makes me wanna go toss another a javelin directly into his smirking maw. So yeah, forget things like meditation, acupuncture, and stress balls... if you really want to feel better, go kill Red Arremer Ace.

Princess Prin Prin



Yes, Princess Prin Prin (AKA Guinevere) has been captured by Emperor Sardius; and yes, you have to go through the cliché quest of rescuing the damsel in distress; and yes, when you finally reach

her, she tells you that you need to start the entire game over in order to save her because you weren't able to get the Goddess' Bracelet on your first playthrough. Okay, looking back at all of that, it might seem like she wouldn't be worth rescuing, but come on… look at that hair! Prin Prin was living in medieval times, and she was dying her hair blue with Manic Panic? That's totally punk rock! Put aside all the clichés, for Prin Prin was clearly a punk rock pioneer, and therefore, absolutely worth saving. It's not shown in the ending sequence, but after they ride off on Arthur's horse, Prin Prin doesn't give him a kiss… she gives him a Bad Religion mixtape.

The Music

Make no mistake about it, none of the games in the Ghosts 'n Goblins/Ghouls 'n Ghosts series would be half as entertaining without those classic soundtracks that manage to seamlessly blend playfulness with creepiness. In fact, the soundtrack for this game is so incredibly good, Pat agreed to allow me to include a sound chip in this article so you can listen to a clip from the theme song! Just press your finger on the Treasure Chest button below to listen:



Wasn't that fun? Great song, isn't it? Yeah, I really love the soundtrack and – what's that you say? Your button is broken? Guess what... it isn't broken. Why? Because it's not a button at all – it's just an image printed on paper. This isn't a musical Hallmark card; it's a Super Nintendo book. If you wanna hear the music, go buy the game, you cheapskate. Honestly, it's the least you can do since you already stole this book.
Also, that wasn't even a treasure chest... it was a Mimic:



Fooled Again!

In summation, I hope this article has convinced you to revisit *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, as it's truly a timeless classic. If you remain unconvinced, please show the article to somebody who actually has good taste in video games, so they can enjoy it instead. Once you've done that, feel free to move on with your life. Who knows, maybe someday you'll find a way to make your life just as useful as that aforementioned *Pit-Fighter* cartridge. Well, maybe not *that* useful, but give it your best shot. Good luck!

Roger Barr is the writer/comedian founder of I-Mockery.com and the creator of video games including Grave Chase, Bionic Chainsaw Pogo Gorilla, and Abobo's Big Adventure. In his spare time, he enjoys long walks on the beach, playing classic games, and writing about himself in the third person.

Nintendo and Argonaut: The International Partnership That Created *Star Fox*

by Karen Niemla

When we recall the 16-bit console era, we most often think of Japanese hardware and software developers, Sega and Nintendo in particular. This was a period when companies such as Capcom and Konami were experiencing a sort of golden age, and it really seemed as though most of the popular console games people loved were from Japan. Western hardware was even less common, with Commodore and Atari, former titans of the video game industry, both pitifully failing to maintain a foothold in the 1990s. It's not that Western developers were unheard of, but there was a public perception that Japan had pulled far ahead of the West in regards to not only consoles but also electronic technology in general. So in hindsight, it's surprising to discover that one of the companies that helped keep the Super Nintendo relevant enough to (arguably) win the 16-bit wars actually originated from Great Britain, supplying them with both software and hardware innovations.

Europe hadn't experienced an early-'80s video game industry "crash" as America had since the European video game market was largely comprised of home computers rather than consoles, with machines such as the Commodore 64, Atari 8-bit line, Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, and umpteen others driving the market. Argonaut Software was founded by 16-year-old programmer Jeremy "Jez" San in 1982 from his bedroom in his parents' UK home, and he'd soon be able to hire more teenagers to work along with him. By 1984, the company had grown enough to release its first game, *Skyline Attack*, a shooter which was similar to *Defender* but featured well-drawn daytime city scenes.



Starglider on the Commodore Amiga

Two years later, Argonaut produced its first landmark hit, *Starglider* for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga, published by Rainbird Software. Like many games of the 1980s, it was inspired by *Star Wars*, but it wasn't just the movie itself that influenced its development. Jez San had wanted to create an official home computer port of the *Star Wars* arcade game, which features 3D vector graphics, and he contacted Atari to do so. They not only responded, but also for a time they talked about the possibility of selling the computer port rights to him as he continued development. Unfortunately, at some point the deal fizzled out, and he instead adapted it into a new, original game in which players pilot a first-person spacecraft over a flat landscape, shooting at enemy vehicles and turrets to defend planet Novenia from the invading Egron Empire. Its transparent wire-frame angular polygons on the Atari ST and Amiga feature astonishingly fluid frame rates, with some models (but not all) even having filled facets. *Starglider* became enormously successful, making around a quarter of a million pounds sterling, plus ports of varying quality were made by other companies for myriad platforms, such as the Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, and even the Apple II. Although it wouldn't be the last, it was the first 3D game for the ST and Amiga and granted Argonaut some notoriety for their technical talent. In 1988, Argonaut created a sequel, *Starglider 2*, again published by Rainbird Software, which was even more impressive than its predecessor, boasting opaque, color-filled polygons with an improved appearance of depth and new explorational gameplay elements that evolved beyond the arcade-style shooting.

Although the Starglider titles have become more obscure over time, their eventual influence on *Star Fox* is still notable, as these games share many characteristics in gameplay and appearance; in particular, *Starglider 2* has a strikingly similar visual style in its enemy and building models. The semi-fixed camera and flight angle, emphasis on shooter gameplay, docking sequences where the player's spaceship enters or emerges from a larger one, and some ship models seem to be ancestral to the later game. *Star Wars*-esque AT-ST-shaped "walker" tank enemies that appear in the Starglider games also look similar to a walking tank vehicle form that the Arwing ship would be able to morph into in *Star Fox 2* and other games of the franchise. In terms of business, the success of the Starglider titles also provided Argonaut Software the capital it needed to expand and develop new technologies and ideas.



Starglider 2 for MS-DOS

In the latter 1980s, Argonaut continued to work on other games, such as the 3D racing title *Days of Thunder*, published in 1990 by Mindscape. It was successful enough to eventually be ported to the NES and Game Boy, among other platforms. Meanwhile, around 1988, another British technology company, Flare Technology (which was related to Sinclair, the company behind the ZX Spectrum), was involved in developing a new 16-bit game console called the Konix Multisystem, which was supposed to have powerful sprite capabilities and unique hardware. It never truly came to fruition, but Flare developed a follow-up which would eventually become Atari's Jaguar console. During the development on Konix, Argonaut was working with Flare as a potential developer for the ill-fated system, and one of Flare's chip designers, Ben Cheese, remained an industry contact of Jez San, which would later prove useful for them both.

Argonaut's relationship with Nintendo was initiated in a more unorthodox manner, however. While home computers had dominated video gaming in Europe during the 1980s, with even the mighty Nintendo and Sega consoles encumbered by inferior distribution and marketing, by the latter part of the decade, consoles were finally gaining popularity, and Argonaut wanted to break into the burgeoning industry. They began developing a 3D engine for the NES to run a possible port of *Starglider*, dubbed "NesGlider," which featured filled color polygons; it was never released, but there was a demonstrational prototype. Jez San had somehow also acquired a Nintendo Game Boy, which hadn't yet been released. After examining its internal workings, he discovered how to circumvent the console's copyright protection that was supposed to prevent unlicensed games from being developed on it, and do so in a legally sound manner, a feat which involved both programming prowess and understanding the hardware well enough to make a low-cost electrical component. Thus, Argonaut began to develop a 3D engine for it as well, principally made by teenager Dylan Cuthbert. San rather boldly decided to show their new prototype to Nintendo by visiting their booth at the 1989 Consumer Electronics Show and asking to speak to their top people. Nintendo's representatives were impressed both by Argonaut's ability to deftly break through their copyright protection and the 3D graphics they had managed to produce on the new handheld.

Amazingly, after their CES encounter, Nintendo contacted San and

asked him to fly to Japan and meet with company president Hiroshi Yamauchi and other Nintendo personnel. They were interested in Argonaut's 3D engine and the idea of working with a European developer. After all, in the UK and Europe, Nintendo had failed to achieve the utter dominance of the market they had done in the U.S. during the NES era, and perhaps they were also interested in bolstering their business relationships in the region.



"NesGlider" demo

Eventually in 1990, other wunderkind programmers at Argonaut, such as Cuthbert and Giles Goddard, were deployed to Japan with San to work alongside Nintendo on developing new games. They were even shown the still-in-development Super Nintendo and its launch titles, including *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, which use the machine's Mode 7 scaling capabilities to create a flat 3D plane effect for landscapes but not the sprite objects on top. Nintendo wanted to know if further 3D effects could be achieved. Given an SNES prototype, Argonaut made a new "NesGlider" demo for it, which wasn't all that impressive for being the maximum 3D that the system could muster. As San would tell *Eurogamer* decades later, "I suggested that if they wanted better, they should let us design a 3D chip for them. We had never designed a 3D chip before, but we had done some hardware so it wasn't a completely bullshit idea." Fortunately, his colleague Ben Cheese and Flare were able to help and designed a chip that could make the SNES capable of 3D graphics, known at first as the "Mario" chip. It was a RISC microprocessor that, in a way, functioned as a GPU for the SNES. This resulted in the creation of a lesser-known chip division of Argonaut, called Argonaut RISC Cores or ARC, which became its own company in the late 1990s, making processors for a variety of devices and applications beyond video games.



Super FX GSU-2-SP1 microprocessor chip

In the meantime, Argonaut continued working on games with Nintendo and the 3D Game Boy prototype that had initially attracted Nintendo's attention at CES; this eventually became the first title they completed. *X* was released by Nintendo in 1992 in Japan but not in the West, although there is a very rough prototype of an English version bearing the name "Lunar Chase" available on the Internet. A floating tank shooter similar to *Starglider*, it too had wireframe polygons and a new but similar story about defending against an alien invasion in space. Besides being among the very first truly 3D games on a handheld, it's also a good game on its own. Considering the hardware limitations, *X* is surprisingly smooth and has decent music as well, making it one of the most technically impressive titles ever on the original Game Boy. Like the Starglider series, there are some similarities with *Star Fox*, which arrived a year later.



X for Game Boy

Star Fox did not begin as an on-rails-style shooter and initially gave the player freedom to move about the world, akin to *Starglider 2*, but Shigeru Miyamoto wanted to simplify the gameplay to make it more approachable to players, giving the Arwing a fixed automatic flightpath. Otherwise, the technical aspects of *Star Fox* were handled by Argonaut, while Nintendo's Miyamoto, director Katsuya Eguchi, and the Japanese development team handled the creative aspects, such as devising the story, locations, and characters that gamers would come to love: Fox, Falco, Slippy, and others. Again, the connection to *Star Wars* returned, with an unabashedly close homage to the film's opening sequence showing a gargantuan spacecraft slowly flying over the camera, accompanied by an orchestral score.

Although these artistic, non-technical elements of video games may seem merely superficial, they are indispensable in creating an emotional connection with players. Without these characters and a story, *Star Fox* on the SNES could have just been *Starglider* on the SNES: a technically impressive title that likely would've been forgotten by average gamers in later decades. The contributions of Miyamoto and the rest of the Japanese team are what made *Star Fox Star Fox* (or *Starwing* as it is known in Europe, due to a conflict over the name of another game in Germany).

By 1993, *Star Fox* was released worldwide, impressing the press and gamers alike and becoming a classic Nintendo hit. In America, Nintendo staged lavish publicity events across the country, featuring parachutists and appearances by actual astronauts, including Buzz Aldrin, plus a skill contest for the game. The special *Super Star Fox Weekend* cartridges made for these events are now rare collector's items. Argonaut was Nintendo's best weapon in the 16-bit war; press articles at the time were reporting on Nintendo's new Super FX chip while also discussing the Sega Activator, which premiered around the same time – a laughable comparison in hindsight.



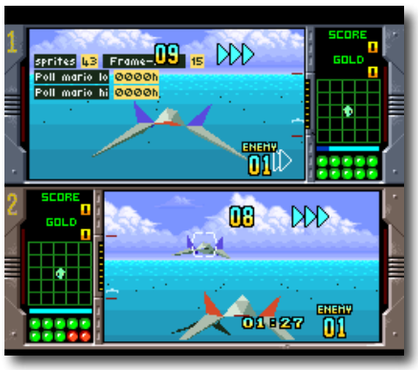
Super Star Fox Weekend

For Argonaut, there was some element of patriotic pride in their success. An Argonaut representative told *The Daily Mirror* in 1993, "We are very proud that a British company has beaten the world in this area. For too long people have thought that hi-tech computer chips are either Japanese or American." Whether this was flag-waving PR talk or not, gamers and industry insiders around the world could see Argonaut's achievements, even though Nintendo's marketing and branding gave them little publicity.

Despite the game's success, the primary complaint against it was its difficulty. As Miyamoto told *The Daily Mirror* in 1993, "Many people

found *Starwing* too hard. The project I'm working on at the moment is *FX Trax*, a driving game which will also use the Super FX chip." This game would eventually become *Stunt Race FX* (*Wild Trax* in Japan), an enjoyably cute racing game with anthropomorphic vehicles and a 3D track running with an even more powerful chip, the Super FX 2, which was going to be used for a *Star Fox* sequel as well.

The next adventure of Fox McCloud was meant to be more ambitious than the first, allowing the player further freedom of movement and exploration in levels (making it a bit more like *Starglider 2* again). Despite being partly finished and anticipated by fans, Nintendo chose to cancel it to focus its marketing on hype for the upcoming Nintendo 64 console. Additionally, the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn were on the horizon and poised to quickly reduce the Super FX's "wow" factor. *Star Fox 2* would one day receive an official release on the Super NES Classic Edition. The long delay has no simple explanation, since there were no issues over ownership and emulation of the Super FX chip and Nintendo was free to release it on the Virtual Console starting with the Wii.



Star Fox 2 prototype

In total, there were eight cartridges released with the Super FX and Super FX 2 chips, including *Doom*, which would've been impossible on the console without it, and other titles such as *Dirt Racer*, *Dirt Trax FX*, and *Winter Gold*. In 1994, Argonaut made its own Super FX game, *Vortex*, a third-person space shooter where the player pilots a robot that can transform into different vehicles (although it is not a Transformers title). Published by Electro Brain, it's a fine but not fantastic game with high difficulty. In partnership with telecommunications company GTE, Nintendo and Argonaut worked on another game, *FX Fighter*, which was to feature 3D models with motion-captured animations. This, too, was canceled, although Argonaut and GTE were able to release it for DOS PCs in 1995. Nintendo would also use the Super FX 2 for *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* in 1995, although its box does not bear the Super FX logo, probably because marketing for the chip associated it with 3D gaming while this title uses the processor for enhancing its 2D capabilities instead.

Even after Argonaut and Nintendo's work on the SNES ended, the British influence continued on into the next console generation, shaping the development of *Super Mario 64* and *Star Fox 64*; the former used some ideas from a prototype platformer Argonaut made featuring Yoshi that they would eventually adapt into *Croc: Legend of the Gobbos* on the PlayStation and Saturn. Additionally, Argonaut was working with Nintendo on an alternate virtual reality device to the Virtual Boy called the "Super Visor," which had head motion tracking and color graphics, according to Jez San.

Argonaut also produced *BRender*, a professional 3D graphics rendering software which could make games for a variety of platforms, including the Nintendo 64 and other consoles. It enjoyed some success in the 1990s when development tools for 3D games were uncommon. Argonaut would naturally use it for their own games, and it was chosen by other developers for projects such as Microsoft's 3D *Movie Maker* and Stainless Software's *Carmageddon*.

In the end, Nintendo's relationship with Argonaut was enormously fruitful for both companies, although one arguably gathered more fruit than the other. Nintendo's relations with developers had improved since its NES days, when it bullied developers and retailers so much that it had attracted scrutiny from the FTC in America for antitrust activity, but they still remained endemically capitalistic, of course. Some former Argonaut personnel and fans feel that Nintendo abused Argonaut for its technology, cribbing their notes to learn how to make 3D games while also canceling their games and hurting them financially due to less Super FX chip production. However, this is unfortunately not uncommon in business, and Jez San says he isn't resentful despite these disappointments.

Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert worked for Nintendo a while longer, making Nintendo 64 games. In 2006, Cuthbert would again work with Nintendo on *Star Fox Command* for the DS through his own company, Q-Games, which still produces games. However, Argonaut itself collapsed in 2004, along with many other companies that couldn't survive a downturn in the changing European game industry of the mid-2000s. Nonetheless, Jez San continues to be successful in other ventures and received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) medal from his country in 2002. Argonaut RISC Cores, which had made the Super FX chips possible, was eventually absorbed by another technology company, Synopsys.

Regardless of what the future holds for the key players, the collaboration of Argonaut and Nintendo was an evolutionary moment for both Nintendo and the European game industry as a whole, with the era of diverse home computer platforms coming to an end and transitioning to the more global industry we know today, where Microsoft Windows dominates PCs and gaming consoles are marketed more consistently across the world. The era that begat Argonaut was a unique time in gaming and computing, and a group of British teenagers helped bring that chapter to a close while turning the page on a new one.

Karen Niemla is of the "Oregon Trail Generation" and enjoys retro consoles and computers, PC gaming, web design, drawing, and writing. For 12 years she's been a librarian and is currently a Reference and Research Librarian at Mercyhurst University. She collects any retro games that interest her, particularly Atari 8-bit.



The Exertainment System LifeCycle

by Kelsey Lewin

It's exercise! It's entertainment! It's… EXERTAINMENT! Nintendo has a long history of promoting physical activity in their video games, from the NES Power Pad to the Wii Fit series. Still, its 1991 partnership with workout equipment mogul Life Fitness feels a little extreme next to their other ventures. Several feet tall and too heavy to lift without help, the Exertainment System LifeCycle 3500 bike is an absolute beast – because it's literally a stationary exercise bike like the ones you might use at the gym. The difference? It hooks up to your Super Nintendo console and lets you pedal while you play using clip-on handlebar controllers. There are even a couple of made-for-Exertainment games that use pedaling as a core mechanic!

Life Fitness was founded in 1977 as a stationary bike manufacturer and has experimented with several ways to make working out a more enjoyable activity throughout its history. When digital displays surged in popularity during the mid-'80s, Life Fitness pushed for greater interactivity with their machines, building a couple of models that had game-like animated racing screens. Eventually, this led Life Fitness to Nintendo, and the two companies spent several years developing two models of stationary bikes for the Super Nintendo: one with a built-in TV screen meant for health clubs, and one for individual home use that would hook up to any TV via console.



In January of 1994, the bike was unveiled to journalists, positioned as the answer to boring workouts. Life Fitness president and co-founder Augie Nieto believed that the Exertainment System was a natural evolution of the fitness trade, combining two giants from different business categories into one fun and useful product that would influence the entire health club industry. The bike was made available for consumer purchase via phone order in July of 1994 and a couple months later via retail stores. It had a suggested price of $799 USD. Although it didn't sell spectacularly, it did receive a fair bit of attention, appearing in holiday buying guides and inspiring several articles about the concept of "Exertainment." There was even an infomercial that advertised ways to win Exertainment merchandise if you purchased the bike. Oh yeah, and Arnold Schwarzenegger endorsed it, as a former chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports.

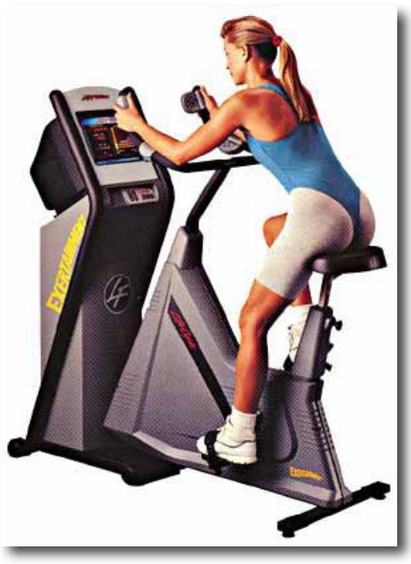
It's possible to use the bike's handlebar controllers to play any Super Nintendo game, but only two titles were ever released that work directly with the bike through pedaling: *Mountain Bike Rally* and a *Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* combo cart, the latter of which is one of the rarest games on the system. *Mountain Bike Rally* is a simple bike racing game – choose a character and bike through a level by pedaling on the Exertainment bike, using the handlebar controllers to avoid obstacles. It's a rebranded clone of the 1994 Super Nintendo title *Cannondale Cup*, which does not share compatibility with the Exertainment bike. Likewise, the *Speed Racer* game included in the combo cartridge is the same as the 1994 standalone *Speed Racer* – only this time, you have to pedal to make the car go. Both games have a tedious unlocking system that makes you bike a pretty significant amount of miles before advancing to the next level, meaning you'll be spending a lot of time replaying each track. Neither game is particularly fun, but they're at least engaging, forcing you to pay attention to what's happening on the screen rather than focusing on how much you hate exercising. Additionally, both of these titles include a built-in "Program Manager" that lets you keep track of your goals and previous workouts.



Nintendo plugged the Exertainment System in the June 1995 issue of *Nintendo Power*, promising upcoming games and a greater variety of supported exercise equipment, such as a stair-stepper, treadmill, and recumbent bike. "Put your Mettle to the Pedal" it read, hoping to entice players to try this brand new way to experience Super Nintendo games. They also shared screenshots of upcoming titles that would never hit the shelves: a fresh take on *Pac-Man* in 3D that would have you pedaling to outrun the ghosts, and a combination cartridge of *Tetris* and *Dr. Mario* where your workout would give you bonus points apparently to help you out of losing situations later in the game. Curiously, the four-page spread made no mention of the accessory's price or even where to get one.

Finding an Exertainment bike these days is not easy – its enormous size makes it impractical to store and nearly impossible to ship. Because it was only released in the US, you'll be hard-pressed to see it anywhere else. It may not be a staple piece to add to your video game collection or your workout equipment, but you've got to admit: the Life Fitness Exertainment System is a pretty interesting SNES accessory.

Kelsey Lewin is a video game history enthusiast and YouTuber. She also co-owns Seattle retro video game store Pink Gorilla Games.





Super Nintendo: More Than Just a 16-Bit NES

by Andre Meadows

Pat put together another book! Yay! Any good franchise knows it's all about the sequel. With the *Ultimate Nintendo* NES and Super NES guides, not only can I have the history of two of my favorite consoles in two wonderful books, but also I can save money on weights! Lifting these gaming books is gonna get me buff, bro! Who says video games can't help with exercise? And with the profits, Pat's hair will continue to flow like blankets on a clothesline in the breeze – truly majestic.

In case you don't remember, I'm the guy in the last book that confessed to renting or sometimes even buying ridiculously bad, cash-grab NES games based on movie and TV properties. As a kid, I would go to Blockbuster (RIP) or local mom-and-pop video stores (RIP because of Blockbuster), and I would rent a movie and the game based on that movie at the same time. Yes, there was the occasional good *Gremlins 2* in the bunch, but many of the licensed games I played were not as entertaining as the movies they were based upon.

You think I would have learned my lesson with the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, right? Yet I rented *Bebe's Kids*. Enough said. I still love that movie – Fun World! As for the game… Enough said. But like the NES, the Super NES had some "diamonds in the rough" in its library of pop culture licensed games. Sure, Mario, Zelda, and Metroid had amazing SNES entries, but give me *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time* and *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!* any day. Not to mention the SNES had one of the best *Ms. Pac-Man* carts ever.

But let's talk about the console itself, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. The console that started the constant evolution of Nintendo after the NES, further proving video games were not going to go the way of the *E.T.* landfill a second time. The console that gave us the war versus the Sega Genesis, a rivalry that would go on until the Dreamcast died and Sonic made his way to Nintendo consoles before joining Mario at the Olympic Games. The console where almost every game has the word "Super" in its title: *Super Adventure Island*, *Super Bases Loaded*, *Super Bomberman*, *Super Metroid*, *Super Punch-Out!!*, *Super Star Wars*, *Super Tennis*… the super list goes super on and super on. Seriously, I'm surprised *Super Mario World* wasn't just called *Super Super Mario Bros.*

But for all its great games, 16-bit graphics, and '90s extreme Mode 7 technology, the Super Nintendo is also quite a quirky system. Look at its build and color scheme, a very bright gray with purple lever aesthetic compared to its black, brooding Sega Genesis rival. There's something kind of "cute" about the console. Sure, the NES is also gray and owns that design that instantly sparks nostalgia for '80s kids the moment you see it, but the Super NES stood out on store shelves with its original look and especially its updated form. This may have inspired the "outside the box" console builds of the GameCube, Wii, Switch, and even that top-loader NES that came out. (And for "SNES cute" with more colors, let's not forget its Super Famicom cousin.)

That different design might have helped me in my quest to get a Super Nintendo in my home. It was hard at first to convince my parents that I needed a Super Nintendo when I already had a Nintendo. To them, the question was "What's the difference?" (I assume kids trying to explain to their parents the difference between a Wii U and a Wii probably had the same problem… I look forward to Pat's *Ultimate Wii U Guide* in 20 years). My parents said if I wanted the console so bad, I'd have to save money and buy it myself, so I put the Super Nintendo on layaway at KMart. Every couple of weeks, I took my allowance and put it on the Super Nintendo, anticipating the day it would be paid in full. When the holiday season came around, my dad was so proud of my determination, he paid off the rest so that I could have the Super Nintendo and *Super Mario World* for Christmas. Not only that, but I was given the surprise of *Pilotwings* and then *F-Zero* a short time later.

After getting everything set up, I held a "demonstration" to prove to my parents the differences between the NES and Super NES, showing our money was well spent. I brought them to my "presentation office" (bedroom), showed them what *Super Mario Bros.* looked like on the NES and then showed them what *Super Mario World* looked like on the SNES. They were impressed… or maybe they were just humoring me. Either way, they saw the difference and were happy that I was happy. And this time, they let me keep both the NES and SNES, as opposed to when I had to give my Atari away to a family member after getting the NES.

I had a sequel demonstration for my parents when I got *Donkey Kong Country*. Same scenario: I showed them *Donkey Kong Classics* on the NES, then *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES. I was impressed by the graphics, the score, and that Donkey Kong was now the hero of his own side-scrolling jungle adventure instead of just being a one-screen, Pauline-napping, barrel-throwing antagonist. My parents liked the part where Donkey Kong knocked Cranky Kong off the ledge and hip-hop danced next to a boombox. If only we all could be so ecstatically pleased with such small gaming details.



I think *Donkey Kong Country* was the game that proved to me that the Super Nintendo was going to be a little different from the NES. True, a lot of the SNES library obviously consists of "that game or franchise you played on the NES but with better graphics, longer playtime, and hey, maybe you can actually save your progress." But the Super NES did try new things when it came to graphics and gameplay, especially with its licensed characters. *Donkey Kong Country* could have easily been "*Super Donkey Kong*," but it instead goes for this adventure game with a unique look and hypnotic score that undoubtedly makes it stand out from the crowd. Sure, the gameplay is simple, but the "character" of the game makes it special, from its presentation to its animations. And the search for all the secret rooms and bonus stages is the icing on the cake. It's one of the few games I ever truly completed, even if I probably couldn't do it again in my older age.

In the same way, *Star Fox* could have just been another good shooter like *Gradius III* or *Super R-Type*. But pop in a Super FX chip, make the heroes a group of talking animal pilots doing barrel rolls, and now it's a new Nintendo IP. Mario could have had a regular *Super Mario World 2* but instead went for a completely different art style and egg-throwing, baby-crying gameplay, with Yoshi front and center. Meanwhile, he joined Geno and Mallow for a Square *Super Mario RPG* adventure and even got his friends and foes together for *Super Mario Kart*, starting a franchise that inspired many sequels and also many, many, MANY *Mario Kart* clones.

Even *Pilotwings* and *F-Zero* stand out as being unique launch titles alongside *Super Mario World*, but something about their style makes them special as well. With the power of the SNES, *Pilotwings* looks just as good as your standard PC flight simulator, if not better. *F-Zero* could have just been a futuristic *Rad Racer*, but the settings, cars, and drivers are so out there – it feels right. Captain Falcon may still be a Smash Bros. character to most people younger than me, but I'll always remember his *F-Zero* roots with Pico and Samurai Goroh. Also, we even have *SimCity* as a launch title on the Super Nintendo – you can build a city and then have it destroyed by Bowser! Godzilla may be King of the Monsters, but in *SimCity*, we have the King of the Koopas! Yes, the Super Nintendo features a lot of games that just feel like remakes of their NES counterparts, but sprinkled in the mix are a lot of titles that take risks in their look or play, allowing the Super NES

to have quite the eclectic game library.

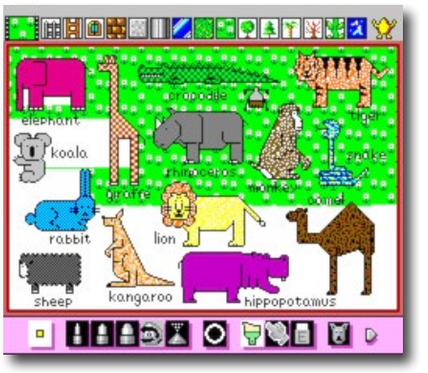
There are two particular Super Nintendo things that for some reason really stood out to me as a kid. One was the Super Game Boy. This is the special accessory that lets you play Game Boy games on TV by placing the Game Boy cartridge inside the slot of an oddly shaped, long SNES cartridge and then putting that into the SNES. You can choose one of various color palettes and select borders for the game (or even draw your own borders), and special Game Boy Color enhanced games have their own color scheme and specially made border. It may seem like a cute way to upgrade Game Boy games, but for me, it meant a lot. My relationship with the Game Boy was a little odd. I had the console and a few games, but I never invested heavily into it because I never really had a place to play it. I didn't travel much, didn't do many flights or road trips, and didn't bring it to school or on the bus often. Most of the time, I was just playing Game Boy at home. But why play *Super Mario Land* on a tiny "black and white" (green and black) screen when you have *Super Mario All-Stars* on TV? There was only one place in the house where having the portable Game Boy was convenient… I think you know the place.

But with the Super Game Boy, I could enjoy Game Boy games the same way I would my SNES games, even if the graphics and sounds were made for a portable system. And the special enhanced Game Boy edition of *Donkey Kong* was awesome! I actually remember working at a toy store in the mall, and they had a little TV to show off store promos, cartoons, etc. My boss allowed me to take home a couple of games to record on my VCR, and they would play the VHS tape in the store to entice people to buy the games. (See, I was an "influencer" even back then.) Game Boy *Donkey Kong* was one of those games I played for the VHS tape. I just loved that game expanding on the original *Donkey Kong* to create new worlds for Mario to flip around, and that Super Game Boy border made it feel like I was holding the arcade system in my hand. The other games I played for the toy store were SNES games: *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* and *College Slam*… we had a lot of copies of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* and *College Slam*.



The other game/accessory that I was the most excited to get day one was *Mario Paint*. I don't know why. I used computers in schools. I knew how to operate a mouse. I had played around with Adobe Photoshop already. I even tried a Wacom tablet at this point. But something about having a mouse on my Super Nintendo fascinated me. Just the way *Mario Paint* presented itself, from the hidden surprises when clicking letters on the title screen to taking a break to swat flies, only furthered my intoxication with this new game. Bless those two figures chanting and doing exercises before the white canvas opened, awaiting my creativity. I would record those guys and use that as my opening for my *Mario Paint* cartoons. Oh, did I mention I would make cartoons with *Mario Paint*? They were nothing that would get me a job at Pixar or anything, but I was proud enough of them to record them segment by segment, making images, animations, and stories of whatever I could think of to draw. I remember making parades using the various character stamps that were available. I remember trying to draw my favorite cartoon characters in *Mario Paint* form. I remember making up silly songs filled with the notes of cats, dogs, trains, planes, boats, and more in the music maker. And I can't forget about that baby face note. Its stare into the void still haunts my dreams.

I even remember making *Super Luigi World*… a fake video game concept of stages for Luigi to walk through. It was Luigi's time to shine, saving Princess Daisy from a character I made up named… Vuigi. At the time, Wario was out already with *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins*, but this was before *Mario Tennis*, so there was no Waluigi yet. Since the letter L is before M, I made the decision that, since V comes before W, Luigi's evil doppelgänger would be Vuigi. Let me know which name you think works best. I also used *Mario Paint* to get good… good grades in school, that is. I would narrate over my drawings in lieu of standard book report presentations. I made *Mario Paint* intro cards for video presentations for our school and after school programs. I even tried to be romantic by using an animated *Mario Paint* card for a crush I had… It didn't work, but at least she appreciated my art.



Now let me make something clear: I was not the Leonardo da Vinci of *Mario Paint*. I have seen *Mario Paint* pictures, animations, and music from others or on YouTube that would make my work look like a kindergarten project. But I still had fun with the process of playing around with *Mario Paint*, especially once I got the special *Nintendo Power* guide dedicated to it. I loved *Mario Paint* so much that I also got the Looney Tunes equivalent, *ACME Animation Factory*. I even went back a console and got *Tiny Toon Adventures: Cartoon Workshop* for the NES. If I wasn't already in love with computer programming at the time and web development later on, maybe this *Mario Paint* phase would have led me to a career in comics or animation or video games. Maybe I would have gone to one of those art instruction schools we had commercials and comic book ads for all the time – the ones that made you draw the cartoon turtle face. But no matter; *Mario Paint* was a fun experience and one of the many creative ways I expressed myself as an adolescent, just like I express myself with my online videos and live streams now. I'm just glad there were no algorithms on my work back then, but given how peers can be at that age, there was definitely a "comments section."

Sadly, all video evidence of my *Mario Paint* creations was deleted, destroyed, or taped over. There's a lesson for you: don't just preserve your artistic video games, but also preserve the creations you make with them. Even though the results are gone, the memories I had creating with *Mario Paint* will never fade away. I like to credit *Mario Paint* (and yes, *ACME Animation Factory*) as one of the reasons I have always found an outlet for creativity to this very day. So thank you, *Mario Paint*… and *ACME Animation Factory*. Thank you for keeping the creativity alive in my heart with a Super NES mouse in my hand.

Mario Paint (and *ACME Ani*… oh, never mind, you get the idea…) was probably my last major rendezvous with the Super Nintendo. I never got a Super Scope. I started playing more games on the go with my Game Boy Color. I couldn't convince my parents to buy that weird Super Nintendo exercise bike. And when I left for college, I left the SNES behind at home for my little siblings. Instead, in my college dorm, I made space for the Nintendo 64 while my roommate played on this newfangled contraption called the Sony PlayStation – wonder if that lasted? But whether it was playing great games or making mediocre art that felt like masterpieces in my head, I will always cherish the Super Nintendo and the many memories it gave me. Thank you for being a part of my life – a *Super* part.

Andre Meadows is the creator of Black Nerd Comedy, the Internet series where he rants, raves, and reviews geek-filled and guilty pleasure movies, video games, cartoons, and '80s-'90s retro nostalgia. Andre also played Eddie the Blue Ranger on the tabletop RPG series Power Rangers Hyperforce, hosted The CW TV special Discontinued, and has been a host/correspondent for SYFY Wire, Regal Cinemas, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Nintendo, etc.

The Weird History Of The Super NES CD-ROM, Nintendo's Most Notorious Vaporware

by Chris Kohler



Nintendo never released a CD-ROM gaming system. But for a while in the early 1990s, it flirted with the idea. That protracted will-they-won't-they romance produced pages of breathless gossip columns in video game magazines, a mountain of vaporware, some terrible Zelda games, and one priceless prototype.

The legacy of the Super NES CD-ROM is also one of historical misinformation, confusion, and outright myths.

In the early 1990s, few people owned CD-ROM hardware, but it looked as if CDs were going to rapidly become the future of video games. A large, expensive game cartridge of the time might hold 2 megabytes of memory, while a cheap CD-ROM could hold over 600. Developers could use that massive storage space for lengthy video sequences, high-quality audio tracks, or anything they could imagine. And for a while, it seemed like Nintendo was on board with that, too.

"It's just around the corner!" read the April 1992 issue of Nintendo's in-house magazine *Nintendo Power*, in a piece about the SNES CD-ROM drive. The 16-bit Super Nintendo Entertainment System had just launched in the U.S. the previous September, and Nintendo was now promising that players would be able to update their cartridge-only system to a CD-capable one in January 1993 for $200. And not a moment too soon, as rival NEC already had a CD drive for its TurboGrafx-16 system, and Sega was about to release one for the Genesis later in 1992.



The Super Nintendo Entertainment System, released in 1991.
Photo: Evan Amos (Public Domain)

But Nintendo's never materialized. To understand why, we should take a trip back in time to the origins of consumer CD-ROM hardware.

While we tend to think of CD-ROM as a totally '90s technology, the first CD-ROM readers rolled out in 1985. One major example was the Philips CM 100, which was about as big as a game console, cost $1,500 (or about $3,500 today), and was packed in with a Grolier's encyclopedia disc – text only, no graphics. As you might imagine, it found a limited audience in the mid-1980s, when many home PCs didn't even have hard disk drives. It seems to have mostly been adopted by libraries, corporations, and other organizations that needed to store a lot of data.

The first CD-ROM game machine – which was arguably the first CD-ROM device of any kind aimed at mainstream consumers – was the CD-ROM², an add-on for the Japanese PC Engine console, known as the TurboGrafx-16 in America. Released in December 1988, it was quite ahead of its time and quite expensive at around $600. The early games (like *Fighting Street*, a version of the original *Street Fighter*) were very similar to cartridge games, just using the CD's extra space for better music and voice samples. It still wasn't quite clear how CD-ROMs could truly benefit video games. It was in this year, 1988, that a young engineer from Sony convinced Nintendo to let him put a CD-ROM drive into its next gaming console.

'You Can Do Your CD-ROM Thing'

The SNES CD-ROM all started with Ken Kutaragi, a young engineer at Sony who'd later become known as the "father of the PlayStation." Kutaragi struck a deal with Nintendo to create the sound chip for the Super NES – a decision he apparently made without the knowledge of Sony's board of directors. The project was a success – the SNES' sound hardware is one of the most widely praised aspects of the machine's design – and for the next step in what was looking like a fruitful partnership between Nintendo and Sony, Kutaragi proposed that Sony be allowed to create a Super Nintendo that had a CD-ROM drive built in. Nintendo agreed.

The behind-the-scenes of this deal are mostly shrouded in Japanese corporate secrecy, but in late 2016, we got some rare insight into how it all went down – from one perspective, that is. Shigeo Maruyama, the former head of Sony Computer Entertainment, discussed it with the Japanese site Denfaminicogamer, translated by Nintendo Everything.

Kutaragi "was a strong advocate for pursuing CD-ROM support over cartridges," Maruyama said. "But Nintendo wanted to stick to [cartridges] for games. CD-ROMs can take 10-15 seconds to load, after all. They probably didn't think users would want to wait that long. But Kutaragi wouldn't let up his arguments, so eventually Nintendo told him, 'Alright. We don't think it will be successful, but you can do your CD-ROM thing.'"

It was, by all accounts, Nintendo's skepticism in the viability of CD-ROMs that caused it to give away too much in the contract it signed with Kutaragi. Sony got the rights to create and sell CD-ROM software that would run on the Super NES-compatible machine,

which it called the “Play Station.” It wouldn’t have to pay Nintendo any royalties or get its approval for CD-ROM games. This meant that if developers and consumers did embrace CD-ROM gaming on the Super NES, Nintendo wouldn’t get a dime off any of those game sales – only the hardware sales.



The ‘Play Station’ prototype discovered in 2015 is the machine that Sony’s Ken Kutaragi created in 1991 – a Super Nintendo with a CD-ROM drive attached to it. *Photo: Mats Lindh (Flickr / CC BY 2.0)*

Why would Nintendo allow this to happen? Maruyama said it was because Sony “explicitly told them we were going to focus on everything but video games.” In other words, Sony’s position was that it would make encyclopedias, home karaoke software, and other non-gaming applications using CD-ROMs, and leave all the gaming to Nintendo. But apparently this was not in the contract itself, and once the ink was on paper, Sony had carte blanche.

It’s also useful, to understand what was going on here, to look at how Sony was evolving in the late 1980s. As the decade dawned, Sony was an electronics maker with a life insurance business on the side. But in late 1987, it acquired CBS Records, home of Michael Jackson and Billy Joel. In 1989, it acquired Columbia Pictures. That same year, it founded Sony Imagesoft, a video game publisher. In the span of just two years, Sony had gone from a hardware-only company to a media juggernaut. This may have contributed to Nintendo’s mounting worries as the years went on and the launch of the Super NES came closer.

The Summer Screwjob

If you’ve heard any story about the Super NES CD-ROM, it’s probably this one: At the Summer 1991 Consumer Electronics Show, the entire world expected that Nintendo would stand up at its press conference and reaffirm that Sony would provide the CD-ROM drive for its upcoming Super Nintendo. Instead, Nintendo betrayed its partner and shocked the world by announcing that it had instead decided to partner with Philips for the SNES CD, delivering a stunning insult to Sony that caused the company to go it alone and develop what we now know today as the PlayStation.

It’s a riveting story, but it’s not entirely true. What really happened is much more complicated.

It is true that, until very shortly before the Summer CES, the Nintendo-Sony joint venture was still on. A *Nintendo Power* article about Super NES in its June 1991 issue made reference to “the CD-ROM unit currently being developed jointly by Nintendo and Sony.” And it is also true that things fell apart rather quickly. But it was not, as the oft-told story goes, that Sony executives were sitting in the audience for Nintendo’s conference expecting to hear the word “Sony” and instead heard “Philips.”

Sony executives, wrote David Sheff in his 1993 book *Game Over*, “had learned about the pending press conference forty-eight hours earlier, and were… stunned.” Howard Lincoln, then a Nintendo of America exec, told Sheff that Sony had sprung into action when it heard the news, trying to put the kibosh on the whole thing. “There were tremendous efforts on a worldwide basis to keep that press conference from happening,” he said.

How did Sony’s spies find out that Nintendo was planning on announcing a partnership with Philips? Likely by the time-honored espionage technique of… reading the newspaper. “Nintendo, Philips Join In Games On CD,” read the headline of a *Seattle Times* story dated May 31, 1991, exactly two days prior to Nintendo’s June 2nd event. “Japan’s Nintendo Co. Ltd. has agreed... with Dutch electronics maker Philips Electronics NV to put its popular video games on compact discs, a Nintendo spokesman said today,” the story read.



Philips’ CD-i unit, which was planned to be compatible with Nintendo’s SNES CD-ROM as part of the agreement between the two firms. *Photo: Evan Amos (Public Domain)*

So a Nintendo spokesperson had already told the media that the company planned to go with Philips as its partner, notwithstanding the deal it already had in place with Sony. That meant that when Sony had its own press conference on June 1st, 1991 and announced its “Play Station” device, it already knew what Nintendo planned to do the next day.

Perhaps that’s why the media came out of Sony’s conference with the impression that Sony was planning on using its contract with Nintendo to try to back-channel its way into game publishing.

“Sony, Nintendo’s Partner, Will Be a Rival, Too,” read the headline of a *New York Times* piece on June 1st, following the conference. “While Sony and Nintendo have collaborated on the machine, Sony will clearly become a competitor of Nintendo,” read the piece. “Sony confirmed yesterday that it had retained all licensing rights for any compact disc game developed for the new system.”

“By that oversight, Sony ended up with a very important business advantage,” Larry Probst, then the CEO of Electronic Arts, remarked in the story. “I heard they gave the store away,” said one analyst. Sony made it clear that it planned to leverage its new holdings in the music and movie businesses, noting that it planned to release a game based on the movie *Hook* and floated the possibility of a Michael Jackson game as well.

So, while the shift from Sony to Philips did all happen in whirlwind fashion, the fact is that when Nintendo finally made it official on June 2nd, nobody was surprised. Once all the dust had settled, Sony still planned to release the Play Station, which was simply a Super Nintendo with a CD-ROM drive attached to it, and create CD-based game software for it. Separately, Nintendo and Philips would team up to create an add-on for the Super Nintendo that would add CD-ROM capability and be compatible with the standalone machine that Philips was going to release later that year, called the CD-i.

“Our engineers reached the conclusion that from a technical standpoint that it was better for Nintendo to work with Philips,” Howard Lincoln told the *New York Times*. “There is a dispute between Sony and Nintendo as to the terms of the agreement.” Meanwhile, the Super Nintendo itself had not even been released yet, and the *Times* correctly noted that all of the backstabbing had taken away attention from the actual, really cool, games that Nintendo was showing off at CES.



The boot screen of Sony's "Play Station" SNES CD-ROM prototype unit.
Screenshot: Kotaku

"It's easy to say that Sony was 100% the victim, and Nintendo 100% the wrongdoer," said former Sony Computer head Shigeo Maruyama in the 2016 Denfaminicogamer interview. "In fact, that's the story the company gave all of us while I was working there." But he wasn't so sure that Sony had no culpability. "I get the feeling something was going on behind the scenes. After all, there had to be a reason Sony wasn't able to go after them."

Since it would clearly have no backing from Nintendo, Sony ultimately decided to not push forward with the original Play Station, and the device became the stuff of legends. In 2015, a prototype of the unit was discovered to be in the hands of a man who had bought the property of former Sony executive Olaf Olafsson at an auction. It is the last remnant of a history that never came to be, with its Sony logo sitting atop a Super Nintendo controller.

The Million-Dollar Guest

That was the end of the story of the "Play Station," but the saga of the SNES CD-ROM continued on. In its April 1992 issue, *Nintendo Power* updated the Nintendo faithful on the progress of the SNES CD-ROM. While the details were still vague, it was clear that what Nintendo and Philips were planning was not like Kutaragi's device, which was just a CD drive attached to a Super Nintendo. The new add-on would also enhance the computing abilities of the Super NES, adding eight megabits of RAM and the ability to display full-screen video.

While Nintendo took this opportunity to proclaim that the device was "just around the corner," it didn't announce any actual SNES CD-ROM games. Instead, the *Nintendo Power* piece mentioned some of the relatively few games that were available for PC CD-ROM systems of the time, implying (but never stating) that the games might come to its device. One game it mentioned was *Cosmic Osmo* by Cyan Worlds. Cyan had published the first PC CD-ROM game, *The Manhole*, and was a year away from launching CD's first killer app: *Myst*.

The other game it mentioned was an in-development project that it simply called *Guest*, which turned out to be *The 7th Guest*, another breakout CD-ROM game that would release the next year. A puzzle game taking place in a haunted mansion created from pre-rendered 3D video sequences, *7th Guest* was a whole bundle of clever technical tricks that added up to a very impressive-looking but ultimately shallow game. But it was so good-looking that Nintendo wanted to secure it as an exclusive for its system.



The 7th Guest. Screenshot: Nightdive Studios (Steam)

"We got a call one day from… Nintendo," said a former Virgin Interactive employee in Steven Kent's 2001 book *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. "They were trying to find games that would be appropriate for their CD-ROM drive that was eventually gaming to happen." Virgin showed Nintendo *The 7th Guest*, and "within days" Nintendo was negotiating a deal to lock down the exclusive console rights to it. Nintendo ended up paying $1 million for rights it never used, and *The 7th Guest* never came out on any consoles – except for Philips' CD-i.

There was one notable Japanese developer that publicly planned to support Nintendo's CD-ROM drive: Square, which was "busy designing the software that will become the next generation in gaming – CD-ROM." This was according to the Spring 1992 issue of *The Ogopogo Examiner*, a newsletter that the RPG publisher mailed to its fans. "Characters in the games will actually speak to you as you play the game, and paper game manuals will become a thing of the past as these are placed right on the screen for easier access," the story read. (Well, one out of two ain't bad.)

Square's newsletter did not mention any specific game titles, but we would later learn that its inaugural SNES CD-ROM game was meant to be *Secret of Mana*. As the release of the CD-ROM drive was pushed further and further back, the action-RPG was moved from CD to cartridge, resulting in some cut content. "I think that when you play it you can get a sense of areas where it seems that something might be missing," Square's Ted Woolsey said of the game in a 1994 interview.

But Square still believed that the CD-ROM unit was coming out, so it made initial plans for another upcoming game, *Chrono Trigger*, to use the CD drive. That's why the game revolved around time travel, one of its developers said: "We wanted to take full advantage of the space afforded by that media, and make a game where you visit multiple different worlds." But *Chrono Trigger*, too, soon had to be converted into a cartridge game.

Sabotage At Sony

As 1992 drew to a close, there was still very little substantive information about the SNES CD-ROM, but there was one major behind-the-scenes development. On October 14th, 1992 – the day before Sega released its much-hyped Sega CD in the States – Nintendo and Sony announced that they had mended fences, and that Sony would now be collaborating with Nintendo and Philips on the SNES CD-ROM add-on after all.

"Nintendo and Sony are teaming up on the next generation of video game technology," read an Associated Press article. "The agreement also allows Nintendo and Sony to license other companies to develop, manufacture and sell disc software, with all licensing activity going through Nintendo." A little over a year after the dueling press conferences, Sony and Nintendo had apparently resolved the key issue – Nintendo would now make its money from the licensing fees, rather than Sony being able to do an end-run around them.



Nintendo Power's April 1992 issue featured an extensive piece extolling the virtues of the SNES CD-ROM. *Photo: Chris Kohler (Kotaku)*

So all was resolved, right? Well, obviously not, as we know now that Sony would release its standalone PlayStation in 1994, launching an all-out attack on Nintendo. So what happened?

Ken Kutaragi, who as a young engineer didn't hold much institutional power at Sony, still wanted the company to go its own way and create a video game console. He was opposed by the older, more conservative Sony board members, who had no interest in creating a console. But Kutaragi had his ace in the hole: He had the ear of Sony chairman Norio Ohga, who had backed up the young engineer when it was revealed that he had created the Super NES' sound chip in secret. Kutaragi convinced Ohga that what Nintendo had done to Sony at the 1991 CES was an unforgivable slap in the face, and that Sony had to respond forcefully. Ohga let Kutaragi pursue the PlayStation project.

Sony's board would not take this lying down. In the book *Console Wars*, Blake Harris says that the announcement that Sony would rejoin the Nintendo project was an action of the "old guard," a sign that they still wielded power within the company. It was also the smart conservative move. Nintendo was the 800-pound gorilla of the game industry, and on the surface it made little sense for Sony, with no game experience, to attempt to defeat it. Better to work alongside Nintendo and collect royalties, went the thinking.

Nintendo's Last Stand

The SNES CD-ROM project, though delayed, was still alive on February 1st, 1993, when Nintendo held a technical conference to update developers on the latest specifications for the format. Documents from that session, recently obtained and scanned by my friend and gaming historian Steve Lin, give us a detailed glimpse into how the hardware would work.

By this point, Nintendo had made a major new addition to the CD-ROM hardware: a 32-bit coprocessor. This would make the CD-ROM sort of a combination of the Sega CD and the 32X, although one assumes it would have looked a bit more elegant than Sega's unwieldy tower of add-ons. The SNES' built-in 1 megabit of RAM would be supplemented by an additional 13 megabits, so a lot of data could be loaded off of the CD-ROM at once. At the center of all of this would be a chip called the Hyper Advanced Nintendo Data Transfer System, or HANDS. Clearly, Nintendo was going the extra mile to attempt to solve CD-ROM's biggest problem, load times.

All of this extra hardware – the 32-bit processor, the RAM, the HANDS, and more – would not be located in the "ND Drive" unit that would sit below the Super Nintendo, but would actually be stored in a cartridge that would go into the SNES' top slot, where games usually went. The ND Drive underneath would simply be the CD-ROM drive, and nothing else. However, it would still require its own AC adapter.

There's one other interesting wrinkle in these documents. A handwritten note next to the picture of the CD-ROM disc itself reads "cartridge or caddy." Remember CD caddies? Early drives had you put the disc into a plastic case, then insert that case into the drive. This helped protect the disc from scratches, but Nintendo had another use in mind: It would put a security chip into the caddy as an anti-piracy measure, then seal the disc inside. So if the SNES CD-ROM had actually shipped, the games wouldn't have been loose discs, but CDs in plastic cases with security chips inside.

Another handwritten note on the document suggested that Nintendo intended to ship the "Super NES CD-ROM System" in 1993 or 1994. But that was the last anyone heard of it. Nintendo never made any official reveal announcement for the SNES CD-ROM: it never showed off the final hardware, never announced any lineup of games, never committed to a date or a price. The device just quietly disappeared.

Part of the reason for its disappearance was surely the impending arrival of the next generation of hardware. In early 1993, Nintendo started working with the American company Silicon Graphics on what would become the Nintendo 64, announcing their partnership and the development of the new, 3D gaming platform later that year.

And in early 1994, it made what the *New York Times* referred to as the "surprise announcement" that its new system, then known as "Project Reality," would not use CD-ROMs, but instead use cartridges.

That's not to say that no Nintendo games, in a sense, ever ended up on CD-ROM. As part of its partnership with Philips, Nintendo gave the Dutch hardware company the rights to create games using its characters for the CD-i platform. Philips took this golden opportunity and created the three worst Legend of Zelda games ever made, plus the barely passable *Hotel Mario*.



Zelda: The Wand Of Gamelon was one of three Legend of Zelda titles produced by Philips for its CD-i, which likely would have been compatible with the SNES CD-ROM had it ever been released.
Screenshot: Philips (VGMuseum)

Meanwhile, Nintendo's decision to avoid the CD-ROM format entirely turned out to be tantamount to opening up a golden door for Ken Kutaragi and Sony to waltz through, scooping up nearly all of Nintendo's market share. The PlayStation, an elegant system built around the CD-ROM, leveraged all of the benefits of the medium: It allowed developers to create massive games with lavish video sequences and orchestrated soundtracks, then let them spend much less money manufacturing the discs, freeing them from the stranglehold Nintendo had on the ROM chip market.

One such developer was Square, which felt so burned by Nintendo's refusal to use discs that it defected entirely to Sony, taking other developers along with it. Square's *Final Fantasy VII*, which shipped on three CD-ROMs, would become one of the most successful games of all time, helping ensure the PlayStation's dominance for years to come – and prove how CDs could let developers create truly unique games.

The SNES CD-ROM, and the way Nintendo talked about it for years, always had a whiff of vaporware to it – not just in the sense that it was never fully detailed and never shipped, but because it always seemed to be, in part, a make-believe product that was intended mostly to stop consumers from buying the actual CD-ROM drive that was being sold by Sega.

The discovery in 2015 of Sony's "Play Station" prototype was an important moment for the history of the SNES CD-ROM. Now that hackers have been able to get into the system and understand how it all works, that means that if any game prototypes are ever discovered, they'll be able to run in emulation or on the real device. (Who knows, maybe there's an uncut *Secret of Mana* out there somewhere.)

But the real Holy Grail of SNES CD-ROM hunters has yet to be found: a prototype of the 32-bit add-on that Nintendo was planning to release. Should that, or games that run on it, ever be found, that would be a fascinating glimpse at a long-lost Nintendo game platform.

Assuming, that is, that it ever existed.

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Nintendo Buys the Seattle Mariners

by Norman Caruso

On April 27th, 2016, Nintendo of America agreed to sell its majority ownership of the Seattle Mariners baseball team. Its CEO, Howard Lincoln, who once ran Nintendo of America, retired once the sale was finalized. For many Seattle fans, it was the end of an era, one with a few highs and many lows. But for others, it was a surprise – not that Nintendo sold the team, but the fact that Nintendo owned a baseball team!

Yes, it's true. Since 1992, Nintendo has had a majority ownership of the Seattle Mariners. But it's a story of more than just money and sports. Nintendo's interest in Major League Baseball sparked a wave of controversy and, in many ways, changed the game. This is the story of Nintendo's quest to buy the Seattle Mariners. We begin with a history of baseball in the Emerald City.

Pilot's Last Broadcast

In 1967, Major League Baseball added two additional teams to the American League. The first was the Kansas City Royals. The other was the Seattle Pilots, named in honor of the Boeing factory headquartered in the city. Baseball had existed in Seattle since the late 1800s, but this was the first time a team would play in the majors. The Pilots were owned by two men: Dewey Soriano, a local man who had been involved in previous Seattle baseball teams, and former Cleveland Indians owner William Daley, who put up most of the financing.

The Royals and Pilots were scheduled to begin play in 1971, which would give them more than three years to assemble a front office and build a team. However, politics soon intervened. Missouri senator Stuart Symington was anxious to start play as soon as possible. Kansas City had just lost the Athletics, which had moved to Oakland after the 1967 season. Symington wanted play to resume quickly, threatening to introduce legislation that would affect the owners, so the team owners revised their timeline: The Royals and Pilots would begin play for the 1969 season. Each team had only 18 months until opening day.

Expectations were high, and the Seattle Pilots were underprepared. Major League Baseball introduced rules and regulations to the team and city. They had to upgrade Sick's Stadium, which the Pilots were renting from the city of Seattle. The league wanted an additional 20,000 seats. They also expected a new domed stadium by the end of 1970. Right from the start, the Pilots were under immense pressure. The owners went over budget on stadium renovations, so they made sacrifices in other areas. Restrooms were only big enough to pass code. Water pressure was so low that players were forced to shower at home after the game. Concession stands lacked basic utilities. On opening day, some fans couldn't even sit down – their seats were still being installed.

Rather than build a core of young players, the Pilots chose to compete immediately by signing veterans such as Jim Bouton and Tommy Harper. In their opening day game, the Pilots beat the White Sox 7-0. But from there, things only got worse. The losses piled up. They traded a promising young outfielder by the name of Lou Piniella to the Royals. He went on to win Rookie of the Year. Attendance was down, and the team was losing money. The owners secretly negotiated to sell the team. In 1970, the Seattle Pilots were sold to millionaire Bud Selig and became the Milwaukee Brewers.

Seattle had a taste of Major League Baseball for only one year… and they were outraged. Washington state attorney general Slade Gorton, representing the city of Seattle, sued the American League for breach of contract. Seattle continued to build the dome stadium, the Kingdome, with the hope that a baseball team would return. In 1976, they got their wish. Major League Baseball agreed to give the city a team in exchange for dropping the lawsuit. The American League officially added two new teams to its roster: The Toronto Blue Jays and the Seattle Mariners.



The Seattle Pilots as pictured on a 1970 Topps baseball card.

On April 16th, 1977, the Seattle Mariners played their first game. They lost 7-0 to the California Angels. What followed were years of disappointing performances and poor attendance. Through the '70s and '80s, the Mariners never made the playoffs or even had a winning season. But in 1989, the fortunes of the Mariners began to turn. The team called up a promising young rookie named Ken Griffey Jr., who quickly became their premiere player. Along with ace pitcher Randy Johnson, the team's outlook began to change. In 1991, the Mariners had their first winning season, finishing the year at 83-79.

Despite the growing positives, owner Jeff Smulyan was in financial trouble. He had borrowed a substantial sum of money to purchase the team in 1989. The 1991 season saw the Mariners lose $5 million. Security Pacific Bank felt that the Mariners were not a viable business and asked for the $39.5 million loan to be repaid or refinanced. On December 6th, 1991, Smulyan put the team up for sale. Rumors spread that the Mariners would move to St. Petersburg, Florida. Thanks to a clause in the team's lease at the Kingdome, local investors had until March 27th to make an offer that would keep the team in Seattle.

Slade Gorton, now a Republican senator and a die-hard Mariners fan, had seen enough. He remembered the lone year of the Seattle Pilots and how devastating it was when they left for Milwaukee. He took it upon himself to step in once again and put together a team of investors to purchase the Mariners and keep them in Seattle. Gorton began calling local companies. His first call was to the wealthiest man in the area: Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation. He declined. His next call went to a video game company, one he had previously helped with counterfeiting issues during his time as a member of the Senate Commerce Committee. A company that was dominating the video game market: Nintendo.

A Great Debt

On the surface, Nintendo seemed like a good choice. They had cash, and tons of it. In 1991, the company had $3.5 billion in sales and accounted for about 80% of the video game market. Their president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, was listed in *Forbes* as one of the world's richest men, worth an estimated $1.5 billion. Nintendo also had roots in Seattle. Nintendo of America president Minoru Arakawa had lived and raised a family in the area for the past 15 years. They were also one of the area's largest employers, employing some 1400 people.

Near the end of 1991, Senator Slade Gorton met with Minoru Arakawa and vice president Howard Lincoln at their headquarters in Redmond, Washington. He didn't waste any time. He immediately inquired about Nintendo purchasing the Seattle Mariners. Arakawa and Lincoln were skeptical. They had little interest in baseball and had only attended one game in the past, mostly to discuss business. Lincoln also had doubts about a Japanese company purchasing an

American baseball team. It could result in bad publicity.

The two were unsure but decided to pitch the idea to Nintendo of Japan president Hiroshi Yamauchi. It was the longest of long shots. He was very careful about Nintendo's finances and consistently stayed out of the public eye. He cared about baseball about as much as he cared about video games – not at all.

In December of 1991, Yamauchi phoned Arakawa and Lincoln with his answer. He offered to buy the Seattle Mariners outright, for $100 million cash. Arakawa and Lincoln were stunned.

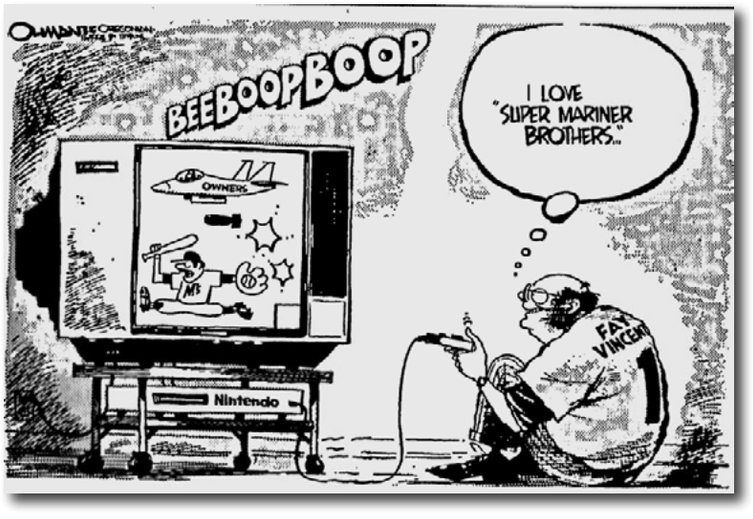
"This offer is not being undertaken as a business, but rather as a form of community service. Japan has the United States to thank for its miraculous postwar recovery and economic growth, and Nintendo has also been allowed to do business in America. I owe a great debt to the United States, and I want to do everything in my power to pay it back." – Hiroshi Yamauchi

On Christmas Eve, Senator Slade Gorton received the news. Although it was good, Gorton and city officials knew a 100% Japanese ownership would not be approved by Major League Baseball. To get around this, Gorton organized the "Baseball Club of Seattle," composed of Yamauchi, Arakawa, and other investors: John McCaw of McCaw Cellular, Christopher Larson of Microsoft, Frank Shrontz of Boeing, and John Ellis of Puget Sound Power & Light Company. Together, they offered to buy the Seattle Mariners for $100 million in cash, with an additional $25 million to invest in the team. Yamauchi would be the majority owner, contributing $75 million for a 60% ownership.

It was the first time an investor outside of North America had attempted to purchase a majority ownership of an MLB team. John Ellis called it "the most highly capitalized and most financially stable operation you have ever seen in baseball." Mariners owner Jeff Smulyan was ecstatic, as expected. He quickly approved the deal. It seemed as though the Mariners would be staying in the city of Seattle. But, as one Mariners spokesperson put it, "Jeff can say yes… and Major League Baseball can say no."

On January 23rd, 1992, the day the deal was formally announced, MLB Commissioner Fay Vincent commented on the offer.

"Baseball has addressed the issue of ownership of its franchises and has developed a strong policy against approving investors from outside the United States and Canada. It is unlikely foreign investors would receive the requisite baseball approval." – Fay Vincent



A cartoon from *The Oregonian* newspaper depicting MLB commissioner Fay Vincent.

Xenophobia

Although Seattle locals were thrilled about the Nintendo investment, the rest of the country wasn't so sure. During this time, anti-Japanese sentiment seemed to be at its highest since World War II, brought on by increased competition in the economy and a recession. In the auto industry, Americans were increasingly ditching their Fords and GMs for Hondas, Nissans, and Toyotas. They were cheaper, required less fuel, and seemed more reliable. While American car companies saw little to no increase in sales, Japanese car companies were flourishing. In 1990, Japan had a $41 billion trade surplus with the United States. 75% of it was from automobiles. Many argued that Japan had unfair trade practices and were too strict when it came to importing US goods.

Relations grew worse when in January of 1992, Japanese politician Yoshio Sakurauchi deemed American workers "lazy." "The source of the problem is the inferior quality of US labor," he said. "They want high pay without working." That same month, the Sumitomo Corporation of Japan won a $122 million bid to add driverless cars to the Metro Green Line in Los Angeles. But public outcry forced the LA County Transportation Commission to cancel the contract.

Nintendo's bid for the Seattle Mariners couldn't have come at a worse time. A poll conducted by CBS News in March of 1992 revealed that 57% of adults were "bothered" by a Japanese company owning a Major League Baseball team. There were even accusations that Nintendo was involved in illegal gambling activities and therefore not qualified to own a baseball team. Others pointed out that professional baseball in Japan wouldn't allow an American company to buy a team, which was true. Nippon Professional Baseball had a rule that stated foreign investors could only own up to 49% of a team.

"Why have a policy of not selling baseball teams to foreign interests? Because, in areas where you can prevent it, you shouldn't sell off valuable core chunks of your culture to anybody, unless it's in your country's best interest. Baseball is one of those rare American institutions that, because of its special, congressionally granted status, can do pretty much what it damn well pleases." – Thomas Boswell, Eugene *Register-Guard*

MLB Commissioner Fay Vincent's argument was based on one of the many unwritten rules of the game. It was the same type of rule that enforced racial segregation in the game before Jackie Robinson ended it – a so-called "gentlemen's agreement." During the December meetings of 1991, baseball's ownership committee did discuss policies on foreign ownership. However, they couldn't finalize the rule and decided to table the discussion for a future meeting. They figured the issue wouldn't arise anytime soon. After Vincent's statement that it was unlikely Nintendo's offer would be accepted, he took a 10-day vacation to Jamaica. Those that were for the deal were outraged and accused Fay Vincent of being xenophobic and a hypocrite. If Canadians could own teams, why not the Japanese?

"Dear Commissioner: Did I miss something, or is this 1942 and not 1992? Fay, what is it that you and the owners of major-league-baseball teams are afraid of? What would possibly keep you from letting Seattle not only keep its baseball team, but grow and flourish with it? Frankly, I'm surprised – and embarrassed – by your arrogance. You seem ready to turn down the bid of the Baseball Club of Seattle without even giving it a chance. Or an audience. This story is bigger than just baseball. The world is watching." – Blaine Newnham, *The Seattle Times*

After the public backlash, Fay Vincent stepped back from the spotlight, stating that ultimately, it was up to Major League Baseball's 10-member ownership committee to approve the sale. Once approved by the committee, the offer had to be approved by 11 of 14 American League owners and 7 of 12 National League owners.

Senator Slade Gorton, who had tirelessly fought to keep baseball in Seattle, stepped in once again. Back in 1922, the Supreme Court ruled that Major League Baseball was exempt from antitrust laws, therefore giving them a monopoly on professional baseball. Senator Gorton promised that, if the sale did not go through, he would do everything in his power to have congress review this exemption.

Over the next few months, the two sides would meet and come up with a compromise.

A Global Game

4,900 miles away across the Pacific Ocean, Hiroshi Yamauchi waited. He found it strange that his bid to buy the Mariners was so controversial not only in the United States, but in Japan as well. He was accused of being arrogant and bringing unwanted attention to the country's trade surplus with the United States. Nevertheless, Yamauchi was content, whether the deal would go through or not. "Of course it is my money, and I'm glad I could pay it," he said. "But this is not business. What do I know about running a baseball team?"

Throughout the spring and early summer, discussions took place between the Baseball Club of Seattle and Major League Baseball. From there, a deal was struck. Hiroshi Yamauchi's role with the team would be passive. He reduced his ownership stake to 49%, leaving 51% to the other local investors. Rather than have the team be controlled by a club, the investors agreed to give control to an individual. They chose John Ellis of Puget Sound Power & Light, a Seattle native. He became chairman and CEO of the Mariners, despite owning only 1% of the team.



Japanese pitcher Kazuhiro Sasaki pictured with Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi.

On June 9th, 1992, members of the ownership committee, which included future president George W. Bush, unanimously approved the sale of the Seattle Mariners to the Baseball Club of Seattle. For the first time in Major League Baseball history, someone outside of North America owned a slice of America's pastime.

In the years that followed, the Seattle Mariners came alive. In 1995, managed by former Seattle Pilot Lou Piniella, the team won the AL West division and made the playoffs for the first time ever. The Mariners would make the playoffs three more times but could never get past the championship series. Despite this, it was clear that Nintendo's investment brought stability to the Mariners and the city of Seattle.



Nintendo of America announces an exclusive licensing agreement with All-Star center fielder Ken Griffey Jr.

Nintendo's ownership of the Mariners did more than help the team. They quickly struck a deal with Ken Griffey Jr. and released a series of games under his name, exclusive to Nintendo consoles. The first game in the series was arguably the best: *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*. The game featured real MLB teams and stadiums but not players (except for Ken Griffey Jr., of course). It came packaged with a collectible Ken Griffey Jr. card and was a major commercial success, selling more than 1 million units. Nintendo would also regularly promote their products during home games. Fans could even order food and drinks using their Nintendo DS handhelds or look up real-time stats.

It could be argued that Nintendo's involvement made baseball a global game. The connection to Japan brought a new wave of talent to the league: Hideo Nomo, Hideki Matsui, Yu Darvish, Nori Aoki, and of course, the Mariners' own Ichiro Suzuki.



Mario attends a Seattle Mariners baseball game. Nintendo would often hold promotional events at the games.

In 2004, after retiring from Nintendo, Hiroshi Yamauchi turned over his ownership of the Mariners to Nintendo of America. He passed away in 2013, having never attended a game. Today, Nintendo still owns about 10% of the Seattle Mariners. In the long run, it was a worthy investment. In 1992, the Mariners were worth $125 million. Today, they are worth around $1.2 billion. However, it would be hard to call the Nintendo era a success in Mariners history. Many fans criticized Nintendo and Hiroshi Yamauchi for being the ultimate passive owners. The Mariners haven't made the playoffs since 2001, the longest drought in Major League Baseball. As a result, average attendance has dropped by more than half. Hopefully under this new ownership group, things can only get better for the Seattle Mariners. But there is absolutely no denying that without Nintendo's help, we might be calling them the Tampa Bay Mariners.

Norman Caruso is the creator of The Gaming Historian, a YouTube documentary series that explores the history of video games. Want to learn about the landmark lawsuits that changed the industry? Or why the Power Glove wasn't "so bad" after all? The Gaming Historian has you covered. The show has more than 50 million views and 575,000 subscribers and has been featured on Destructoid, Polygon, Nintendo Life, and even Playboy.com. Norman earned his history degree from Elizabeth City State University.

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