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DJPubba_Tim Lindquist

I was recently checking out eBay recently for retro gaming goodies and came across a seller in the UK selling his SG-1000 (Japanese Master System) collection. The games had the best names *ever*. Check it out: *Dragon Wang*, *Guzzler*, *Girls' Garden*, *Hustle Chummy*. Also *Star Jacker*. Yes, *Star... Jacker...* Here I thought *Hole Land*, *Hot Dog Storm*, *Van Van Car* and *Oh My God!* were the best game names I'd heard.

Now Playing: *Castlevania* (DS, X68000, arcade), *Disgaea 3*



Roger Danish_Greg Off

This month Greg wrote 45 official strategy guides, 19 instruction manuals, localized four games and pleased one sexy lady, all while working from a hotel in Japan on his laptop and iPhone.

Now Playing: Phone tag



Wolfie_Terry Wolfinger

So about two months back I was fortunate enough to participate in Sebastian Kruger's 4th annual workshop held in Barsinghausen, Germany. It was myself along with 20 other artists selected worldwide for a week of painting (and some drinking) with the master, himself! If you don't know who this guy is, google him- he's amazing! Currently recovering from a tequila-soaked Halloween! "For the Horde!"

Currently Playing: *Saint's Row 2*



Wanderer_Thomas Wilde

Watching the *Max Payne* movie reminded me that I've been meaning to replay the *Max Payne* games. They've aged remarkably well, but the most astounding thing is how somebody managed to walk away from these and make a slow, boring, talky nap inducer of a movie. What the *hell*.

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*, *Max Payne*, *Mega Man 9*, *World of Warcraft*



James_James Cunningham

Halloween is gone and Thanksgiving is segueing right into Christmas. What the &%*@ happened to 2008? Seriously, it only just started last week. If I'm one of the most impatient people on the planet it's only because someone slammed down the accelerator on the rocket-bike of time and they just won't let up.

Now playing: *Mother 3*, *Little Big Planet*, *Silent Hill Homecoming*, and much, much more.



Lynxara_Alicia Ashby

What possesses publishers to release a year's worth of games in a single month?

Now Playing: *Persona 4*, *Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World*



Racewing_Geson Hatchett

This is getting ridiculous. I get to play maybe one RPG a year, if I'm lucky. Once you get out of college and into the work force, that's really all you can do. I've had *Persona 3* sitting here for two years now! I move we make RPG stories more concise, and the games themselves less grind-tastic. Who's with me — hey, what's with those pitchforks?

Now Playing: *Saints Row 2*, *Sonic Unleashed*, *Mortal Kombat II*



HonestGamer_Jason Venter

I've noticed that while on the one hand I'm constantly looking for those few games that present me with something new I haven't encountered during my years of gaming, the other hand is busy playing the heck out of everything familiar that I can find. Me? Conflicted?

Now Playing: *Dokapon Kingdom* (Wii), *Tales of Vesperia*, *Star Ocean: First Departure*, *Mega Man 9* (Xbox Live)



Ashura_Brady Hartel

Fun Fact: Discarded pizza boxes are an invaluable source of cheese.

Now you know, and knowing is half the battle.

Now Playing: *Little Big Planet*, *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*, and *Persona 4*



Hitoshura_Iaian Ross

Why is it that whenever I mention "fog" with regards to *Persona 4*, a fog bank rolls in where I live for an hour and then disappears?

Now Playing: *Persona 4*



Dack_Steve Hannley

You're going to want to eat cat food, huff a little glue and drink some beer. There's some sort of weird reaction when that happens. It makes you feel sick and want to fall asleep, because there's going to be about 50 cats howling outside your window and you have no idea how loud 50 cats are.

Now Playing: *Fallout 3*, Yellow's "Oh Yeah", *TV On the Radio's "Dear Science"*



Jeremy_Jeremy Peeples

It took two years, but I was finally able to find (and buy) a Wii and after scouring the shelves for stuff, I'm baffled by the sheer quantity of shovelware for it. Thank goodness for A-list holiday releases.

Now Playing: *Mother 3*, *Super Mario RPG*, *Mega Man Zero 4*, *Midnight Club: LA*, *Forza Motorsport 2*, *GRID*



Arlieth_Thomas Shin

I don't know why, but for some reason I've stuck with perhaps the worst character in all of *Street Fighter IV*... Vega (Claw). Maybe I like taking more damage than Akuma when my mask flies off. Maybe I like being trapped in a corner with no reversals. Maybe Zangief just wants to be my friend, but that usually involves having my skull crushed between his thighs. Maybe my claw keeps falling off because my girlfriend just put them in the dishwasher again.

Now Playing: *Street Fighter IV* (Arcade), *Contact* (DS), *Little Big Planet* (PS3)



Kitty_Karin Renoux

The industry is a cruel, cruel place. There's a wealth of titles I need to play, but I have no time for them.

Now playing: Nothing. Nothing *at all*.



Big Wym_Jeb Haught

Well, I didn't think it was possible, but something has temporarily replaced my addiction to WAR, and its name is *Fallout 3*. I'm definitely not done with WAR, but I'm forced to take a short hiatus. Funny how *Fallout 3* costs the same as other games who's developers didn't even put forth 1/10 the effort. That's right, I'm talking to you Golden Axe: Beast Rider!

Currently Playing: *Fallout 3*, *Dead Space*, *Resistance 2*



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8. on the cover
street fighter iv

Street Fighter IV is in arcades throughout Japan and the West Coast, and that means it's time to break the game open and see how it ticks. Check out our in-depth examinations of *SFIV*'s system mechanics, character strategies, and an exclusive interview with Yoshinori Ono! It all begins on page 8.

34 feature let's retrogame holiday!

Is there a game tucked away in your closet, forgotten, that could be worth big bucks? Well, probably not. Still, if you want an education on what the most collectible, rare, and valuable games of all time are, chase the chuck wagon to page 34.



42 reviews sonic unleashed, wii music

We've got two huge, in-depth looks at *Wii Music* and *Sonic Unleashed* this month. Go beyond the score, and check out our interview coverage with Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto and Sega's Patrick Riley. It starts on page 42.



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Jump in.

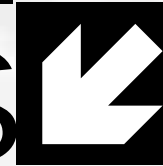




Return of the NEW CHALLENGERS



by arlieth



Introduction

In 1999, when *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* hit arcades across the world, no one knew when players would master it, least of all the game's Sound Management Director, Yoshinori Ono. For years, players strove to exhaust every technique, gimmick, combo, glitch and strategy from its nineteen-character roster, with only four of them (Ryu, Ken, Chun-Li and Akuma) from the original *Street Fighter II* series. Later, the game would achieve some devoted success with the hardcore crowd, while alienating many others who were unable to survive its terrifying learning curve. It was clear that the *Street Fighter* franchise was a mere shadow of its former glory. But *Street Fighter* was as much a part of Capcom's identity as *Castlevania* is to Konami. And even as Capcom Coin-Op USA closed its doors in 2004, fans never gave up hope.

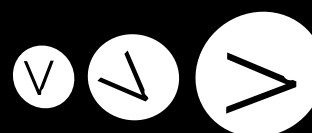
Almost a decade later, *Street Fighter* finally makes its comeback. In an effort to return the series to its former glory, Yoshinori Ono, now Lead Producer for the series, has taken a step back... literally, as *Street Fighter IV* takes place before the events of the controversial (and almost impossible to master) *Street Fighter III* trilogy. The gameplay is reminiscent of the old-school era of *Super Turbo*. The original World

a carefully planned strategy. This was evident from the amount of damage possible in a single combo, because characters such as Yun, Urien and Makoto could win with a single opening. With insta-kill setups and the all-out offense possible with the Parry system, it wasn't as important to play carefully and strategically when a single guess could lead you to victory.

Street Fighter IV is a total break from that philosophy. It is a game of position, angles and the crafting of traps. The reduced mobility, the slower pace and the Ultra System each contribute to a game engine that encourages careful play. At the highest levels of play, the game is about strategically reducing your opponent's options over time so that they are caught in an inescapable situation. Some would call this "cheap".

The cold truth about *Street Fighter II* is that most fans of the series never reached that level of skill. Many were held back by an invisible code of honor that limited their potential, with rules like "no throwing" and "no chip-kills". As a result, gamers who haven't touched a *Street Fighter* title in years will have a lot of catching up to do.

the most popular fighting game on the planet), you're probably going to end up being just like them. *Street Fighter IV* is a hardcore game with a hardcore learning curve. Fortunately, we wrote a hardcore guide to help you along.



More than you ever wanted to know ABOUT HOW TO PLAY STREET FIGHTER IV

Warriors, along with the Four Bosses of Shadaloo, have returned. Most importantly, it no longer requires a Master's Degree (har har) to survive a match for thirty seconds. It's kinder. Gentler. n00b-friendly, even. But it doesn't make it any less hardcore. Quite the opposite, in fact. Often touted as a "hardcore game", *Street Fighter II: 3rd Strike*'s technical requirements gave players the flexibility to rely more upon skill than

If you've never played a fighting game before, be warned: Most other types of games (e.g.: RPGs, adventure) have a learning curve that spans a few hours. They are intended to be played for a couple weeks, at best. A fighting game is designed to be played for years, and its learning curve reflects that. If you have friends that play *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (arguably





button mashing 101 SYSTEM MECHANICS

Position and Movement

Street Fighter IV places particular importance on position and movement. You can walk, crouch, jump and dash, and each of these will immediately change your available moves and your position in relation to two things: Your opponent, and the corners of the stage. Knowing your options in the myriad combinations of positions is crucial- some characters fight better at close range, others fight better in the air, and it is almost universally bad news to have your back to the wall. New to this game is the ability to back-dash with a

need to know when to block, how to block (high or low?) and when you can't block. For starters, all jumping attacks (except for dive-kicks) must be blocked high, and all crouching kicks must be blocked low. Most other attacks can be blocked either standing or crouching, with the exception of "Overheads" which must be blocked high and usually have a short delay before striking. When blocking an attack, you'll be in a state called "block-stun", where you are unable to attack, move or jump. Some blocked attacks allow you to retaliate before your opponent recovers. The only attacks you cannot block are Throws, Command Throws (Grabs) and Level 3 Focus Attacks. Finally, immediately after blocking an attack, you cannot be thrown for a brief period of time (until your block-stun wears off).

Normal Attacks

These are the bread-and-butter of every Street Fighter match. Like chess pawns, they may not seem impressive, but they make up for it in sheer numbers. All characters have Close Standing, Far Standing, Crouching, Vertical Jumping and Diagonal Jumping versions of their normal attacks, each with different properties. You should pay extra attention to your character's c.HK range, since it's knockdown makes it the most tactically powerful of your normal attacks.

LP: Light Punch. Extremely quick but short-ranged and weak, these often chain together with Light Kicks to form the basis of close-quarters combat.

MP: Medium Punch. Average speed, strength and range, but often allows you to link or cancel into many Special Attacks or other normal attacks.

HP: Hard Punch. Slowest speed, with high power and priority. Can often be canceled into Special Attacks at close range. Slow recovery if missed.

LK: Light Kick. Very quick, but weak. Usually reaches farther than Light Punch. Crouching LKs are necessary for finding holes in your opponent's defense.

MK: Medium Kick. Very good speed and range, and usually allows you to cancel into Special Attacks from farther distances. Important for 'footsies'.

HK: Hard Kick. Slowest kick, but the most versatile at long distance. Crouching HKs (c.HK) will knock down, and j.HKs almost always set up for combos.

Command Normals

These are normal attacks that usually require you to hold a direction on the controller. For example, Guile's Chopping Straight is notated as "f+MP". Hold Forward

and press MP to execute it. Many command normals have special properties (the Chopping Straight is an Overhead attack, for example), and some can even be done in the air, like Rufus's Falcon Kick (df+j.MK).

Throws

Throws are performed with LP+LK at close range. They're unblockable, but can be defended against if the opponent presses LP+LK at the same time. Throws cannot be Quick-Recovered from, and some characters can perform throws in the air as well (Guile, Chun-Li and Vega). You can 'tick' into a throw by forcing your opponent to block with a quick attack like c.LK, then throwing them almost immediately afterwards. (If you throw too soon, they'll still be in block-stun and you'll miss.) You can perform different throws by moving the controller back, forward or leaving it in neutral right before you throw.

Special Attacks

These are your fancy chess pieces, your bishops, knights and rooks. Almost all of these have special properties (projectile, invincibility frames, juggle, etc.) and look really fancy, but usually have severe recovery if blocked. They can also be performed by 'canceling' a normal attack to a special attack. However, they require fancy motions like QCF (Quarter Circle Forward), HCB (Half Circle Back), Charge (hold a direction for one second) and DP (Shorthand for "Dragon Punch", or Ryu and Ken's Shoryuken). This is performed by pressing F,D,DF (think of a "Z" motion) on your controller. Some Special Attacks are really Throws (a.k.a. "Command Grabs") with enhanced range and damage. Finally, Special Attacks performed by mashing punches or kicks like Chun-Li's Hyakuretsu Kyaku ("Press K x5") work as if you had to "charge" the Special Attack with kicks. You can press any kick to count as a "charge", and the kick you press for the fifth "charge" determines the version (LK,MK, HK).

Charge Attacks

Charge attacks often make it difficult to maneuver. However, you can dash forward and still maintain your charge. It takes a while to learn, but you can also use this technique while using a Focus Attack.



> Position

Being trapped in a corner at close range is a very dangerous situation.

brief invulnerability period. This is crucial for close and medium-range fights where you're on the defensive and need some breathing room. However, if you're stuck in the corner, your back-dash won't do you much good. There is one other position: flat on your back. If you're knocked down, you can usually Quick-Recover by tapping Down or pressing two buttons.

Note: This guide uses abbreviations: Directions are denoted by (u)p, (d)own, (b)ack and (f)orward, while positions are denoted by (c.)rouching or (j.)umping. Far and Close positions are relative to your opponent and will be mentioned as well, but not abbreviated.

Blocking

Before you press a single button, *learn to block*. You'll

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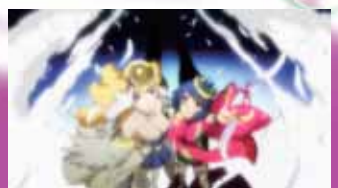
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intermediate system mechanics WHAT'S NEW IN SFIV? ↙

Focus Attacks

The new tactical tool in *SFIV* is the Focus Attack (aka "Saving Attack" in Japan), performed by pressing (or holding) MP+MK while standing. It has three strength levels, depending on how long you hold it. At Level 1, it will execute a blockable attack for minor damage and hitstun, unless it's a counter-hit. If that happens, they enter "crumple-stun" where they're open for a combo for a brief moment. At Level 2, crumple-stun is guaranteed, but the hit is still blockable. At Level 3, which usually takes a full second of charging, the attack becomes unblockable, executes automatically, breaks through Super Armor, and results in crumple-stun.

The property shared by all Focus Attacks is that during charging, you have one point of Super Armor, and can cancel the charging animation or a connected hit with a forward dash or back dash at any time (Focus Attack Dash Cancel, or FADC for short). You can thus feint and bait wakeup attacks, or make them block a Level 1 Focus Attack, cancel into a dash, and throw them.

There are other, more advanced techniques with the Focus Attack that will be covered below, especially with FADC.

Super Armor

This is a new mechanic for the *Street Fighter* canon series, but familiar to *Versus* players. Focus Attacks (and some EX Special Attacks) have one point of Super Armor, meaning that they will "soak" one hit and continue to execute their move. El Fuerte's EX Habanero Dashes are even better, with two points of Super Armor. While you still suffer damage from a soaked attack (your health bar turns grey), the damage is gradually healed over time.

However, if the player is hit by any attack or throw before that damage is fully recovered, any unrecovered health is lost permanently. Blocked 'chip-damage' from Special Attacks will not forfeit your recovery. Successive armor-soaked hits stack cumulatively, so absorbing four Hadoukens in a row would put a huge amount of your health at risk and would take a lengthy period of time to recover. Most important of all, if you have no health left, soaking an attack with Super Armor will knock you out! Be careful about using Focus Attacks in this situation.

Armor Break

Almost every character in the game has a Special Attack with the Armor Break property, denoted as

"Break" in the character movelists. This will completely nullify Super Armor and displays a "shattering" effect when this occurs. Zangief is the only character in the game without one. Also, Special Attacks executed as Reversals (performed immediately out of "block-stun") will automatically gain Armor Break.

Super Gauge

This four-bar gauge determines whether or not you'll be able to perform enhanced versions of moves (EX Special Attacks), EX Focus Attacks or a Super Combo. It increases whenever you hit an opponent, execute a special attack (except for projectiles), have an attack blocked, or get hit. Like *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, you cannot build Super Gauge by whiffing normal attacks. However, it does carry over between rounds.

Revenge Gauge

The Revenge Gauge increases whenever you suffer damage, even if it's temporary damage from Super Armor. When this gauge hits 50%, you can execute an Ultra Combo, but you'll do even more damage when it hits 100%. This gauge does not carry over between rounds. Advanced players often use Focus Attacks to 'soak' hits and build their Revenge Gauge without taking permanent damage early in a match.

EX Special Attacks

These enhanced versions of Special Attacks cost one EX bar from your Super Gauge and often have invincibility, enhanced speed and extra damage. Some

even have juggle properties which allow for extended combos, like Ryu's EX Tatsumaki. You can perform these by pressing two Punch ("PP") or two Kick ("KK") buttons when executing a Special Attack.

EX Focus Attacks

This technique is activated by interrupting most normal attacks and some Special Attacks (Marked as "Cancel" in the movelist) with a Focus Attack (MP+MK). This costs two EX bars, but allows unique combo opportunities, especially if the EX Focus Attack is dash-canceled. You can also use it for defensive purposes (i.e.: stopping a Special Attack from continuing and leaving you vulnerable).

Focus Attack Dash Cancel (FADC)

All Focus Attacks can be interrupted or canceled with a dash command, but "FADC" is used to denote an EX Focus Attack that is canceled with a dash. In combos, an FADC often allows you to continue a combo for even more hits than is normally possible. For example, Ryu can perform a c.MK -> HP Shoryuken, and this would normally end the combo.

However, he can extend the combo by performing c.MK -> HP Shoryuken, interrupt the HP Shoryuken's animation with an EX Focus Attack, cancel the Focus Attack with a forward dash (FADC), and perform another HP Shoryuken or an Ultra Combo for additional damage. Some characters use this technique exclusively to create guaranteed opportunities to connect an Ultra Combo.

Super Combos

Often extremely quick with high priority, these can be performed when the Super Gauge is filled to 100% (four EX bars). Most normal attacks, and Special Attacks marked "Cancel" can interrupt the animation of a connected attack into a Super Combo for a guaranteed hit. For example, Ken can perform a close MP -> HP, canceled into an HP Hadouken, then super-canceled into his Shoryu Reppa. Some characters benefit greatly from this option, but others are better served by using the Super Gauge on EX Special Attacks instead. It depends entirely on your playing style.

Ultra Combos

When the Revenge Gauge reaches 50% or more, your Ultra Combo becomes available. These tend to be slightly slower to activate than a Super Combo, and cannot be canceled into from a normal or Special Attack. However, they can often be performed after an FADC or as a juggle. An Ultra Combo is usually invincible on startup and gives you an opportunity to make a comeback against your opponent. If the Revenge Gauge is fully charged at 100%, your Ultra Combo will inflict 150% of its normal damage. What often determines a character's ability to make a comeback is whether or not their Ultra Combo can be easily comboed into (Ryu, Rufus and Sagat for example). Some characters are simply unable to, and can only combo from a crumple-stun state like Zangief and Vega. The character stats appendix later in this guide lists these for your convenience.

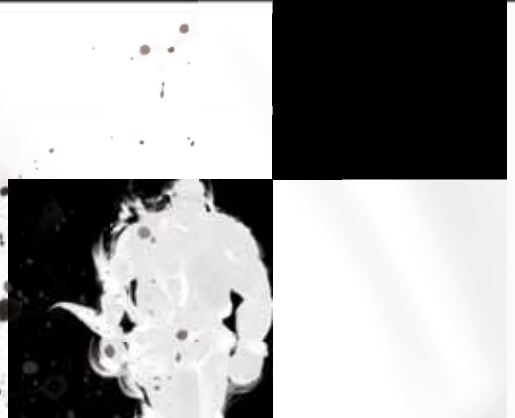
>FADC

M.Bison uses an FADC to safely interrupt a blocked Double Knee Press into a blocked Focus Attack.



>Focus Attack

Chun uses the Focus Attack's Super Armor to counter Vega's Flying Barcelona Attack.



hardcore players only ADVANCED MECHANICS

Frames of Animation

Fighting games typically operate at 60 frames per second (fps). It's important to know how frames work because you'll be able to create new combos and retaliate against blocked attacks that appear 'safe'. The three most important frame numbers for an attack are: Startup (how long it takes to come out), Frame Advantage if Blocked (helps with baiting and punishing attacks) and Frame Advantage on Hit (helps with combos). Frame advantage is an important concept to learn: the more frames of advantage that you have, the sooner you'll recover before your opponent. If frames are denoted in negative numbers (-2, -5), it means they'll recover before you do! If an attack has 7 frames of block-stun, 10 frames of hit-stun and 12 frames of recovery, that means your opponent recovers in 7

frames if blocked, in 10 frames if hit, and you recover in 12 frames no matter what. If you subtract the recovery from the block or hit frames, you have the final numbers: -5 frames on block (7-12), and -2 frames on hit (10-12). For example, Chun-Li's HK Hazanshu has 26 frames of startup, -1 frame on block, and +4 frames on hit (+4 frame advantage). Coincidentally, her c.HK has 4 frames of startup, is -5 frames on block, and knocks down on hit. You can make a HK Hazanshu (+4f hit) to c.HK (4f startup) combo, but you have zero room for error. If you perform the c.HK late, it'll be blocked and you'll be vulnerable for 5 frames. Do your homework and study your frames!

Combos

There are four methods of connecting multiple attacks

into a continuous combo: Chaining, Linking, Canceling and Juggling. Chaining exclusively involves LP and LK, and can chain into each other (c.LK -> c.LP, or c.LP x3) freely. Then there's Linking, in which the animation of one attack must completely finish (including recovery) until the next attack is executed. For this to work, the first attack must have frame advantage. As mentioned earlier, Chun-Li's HK Hazanshu (+4 on hit) can link into her c.HK (4f startup). The final type is Canceling, which completely interrupts one attack to start another. Ryu's c.MK is normally -2 frames on hit. However, you can interrupt his recovery frames of animation into the Hadouken (13f startup), which would normally be impossible to link together.

The distinction between Chaining and Linking is important. In *Street Fighter IV*, if an attack chains into another attack, that second attack cannot cancel! For Zangief to combo c.LP -> c.LP -> EX Banishing Flat, the two c.LP attacks must be *linked*, not chained. Therefore, if c.LP -> c.LP is a chain, one more c.LP must be linked into for an EX Banishing Flat to be canceled into. It would look like c.LP (chain) c.LP (link) c.LP (cancel) EX Banishing Flat.

For Cancels, the hierarchy is a one-way street, and goes Normal -> Special -> EX Focus Attack or Super Combo. Normals can cancel into any of the other options, but a Special can only cancel into an EX Focus Attack or Super Combo, not another Normal. The only time a Normal can cancel into another Normal is with a character's "Target Combo", such as Ken's close MP->HP.

If your opponent blocks the first hit of your combo, you can still continue to attack, but you should avoid ending it with a move that leaves you vulnerable on block (e.g.: Shoryuken). A string of attacks that links together and locks your opponent in block-stun is extremely handy to prepare your next attack. These are known as "block-strings" and can be just as effective as an actual combo. Characters with attacks that move forward, are safe on block, and end with them in a favorable position can do especially well with this; M.Bison's Double Knee Press is perhaps the best example.

Float/Juggle

Typically, when you're hit in mid-air, your character will backflip and land on their feet. But some moves will cause you to fall strangely (marked "Float"). If you're hit by a "Float" attack in mid-air, such as M.Bison's Hell Attack (j.MP+MP), you'll be vulnerable to being hit with certain attacks afterwards. Some characters have ground attacks that launch you into a Floating state, like Abel's c.HP. Being in a "Float" state is bad.



> Combos

You can take advantage of Float and Juggle properties by interrupting your moves with an FADC for greater flexibility.

Attacks that can hit you during a "Float" state are marked as "Juggle", such as M.Bison's EX Psycho Crusher or Abel's Muga (his Ultra). A simple combo to do is M.Bison's Hell Attack against an airborne opponent (which puts them in "Float"), then juggle them with the EX Psycho Crusher. Float and Juggle properties tend to be involved in the game's most advanced combos.

Reversals

After blocking an attack, if you perform a special attack *immediately* after emerging from block-stun, your attack will show up as a Reversal. In this game, Reversal attacks gain the Armor Break property. That means moves like Ryu's Shoryuken can Armor Break out of a sticky situation, even though his Shoryuken normally can't Armor Break! Keep this in mind when using Focus Attacks. Keep this mind if you're trying to perform a Focus Attack trap, such as Akuma's air fireball with a Focus Attack followed immediately after. If E.Honda was the one being trapped, his reversal EX Hyakkan Otoshi (which doesn't have Armor Break) would actually Armor Break you on the way up!

Counter-Hit

In most instances, if an attack interrupts another attack during its startup or active attack frames (but not during recovery), it causes a Counter-Hit state. Counter-Hits inflict 25% extra damage and 1-3 additional frames of hitstun, allowing for combos not normally possible. The sole exception is a Level 1 Focus Attack, which causes crumple-stun if it connects as a Counter-Hit. Sometimes, opposing attacks with trade hits with each other, and both be considered counter-hits.

Stun

There is an invisible gauge that measures how much 'Stun' damage you've taken. It heals over time, but if you

take too much Stun damage too quickly, your character will fall down dizzy and will be completely defenseless. Most characters have about 1000 Stun points. Light attacks usually inflict 50 points, Medium attacks about 100 points, and Hard attacks and Specials about 200 points of Stun. Supers and Ultras *never* inflict Stun. Note: If you inflict Stun in the middle of a combo, *your combo ends immediately*. All subsequent attacks will miss (even if they're airborne, e.g.: If Vega's EX Barcelona Attack stuns Chun-Li, then the follow-up Izuna Drop will whiff), so stop what you're doing and charge a Level 3 Focus Attack!

Crumple

"Crumple-stun" is a sort of 'mini-stun' that occurs only after Focus Attacks (Counter-Hit Level 1, or a cleanly hit Level 2 or Level 3). During this state, your opponent will slowly crumple to the ground and is temporarily open to an attack (throws and command grabs work too). However, if you take too long, your opponent will only be open for one hit of your attack, making it difficult to combo! In order to make the best use of it, you'll have to cancel your Focus Attack with a dash immediately after it hits. Also, some characters (Zangief, Vega) can only combo their Ultra with a crumple-stun opportunity (see the chart later in this guide).

Cross-Ups

Jumping attacks can be strange- if their hitbox is sufficiently wide enough, they can hit from behind. This is the idea behind a cross-up: to jump just past your opponent with an attack that can hit behind you (or under you) that can only be blocked in the opposite direction. Zangief's j.d+HP, Ryu and Ken's j.MK, C.Viper's Flame Kick, and many other attacks can be used in this manner. These are easy to perform after a throw, since your opponent can't quick-recover from them.

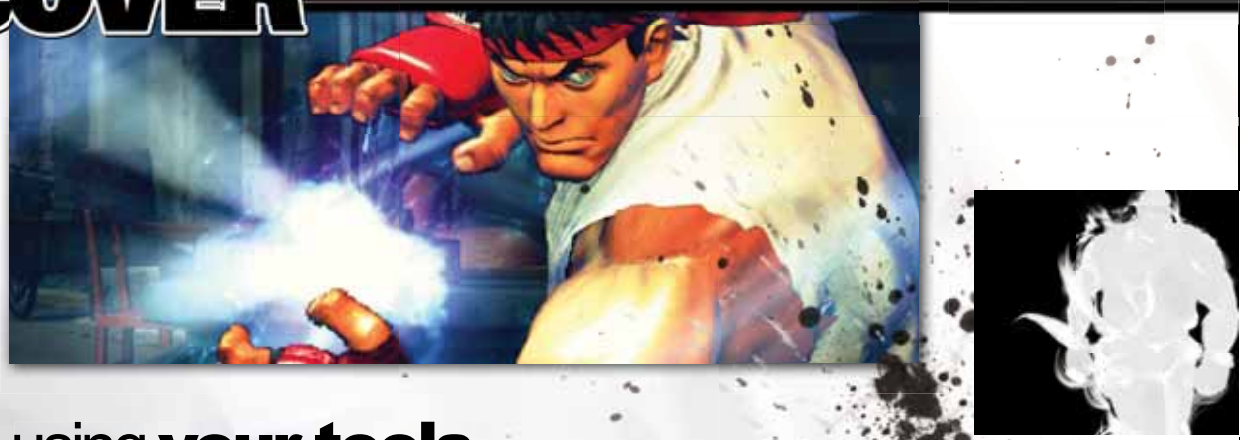
Kara-Canceling

As mentioned in our interview with Yoshinori Ono, there is a high-level technique in *Street Fighter IV* (included by design) known as Kara-Canceling. Originally a glitch in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, this technique enhances the range of an attack or throw by "empty" canceling an attack into another before it fully extends. Throws have a three-frame input "forgiveness" window in which to press LP+LK simultaneously. If this window didn't exist, it would require pressing LP+LK at the exact same time. Many attacks cause a character to quickly move forward within the first three frames of startup, like Ken's f+MK. Because all normal attacks in *Street Fighter IV* have a minimum of three frames of startup, you are allowed to cancel the first three frames of any normal attack into a throw! To execute this with Ken, you would press f+MK, then within 3 frames, press LP+LK simultaneously. This is very fast- three frames is only 3/60ths of a second! If done correctly, Ken's throw will reach *much* farther than normal. It is possible to kara-cancel into Special Attacks as well.

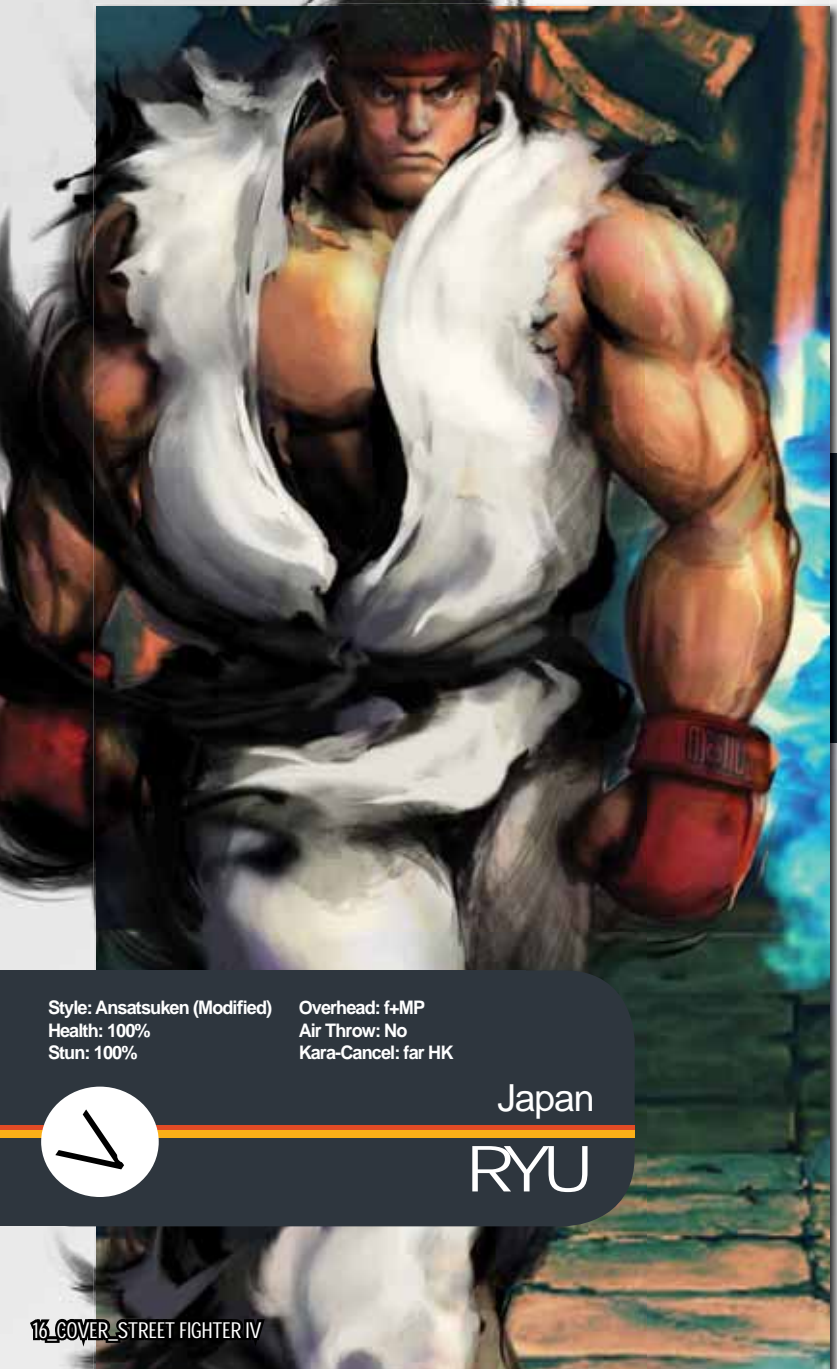
Special-Only Kara-Cancels are done in a different manner. This type of kara-cancel can only cancel into a Special Attack, but can be done much slower. E.Honda can begin his Shikofumi (df+HK) stomp, and before the stomp comes out, press HCB+P to kara-cancel into his Oicho Throw. In this instance, it's more like a feint than a range-increasing technique. (This is identical to Makoto's LK kara-cancel in *SF3:3rd Strike*.)

There are also Special Attacks being kara-canceled into their EX versions because of this same 3-frame window being applied to PP and KK button inputs. Ken can extend the range of his EX Tatsumaki in the air by kara-canceling from the HK Tatsumaki. The input would look like this: jump, qcb+HK (then quickly) MK. What results is an EX Tatsumaki with the trajectory of a HK Tatsumaki. There is rumor that the same technique can be applied to Ultras because of their triple button (PPP and KKK) inputs, but their potential is unknown.





using your tools
CHARACTER MECHANICS



Style: Ansatsuken (Modified)
Health: 100%
Stun: 100%

Overhead: f+MP
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: far HK



Japan
RYU

Properties Introduction

Each character has a dizzying arsenal of moves and techniques which form the foundation of their playing style. However, it is up to you, the player, to utilize them to their fullest potential. The following information on each Street Fighter will utilize concepts and terms from the Mechanics section of this article, so it is recommended that you familiarize yourself with that first before continuing on.

Property	Explanation
Low	Low attack. Must be blocked crouching.
Overhead	High attack. Must be blocked standing.
Grab	Close-ranged grab, and cannot be blocked at all.
Cancel	Can be interrupted with an EX Focus Attack or a Super Combo.
Armor	Has Super Armor, which can absorb attacks and continue to execute.
Break	Penetrates an attack with Super Armor and stops it immediately.
Float	Causes your opponent to be in "Float" state until they fall to the ground.
Juggle	Allows the attack to hit an opponent who is in "Float" state.

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Sakotsu Wari	(Overhead)	f+MP
Mizo'ochi Kudaki	(Cancel) (Float)	f+HP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Hadouken	(Cancel)	QCF+P
Shoryuken	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+P
Tatsumaki Senpū Kyaku	(Break)	QCB+K (Ground or Air)
EX Hadouken	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Float)	QCF+PP
EX Shoryuken	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+PP
EX Tatsumaki Senpū Kyaku	(Juggle) (Break) (Float)	QCB+KK (Ground or Air)
Super	Properties	Command
Shinkū Hadouken	(Juggle)	QCFx2+P
Ultra	Properties	Command
Metsu Hadouken	(Juggle)	QCFx2+PPP

The Eternal Wanderer
If you truly wish to learn the new SFIV system, Ryu epitomizes it: He cannot be played to his fullest potential without learning the EX Focus Attack/Dash Cancel technique. He has great pressuring ability and can capitalize for heavy damage in any opening. However, his Ultra is only useful in combos (not as a reversal), and he has one of the slowest-recovering c.HK sweeps in the game. Be careful not to use it in close range. While he doesn't have the ground-pressure tools and footsies that Ken has, he still has his j.MK crossup (which works particularly well in the corner) and can bait throw attempts with EX Tatsumaki (it hovers in place and vacuums in the opponent), which is relatively safe if blocked.
Ryu has the powerful ability to link after his f+MP overhead. If you see it connect on your opponent, follow it up with a c.LP combo, or instead link a HP Shoryuken, FADC and juggle with your Ultra (this is the basic method of using Ryu's Ultra). He is also able to combo his c.LK-c.LP-c.MK into an EX Hadouken and juggle with an EX Tatsumaki, followed by an Ultra in the corner, or hit you out of the air with his 2-hit j.MP and juggle you with an Ultra, or... you get the point. You can also cancel f+HP into a special attack, or link into a c.LP to start a combo. Combined with his EX Hadouken's distance-control and the Tatsumaki to dodge fireballs, he'll always remain a threat when played carefully and consistently.



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Jump in.





ken's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Inazuma Kakato Wari	(Overhead)	b+MK
Fumikomi Maegeri		f+MK
Shiden Kakato Otoshi	(Overhead)	f+HK, Hold K to fake
Target Combo	(Cancel)	close MP-HP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Hadouken	(Cancel)	QCF+P
Shoryuken	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+P
Tatsumaki Senpoo Kyaku	(Break)	QCB+K (Ground or Air)
EX Hadouken	(Cancel)	QCF+PP
EX Shoryuken	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Float)	DP+PP
EX Tatsumaki Senpoo Kyaku	(Break)	QCB+KK (Ground or Air)
Super	Properties	Command
Shoryu Reppa	(Juggle)	QCFx2+P
Ultra	Properties	Command
Shinryuken	(Juggle)	QCFx2+PPP

The Crimson King of Brawling

For players still uncomfortable with the new mechanics, Ken fits like a comfortable, padded glove, allowing you to punch brick walls without hurting yourself. Ken is easier to learn for beginners, but while his techniques and tactics are simple to learn, he has fewer opportunities for high-damage combos. For anti-air, Ken's MP Shoryuken has better invincibility frames than the HP version, making it better to use against jump-ins. If you're in a pickle, Ken's Ultra is geared to re-capture momentum with brute-force invincibility. However, it combos poorly, so Ken's biggest potential for damage is to cancel into his Super instead. Because Super gauge takes so long to build, it is even more important for Ken to use his superior 'footsie' techniques to dominate the ground. Fortunately, his f+MK kick allows him to get in close without losing frame advantage.

When Ken manages to close distance, his mix-up game becomes extremely powerful. After linking c.LK/LP x3, Ken can choose to either combo into the HP Shoryuken (it has huge horizontal reach), or (if it was blocked) follow with a kara-throw (f+MK), which has just as much range and allows Ken to set up a new pressure situation. Ken can also choose to jump over his opponent and land a solid cross-up j.MK to continue the pressure. It may not be flashy, but the damage (and meter) adds up quickly.

Style: Ansatsuken (Modified)
Health: 100%
Stun: 100%

Overhead: b+MK, f+HK
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: f+MK



United States of America
KEN MASTERS



chun-li's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Kouhou Kaiten Kyaku		df+LK
Kaku Kyaku Raku	(Overhead)	df+HK
Kakusen Shuu		f+MK
Kinteki Shuu		b+MK
Kenku Kyaku		After Kinteki Shuu, MK
Tensho Kyaku	(Float)	After Kenku Kyaku, d,u+MK
Head Stomp	(Juggle) (Float)	In Air, d+MK (x3)
Wall Jump		Jump near a wall, Up-Forward
Target Combo	(Float)	j,HP-HP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Kikouken	(Cancel) (Float)	Charge b,f,P
Hazanshu	(Cancel) (Overhead)	HCB+K
Spinning Bird Kick	(Break)	Charge d,u+K
Hyakuretsu Kyaku	(Cancel) (Float)	Press Kick x5
EX Kikouken	(Cancel) (Float)	Charge b,f,PPP
EX Hazanshu	(Cancel) (Overhead)	HCB+KK
EX Spinning Bird Kick	(Juggle) (Break) (Float)	Charge d,u+KK
EX Hyakuretsu Kyaku	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Float)	Press Kick x4, then KK
Super	Properties	Command
Senretsus Kyaku		Charge b,f,b,f+K
Ultra	Properties	Command
Housenka	(Juggle) (Break)	Charge b,f,b,f+KKK

The Legs of Legend

Chun-Li is one of the most technical characters in the game. She has the fastest dash and FADC, allowing her to capitalize well on Focus attacks. However, her opportunities require massive EX meter-burning, such as comboing c.LK-c.LK-EX Hyakuretsu to juggle with her Ultra in the corner. Outside of juggle combos, her Ultra is fairly quick and can punish fireballs and many blocked sweeps. Expert players should learn how to Charge-Partition her dash into the Ultra. And like 3rd Strike Chun, you can use EX Spinning Bird Kick as your "Get the hell off me" button. In a zoning situation, her Kikouken projectile works well with her MK and HK as anti-air measures, and the Hazanshu is a good attack for leaping over fireballs, but it can't Armor Break so savvy players can Focus through it to punish you.

Be warned: "Technical" is also euphemism for "hard work" (some prefer "high-maintenance"). The majority of damage will be dealt from carefully chosen normal attacks, not specials. Her Kaku Kyaku Raku (df+HK) cross-up kick works very well against cornered opponents (especially after throws), and jump-back HK works as an instant overhead for that last bit of damage to KO your opponent. She also gains a new chain combo with the Kinteki Shuu (b+MK), and the final hit (Tenshou Kyaku) launches for a juggle opportunity. One of her best mix-ups by far is her j,HP-HP chain, where you can skip the second HP and instead land with a c.LK combo, or throw. If your opponent activates a Focus Attack, her j,HP+HP will blow through the armor before the Focus can hit you. On characters that don't have an invincible wake-up option, this trap is almost impossible to escape from. If you hit someone in mid-air with j,HP->HP, you can juggle with EX Spinning Bird Kick or jump again and use your Head Stomp to build meter.

Style: Wu-Shu
Health: 90%
Stun: 105%

Overhead: Hazanshu, j,HK (Jump away)
Air Throw: Yes
Kara-Cancel: f+MK



People's Republic of China
CHUN-LI

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Shikofumi	(Overhead)	df+HK
Target Combo		close MP(1st hit)-df+HK
Special Attacks:	Properties	Command
Hyakuretsu Harite	(Cancel)	Press Punch x5
Super Zutsuki	(Cancel) (Break) (Float)	Charge b,f+P
Super Hyakkan Otoshi	(Float)	Charge d,u+K
Oicho Throw	(Grab)	HCB+P
EX Hyakuretsu Harite	(Cancel)	Press Punch x4, then PP
EX Super Zutsuki	(Cancel) (Break)	Charge b,f+PP
EX Super Hyakkan Otoshi	(Float)	Charge d,u+KK
EX Oicho Throw	(Grab)	HCB+PP
Super	Properties	Command
Oni Musou	(Juggle)	Charge b,f,b,f+P
Ultra:	Properties	Command
Super Oni Musou	(Juggle) (Break)	Charge b,f,b,f+PPP

e.honda's movelist

The Hot-Blooded Wrestler

E.Honda has often been an underrated character. Like Chun-Li, he requires an expert player to fully utilize his potential. His Zutsuki (headbutt) serves as a solid anti-air measure and breaks through armor, and many characters have difficulty punishing it on block, including Ryu and Sagat. His Ultra might not have the best priority, but if it trades, Honda can immediately charge for a Level 3 Focus Attack that's almost impossible to escape from. He also has exceptional range with his j,HK and mix-up opportunities with his Hyakkan Otoshi, which has invincibility frames on the way up (EX is fully invincible as it rises), and is safe on block! However, it cannot Armor Break, so don't go crazy with it.

Where Honda is surprisingly good at is his wake-up game. His LP Oicho Throw can be ticked after several crouching light attacks, after HP Hand Slaps, and even kara-canceled from his Shikofumi (df+HK) overhead! Since the Oicho cannot be quick-recovered from, this gives him ample opportunity to set up a cross-up, a Focus Attack or Hand Slaps. Hand Slaps are great to use against someone getting up or after a Saving Attack. If you connect, you'll recover in time to set up a mix-up or the following combo: c.LK -> c.LP -> EX Hand Slaps -> c.LP -> EX Hyakkan Otoshi. Also, if you connect an HP Hand Slap, you can link a far HK afterwards for free damage.

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Surprise Forward		b+KKK
Surprise Back		f+KKK
Rock Crush		b+MP or f+MP (Hold MP for Overhead)
Fear Down		d+PPP
Amazon River Run	(Low)	df+HP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Rolling Attack	(Cancel) (Break)	Charge b,f+P
Backstep Rolling	(Overhead)	Charge b,f+K
Vertical Rolling		Charge d,u+K
Electric Thunder	(Cancel) (Float)	Press Punch x5
EX Rolling Attack	(Cancel) (Break)	Charge b,f+PP
EX Backstep Rolling	(Overhead)	Charge b,f+KK (Hold b or f to move)
EX Vertical Rolling		Charge d,u+KK
EX Electric Thunder	(Cancel) (Float)	Press Punch x4, then PP
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Ground Shave Rolling	(Juggle)	Charge b,f,b,f+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Lightning Cannonball	(Juggle) (Low) (Overhead)	Charge b,f,b,f+PPP

blanka's movelist

Warrior of the Jungle

Blanka has some stupidly good tricks going for him. He has great range and speed on his normal attacks, a great cross-up j.MK, and can link attacks together to combo into a Rolling Attack, like j,HK -> MP -> c.MK -> LP -> HP Rolling Attack as a bread-and-butter combo. He still has his Surprise dashes which can cross-over opponents (f+KKK or b+KKK), and now has a new command crouch, the Fear Down (d+PPP) which dodges fireballs, many attacks, and can be canceled directly into a special attack. Another move to abuse is his Amazon River Run (df+HP) slide, which knocks down and goes under every fireball in the game, including Sagat's low Tiger Shot! His standing HP and neutral j,HP also work as extremely effective anti-air measures.

His special attacks are even better. The Rolling Attack is extremely difficult to punish, especially for Zangief! (see the chart later in this guide). The EX version even goes through fireballs and comes out instantly. Blanka's EX Backstep Rolling is now controllable in mid-air, allowing for precision cross-up attacks. EX Vertical Rolling has five frames of full-body invincibility, useful for anti-air but may not be as good for ground-based reversals. His Electric Thunder is immune to high attacks, and the EX version envelops his entire body in electricity. Either of these versions can punish holes inside an attacker's blockstring. His Super can adjust distance with the button used, and can juggle after an Electric Thunder in the corner. His Ultra is ridiculous: It starts as a low attack, turns into an overhead, and then goes mid. It also has massive invincibility on start-up, and is so fast that it can link after c.MK!

Style: Electric Shock & Wild Fighting
Health: 105%
Stun: 95%

Overhead: b+MP or f+MP (Hold MP)
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: None



Federative Republic of Brazil
BLANKA





zangief's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Flying Body Attack		Diagonal Jump, d+HP
Double Knee Drop		Diagonal Jump, d+LK
Headbutt		Vertical Jump, d+MP or d+HP
Long Kick	(Low)	df+HK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Screw Piledriver	(Grab)	360+P
Banishing Flat	(Cancel)	DP+P
Double Lariat	(Float)	PPP (Hold b or f to move)
Turbo Lariat	(Float)	KKK (Hold b or f to move)
Flying Power Bomb	(Grab)	360+K (Far)
Atomic Suplex	(Grab)	360+K (Close)
EX Screw Piledriver	(Grab)	360+PP
EX Banishing Flat	(Juggle) (Cancel)	DP+PP
EX Flying Power Bomb	(Armor) (Grab)	360+KK (Far)
EX Atomic Suplex	(Grab)	360+KK (Close)
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Final Atomic Buster	(Grab)	720+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Ultimate Atomic Buster	(Grab)	720+PPP

Style: Russian/American Pro-Wrestling Overhead: None
 Health: 120% Air Throw: No
 Stun: 120% Kara-Cancel: None

Russian Federation
ZANGIEF

The Red Cyclone

Out of the box, Zangief is one of the most dominating characters in the game: He has the highest stamina (120%), the hardest-stunning attack (neutral j, u+HP, his headbutt), amazing air-to-ground attacks like his cross-up body splash (j, d+HP) and his new air stomp (j, MK) which has huge downward range (helpful against Guile's Flash Kick), and a far-reaching sweep (df+HK). He also has a running grab with Armor, the EX Flying Powerbomb. His Lariats also retain their initial priority as anti-air reversal attacks (as well as dodging ALL fireballs, including Ryu's Ultra), and are confusing as hell to counter (see the guide later in this article). Furthermore, both Lariats can be 'steered' with the controller (hold back or forward), and the PPP Lariat is temporarily invulnerable to high attacks, while the KKK Lariat will dodge low attacks. About the only thing he's missing is an Armor-breaking attack, but you can use EX Banishing Flat's multiple hits to do the job.

The Banishing Flat deserves deeper examination. All versions nullify projectiles and cover distance faster than dashes (use after an SPD), but leave Zangief slightly vulnerable to attack, even if it hits. The EX version doesn't have this problem, it knocks down. It also has invincibility frames, and can be blind-confirmed from long distance with standing and crouching jabs (perform LP -> EX Banishing Flat from long distance- if the LP misses, the EX Banishing Flat won't come out). However, if blocked, Zangief will still be vulnerable to combos (9 frames of recovery). As for his EX Screw Piledriver, it has invincibility frames, but takes slightly longer to activate than the LP Screw Piledriver. You can also use his far HK to advance closer into grab range, especially since it will miss crouching characters. Finally, his Ultra grabs instantly- if your opponent is still on the ground during the startup animation, they're dead meat. His main weaknesses are that he's a large target (not too much of a handicap), and that he has no full-screen distance options against characters like Blanka and Akuma.

guile's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Chopping Straight	(Overhead)	f+MP
Spinning Back Knuckle		f+HP
Knee Bazooka		b+LK or f+LK
Rolling Sobat		b+MK or f+MK
Reverse Spin Kick		Close b+HK or f+HK
Guile High Kick	(Float)	df+HK
Target Combo		c.MK-f+MP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Sonic Boom	(Cancel)	Charge b,f+P
Somersault Kick	(Cancel) (Break) (Float)	Charge d,u+K
EX Sonic Boom	(Juggle) (Cancel)	Charge b,f+PP
EX Somersault Kick	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Break) (Float)	Charge d,u+KK
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Double Somersault	(Float)	Charge db,df,db,uf+K
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Somersault Explosion	(Juggle)	Charge db,df,db,uf+KKK

The Secret Blade

For some reason, Guile's only had two special attacks in his entire Street Fighting career. That's okay, because that's all he really needed. The Sonic Boom isn't just a projectile. Think of it instead as a power-up to all of his normal attacks. Guile recovers almost instantly after throwing one, and the LP version travels so slowly that Guile can attack before it reaches his opponent. The EX version is the opposite, flying across the screen like a bullet and hitting twice (but it does not knock down). It can also juggle if you hit an opponent with a traded Somersault Kick, or off of Guile's High Kick (df+HK).

The Somersault Kick serves as a decent wake-up attack, moreso because of its Armor Break properties. Unfortunately, it's a little more vulnerable than in previous games. Many jumping characters can stuff Guile in mid-air if the Somersault isn't executed early enough. (The EX Somersault Kick has enough invincibility frames to cover him, though.) If this is the case, you can use c.HP as an alternate anti-air to cover the zones where the Somersault is weakest. You can still combo into it, as long as you don't chain into the attack you're trying to cancel (this is the number one reason for failure). In a combo like c.LK -> c.LK -> c.LP -> HK Somersault Kick, you must correctly time the link between c.LK -> c.LP. Guile still has his cross-up j.LK and his excellent arsenal of normal attacks (try out his b+MK and f+MK Sobat kicks for footsies), and should almost always be on the offensive with a Sonic Boom plowing the way ahead of him. Almost, because there are some attacks that punish Sonic Booms reliably (see later in this guide). Finally, if you connect Guile's Super, you can follow up with his Ultra!

Style: Martial Arts/Pro-Wrestling Hybrid Overhead: f+MP
 Health: 100% Air Throw: Yes
 Stun: 90% Kara-Cancel: MP

United States of America
GUILE

WING

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Style: Yoga
Health: 90%
Stun: 90%

Overhead: b+LP, j,HP (Jump away)
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: None



Republic of India
DHALSIM

dhalsim's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Yoga Shock	(Overhead)	b+LP
Drill Kick		In Air, d+K
Drill Headbutt	(Float)	In Air, d+HP
Yoga Tower	(Cancel)	d+PPP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Yoga Fire	(Cancel)	QCF+P
Yoga Flame	(Cancel) (Break)	HCF+P
Yoga Blast	(Cancel)	HCB+K
EX Yoga Fire	(Cancel)	QCF+PP
EX Yoga Flame	(Cancel) (Break)	HCF+PP
EX Yoga Blast	(Cancel)	HCB+KK
Yoga Teleport: Behind (Close)		DP+PPP (Ground or Air)
Yoga Teleport: Front (Close)		DP+KKK (Ground or Air)
Yoga Teleport: Front (Mid)		RDP+PPP (Ground or Air)
Yoga Teleport: Front (Far)		RDP+KKK (Ground or Air)
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Yoga Inferno	(Juggle)	QCFx2+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Yoga Catastrophe	(Float)	QCFx2+PPP

The Spiritual Seeker

Dhalsim, like Chun-Li, plays in a completely different fashion than from before. While he's still stretchy (with limbs and slides going under projectiles), his drills can't be used as offensively, and his teleports give him some crazy mix-up options from full-screen, especially when used with his Ultra (Yoga Catastrophe is the new Aegis Reflector). You can also "Tiger-Knee" the teleport (Finish the motion with up-forward before pressing PPP or KKK) so that it activates right off the ground. When you re-appear, you now have an instant aerial attack and will land immediately to continue your combo. Unfortunately, the Yoga Teleport makes for a poor escape move when you're cornered. There is NO option to teleport to the other side of the screen, only right behind your opponent. Keep in mind that while his limbs do stretch, you can shorten all of his crouching, standing and jumping attacks by holding back on the controller.

The Yoga Tower is an evasive move. It dodges many attacks and even command throws (like Zangief's Screw Piledriver), and you can cancel out of it with a special or normal attack. As for Anti-air options, his short-range normals like db+LP and b+HK have surprisingly good priority, and can often be canceled into a HP Yoga Flame (which gives frame advantage on block). He also has the longest-reaching Focus Attack, but where Dhalsim falls short is with FADC. Along with Zangief, he has the slowest Dash Cancel in the game, and the slowest forward dash in the game... so after a Focus Attack, you'll often have to backdash instead.

balrog's movelist

Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Dash Straight	(Cancel) (Float)	Charge b,f+P
Dash Upper	(Cancel) (Float)	Charge b,f+K
Dash Ground Straight	(Cancel) (Low) (Float)	Charge b,df+P
Dash Ground Smash	(Break) (Cancel) (Float)	Charge b,df+K
Dash Swing Blow	(Break) (Cancel) (Overhead) (Float)	Charge b,df+P (Hold)
Buffalo Headbutt	(Float)	Charge d,u+P
EX Dash Straight	(Cancel) (Armor) (Float)	Charge b,f+PPP
EX Dash Upper	(Cancel) (Armor) (Float)	Charge b,f+KK
EX Dash Ground Straight	(Cancel) (Armor) (Low) (Float)	Charge b,df+PP
EX Dash Ground Smash	(Break) (Cancel) (Armor) (Float)	Charge b,df+KK
EX Dash Swing Blow	(Break) (Cancel) (Armor) (Overhead) (Float)	Charge b,df+PP (Hold PP)
EX Buffalo Headbutt	(Float)	Charge d,u+PP
Turn Punch	(Break) (Cancel)	Hold PPP or KKK, Release
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Crazy Buffalo	(Juggle) (Break)	Charge b,f,b,f+P or K
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Violence Buffalo	(Juggle) (Break)	Charge b,f,b,f+PPP or KKK

The Lion's Roar

Balrog is solid. While he has no Command Normal attacks, his mid-range options are terrifying. If you have an Ultra charged, you can punish fireballs and some openings, but where it really shines is if you popped them up with his Buffalo Headbutt, because the Ultra will juggle (use KKK for better vertical range). The Buffalo Headbutt can also go under fireballs and can be comboed from linked c.LP attacks. The Dash Swing Blow, while being an Overhead, also allows Balrog to follow up with a c.LK -> Dash Straight -> Super, and the EX Dash Upper can be followed up with c.LP -> c.LP -> Buffalo Headbutt, which sets up for an Ultra. If you're in a pinch, the EX Buffalo Headbutt has 15 frames of invincibility, more than enough for any situation, and his EX Dash punches all have Armor. Also, Balrog's Super and Ultra will change to uppercuts (for anti-air and juggles) if you use Kicks instead of Punches to execute it.

Learning how to use the Turn Punch can be tricky, as you'll have to deal with losing all of your kicks or punches, playing finger Twister(tm) to access your remaining buttons, and then not losing the charge accidentally. It's rare for a Turn Punch to hit Final status (it requires 56 seconds of charging!), but will destroy 50% of your opponent's life, if not blow their head off. Even if you never charge it for that long, the Turn Punch will give you a ready retaliation option for Focus Attacks due to its Armor-break property. It can also dodge attacks and projectiles during the back-turn (18 frames), which lets you counter moves like Abel's Wheel Kick, Vega's Barcelona Attack, and even El Fuerte's shenanigans (though you can still be grabbed). If you happen to have a Super charged up, you can cancel into that, too!

Style: Boxing
Health: 110%
Stun: 100%

Overhead: Dash Swing Blow
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: None



United States of America
BALROG

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Piece of Mercury		df+MK
Cosmic Smart	(Float)	df+HK
Backslash		PPP
Short Backslash		KKK
Special Attacks:	Properties	Command
Rolling Crystal Flash	(Cancel)	Charge b,f+P
Scarlet Terror	(Break)	Charge db,f+K
Sky High Claw		Charge d,u+P
Flying Barcelona Attack		Charge d,u+K (Hold b or f to move)
EX Rolling Crystal Flash	(Cancel)	Charge b,f+PP
EX Scarlet Terror	(Break)	Charge db,f+KK
EX Sky High Claw	(Break)	Charge d,u+P
EX Flying Barcelona Attack	(Juggle) (Float)	Charge d,u+KK (Hold b or f to move)
Izuna Drop	(Juggle) (Grab)	During Barcelona, f+HP or b+HP near opponent
Remove Claw		DP+P
EX Remove Mask		DP+PPP
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Flying Barcelona Special		Charge db,df,db,uf+P
Rolling Izuna Drop	(Grab)	During FBS, f+P or b+P near opponent
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Bloody High Claw	(Break)	Charge db,df,db,uf+PPP

vega's movelist

The Blood-Stained Claw

Of the Four Kings of Shadaloo, Vega drew the short straw. His d+HK slide is slower than molasses and is easily punished, he lacks solid anti-air options, and he loses his gear faster than a Chippendale stripper. This is bad, because if his mask falls off, he suffers a 25% defense penalty. If you lose his claw, your punches lack range and damage. Vega dominates on the ground, however. His MK has insane range and speed, and will force many players to jump out of frustration. Because Vega lacks anti-air options, keep your distance and be ready to slash them out of the air with j,MP, an air-throw, or an anti-air Focus Attack. His modified Cosmic Smart (df+HK) now launches opponents and is safe on block. And on wake-up, you can use his Backflips (PPP or KKK, varying length) for full invincibility. Unfortunately, his Scarlet Terror has poor ground length and is easily countered. It serves as anti-air only from long distances.

The EX Barcelona Attack's initial leap is an attack! You'll need to aim it at the opponent (Charge d, uf+KK). It lacks priority, but has speed and full-screen range. It can combo after a Cosmic Smart and sets up for an Izuna Drop, and also combos from c.LK, c.LP or c.MP. To go through fireballs, the EX Rolling Crystal Flash works best. Vega also has one of the farthest Focus Attacks in the game, and can combo his Ultra off of crumple-stun if charge-partitioned. Outside of this, his Ultra is only useful for full-screen punishes. On the other hand, his Super Combo, the Barcelona Special, sets up like the normal Barcelona Attack. If you grab your opponent, it becomes the Rolling Izuna Drop and is surprisingly effective.

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Fake Kick		Press HKx2 quickly
Step Low Kick	(Low)	f+LK
Step High Kick	(Juggle) (Float)	f+HK
Heavy Tiger Elbow	(Overhead)	f+HP
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Tiger Shot	(Cancel)	QCF+P
Ground Tiger Shot	(Cancel)	QCF+K
Tiger Uppercut	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+P
Tiger Knee Crush	(Cancel) (Break) (Float)	DP+K
EX Tiger Shot	(Cancel) (Float)	QCF+PP
EX Ground Tiger Shot	(Cancel) (Float)	QCF+KK
EX Tiger Uppercut	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+PP
EX Tiger Knee Crush	(Cancel) (Break) (Float)	DP+KK
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Tiger Genocide	(Juggle)	QCFx2+K
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Tiger Destruction	(Juggle)	QCFx2+KKK

sagat's movelist

The Honorable Emperor

The King of Muay Thai is so powerful in this game that he can completely shut out any opponent's game plan. His Tiger Knee Crush hits twice, breaks armor, and if spaced correctly, has no recovery penalty and can cross-up his opponent after the second hit! You can lock an opponent down with a c.LK -> c.MK -> LK Tiger Knee Crush blockstring which leaves few openings for your opponent to escape. Furthermore, his Step Low Kick is safe if blocked, allows him to cancel into a special attack on hit, and can also kara-cancel into a special attack, which can give his HK Tiger Knee Crush full-screen range! His Tiger Shots also recover quickly, and his Tiger Uppercut still hits like a ton of bricks. His air options aren't lacking either: j,LK is an effective cross-up, and his j,MP is an effective jump-in, as well as having the ability to juggle!

To make things worse, his Ultra is easier to combo into than Ryu's! It will connect after a deep j,HK on counter-hit, or a FADC'd Tiger Uppercut. It also connects off of his Step High Kick (f+HK), which has odd juggle properties (much like Ryu's j,MP). An FADC or traded Tiger Uppercut can be followed up with a Step High Kick, then finished with his Ultra. Basically, whenever Sagat has an Ultra charged, jumping in on him amounts to suicide. His one weakness is his sheer height. Characters like Vega and Chun-Li gain a slight advantage against him because of this. Both characters can hit him crouching with a jump-back overhead attack, and certain combos become easier to perform because of his height (including Vega's EX Flying Barcelona Attack).

Style: Muay Thai
Health: 110%
Stun: 110%

Overhead: f+HP
Air Throw: No
Kara-Cancel: f+LK (Specials Only)



Kingdom of Thailand
SAGAT



Style: Spanish Assassination Arts
Health: 100% (75% without Mask)
Stun: 90%

Overhead: j,HP (Jump away)
Air Throw: Yes
Kara-Cancel: HK

Kingdom of Spain
VEGA





m.bison's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Hell Attack	(Float)	j.MP->MP during Diag. Jump
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Psycho Crusher	(Cancel) (Break)	Charge b,f+P
Double Knee Press	(Cancel 1st)	Charge b,f+K
Head Press	(Overhead)	Charge d,u+K
Somersault Skull Diver	(Overhead)	After Head Press, P (Hold b or f to move)
Devil Reverse	(Overhead)	Charge d,u+P (Hold b or f to move)
EX Psycho Crusher	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Break)	Charge b,f+P
EX Double Knee Press	(Juggle) (Cancel 1st)	Charge b,f+KK
EX Head Press	(Float) (Overhead)	Charge d,u+KK
EX Somersault Skull Diver	(Juggle) (Overhead)	After EX Head Press, P (Hold b or f to move)
EX Devil Reverse	(Juggle) (Overhead)	Charge d,u+PP
Teleport: Behind (Close)		DP+PPP
Teleport: Front (Close)		DP+KKK
Teleport: Front (Mid)		RDP+PPP
Teleport: Front (Far)		RDP+KKK
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Knee Press Nightmare	(Juggle)	Charge b,f,b,f+K
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Nightmare Booster	(Juggle)	Charge b,f,b,f+KKK

Style: Psycho Power Overhead: None
 Health: 100% Air Throw: No
 Stun: 95% Kara-Cancel: None

Shadaloo Crime Syndicate M.BISON



c.viper's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
High Jump		d,u
Viper Elbow	(Overhead)	f+MP
Double Kick		f+MK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Thunder Knuckle	(Juggle) (Cancel) (Break) (Float)	QCF+P
Burning Kick	(Float)	QCB+K (Ground or Air)
Seismo Hammer	(Cancel)	DP+P
EX Thunder Knuckle	(Cancel) (Break) (Float)	QCF+PP
EX Burning Kick	(Float)	QCB+KK (Ground or Air)
EX Seismo Hammer	(Cancel) (Float)	DP+PP
Feint		After Seismo or Thunder, PP
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Emergency Combination	(Juggle)	QCFx2+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Burst Time	(Juggle)	QCFx2+PPP

Style: Way of the Secret Spy Overhead: f+MP
 Health: 90% Air Throw: None
 Stun: 95% Kara-Cancel: None

United States of America C.VIPER

The Demon From Hell

M.Bison, aka "Dictator" can lock-down an opponent with his Double Knee Press, and his standing kicks have great reach and priority. His air options are just as strong: he can capitalize off of mid-air Hell Attacks (j.MP-MP) with followup juggles, and he has a j.MK cross-up. His Devil Reverse looks identical to a jump on ascent, and can fake you out! That's not all, though. His EX Psycho Crusher absorbs 1-hit fireballs (like Zangief's Banishing Flat) and has a huge hitbox, making it good for anti-air escapes, and his EX Devil Reverse is an invincible escape as it goes up. The EX Head Press has invincible start-up (great as anti-air), does a TON of damage (as much as some combos), and can even defeat Zangief's Double Lariat. EX Double Knee Press goes full-screen through fireballs, making it an invaluable tool against Guile's Sonic Booms. Best of all, his Ultra is invincible on start-up, and can juggle after a Hell Attack for full damage, as it will 'grab' airborne characters.

Unfortunately, Dictator lacks an overhead or kara-throw for ground mixups. Much of his game will be spent teasing out openings with his Devil Reverse and well-placed Double Knee Presses for minimal recovery. Also, the Skull Diver and Devil Reverse falls are both vulnerable to being Focus countered. When hitting people out of the air with his Hell Attack, keep in mind that you can follow up with any attack on the ground if you only press MP once. If you hit it twice (j.MP-MP chain), you will only be able to juggle with techniques specifically with the Juggle property, such as the EX Psycho Crusher or Ultra.

Miss Perfect

Of the four newcomers, Crimson Viper is the flashiest... and the most complex. She is the only character in the game that has a High Jump (Tap down, then any upward direction), and inherits the ability to jump-cancel certain attacks for additional combos, even into her Ultra. She can also cancel her Thunder Knuckle and Seismo Hammer to recover faster with a feint (press PP immediately after the startup animation), which can actually be used to make combos. She pays a price for this versatility: She has 10% less health and deals about 20% less damage than average. Her Focus Attack is also rather slow. In order to keep up, she'll need to constantly be on the offensive and combo, combo, combo.

Viper's normal attacks are decent. Her HK and Double Kick (f+HK) both dodge low attacks on startup, and her j.HK works as a crossup, especially useful after her back throw. Her Viper Elbow (f+MP) is both an Overhead and an advancing short-jump attack. Her special attacks take some time to explain. The Thunder Knuckle is really three specials in one: LP goes under fireballs, MP is faster, and HP has brief invincibility and can juggle an opponent twice if the first HP Thunder Knuckle was an early anti-air. EX version will get you out of the corner and knock the opponent down. Viper can also punish fireballs with a high-jump Burning Kick, and the move can also cross-up opponents after a jump-kick (you can combo into it in the air), giving way to a mix-up mind game. The Burning Kick also combos into Ultra in the corner. In a pinch, EX Burning Kick acts as a decent wake-up and gets opponents off of you in a hurry. Her EX Seismo Hammer has massive invincibility frames, can launch, and can be jump-canceled into her HP Thunder Knuckle, Burning Kick, or an Ultra. Because of its versatility, it'll probably be your biggest meter drain, but if it gives you the opportunity to combo into your Ultra, go for it!

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abel's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Front Kick		f+MK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Change of Direction	(Float)	QCF+P
Second Middle	(Overhead)	After Change, F+P
Second Low	(Low)	After Change, F+K
Finish Middle	(Overhead)	After Second, F+P
Finish Low	(Low)	After Second, F+K
Wheel Kick	(Break) (Float) (Overhead)	QCB+K
Marseille Rolling		QCF+K
Sky Fall	(Float)	DP+P
Tornado Throw		HCB+P
EX Change of Direction	(Float)	QCF+PP
EX Wheel Kick	(Break) (Float) (Overhead)	QCB+KK
EX Marseille Rolling		QCF+KK
EX Sky Fall	(Juggle) (Float)	DP+PP
EX Tornado Throw	(Grab)	HCB+PP
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Mushin	(Juggle) (Break)	QCFx2+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Muga	(Juggle) (Break)	QCFx2+PPP

Style: Judo Variant
Health: 110%
Stun: 105%

Overhead: Second Middle, Finish Middle
Air Throw: None
Kara Cancel: None



French Republic

ABEL



el fuerte's movelist

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Triangle Jump		Jump near a wall, Up-Forward
Drop Kick	(Overhead)	f+MK
Target Combo		Far MK-MK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Habanero Dash		QCF+P
Habanero Back Dash		QCB+P
Stop		During HD/HBD: LP
Tostada Press	(Overhead)	During HD/HBD/Triangle Jump: MP
Fajita Buster	(Grab)	During HD/Triangle Jump: HP
Propeller Tortilla	(Grab)	During HBD, HP
Back Step		During HD, LK
Gordita Sobat	(Float) (Cancel)	During HD, MK
Caramale Sliding	(Low)	During HD, HK
Picadillo Jump		During HBD, K
Quesadilla Bomb	(Break) (Cancel) (Float)	Hold K, Release
Guacamole Leg Throw	(Juggle)	DP+K
EX Habanero Dash	(Armor)	QCF+PP
EX Habanero Back Dash	(Armor)	QCB+PP
EX Quesadilla Bomb	(Break) (Cancel) (Float)	Hold KK for 8 seconds, Release
EX Guacamole Leg Throw	(Juggle)	DP+KK
Super Combo	Properties	Command
El Fuerte Dynamite	(Juggle)	QCFx2+K
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
El Fuerte Flying Giga Buster	(Grab)	QCFx2+KKK (Hold b or f to move)

Style: Lucha Libre
Health: 90%
Stun: 100%

Overhead: Tostada Press, f+MK, far HK
Air Throw: Yes
Kara-Cancel: None



United Mexican States

EL FUERTE

The Man Without A Past

Abel is a deceptively effective character. His mix-up series is the Change of Direction (QCF+P), and gives you options for low and overhead attacks. The "Mids" always come faster than the "Lows" and are guaranteed to combo if the initial Change of Direction hit, but the "Lows" do more damage. His Tornado Throw is a little slow, but is invincible to throws (the EX version is invulnerable to attacks) and allows him to dominate in close situations such as a blocked Focus Attack dash-canceled into a throw. His Marseille Rolling makes him temporarily invulnerable to attack, but is vulnerable to throws. The Sky Fall will grab opponents out of the air, and works well after his c.HP. His Wheel Kick is great for punishing fireballs, but the initial startup can be Focus countered. As for normal attacks, you'll mainly be comboing c.MP into Change of Direction. His j.MK is also a decent cross-up and works after a Tornado Throw or Ultra. The real killer in his toolbox is his humble Front Kick (f+MK), which cancels into a dash with time to spare. If it counter-hits, you're looking at a free combo. Finally, he has an Ultra that rushes across half the screen like a homicidal madman, goes through fireballs, catches opponents out of the air, juggles after a c.HP, and punishes just about everything. Beware though, if his c.HP is blocked, it leaves him as vulnerable as a blocked Ken sweep (-6 frames), and many characters can quickly punish him for it.

The Courageous Hurricane

True to Lucha Libre form, El Fuerte throws his entire body at you to attack, and he's fast. His Habanero Dash is difficult to track, and during it, he gains a low sliding attack (Caramale Sliding), an overhead/anti-air cross-up body-slam with invincible start-up (Tostada Press), a command throw that only 'hits' standing enemies (Fajita Buster), a safe attack with frame advantage on hit (Gordita Sobat), a back dash (Back Step) and cancel (Stop) option. The Habanero Back Dash is slightly different, in that the Fajita Buster gets changed into the Propeller Tortilla (which is unblockable), and all Kicks lead to the Picadillo Jump, which sets him up for a Triangle Jump into his wall-options: either the Tostada Press or the Fajita Buster. The Tostada Press is a huge part of El Fuerte's pressure game. It has invincibility frames (allowing it to pass through fireballs), attack frames in the air, ability to cross-up, knockdown on hit, and relatively safe recovery distance (he's punishable, but not for long), forcing opponents to adapt to it.

Creative use of the Habanero Dash allows you to control the entire stage; the EX version even has two points of Super Armor! It is also possible to gain frame advantage with the Habanero Dash -> Stop combination after a close HP, which can be performed repeatedly. El Fuerte also has his close HK, which launches and sets up for his Guacamole Leg Throw, and his Quesadilla Bomb, which can Armor Break. The EX Guacamole Leg Throw has massive invincibility, and its angle gets him away from cross-up attempts. Finally, his Super is easy to link into after his Drop Kick (LP version has 3f startup), and his Ultra is an invincible flying grab that can be steered in mid-flight to catch grounded opponents.

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Falcon Kick	(Juggle) (Float)	In Air, df+MK (Hold f or b to move)
Virtua Kick	(Overhead)	f+MK
Glory Kick	(Low)	df+MK
Fragrance Palm		f+HP
Target Combo	(Float)	Close LK-HK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Messiah Kick	(Float)	QCF+K
Messiah Finish (LK)	(Cancel) (Float)	After Messiah Kick, LK
Messiah Finish (MK)	(Low)	After Messiah Kick, MK
Messiah Finish (HK)	(Overhead)	After Messiah Kick, HK
Galaxy Tornado	(Juggle) (Break) (Float) (Cancel 1st)	QCF+P
Snake Strike	(Juggle)	DP+P
EX Messiah Kick	(Float)	QCF+KK
EX Galaxy Tornado	(Break)	QCF+PP
EX Snake Strike	(Juggle)	DP+PP
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Spectacle Romance	(Juggle) (Break)	QCFx2+P
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Space Opera Symphony	(Juggle) (Break)	QCF+PP

rufus's movelist

The Dancing Giant

The only thing more ridiculous than Rufus's appearance is how good he is: He has a controllable dive-kick (df+j.MK, Hold b or f to move) that can be performed immediately off of the ground, a spin-kick (Messiah Kick) that can EX as an invincible wake-up and has combo (LK), low (MK) and overhead (HK) options, a hopping flurry of attacks (Snake Strike) that, if EX'ed, has invincibility and does more damage than Sagat's EX Tiger Uppercut, and a spin-attack (Galaxy Tornado) that can nullify fireballs, launch, and can vacuum opponents with the EX version. To top it off, he has the second-highest health in the game! His normal attacks are just as crazy. His far HK launches for an EX Snake Strike or his Ultra, and can also chain from his close LK, which is extremely fast (4 frames). Therefore, with a quick LK-HK chain, you could confirm a launch before finishing with the Ultra! For distance, he has a c.HP that reaches halfway across the screen, but recovers slowly. To get in closer, he has a rolling low-kick (d+MK) that's safe on block. In the air, his j.HK has the same property as M.Bison's Hell Attack (juggle state), allowing you to juggle with his Ultra or EX Snake Strike. He's so beginner-friendly that it almost seems unfair, but veteran players familiar with dive-kick strategy can shut his Falcon Kick game down if they're careful.

Command Normals	Properties	Command
Zugai Hasatsu	(Overhead)	d+MP
Tenma Kujin Kyaku	(Overhead)	At peak of jump, d+MK
Special Attacks	Properties	Command
Gou Hadouken	(Cancel)	QCF+P
Shakunetsu Hadouken	(Cancel)	HCB+P
Zankuu Hadouken		In Air, QCF+P
Gou Shoryuken	(Juggle) (Float) (Cancel)	DP+P
Tatsumaki Zankuukyaku	(Float) (Cancel 1st, MK, HK)	QCB+K (Ground or Air)
Hyakki Shuu		DP+K
Hyakki Gouzan	(Low)	After Hyakki Shuu, nothing
Hyakki Goushou	(Break) (Overhead)	After Hyakki Shuu, P
Hyakki Goujin		After Hyakki Shuu, K
Hyakki Gousai	(Grab)	After Hyakki Shuu, LP+LK (close)
Ashura Senkuu (Far)		DP or RDP + PPP
Ashura Senkuu (Short)		DP or RDP + KKK
EX Gou Hadouken	(Float) (Cancel)	QCF+PP
EX Shakunetsu Hadouken	(Cancel)	HCB+PP
EX Zankuu Hadouken		In Air, QCF+PP
EX Gou Shoryuken	(Juggle) (Float) (Cancel)	DP+PP
EX Tatsumaki Zankuukyaku	(Juggle) (Float)	QCB+KK
EX Hyakki Shuu		DP+KK
Super Combo	Properties	Command
Shun Goku Satsu	(Grab)	LP,LP,f+LK+HP
Ultra Combo	Properties	Command
Shin Shun Goku Satsu	(Grab)	LP,LP,b+LK+HP

akuma's movelist

The Ultimate Fist

Akuma has low health but high offense; the proverbial glass cannon. He can win any fireball fight with his Shakunetsu Gou Hadouken (3 hits for HP version), juggle after LK Tatsumaki, and uppercut newcomers. He has also has the Hyakki Shuu ("Demon Flip") that leaps into the air and follows with a dive kick, armor break/overhead, throw or low attack, and that dive kick hits like a Mack Truck. Akuma can throw air fireballs at varying angles (determined by button; EX version fires two), and his air fireballs travel so slowly that land behind it to maintain his offense. Because of these options, Akuma can approach with impunity. His bread-and-butter is dive kick or air fireball, close HP -> LK Tatsumaki -> HP Gou Shoryuken. But if his opponent trapped behind the air fireball, Akuma can also decide to charge a Focus Attack. After a blocked Focus Attack, most players tend to dash in and throw. Akuma has a more devilish option; he can dash in and activate his Shun Goku Satsu (Super or Ultra version), which is now even easier to execute (it's now three motions instead of five: LP, LP, f+LK+HP).

His far HK is a double-kick that advances him similarly to Ken's, forces his opponent to stand on hit, and gives him frame advantage (just enough to sneak another attack in). He also has a small kara-cancel with HP, though it isn't nearly as good as Ken's. His Ultra (Shin Shun Goku Satsu) however, does not have many frames of invincibility (the Super version is much better for this), but inflicts terrifying damage. Mastering it as an anti-air measure will completely change the nature of late-game strategy against you.

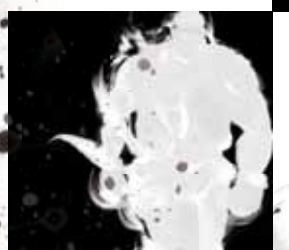
Style: Ansatsuken (Unsealed?)
Health: 85%
Stun: 85%

Overhead: f+MP
Air Throw: None
Kara-Cancel: HP, f+MP (Special Only)



Japan

AKUMA



everything else
THE APPENDIX DATA

Counter-Attack Options

Can't figure out how to defeat a certain move? These are our recommended attacks to retaliate or counter troublesome special attacks, especially if they seem safe on block. These attacks include: Zangief's Double Lariat, E.Honda's Zutsuki (Headbutt), Blanka's Rolling Attack, and Guile's Sonic Boom.



>Key:
(F) = Far
(C) = Close
(S) = Must Block Standing
(H) = Works Even If Hit

Miscellaneous Character Data

This information will be useful to help gauge your character against your opponent's. Knowing if your Ultra can be comboed into is especially important- if you know how your opponent uses their Ultra, you may be able to bait them into wasting it. At high levels of play, it is rare to see an Ultra used outside of a combo because of the severe penalties involved in missing. If your opponent's Ultra misses and has more than -30 frames of recovery (disadvantage), you can set up a combo starting with a Level 2 Focus Attack.

For clarification, the Jump frames are listed as Startup+Air-Time. Notice that Zangief has the highest jump startup. This is because he needs extra time on the ground to execute a 360 or 720 degree motion (e.g.: Screw Piledriver) without accidentally jumping. Dhalsim's jump startup, on the other hand, is *faster* because of the necessity of performing an aerial Yoga Teleport immediately off of the ground. In effect, this actually gives him a ~30 frame jump.

Chara	Health	Stun	Dash Speed	Backdash Speed	Jump Speed	Ultra Startup	Ultra Recovery	Combo into Ultra
Ryu	1000	1000	18	27	4+36	10	-25	Yes
Ken	1000	1000	18	27	4+36	9	-50	Yes
Chun-Li	900	1050	15	22	4+41	6	-47	Yes
E.Honda	1100	1100	19	27	4+37	10	-15	Stun Only
Blanka	1050	950	21	26	4+34	3	-41	Yes
Zangief	1200	1200	26	26	6+37	0	n/a	Stun Only
Guile	1000	900	19	26	4+36	6	-77	Yes
Dhalsim	900	900	32	29	3+56	11	+44	Yes
Balrog	1100	1000	18	24	4+36	10	-25	Yes
Vega	1000	900	20	22	4+35	Varies	-30	Stun Only
Sagat	1100	1100	18	29	4+36	9	-48	Yes
M.Bison	1000	950	17	25	4+40	11	-35	Yes
C.Viper	900	950	19	27	4+36	6	-201	Yes
Abel	1100	1050	16	25	4+36	13	-30	Yes
El Fuerte	900	1000	16	19	4+39	4	n/a	Stun Only
Rufus	1150	950	20	27	4+39	8	-13	Yes
Akuma	850	850	18	25	4+36	4	n/a	Stun Only

Character	Zangief Double Lariat (PPP)	E.Honda's Headbutt (Charge b, f+P)	Blanka's Rolling Attack (Charge b, f+P)	Guile's Sonic Boom (Charge b, f+P)
Ryu:	HK (F), HP (F), c.HK (C)	HP Super	HP Super (H)	Tatsumaki, EX Hadouken
Ken:	EX Shoryuken (F), LK (F), c.MK (C)	f+MK	Near corner, Step then f+MK	EX Hadouken, EX Tatsumaki
Chun Li:	HP (F), HK (F), c.MP (C), Ultra (F or C)	Step then c.HK, Step then MP (S), Super, Ultra	Dash then HK Super, Ultra (H)	Hazanshu, Ultra
Blanka:	df+HP (Beats Lariat startup at max distance)	df+HP, EX Rolling Attack	Step then df+HP (H)	df+HP, EX Rolling Attack
Zangief:	HK (F), LP (F), Double Lariat (C)	EX Banishing Flat	Near corner, EX Banishing Flat	EX Banishing Flat
Honda:	HP (F), Headbutt (late)(F/C), Ultra (C)	HP Super (S), Ultra (S)	HP Headbutt, HP Super, Ultra	Super, Ultra
Guile:	HP (F), c.HK (C), HK Somersault Kick (F/C), EX Sonic Boom (during Lariat recovery), Ultra (C)	--	EX Sonic Boom	EX Sonic Boom
Dhalsim:	c.HP (F), HP (F), c.HK (C)	LK, HP	HP (H), c.HK (S)	df+HP
Balrog:	LP (F), c.HP (F), EX Buffalo Headbutt (F/C), EX Dash Upper (F)	LP Dash Straight, HP Super, Ultra	LP Dash Straight, LP Super (H), Ultra (H)	EX Dash Straight, Super, Ultra
Vega:	HK (F), c.HK (C), EX Barcelona Attack (C), Ultra (F)	HK, EX Barcelona Attack	Dash then c.MP, EX Barcelona Attack, Ultra	Ultra
Sagat:	HK (F), HK Tiger Knee (F), HP Tiger Uppercut (C), Ultra (F/C)	HK Super (S)	Near corner, EX Ground Tiger Shot	EX Tiger Shot, Ultra
M.Bison:	HP (F), c.MK (C), HK Double Knee Press (C), Ultra (C)	Step then MK, HK Double Knee Press, HK Super	c.HK, HK Double Knee Press, HK Super	EX Double Knee Press
C.Viper:	Seismo Hammer (F/C), HK (F), c.HK (C)	LP Super	HP Seismo Hammer	Viper Elbow, EX Seismo Hammer, LP Thunder Knuckle, Burning Kick
Abel:	HP (F), c.HK (C), EX Wheel Kick (F), EX Change of Direction (F)	MP Change of Direction, Ultra	Ultra (H)	EX Change of Direction, EX Wheel Kick, Ultra
El Fuerte:	Tostada Press, Propeller Tortilla (F), c.HK (C), Ultra (F/C)	Ultra	Habanero Dash -> Caramale Sliding, Step then Ultra (S)	EX Habanero Dash -> Caramale Sliding, Ultra
Rufus:	Far HP (F), EX Messiah Kick (C), LP Snake Strike (C), Ultra (C)	c.HP, EX Galaxy Tornado	Step then c.HP (S)	HP Galaxy Tornado, EX Messiah Kick
Akuma:	Tenma Kujin Kyaku (F), Hyakku Goujin (F) c.MK (C)	--	Super, Ultra	Tatsumaki, EX Shakunetsu Hadouken, EX Gou Hadouken

>Counter Attack Examples

Here's what to look for when doing the above moves. Take a look!





looking ahead INTO THE HOME FUTURE

Console Talk

New playable characters for the console version will include Sakura, Gouken, Dan, Fei Long, Gen and Rose. New characters may end up shipping in the game itself, or as downloadable content, but as of press time, we don't know for certain. Also, it is a given that console players will have access to online play, and the game's architecture was developed from the beginning to be optimized for this purpose. Early test reports look favorable in Japanese networks, but Japan is about the size of California, and seeing how well that netcode holds under cross-country conditions is a different beast altogether.

For dedicated players, there's also a deeply-involved Training mode that teaches you basic and advanced combos with each character. Those of you who remember *Street Fighter EX + Alpha* and its top-notch "Expert Mode" missions will be pleasantly surprised with the tools available to learn the game's mechanics.

For console versions, we highly recommend that you purchase an arcade-quality joystick to play *Street Fighter IV*. One of the best sticks on the market is the Hori Real Arcade Pro 3 (HRAP3) for the Playstation 3 (also PC compatible via USB), though there are reports that Mad Catz will also be creating an official joystick. Since most arcades and tournaments now use the Japanese style of joysticks (the gumball kind, not the bat-sticks), practicing on a Japanese-style joystick will allow you to instantly translate your console skills over to the arcade. The advantage of having an arcade-quality stick like the HRAP series is that broken parts can be replaced with new arcade hardware that you can purchase through various vendors online. While you can expect to pay over \$100 USD for hardware, it is a very sound investment.



>Special Thanks

This guide would not have been possible without extensive help from key staff, the fighting game community and my friends: Shoryuken.com, Capcom, Yoshinori Ono, Andrew Alfonso, Ed Ma, Kentaro Inoue, Ultravid, Bebop, Dzuy Vuong, Scott Tsai, MarkMan, Family Fun Arcade, Denjin Arcade, Arcade Infinity, and Joanna Micco.





creator interview DIRECTOR YOSHINORI ONO

HGM: The first thing that caught my attention with SFIV development was that it was developed with Dimps, who developed *The Rumble Fish*. What kind of relationship does Capcom and Dimps have and how did Dimps contribute to SFIV's development?

Ono: Dimps is co-developing the game with Capcom. It is well known that Dimps employs a substantial amount of old-school fighter-era staff members that have worked on many revolutionary fighting games, including the original *Street Fighter* that started the series. We basically created a big team composed of both Capcom and Dimps staff and developed the game hand in hand.

The concept of this game, of course, is to bring an SFII-era fighting tool into the 21st century. This is why a team with so much experience in the fighting games of that time period is so well-suited to this particular project, and this is why we are engaged in a co-development scheme with Dimps.

HGM: The price tag for a set of SFIV cabinets seems to have shocked players. Is the market in Japan for arcade machines able to support that kind of pricing?

Ono: Well, we are using a brand new arcade board (Taito X-2), a brand new cabinet, it's equipped with ID card readers, and the machines can be networked in clusters. Since all of these features are sold as a full set, it is indeed a pricey proposition, but arcade owners here [in Japan] probably viewed it as the standard deluxe or premium machine price.

HGM: As of this interview, there have been no announcements to bring SFIV arcade cabinets to the United States. Has Capcom decided finally whether or not to release the arcade version in the American arcade market?

Ono: Well, the unfortunate reality is that the arcade market in the States isn't exactly healthy. Add to that the fact that Capcom USA doesn't have access to the sales network it once did on the arcade front [Capcom Coin-Op USA closed in 2004], and you can see that things are quite difficult. That said, we have no intention of simply giving up and negotiations with possible distribution partners are ongoing.

HGM: I've heard from many SFIII:3s players that don't want to stop playing SFIII to play SFIV because of the time invested into learning the Parrying system. They would love to jump onto SFIV if there was a mode that eliminated Ultras and Focus attacks but brought back Parrying. Was this idea ever brought up during development?

Ono: Well, it is important to remember that we are treating SFIII and SFIV as very different beasts. Each game plays by its own rulebook. As you say, the techniques people spent time honing in III will not work in IV. Capcom's attitude about III is that the complex gameplay system

in that game is the main reason that it is still so widely enjoyed to this day.

That is why it's always good to hear from fans who love III. Capcom is very happy to hear that SFIII has a place in the hearts of so many hardcore fans. That said, IV is much closer to II in regards to rules and gameplay. Which is not to say that these two games are identical. We worked with the rulebook of II as the base and built on top of it, adding new layers and tweaking things here and there.

This is the concept on which we based all of development for IV, and I think we've come up with something unique as a result. When you actually sit down to play the game, I think you realize that it has a feel that is different from previous iterations.

HGM: Players have already begun utilizing SFIII's kara-cancel glitch (to extend range on throws and attacks) in SFIV. Was kara-canceling deliberately left in SFIV to add to the game's depth, or was it an honest oversight? And if it was unintentional, will it be left alone, or will it be patched later on?

Ono: Kara-canceling is no bug and it was no oversight. It was, as you insinuate above, included deliberately. We knew that problems would pop up here and there as a result of this decision, but we feel that the depth it adds to the gameplay was a big enough merit to justify its inclusion. Both the dev team and our quality assurance team came to this conclusion. We were careful to build the game around this feature to minimize negative effects and ensure that the general rulebook for IV was suited to it.

HGM: I've noticed that in SFIV, you cannot quick-recover when being thrown.

I have the feeling that this change, although minor, was a very deliberate decision. I've also noticed invincibility frames on back-dashes. What was the rationale behind these changes, and what other minor tweaks were discussed with gameplay?

Ono: First, let me address the quick-recover issue you bring up. In order to prevent a series of sure-thing counterattacks, we decided to make certain moves resistant to recovery.

We've broken this system down into three basic components or options that a player has and they are crouching sweep kick, throw, and special move throw.

As for back dashing, let me start by saying that IV's basic gameplay system is based upon *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, the last of the SFII series. The way attacks can be layered and the fact that throws are generally very powerful in this system made it necessary to allow for a brief period of invincibility in the back dash maneuver. This opens up many more strategic options in both the

offensive and defensive realms. Furthermore, if you back dash your way out of a Focus Attack, you can deepen your offense and defense options even further.

I can tell you quite a bit about some of the minor tweaks we implemented. We've tried to tune the game so that the cancel system has some depth and isn't just a two dimensional process. The timing is such that you can pull it off almost as soon as the thought hits your brain, allowing for some harrowing matches.

Furthermore, we put a lot of energy into avoiding turning the game into a combo-fest. Instead, we steered the gameplay to focus more on distancing yourself from your opponent or closing that gap when necessary, harkening back to SFII gameplay. The big challenge was in deciding where to draw the line. We decided to spice things up by tuning the cancels to suit a feint-heavy gameplay style as well as the traditional cancel uses. Fine-tuning the balance when it comes to these cancels was a challenge, but we think we've come up with a really strategic fighting tool that will show its depth as time goes on.

HGM: It's fun to be playing updated versions of the original twelve Street Fighters, and for the most part, the core of their gameplay hasn't changed much. There is one exception, however: Chun-Li. I really like her new changes built upon her SFIII:3s foundation, but she appears to be a character with a very high learning curve again, like in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. Why does Chun-Li keep changing so much from game to game?

Ono: Chun-Li is the eternal Capcom heroine, no matter the series or title we speak of, and she will continue to fulfill that role in the future. Basically, we want her to stand out as our heroine, so a lot of effort is put into tuning her and establishing a solid and unique feel for each title in which she appears. As for me, I want gamers to appreciate her strength as well as her beauty, so we have tuned the game to this end.

HGM: How big of a factor was the Focus Attack system when designing the new characters and adapting classic ones?

Ono: Well, the Focus Attack system serves many purposes. Obviously, it's there to add a layer of strategy, but it serves another very important role as well in that it gives us an opportunity to show off the characters personalities. The type of move they perform and the way they pull it off, their reaction to their own move, it all serves to give us a glimpse at the kind of characters these fighters are. This is especially useful when dealing with the new characters as they haven't yet had time to enter the consciousness of the average gamer.

HGM: What kind of challenges did you have when designing the game for a 16:9 screen ratio? It seems

that some characters that make use of wall-jumps, like Chun-Li and Vega, might have a problem reaching the wall at times.

Ono: As you can imagine, the move to 16:9 indeed brought several challenges to the table. Firstly, the fact that the main gameplay surrounds the idea of managing the distance between yourself and your opponent means that we had to carefully use the space given when it comes to jump arcs and the like. On top of that, fireballs and other projectiles needed special attention since they have high priority and can be thrown from all the way across the wide screen. That's where we started with our tuning, actually.

By knocking out the above two issues at a relatively early stage, we were able to handle wall jumps without any major issues, since the basics were already in place for the transition to the new aspect ratio. I want to assure players that the feel of the game is not thrown off due to the 16:9 display. Wall jumps and other maneuvers should feel pretty much exactly like they always have.

HGM: One addition to SFIV that shocked me was the new Super Armor system. It's perfect. It makes perfect sense to include it for EX attacks, especially when a 7-foot tall Russian bear-wrestler is about to crush you, and it wouldn't make sense to stop him with a simple jab. Was this feature ever discussed for previous *Street Fighter* games (excluding Vs. titles)?

really comes down to how they use them. This is why it's so important to try to look for patterns and make educated guesses about how your opponent will move. It's really the only way to win. It's a bit like chess in that way. You can fake your opponent out by feinting or making them think you'll do something specific, then change it up on them and whip out something entirely different. In IV, it's almost like you win by getting a checkmate rather than a knockout. We've tried to do everything possible to extend the life of the game and allow for deeper and deeper strategies to develop throughout its lifetime.

HGM: In general, do you advocate players to stick with one character, or to learn multiple characters?

Ono: No matter the era, no matter the game, I think the most important thing is to know your opponent. That's the quickest way to mastering any game in the genre. That said, actually getting your hands dirty with a variety of characters will help you to understand what they're capable of and what their strengths or weaknesses may be. You can then exploit this knowledge when on the other side of the ring. In that sense, I highly recommend that players experiment with as many characters as they can to deepen their knowledge of the game.

HGM: For SFIV tournaments, do you prefer them to be run with a 'locked' character selection, or the freedom to change characters?



Ono: An argument could be made that the parry system in SFIII: 3rd Strike took on a similar role to the Super Armor. At least that's the way I look at it. If parrying has any negatives, it would have to be that really mastering it — knowing how to activate it, how to use it effectively, when to unleash it and when to hold back these aspects — was extremely difficult and narrowed our audience for III. As for the Super Armor in IV, it is really the result of wanting to add a gameplay element that would be available to anyone, that would suit the images of the characters themselves, and that would inherit the type of gameplay that parrying brought to III, albeit with a different feel.

HGM: I felt that with SFIII, it was easy to be lazy with strategy and matchups because of the tactical superiority of the Parrying system. You didn't have to learn what moves could beat another character's moves because you could just Block it and retaliate with a super. It was the great equalizer. But with SFIV, even though it is easier to introduce to people, it actually has deeper strategy because of the importance of learning character-specific matchups. Is there any basis to this?

Ono: This is probably the result of steering the general gameplay as much as possible to encourage "yomi", or the reading and predicting of an opponent's moves. Even if you know your opponent's character inside and out, it

Ono: I really prefer the locked style of tournament play. We've already run a few tournaments in Japan and we've found that limiting the character selection is more fun for the audience as it brings about some match-ups that would seem, at first glance, to be rather unbalanced. But that's when the pros kick it into overdrive and let us see what they're really made of. I've seen some amazing matches at these tournaments.

HGM: 14. Rumor has it that the legendary Umehara Daigo is well on his way to racking up 10,000 wins with his Ryu (if he hasn't exceeded that already). What kinds of contributions have top-tier players like Daigo, Ohnuki, and others, made to the SFIV development process?

Ono: Well, I can't make any claims as to whether this is actually the real Umehara, but it so happens that the holder of the number 1 rank on the Grandmaster chart in IV is a player who goes by the name UMEHARA. You can draw your own conclusion.

Like I've said before, the concept behind IV is chess. And by that, I mean that it's a tool accessible to a variety of users, each playing at their own skill level. With chess, we have matches that run the gamut from televised and hyped showdowns between Russia and America, all the way down to a grandfather and his grandson playing on a folding table in the backyard on a relaxing Sunday evening.

Our goal was to lower the barrier of entry into this game to the point that even those who don't traditionally play fighting games won't feel daunted by it and can jump right in. From what I've heard from fans at various events and arcades, we have achieved this goal. That does leave us with a little less focus on the hardcore, but the problem is that if we had spent too much time and energy skewing the game in favor of the pros, we could risk blowing our goal of bringing back lapsed SFII players. You can see our dilemma. In the end, we decided to cast the net as wide as possible and open the game up to more people. The pros have also jumped on board, showing us that our target market is indeed vast and giving us confidence that we have not left anyone behind.

HGM: SFIV has returned to a more 'simplified' system. How complete do you feel SFIV's core mechanics are? Do you plan on experimenting with new game-play features and game engine tweaking in future installments (making it more complex), or will you focus more on character balance and development (making it deeper)?

Ono: Well, for now, I'd really like to spend some more time with this rulebook and continue observing the way people play. Here in Japan, arcade players are only now beginning to dig deeply into the game. Once the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions are released, we will have that many more players out there giving feedback and allowing us to research their reactions. Only after we know how our

audience feels will we embark on any major adjustments.

That said I wouldn't put my money on changes so sweeping as to completely rewrite the rulebook. Should I get a chance to make an updated version, the first thing I would do is lean on the information we've gathered from players and make sure that our adjustments are in line with what people want. At any rate, I think we're looking at minor tweaks to the original rulebook and not a reinvention of the wheel.

HGM: Finally, after what date do you anticipate we could get access to the console versions?

Ono: I'm focusing all my energy on getting the game out sometime this winter season. Players in Japan and elsewhere in Asia have access to the arcade game, but fans in North America and Europe aren't so lucky. There are a few machines floating around, and some fans have been cool enough to seek us out at various events to get a chance to play, but the majority of potential players are eagerly awaiting a proper home port. That doesn't seem fair to me, so I want to do what I can to get the game in those players' hands as soon as humanly possible. Instead of focusing on unnecessary additions, our primary goal is to get the game out there so that people can begin delving into this fighting tool. That's what the team is focused on right now.

The holiday season is a wonderful time of year, when all good little hardcore gamers give and receive the games they've been drooling over all year.

At least, that's how we think it should work. So, in order to help turn that fantastical dream into reality, we've put together this handy retro wish list to show our loved ones — who may need a guide to what we'd love — what we want for Christmas!

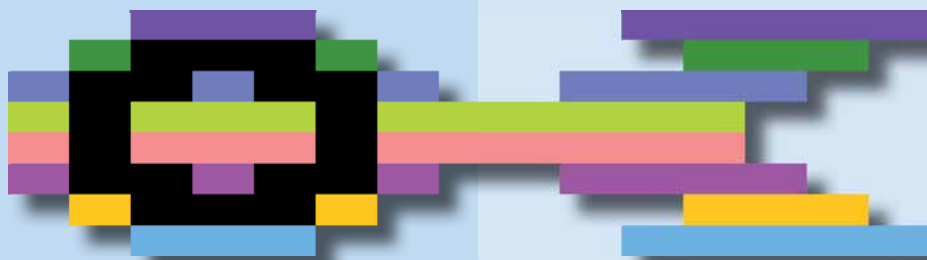
According to Christian mythology, the Holy Grail is the chalice used by Jesus during the Last Supper and is said to possess miraculous powers. While video games are not often characterized as being miraculous, certain video game titles have been actively sought after by collectors in a manner as rigorous as the quest for the Holy Grail by King Arthur's knights, the Knights Templar and even Indiana Jones.

The games featured in this article are those that demand or have demanded an amazing amount of cold hard cash to acquire. This compilation completely disregards game quality and only deals with rarity... which usually translates to a hefty monetary value.

In most cases the popular games are also the best ones to play. The end result is that bad games ultimately have a lower manufacturing count and poorer distribution. Therefore many games mentioned in this article play horrendously, and while you may wish to own them, you may never want to actually play them. What a crazy world we live in, and what a crazy hobby that entertains us!

While this is a listing of valuable games, it is also a historical article. So, while selecting the games to be featured, it was important to offer juicy tidbits as to why each game listed was. These anecdotes may give clues as to why these games have become so valuable.

*** Editor's note:** The prices you see in the following article are rough estimate averages based on what is the likely price in the current market. These prices do not take into account passing fluctuations caused by industry events, or the way price will vary according to condition of the game. A pristine, sealed copy of a title is going to sell for more than an unsealed or damaged copy. Consider these prices a "baseline", what you could expect to pay in a theoretically "average" sale. Obviously, few individual sales are really average!



Unreleased Prototypes (ANY) Priceless

There are many games that were completely developed, but never published (and so, never mass-produced). These are known as prototypes, and are obviously very rare. Most were meant to remain "in-house" or be destroyed, but time proves that sometimes they survive.

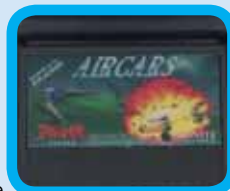
There is nothing more appealing to a collector than to own something that was never meant to be in one's hands. Because prototypes are often one-of-a-kind objects, their actual value is extremely hard to determine due to a limited transaction history.

Besides, while many games featured in this article may be difficult to obtain for one's personal collection due to a lack of income, they are still available from time to time for a price. Any prototypes appearing here would only tease an interested individual, no matter how much disposable income he may have to indulge in the hobby!



Air Cars (1995) Atari Jaguar \$100

The only of three announced titles for the Atari Jaguar by Midnight Entertainment Group to be released, this title barely made it out the door. Released without a box, it came coupled with only a manual in a cardboard insert; even the controller overlay was omitted. However the back page of the instruction manual had the layout if you wanted to attempt making your own in Arts n' Crafts class. The game supports eight-player network game play, if you can manage to find seven more copies of this rare game, a rare CatBox and some poor saps willing to play this horrendous action battle game.



Air Raid (1982) Atari VCS, a.k.a. Atari 2600 \$3500

The sole release by the oddly-named company MenAvision, *Air Raid* was encased in a solid blue plastic casing and featured a distinctive "T-shaped" handlebar grip. The label artwork featured an illustration of alien saucers aggressively battling helicopters and jets over a city full of high-rise buildings. Interestingly, the label did not even feature the game title or manufacturer. As a side note, be sure not to pay over three grand for *Air Raiders*, a very common title published by M Network and worth about four bucks!



Atlantis II (1982) Atari VCS a.k.a. Atari 2600 \$1000

The "Defend Atlantis" contest required players to mail in a photograph of their high score in *Atlantis*, after which the top four players would compete in a special tournament to be held in Bermuda for a chance to win \$10,000. What publisher Imagic did not anticipate is that more than four players would max out *Atlantis*'s the score counter.



To narrow down the numerous "finalists," ten (and only ten) new cartridges titled *Atlantis II* were custom programmed for the competition and sent to those players who previously submitted "perfect" scores. This new version awarded points more sparingly and played at a much faster speed... and required that results be submitted within a two-day period!

In November of 2006, one copy of *Atlantis II* was listed for auction on E-Bay for a cool \$1,750,000. The game, however, went unsold at that "bargain" price. If you own a copy of *Atlantis*, you might want to pop it into you Atari VCS immediately. While *Atlantis II* was packaged in a box with a substandard "Atlantis II" sticker on the box, the cartridge label itself remained the same. The actual game play is the only way to determine which version is which. So, your ordinary copy of *Atlantis* might just turn out to be the crown jewel!

Bangai-O: Prize Edition (2000) Sega Dreamcast \$600-\$1300

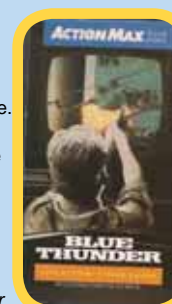
While the regular release of *Bangai-O* is hard to find, this version is next to impossible. In January of 2000, a Japanese gaming contest awarded five copies to the five highest scoring contestants. This special version included an autographed themed phone card and poster. The game itself is identical to the standard release, but the jewel case packaging included a



sticker identifying the game as the "winner's trophy." Try your best on your regular version to match the winner's score of 60,199,689, and see if you could have been awarded such a prize.

Blue Thunder (1987) Action Max \$100

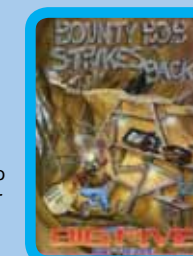
World of Wonder decided to enter the videogame business in 1987, but their unique VHS console played more like their *Teddy Ruxpin* than a videogame. While the game played in a miserable manner similar to the other light gun games on the Action Max, the game itself had a high video production value and included footage from the



popular 1983 *Blue Thunder* movie featuring the high-tech helicopter of the same name. While the other games for the Action Max system are easy to find, this was the only non-launch title to make it to market, and had minimal distribution since the unit failed on arrival.

Bounty Bob Strikes Back! (1984) Atari 5200 \$250 - \$500

In the early 80's, Bounty Bob's predecessor *Miner 2049er*, was available for most platforms and computer systems of the time. The original sequel to *Miner 2049er* was *Scraper Caper*, but the game was scrapped and never made it to store shelves. *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* was the official sequel, but it was so late to arrive that most of the game's following had forgotten about poor Bob. It did finally get released, but for only a few systems. Perhaps one of the best playing games of the era, *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* was a sequel that actually bested the original. Who knew that mining could be so much fun? It should also be mentioned that the software box and full color poster that were packaged with the game are even more valuable than the game itself!



LET'S RETROGAME HOLIDAY

A feature by Michael Thomasson of Good Deal Games

Bubble Bath Babes (1991)
Nintendo Entertainment System
\$500 to \$750

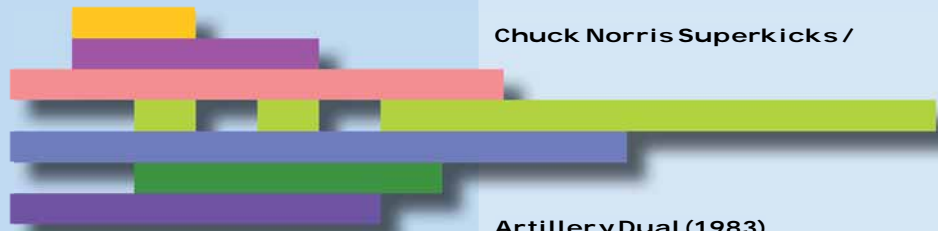
A Taiwanese company by the name of Panesian released, ahem, a "handful" of adult titles for the original Nintendo Entertainment System. Accompanied by *Hot Slots* and *Peek-A-Boo Poker*, the rarest of the three, *Bubble Bath Babes*, made its way ONLY to certain seedy video rental stores. The title was not sold in traditional retail establishments as Nintendo certainly did NOT give the green light to a nude bathing woman surrounded by bubbles, despite its game play similarity to Nintendo's own *Tetris*. Since it was direct-to-video in distribution, *Bubble Bath Babes* was packaged in a VHS-style case, and not the usual NES cardboard box. Less than a grand are believed to be in circulation among those not too ashamed to admit having paid cold hard cash for them.

Chase the Chuck Wagon (1983)
Atari VCS, a.k.a. Atari 2600
\$50 to \$500

Looping almost continuously on the only three television networks in the early '80s were commercials for Purina's Chuck Wagon dog food. Each spot would involve a miniature covered wagon that would emerge from an open bag of their branded dog food and race through the kitchen, narrowly escaping a malnourished dog in hot pursuit! When Purina hired



game developer Spectravision to program an Atari VCS game around the famous commercials, a new technique involving cross marketing evolved and the



industry was forever changed for the worse!

While the game is scarce, it is not as rare as many other Atari titles. Over the years it has gained a false reputation of being difficult to locate. This illusion of rarity evolved from the game's original distribution method. *Chase the Chuck Wagon* was only available via mail order, and to obtain a copy a customer had to mail in several proofs of purchase from the bags of dog food and then wait eight to twelve weeks for delivery via snail mail.

In the game, the player controls a canine that has to navigate a maze to reach the trademark chuck wagon. The gameplay is simplistic and theme would bore even young children. The fact that one would have to own a dog that consumed a great deal of Chuck Wagon brand dog food and have a parent willing to take the time to collect, mail and add additional payment to cover postage, ensured this game was

delivered to few households at the time. The remaining undelivered inventory was later destroyed.

The title itself has become a synonym for rare video game hunting, and

recently a new online game auction site with the same name, ChasetheChuckwagon.com, has emerged to play off the mystique surrounding the history of the game and the hunt for rare titles.

Chuck Norris Superkicks /

Artillery Dual (1983)
Colecovision
\$100

A company named XONOX released several combination titles that featured two games on one cartridge. While most were released in PAL format in Europe, some NTSC versions were released in Canada and found their way across the border onto US soil. Other XONOX dual cartridges combined the games *Tomarc the Barbarian*, *Motocross Racer*, *Robin Hood* and *Sir Lancelot*, and sometimes those do fetch a bit more. But, come 'on: how cool is Chuck Norris! He can slam a revolving door! If you do not collect his game he'll introduce you to the only two hands that can beat a royal flush... Chuck Norris's right hand and Chuck Norris's left hand!

Congo Bongo (1984)
Intellivision
\$300

This game, based on the 1983 Sega coin-op, was the only of three planned Sega Intellivision titles to reach the market. This title may be the only game ever to be released that features a gorilla that sets flame to protagonist's heinie. Completist collectors can stop hunting after acquiring the game, box and manual, because while most Intellivision games were packaged with controller overlays, *Congo Bongo* did not include a set.



Darxide (1996)
Sega 32X
\$400

Originally set to be released as *Dark Side*, before copyright restrictions led to the clever name change, *Darxide* was the final international release for the Sega 32X. It was released only in Europe and compatible only with European hardware on a European PAL

television. Even if you find a copy, finding a way to actually play the game can prove to be quite elusive!

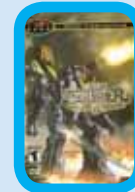
Donkey Kong Country Competition Cartridge (1995)
Super Nintendo
\$200 to \$500

The popular rental chain Blockbuster Video hosted the Blockbuster World Videogame Championship II in 1995, during which *Donkey Kong Country* tournaments were held in many of their stores. Following the tournament, some of the specially-made competition cartridges were given away to contest finalists, and in some locations were even sold as used games in Blockbuster discount bins following the event. They were also briefly made available to Nintendo Power subscribers. Since only two and half thousand copies were manufactured, the irony is not lost that this game was developed by the company... Rare!



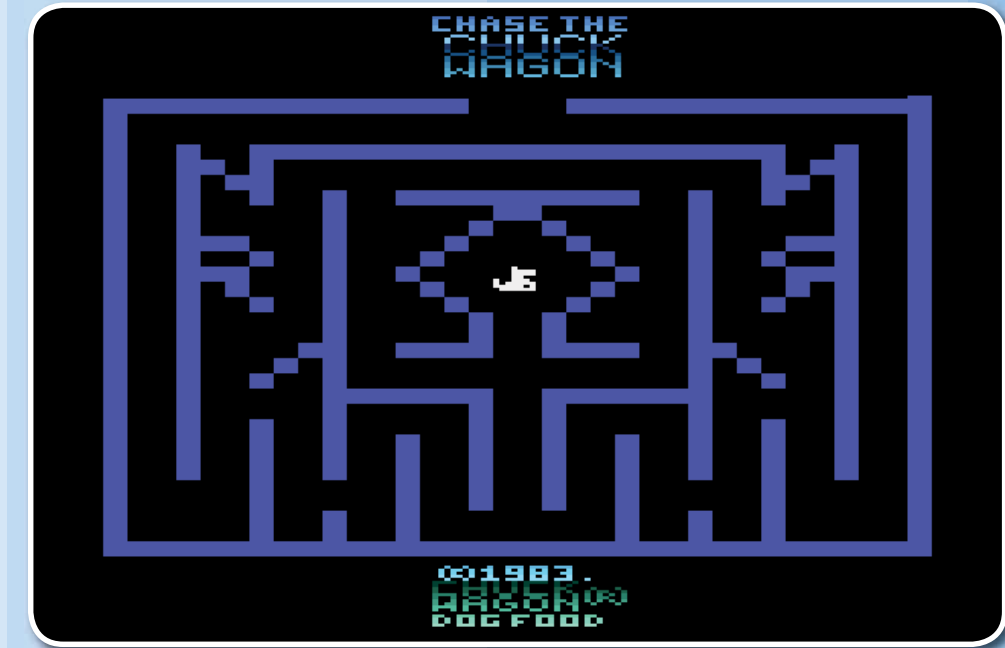
Iron Soldier 3 (2000)
Nuon
\$100 - \$200

Originally revealed as VM Labs's gaming platform "Project X", the NUON eventually became a graphics processor that added additional functionality to several branded DVD players that included the technology. Only eight games were released for the platform, with *Iron Soldier 3* being recalled due to incompatibility with certain Nuon-enabled players shortly after release. Note that this game was the sequel to the first two installments of *Iron Soldier* on the Atari Jaguar. While not rare in the least, *Iron Soldier 3* was also later released on the PlayStation platform.



Mr. Boston Clean Sweep (1982)
Vectrex
\$1,000 - \$2,500

Purina wasn't the only company who thought having a video game about their product would make for great



marketing. Mr. Boston was a liquor company. *Mr. Boston Clean Sweep* was regular Vectrex *Clean Sweep* with Mr. Boston plastered on. Never heard of Mr. Boston? Yeah, the marketing didn't work so great... kids don't drink rum, remember guys? But, dang it, what a lovely collectible we now have to dream of finding in a Boston thrift store some day (they were actually based in Kentucky, go figure)!



Magical Chase (1993)
TurboGrafx 16
\$250

For a rare title, the game name itself could not have been more prophetic. If you want a copy of this hard to find game, you will need to embark on a 'magical chase' just to get your sweaty hands on a copy! Even more ironic is the fact that the developer's name is Quest.

Magical Chase is a TurboGrafx-16 title that was heavily influenced by the popular *Cotton* series, complete with a witch who flies the unfriendly skies

on a broomstick. The gameplay is very similar to *Gradius*, and just as difficult. Despite the candy-coated paint job given to try and make this release a kid's title at the time, no paint job can hide the fact that this is a real SCHMUP!

Technologically, *Magical Chase* soars above other TurboGrafx-16 titles due to its extensive use of multi-plane scrolling. The TG-16 hardware is only capable of rendering a single background layer, so creating parallax scrolling via multiple layered sprite graphics accomplished "the impossible" and made *Magical Chase* a real stand-out title for the time on the system!

Metal Slug (1996)
Neo-Geo AES
\$1000

While the arcade MVS version is common and sells for around fifty bucks, the AES home version is worth well over twenty times that amount.



This low quantity, high quality 2D production slipped out quietly when 3D gaming was becoming all the rage in the industry. This game is readily available and budget priced on numerous platforms such as the Nintendo Wii, Playstation 2, Game Boy Advance and Sony PSP, but collectors want the "real deal" and it will cost them!



Music Machine (1983)
Atari VCS a.k.a. Atari 2600
\$200 to \$300

The Christian faith group Sparrow created The Music Machine as a companion to its record albums. In the game, innocent children Stevie and Nancy carry a basket and gather angels, hearts, mustard seeds, harps and other symbols of virtue. Since The Music Machine was only sold in Christian bookstores and created to enhance moral values in players, one could argue that it is much more "holy" than the other holy grails listed in this article.

Nintendo World Championship Cartridges (1990)
Nintendo Entertainment System
\$3,000 to \$10,000

Similar to the adventures of Fred Savage in the Nintendo promotional movie, *The Wizard*, there actually were famous gaming tournaments. Nintendo staged a thirty city Powerfest Tour in the U.S. and Canada, allowing Nintendo fans to prove themselves against a six minute timed blend of several popular Nintendo titles of the time. In order for competitors to qualify for the tournament, each entrant must have collected fifty coins in the first level of *Super Mario Bros.*, complete a lap in *Rad Racer* and then score as many points as possible in a game of *Tetris* with any time remaining using a specially designed cartridge.



The *Rad Racer* score would be multiplied by 10, the *Tetris* score would be multiplied by 25, and then all three scores were combined into a final total. The top ninety finalists were awarded a gray edition of the cartridge.

Nintendo Power also awarded an additional twenty-six World Championship cartridges in a contest. These cartridges are gold in color, similar to the *Zelda* cartridges common in circulation. Only a dozen of the twenty-six gold carts have surfaced since 1990. While most of the gold carts have sold for around six grand, the most recent sold to a New York collector for \$15,000. Do you have one of the remaining fourteen copies in your collection?

Panzer Dragoon Saga (1998)
Saturn
\$200 to \$300

This critically-acclaimed role-playing game is highly sought after and demands a high asking price more for its gameplay and popularity than actual rarity. Originally only six thousand copies were produced, but later two additional shipments of 12,000 each were made to try and meet demand. Since it is so adored, those who have the game are hard pressed to part with their copy, and as a result, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is worthy to be considered a rare find.

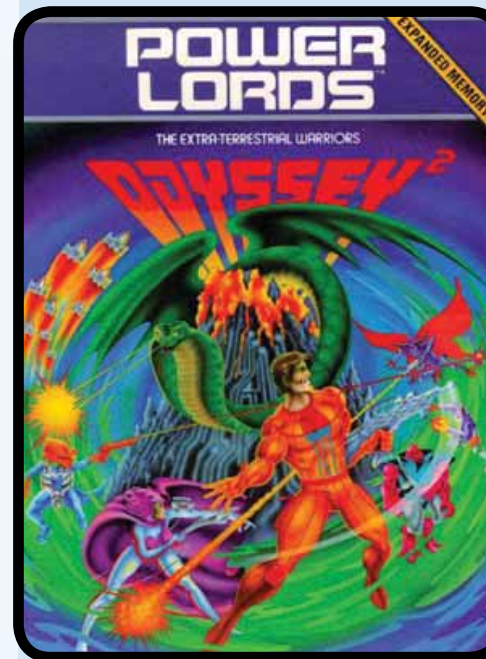
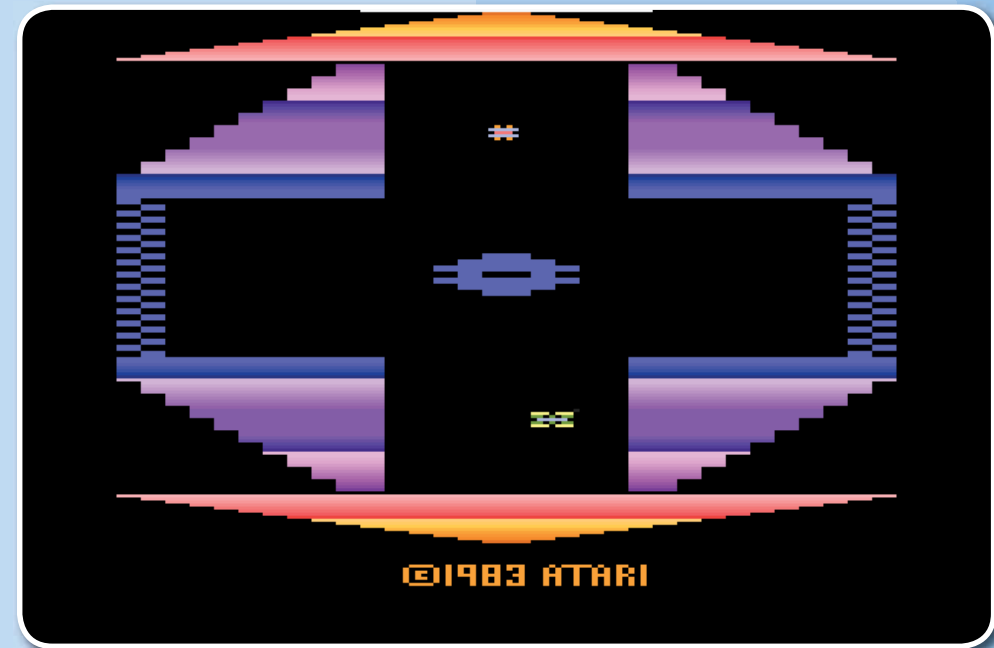
Most believe *Saga* to be the third game in the series, behind the original *Panzer Dragoon* and *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*. It is actually the fourth, as *Panzer Dragoon Mini* was released for the Sega Game Gear.

Pepsi Invaders (1983)
Atari VCS a.k.a. Atari 2600
\$500 to \$2000

The Coca-Cola company commissioned Atari to modify their popular *Space Invaders* game to be distributed at their 1983 sales convention in Atlanta. Each row of six *Space Invader* aliens were replaced with the letter characters P E P S and I. Other changes in gameplay included unlimited lives and the inclusion of a three-minute time limit. Sales executives that attended the meeting were give one of the 125 copies created, along with an Atari VCS console. Definitely a quirky release, and since those awarded were not avid game players, who knows how these have circulated over the years or even how many are known to be left in existence.



The game was packaged as a solid black cartridge in a flimsy Styrofoam shell, and as a result, the gaming community incorrectly referred to this game as the game's victory message that flashed on the screen. This "*Coke Wins*" title was used until designer Omarzu revealed the proper name (*Pepsi Invaders*) years later. Collectors beware, as numerous counterfeit versions of *Pepsi Invaders* are in circulation.



Power Lords (1983)
Odyssey2
\$150

When the Odyssey2 was conceding defeat to competitors Atari, Coleco and Mattel, it had one late release, *Power Lords!* Don't think that the exclamation point makes it a great game, because every Odyssey2 game published ended with that same interjection! Anyway, *Power Lords* was based on a failed action figure line of the same name created by Revell. The game was only officially released for the Odyssey, although a prototype version exists for the Colecovision, which is also quite valuable.

Quadrun (1983)
Atari VCS a.k.a. Atari 2600
\$300 to \$850

Atari had a fan club in the early eighties that included a subscription to Atari Age Magazine. On four separate occasions, the club released exclusive titles via mail order only to club members. *Quadrun* was one such title, and warranted the limited release after a test group consisting of mostly young girls stuck their noses up at the rather unusual play mechanics

of the game. Approximately ten thousand *Quadrun* copies were released. *Quadrun* is recognized for being the first of two VCS titles to feature voice synthesis and to do so without any additional hardware. A fantastic game that is worthy of its hefty price!

SD Gundam Dimension War (1995)
Nintendo Virtual Boy
\$1000

Forget about how hard it is to find *Jack Bros.* for the Virtual Boy, as there are bigger fish to catch in the small Virtual Boy pond. While many import Japanese Virtual Boy games made it stateside when the system went belly up prematurely, there were two titles that rarely reached these shores: *Virtual Bowling* and *SD Gundam Dimension War*. While *Virtual Bowling* nets half a grand, the real score is the SD Gundam anime turn-based strategy game *Dimension War*.



Stadium Events (1987)
Nintendo Entertainment System
\$300 to \$1000

Stadium Events was recalled for being so good! Really! But of course there is more to the story... Bandai officially released the game in 1987 with Nintendo's permission, only to have the game recalled after its initial shipping.

Approximately 2000 copies were distributed only to test market in Woolworth Department stores, but it is suspected that only about a fifth of those made it into customers hands before the Big "N" ordered them back in order to bring the product under Nintendo's own wing and release it as *World Class Track Meet*. This recall makes *Stadium Events* the rarest of the 800+ NES titles.



The game used an accessory called the Family Fun Fitness Mat. This input device allowed the player to play the game with his feet by stepping on designated positions on the pad itself. This controller was later replaced by Nintendo's own "Power Pad." Note that the Power Pad and *World Class Track Meet* cartridges were packed in with many NES consoles as a Power Set Bundle and are very common.

StarFox Super Weekend Official Competition Cartridge (1993)
Super Nintendo
\$200

Between April 30th and May 2nd 1993, several retailers hosted tournaments to promote the new Super Nintendo title, *StarFox*. Many cross-promotional *StarFox*-themed prizes were awarded such as pins, apparel including t-shirts and jackets, and even vacation packages. Well, the vacation packages were to exotic locales across the globe, not to actual *StarFox* destinations in the Lylat system. These tournaments were held in the United States and the United Kingdom and used special competition cartridges that played differently than the regular version of *StarFox*. Approximately

2,000 copies of the competition cartridge were manufactured. Nintendo Power also offered a few remaining cartridges in their catalog for a limited time.

Swordquest: Waterworld (1983)
Atari VCS a.k.a. Atari 2600
\$75 - \$350

What began as *Adventure II* quickly evolved into its own large-scale intellectual property. One game became four and the *Swordquest* series was born. Following *Earthworld* and *Fireworld*, which were released via regular retail channels, *Waterworld* was released only to Atari Club members. The fourth and final game, *Airworld*, was cancelled when Warner Communications bought and took control of Atari.



Each of the *Swordquest* titles was packaged with a DC comic book that explained the plot and included clues to help direct the player not only to the solution of the individual game but also a part of a large scale contest. Prizes, valued at \$150,000, consisted of the *Waterworld* Crown, the *Earthworld* Talisman, the *Fireworld* Chalice, the *Airworld* Philosopher's Stone, and finally the grand prize, The Sword of Ultimate Sorcery. The last three prizes were never awarded and would certainly be considered real world holy grails unto themselves.

So now you know all about the legendary titles we all dreaming of owning some day. Other collectors know very well of their existence and their demand is unmatched. Will you ever see one? Uncertain. Will you ever possess one? Very unlikely. Will you stumble across even one of them in the wild? Doubtful. Even so, is your wallet up to the challenge? Certainly! Obtaining a single game on this list will award you the best holiday gift ever along with bragging rights among your peers and be the centerpiece of your collection! Fan boys, dreamers and collectors, we wish you only the best of good fortune in your endeavors!



Other Stocking Stuffers We Ran Out of Space for

- Akumajo Dracula X: The Rondo of Blood* (Konami, PC Engine) - \$100 - \$120
- Akumajo Dracula* (Konami, X68000) - \$200 - \$250
- Battlesphere* (4Play/ScatoLOGIC, Jaguar) - \$400 - \$600
- Birthday Mania* (Personal, Atari 2600) - \$2,000 - \$2,500
- Blockbuster World Video Game Championship II* (Sega Genesis) - \$1,500 - \$2,000
- Crazy Climber* (Atari 2600) \$70 - \$120
- Condor Attack* (Ultravision, Atari 2600) - \$150 - \$200
- Daytona USA: CCE Netlink Edition* (Sega, Saturn) - \$150 - \$250
- Dragon Force* (Working Designs, Saturn) - \$80 - \$120
- Earthbound* (Nintendo, SNES) - \$50 - \$75
- Ell's Ladder* (Simage, Atari 2600) - \$1,000
- Gauntlet* (Answer, Atari 2600) - \$80 - \$120
- Guardian Heroes* (Sega, Saturn) - \$90 - \$120
- Halloween* (Wizard Video, Atari 2600) - \$150 - \$200
- Jack Bros.* (Atlus, Virtual Boy) - \$100 - \$200
- Kizuna Encounter* (PAL) (SNK, Neo-Geo) - \$9,000 - \$12,000
- Lochjaw* (Apollo, Atari 2600) - \$250
- Malagai* (Answer, Atari 2600) - \$180 - \$250
- Mega Man X3* (Capcom, SNES) - \$80 - \$150
- Mine Storm/Mine Storm II* (GCE, Vectrex) - \$400 - \$550
- Myriad 6 in 1* (Myriad, NES) - \$200 - \$300
- Ninja Gaiden Trilogy* (Tecmo, SNES) - \$150 - \$300
- Psychic Killer Taromaru* (Time Warner, Saturn) - \$150 - \$250
- Radiant Silvergun (Japan)* (Treasure, Saturn) - \$200 - \$300
- Sonic Adventure Limited Edition* (Sega, Dreamcast) - \$50 - \$75
- Spiker Super Pro Volleyball* (Intellivision) - \$800 - \$1,500
- Tactics Ogre* (Atlus, Playstation) - \$80 - \$120
- Tetris* (Sega, Genesis) - \$5,000 - \$15,000
- Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Wizard Video, Atari 2600) - \$100 - \$150
- Video Life* (CommaVid, Atari 2600) - \$1,800 - \$2,500
- Virtual Bowling* (Japan) (Virtual Boy) - \$600 - \$800

Sonic the Hedgehog (1987)
Sega Master System
\$200

The original *Sonic the Hedgehog* was released for the Sega Genesis while the Sega Master System was on life support in the United States. However, the SMS was much more popular in Europe, so Sega released a "dumbed-down" version for the older and inferior Master System. It shared the same plot as its Genesis older brother, but offered some new stages, zones and boss battles. This was eventually used as a pack-in title and is extremely common, mostly worthless, and not really collectable.



However, the game was also released in small quantities as an official late release title in America. While the game plays the same, the only cosmetic difference is a UPC sticker slapped on the packaging. So, if you simply want to play the game, grab yourself an inexpensive region-free European version. If you're a collector, get ready to pay many golden rings for essentially the same item!

Spider-Man: Web of Fire (1995)
Sega 32X
\$100 to \$150

The final domestic release for the "doomed from the start" Sega 32X is also the rarest on the Sega Genesis expansion platform. Sega, seeing the writing on the wall, only created 1,500 copies of this title featuring Marvel Comics friendly neighborhood Spider-Man.



Thanks to AtariAge.com for permission to use some of their images.

Wii Music™

Reviewed by Racewing



There is a certain type of gamer that *Wii Music* is *not for*. To them - people who play music games alone with plastic instrument replicas, who try to play for absolute tonal and rhythmic perfection, who live for increasing multipliers and high scores, and who believe that games absolutely *must* rank their players based on some sort of performance criteria - *Wii Music* will be frustrating and boring. While there is a certain validity to the frustration of these gamers, I can tell you now that their voices will be *drowned out* by the sound of ringing cash registers, and the laughter of other delighted people.

What Nintendo has accomplished with *Wii Music* is a widening of the potential audience for music games that goes beyond the mainstream popularity the genre currently enjoys. *Wii Music* does for music what *Wii Sports* did for popular sporting events. Nintendo has stripped the concept of the "music game" down to its bare essentials, then stripped away even *more* of the traditional "game" aspect, in a way that may seem spiteful to a hardcore traditionalist. In place of all of the flash, frills, colored note tabs, and licensed master recordings we've gotten used to, Nintendo has added a *connection* that's hard to explain.

It's a connection between user and medium, the likes of which few developers are capable of creating. You wave the Wii Remote and Nunchuk in certain ways, you press their buttons, and *bam*, music happens, and it sounds good. Who knows *how* it's happening (well, okay, Nintendo says there's chord theory in the code), but there it is. Just as the game says, now *anyone* can make music.



The meat of the title, Jam mode, flies in the face of convention. *Wii Music's* tracklist is a far cry from all of the rock fantasy games out there today. Say goodbye to Metallica and Iron Maiden; replacing them are public domain tunes such as "Yankee Doodle," campy '80s hits such as Wham's "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go," classical music, and well-known tracks from Nintendo's own back catalog of games.

Most games only allow you to play their songs *one way*. It's always their notes, their rhythm, their beats, underlying your controller inputs every single time. *Wii Music*, however, lets you *play with the songs*, much like clay. In Jam mode, you pick from about five dozen instruments to fill the six parts of a group. This means that at the outset, you have the ability to create custom remixes of tunes you've known all your life. Want a Latin-jazz "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star?" How about dogs and cats singing Earth, Wind & Fire? Perhaps you might feel like creating the most epic *Legend of Zelda* theme ever? With *Wii Music*, you can, and are encouraged to. Afterwards, you can save it in a music video format and trade it around online.

Publisher: Nintendo · Developer: Nintendo · Rating: Everyone
Genre: Music · Category: Possibly Psychic · Release Date: 10/20/08

Once you pick your instruments, it's time to start playing. As long as you follow the overall beat of the song you choose, you can perform it however you wish. You can freestyle with it, you can add notes, subtract notes, bend and twist notes, or cooperate with friends to make a song's melody, harmony or rhythm elements more or less significant. In other words, you can make any given song more awesome than it used to be, or make it totally crazy. Whatever happens, in the end, it becomes your own. It deftly sidesteps the "Hey, Don't I Already Have an iPod?" syndrome that haunts many licensed music games.

During your improvisation, the game automatically figures out how to make your added ingredients sound their best. It's hardly infallible, but it works far more often than it doesn't. You won't be able to recompose pieces note by specific note, but as long as you have one *iota* of musical inclination in your body, you and the game will still come out with something that sounds really good. If you're old enough to remember a little PSX gem by the name of *Um Jammer Lammy*, be happy. Apparently Nintendo did, too.

All of this is wrapped up in a package no different from *Wii Sports* or *Wii Fit* in terms of aesthetics. Large fonts, soothing pictures and happy Mii's once again permeate the proceedings. Aside from the main Jam mode, you've got Pitch Perfect, a mode that helps to teach music recognition to those who may need it, set up in the form of a quiz show. There's Handbell Harmony, which lets you and up to three friends play through certain songs entirely with handbells in a setup reminiscent of *Guitar Hero*. There's also Mii Maestro, which you may remember from Miyamoto's conduction of a virtual orchestra to the *Zelda* theme at E3 2006.



If you've got a Wii Balance Board, there's a Virtual Drum Set waiting for your use, albeit with somewhat confusing button controls as opposed to true spatial recognition. Finally, there's Instrument Improv, where you just pick an instrument, and give it all you've got. Even without specific note control, it's a blast, and *will* put a smile on your face. Probably the only truly bewildering downside is the lack of song variety in any of these side modes. You can Jam to any song, but only Maestro or Handbell to five or six. Say what? More Nintendo game music would also have been nice. Here's hoping for DLC.

Music games, thus far, don't come any more novel than this. There is no easier way to make music and play recognizable songs than by playing *Wii Music*. It's great to mess around with any time you feel like having some crazy pointless fun, but has the potential to get deep when you least expect it. Best of all, it doesn't require any budget-destroying fake plastic instruments. Families are going to go absolutely nuts over this.

Me, though? I'm waiting eagerly for all the drunken *Wii Music* YouTube videos. You *know* they're coming.



Second Opinion by DJ Pubba - Score: 4 of 5

I had a ton of fun playing this. I love being the oompa-loompa tuba-d00d or the cowbell-banger. Give me more licensed tunes and I'll add more points.

Final Score: 4 of 5

Interview with Shigeru Miyamoto

Shortly before launch day, we were given the opportunity to meet with Shigeru Miyamoto, the man behind many of Nintendo's most popular game franchises including *Wii Music*. We were among several different magazines and web sites who were invited. What follows are what we felt were some of the more interesting questions, answers and thoughts which Mr. Miyamoto shared with us.

Shigeru Miyamoto: Because we knew [this is] such a new and different kind of game, our feeling all along has been that it will be one of those long sellers that doesn't race right out of the gate. But [what] we are finding is that people who've played the game and spent a good deal of time with it are reacting very positively to it and writing some very long things about it.

Now, for me personally, my thoughts and [feelings] about this game are really [a] little bit different from a lot of the other games that I've made. I've been making games for thirty years, and that whole time I've been a musician and a big fan of music. Over all those years, I personally thought that creating a game out of music was something that was very difficult to do.

So, unlike a product like *WiiFit* where... you know, with *WiiFit*, I had started a diet that had me weighing myself every day, and I found something interesting in that experience and found a way to take that experience and translate it in the form of a video game. Really, with *Music*, what I experienced was that I had this passion for creating video games for thirty years and this passion for creating music for thirty years, but I was never really able to find a way for the two of those to come together.

Having that long experience of not really being able to find a way to turn music into a video game product... seeing the end-result that we've achieved with *Wii Music* has left me very happy.

Of course, over the last ten-plus years we've seen what people now call "music games" start to emerge and take form — games like *Beatmania* and, more recently, games like *Guitar Hero*. When I looked at those as a game designer — you know, I called those "music games" myself — and I looked at those and thought, "You know, they're very well made and they're very fun."

But what I really experienced with those was that, while the gameplay itself is very fun, I often found that, in playing those games, the enjoyment that I got out of them was very different from the kind of enjoyment that I get out of playing music.

So, while, as a game designer, when I looked at games like *Beatmania* and *Guitar Hero* and [saw] the fun of those games as games, when I looked at them from my perspective of being a musician.... To me what those games reflected was — games that were trying to allow people to be the very best cover band that they could be. And my feeling was that if, as a musician, I were to create a music game, my goal wouldn't be to try to allow people to join the best cover band that they could join, but rather to let them move beyond that rather basic level of music training of trying to replicate existing music, and, instead, give them the creative freedom to try to bring their own personal creativity and their own flair to music creation.

I feel that with *Wii Music* we've managed to achieve that, and my hope is that we'll have as many people as possible who'll be able to play *Wii Music* and experience what it's like to have that creative freedom in creating music.

I mentioned to you that I've been playing music for thirty years, in fact in my college days. But that doesn't mean that I am a good musician. I'm not very good at playing instruments, and I'm not very good at performing publicly, and, in fact, I'm rather embarrassed about playing in front of other people. But, on October 2nd at Yoyogi in Tokyo, we held our media event, and I was able to get on-stage in front of a very large audience and perform a song together with the director of this game in front of a thousand people or more. It was a very liberating experience to feel like... here was this instrument that finally I can play and know that I'm going to play it well and be able to let out my musical creativity in front of a large audience.

I hope you'll take that all into account and look at *Wii Music* from that perspective when you're playing the game and then talking about it to people.

Question: What kind of demographic did you have in mind when creating the game? Did you expect this to appeal to the "core gamer?"

SM: When I create a game — not just *Wii Music* but any game — I don't really focus on a particular audience or particular age range. I feel that the games that I'm making are based on a more universal, inherently human sense of fun that I think doesn't really change, regardless of your age.

In creating a game like a *Super Mario Bros.* sequel or a *Zelda* sequel, we do create those games [while] trying to take into account the experience and knowledge that players of those franchises have had in the past games. Simultaneously, we feel it is very important that we always look at how people who have never played a *Super Mario Bros.* game or a *Zelda* game are going to interact with this title. How are they going to experience it?

With regard to *Wii Music* there were two things that we looked at in creating it. One, of course, was that I think the game's fun. Regarding the second.... There's a director that some of you may be familiar with who works with me. He was a director with me for the last twenty-plus years, and he's a producer now. He knows absolutely nothing about music and cannot play music whatsoever. Throughout the development of *Wii Music*, I was keenly watching how he responded to *Wii Music* and whether or not he, as someone who's not musically inclined, would think it was fun.

I think that people have probably heard me say that I think this title is very well suited to an elementary musical education for children — a very good first step to really introduce children to the key theories of music. That's an opinion that I have formed after seeing the final product, and it wasn't something that I strove to try to create from the outset.

So when I say that I think that *Wii Music* is very good for elementary education or first-step music education for children, the reason I think that actually stems back to my experience in elementary and middle school with studies in history and geography. Those were two subjects that I had absolutely no interest in whatsoever as a child and hated. But as an adult now, I've developed quite a deep interest in those. I think that's because I have the perspective that allows me to understand what kind of role history and geography can play in the world. In the case of music, I think that, if we're able to introduce children to the joy of musical creativity from the outset, then they're going to be more interested in the principle of music theory. And that's why I've been suggesting that perhaps *Wii Music* is a better way to start music education than starting with basic tools.

As for the question of whether or not it would appeal to core gamers.... We didn't really look at it in terms of how it would appeal to so-called "core gamers" versus so-called "casual gamers." The appeal of this game is based upon people's own personal interest in music. Obviously, among people who are casual gamers there are people who have very intense interest in music creation, and I think that *Wii Music* is the kind of game that is able to take a person's interest in music — whether it's deep or just a budding interest — and grab a hold of people. I think that with *Wii Music*, particularly when it comes to the ability to relayer parts and rearrange songs, you're going to find that people who have that core musical interest are going to become obsessed with the process of rearranging their songs — to the point that among the *Wii Music* audience you will find people who are as "core" of a gamer at *Wii Music* as you would in any other franchise or genre.

Maybe it's a question of the degree of interest in music that might result in some people's confusion as to the audience for *Wii Music*. If you're the type of person who starts tapping your hands or humming when you listen to music on a CD, then I think you'll find this game interesting.

Question: Forgive me if I'm wrong, but it seems like the track list is the same across all territories. I'm wondering if there was any thought of localizing it for different territories. And on that note, why were there so few classic Nintendo tracks? I think I've counted only three 8- and 16-bit songs.

SM: This time around we wanted to have one song list worldwide. Using the *Wii Music* system, I think it would be interesting to go forward with localized song lists for different markets. With regard to the NES songs — I would assume that everyone here is familiar with the very large number of songs from the NES and Super NES era. We wanted the music in the game to appeal to a very broad audience, and probably not many people in the mass market would be as familiar with those songs. So, in the song selection this time around, we wanted to focus on songs that people will know by ear for the most part, because that will make it easier for them to play the song and improvise the song.

Question: You're prohibited from ever talking about your hobbies but then you accidentally revealed that you have a deep interest in history. Is *Wii History* next?

SM: I think that one thing that *Wii Music* helped to reinforce for me was that there really is a wide selection of topics of interest that span all ages. Obviously, there's a lot of different genres of games, there are a lot of different skill levels of gamers, but, again, I really just focus on those innate human experiences and that type of entertainment is something that spans generations.

Question: I know it's a very broad range of instruments and there were some weird ones — we saw the cat in a dog suit and the karate practicing guy — and I'm wondering if there's anything weirder than those that didn't make the final cut.

SM: I don't think there were any other instruments that were weirder than what we have in there. There were many other varieties of guitar, but, when we decided to cut down the instruments to sixty, we ended up removing some of those. The one thing that I think I regret most about *Wii Music*, and I think it's a mistake on my part, was that we didn't include a mandolin.



reviewed by racewing



SONIC UNLEASHED



For fans of Sonic the Hedgehog, as well as Sega, there's a lot riding on Sonic Unleashed.

After the negative overall reception given to *SONIC the Hedgehog* (2006), the famous character's stock was put in serious jeopardy, until *Sonic and the Secret Rings* and *Sonic Rush Adventure* came to his rescue. *Sonic Unleashed* is the game that Sega's now touting as the *real* return to console form for their company mascot.

In a bold yet cautious approach, Sonic Team's built two distinct versions from the ground up for two separate sets of platforms. Furthermore, for the Wii and PS2 versions of this game, Sega wisely tapped Dimps (the minds behind the *Sonic Advance* and *Sonic Rush* games) as designers of the daytime versions of stages. With all this planning, has Sega gotten things right? Having played from start to credits, and then further still, I can easily say that at least for one platform, it's mission accomplished.

The daytime stages, where you control the cool blue hedgehog we all know and love, are *fabulous*. The game often sports *Secret Rings*'s behind-the-back perspective, which allows you to control Sonic like a superfast race car (with a sweet *Outrun 2*-style drift to boot). *Sonic Rivals*'s 2.5D perspective kicks in for about half of each stage, complete with dynamic camera angles that show off Sonic's best and speediest moments in style. Finally, hailing from *Sonic Rush Adventure* is Dimps's great stage design, complete with multiple paths and junctions through courses, assuring that every one of these stages has rewarding, long-term replay value.

In addition, Sonic's got some new moves. The Quick Step allows for fast horizontal movement without any break in the action, eliminating many analog-stick mishaps that plagued Sonic last generation. The Sonic Boost allows for a burst of speed on the ground but *also* in the air, making it great for avoiding bottomless pit-deaths. The only bad part about all this is that there appears to be no multiplayer whatsoever. So unlike *Sonic Rush Adventure*, you can't have limitless fun zooming around these great levels with a friend or online opponent. It's a shame, because these well-done stages *cry out* for the treatment.

During nighttime, the Werehog's quick scampering movements, double-jumps and stretchy arms allow him to shimmy along poles, across narrow walls and past precarious platforms, as well as efficiently take out multiple baddies at once with a respectable and responsive combo system.



Publisher: Sega • Developer: Sonic Team/Dimps • Genre: Action • Category: Supersonic • Release Date: 11/18/2008 • # Players: 1 • ESRB: E10+



Sonic Unleashed is a fairly Big Thing(tm) for Sega, and they've been making quite a bit of noise to make sure the gaming press knows it...

INTERVIEW: PATRICK RILEY

The fighting and platforming are still fairly speedy, feel surprisingly rewarding, and are actually, dare I say, a good way to *relax* after all that pent-up adrenaline's been coursing through your systems from the daytime missions. While, as an older fan, I can't bring myself to embrace the Werehog decision, I can't really *fault* it either, because what's here definitely works.

Rounding everything out is a completely optional hub world with special bonus rooms, containing extra lives and secret missions waiting beyond some novel puzzles which involve switching back and forth between Sonic's two forms. Also making a return appearance are the much-maligned "town" stages from *SONIC*, only this time, they're little more than graphic menus and text boxes, keeping the pace of the game fast.

The best part of this game is that it's actually well-designed at its core, and clearly playtested. Usually invisible walls in games are a sign of trouble, but here their presence often saves the player from headaches and unfair deaths off of stage sides. Even during the Werehog's sections where they're largely absent, I counted all of five situations (out of a couple hundred) where I actually felt frustrated. The Werehog can be somewhat slippery, like Sonic was last generation (oddly enough, the Hedgehog now stops on a dime). Still, on the whole, things are very manageable and control well. Motion controls are also present. In the daytime Sonic controls a lot like he did in *Secret Rings*, and at night you use the manipulate the Werehog's arm actions yourself. While the setup's all right, after a while I simply stuck with the Gamecube controller.

Even given the blistering speeds Sonic moves at here, odds are you'll slow down to check out the scenery. *Unleashed* for the Wii boasts huge worlds, busting with light, color, expansive backgrounds and terrain effects. Whether it's looking at a beautiful forest waterfall while playing as the Werehog, or spinning through dizzying loop-de-loops as Sonic with your point-of-view going from the bottom up, the framerate never, *ever* dips.

Dressing all these wonderful visuals is a feast for the ears. The background music eschews the hard rock of most current-era *Sonic* games and instead is a fusion of jazz and old-school game tunes. Much of it calls forth memories of *Sonic Rush Adventure*—which it should, since the composer for that game also worked on this. The voice acting is as cheesy as it's ever been, but hats go off to the actual sound *direction* in this title. As Sonic runs through stages, he gives off whoops and hollers that show he's having *fun* being the Fastest Thing Alive. As the Werehog, he's snarling and aggressive, and even howls.

In the end, the whole of *Sonic Unleashed* is slightly greater than the sum of its parts. Sonic fans who own the current crop of Nintendo systems can once again hold their heads up high. The Wii rendition of *Sonic Unleashed* is the best console Sonic game since probably the Dreamcast days. Even if the absolute worst happens, and the next-gen versions somehow end up completely dropping the ball, there's one system where things are as they should be.

Score: 4 of 5



This time, however, we went to *them* to find out just where they were planning to go with all of this, as well as with Sonic's future. Fortunately, Patrick Riley (Producer at Sega of America) was kind enough to answer our questions.

HGM: In a nutshell, what do you hope to accomplish in terms of the Sonic character and his franchise with *Sonic Unleashed*?

Riley: The goal is to re-launch the franchise with a high-quality, immensely enjoyable game.

HGM: Just what happened to the *SONIC the Hedgehog* (2006) team? Is *anyone* from it still involved in this project?

Riley: Some of the *Sonic Unleashed* team members were on *SONIC the Hedgehog* (2006), but many of them were not. Many are younger, energetic and passionate team members working on their first game, and many of them worked on major titles for other companies and this is their first game for SEGA.

However the leaders of the [*Sonic Unleashed*] development team were not on *SONIC the Hedgehog* (2006), namely Hashimoto-san, who is the game design lead/director/technical lead and Kawamura-san who is the art director. Interestingly enough, Hashimoto-san and Kawamura-san's last big console Sonic project was *Sonic Adventure 2*, in which they were two of the creators of the original Chao. Kawamura-san did the art design, and Hashimoto-san did the programming and design. So you can see that there is a rich history of true Sonic experience behind this game.

HGM: What, exactly, are the specifics, features and benefits of the Hedgehog Engine? How does it help in making *Sonic Unleashed* a more fun game?

"[The] Hedgehog Engine is an investment in future SEGA games."

Riley: The Hedgehog Engine, which was created by some of the team members making the game, uses a technique known as "Global Illumination" in which the reflections of colored light around a scene is calculated and baked into a pre-rendered lighting pass. This makes for vibrant and detailed scenes that feel like high-end computer animation. Also, since Sonic runs so fast, the need for an engine to be able to stream textures and geometry is extremely important. So the engine was also built from the ground up to allow for this. Finally, the Hedgehog Engine is an investment in future SEGA games. *Sonic Unleashed* is just the first game, but it's a base from which we can develop future Sonic titles and titles of other genres without having to start from zero on the engine and toolset.

HGM: Why the Werehog, exactly? We've heard the official reason, to add "gameplay variety", but we've heard that to justify several past Sonic games that have come

under fire (at least by critics) for this very reason. Is there a reason Sega and Sonic Team stick to their guns in this regard? (Are all the characters and differing gameplay concepts that popular with the younger audience, for example?)

Riley: We definitely wanted to try something a little different with Sonic and appeal to both Sonic fans and people outside of the normal target audience. There were skeptics internally here at SEGA as well, but as the gameplay matured everyone came to see the promise in the Werehog element as it grew and matured. One side effect that I enjoy is that it's always difficult to encourage exploration in the game while simultaneously asking players to run 300 miles per hour to get a top rating. The Werehog gave us a chance to include that element of exploration.

HGM: Given the above, do Sega and Sonic Team consider its classic form of high-speed platforming gameplay to still be viable in today's industry, outside of the handheld market?

Riley: Absolutely. With the power behind all the new platforms we can continue to take that kind of gaming to new levels and make it that much more intense and make sure gamers continue to feel the speed they look for in a Sonic game. Once people get this game in their hands, they will see that the team has proven that it is possible to keep adapting Sonic to the modern era and there is still room for him. The development team has really nailed the combination of 3D with 2.5D, and have designed levels that stand up to a lot of replay. Some of the levels such as Apotos were in near final form months ago and I've been enjoying playing them on a regular basis since then.

HGM: Any chance of a 2D console Sonic revival, a la Capcom's recent efforts (*Bionic Commando Rearmed*, *Mega Man 9*)?

Riley: I agree with the fans that it would be great so stay tuned and see what comes down the pipe. In the meantime, I'm sure you will all enjoy *Sonic Unleashed* and its 2D/3D gameplay elements.



2ND OPINION

Second opinion by Zippy • Score: 4 of 5

...man, we had to wait 8 years and suffer a *human/hedgehog romance* just to get this. Fortunately, this *almost* makes up for it.

FINAL SCORE: 4 of 5

HAMMER

Resistance 2

When Insomniac introduced the gaming world to *Resistance: Fall of Man*, fans were surprised at how well the PS3 could handle such intense 32-player firefights.

With *Resistance 2*, the player limit has been raised to a whopping 60, which is simply unheard of on consoles. But despite having so many players, the game is still overflowing with useful additions and features that truly enhance game play.

When my session began, I was thrust into a large urban map called Construction that had several pathways snaking throughout the buildings and debris. This particular battle takes place at night, which helps to enhance the laser fire and explosions (of which there were plenty). My 'tour guide' was Insomniac community director James Stevenson, who explained to me that every player is automatically placed on a team when they enter the fray, and that team is randomly pitted against an enemy team for the duration of the match. These rival teams will be directed by screen prompts to fulfill different objectives, but they will always fight over the same territory. On top of that, players earn extra points for killing rival squad members, giving them more incentive to focus their fire. Sounds cool to me.

Continuing on my session, I was prompted to meet up with fellow squad members at a rendezvous point and then press on to the main objective. This simple yet effective idea ensures that teams will always attack their objectives in a group (if they can follow orders). Despite not knowing each other, my squad met up at the indicated point and we all attacked our objectives like a well-oiled machine. "Wow," I thought, "this kind of cooperation never happens in PUGs." I guess we just needed some direction.

Apparently, the enemy wasn't too thrilled with losing their real estate because a furious battle erupted all around me. Grenade and rocket explosions sent bodies flying while gunfire

ripped through friends and foes alike. After killing several enemies without dying,

I was able to activate a personal shield that protected my front and was large enough to also protect one or two comrades. We charged forwards and tore through a group of Locust only to be dropped by some well-placed grenades at our feet.

On my way back to the battle, I was cut down by sniper fire from above before I even arrived. Time to seek revenge! James told me that there were several areas to gain access to the rooftops, so I ignored the firefight and stalked my killer. I took cover on a rooftop, placed the reticule of my sniper rifle over his head, and BAM!! But rather than rejoin the battle, I just waited for him to come up and seek revenge on me. Hopefully he noticed that it was the same player that just killed him twice in a row, mwahaha.

Even after playing *Resistance 2* multiplayer for several hours, I still wanted to go back for more. I originally thought that having so many players interacting at the same time would be confusing and produce intense lag, but neither happened. This is due to the innovative squad rivalry system that focuses battles in different areas of the map instead of letting front lines form on their own. Add a fantastically fun eight-player class-based co-op mode to the mix and this may just become my new multiplayer game of choice.

by BigWyrM



いっせ! 源さん

～夕焼け大工物語～



Review by: E. Goban
Publisher: Irem
Developer: Irem
Release Date: 6/30/08
Genre: Platformer
Category: Beat 'em up
of Players: 1
Rating: 3.5 of 5



Worth Importing?

Ikuze! Gen-San: Yuuyake Daiku Monogatari is a solid, if unspectacular, platformer. English-only gamers shouldn't have much trouble navigating the menus, although the storyline will remain a mystery. Old school gaming enthusiasts will appreciate Gen-san's quirkiness and ought to give it a try.



Every *Daiku no Gen-San* game follows the same basic platformer formula of jump, dodge, smash and repeat liberally until the world is fully cleansed of evil. Irem doesn't try to reinvent the game play wheel, focusing instead on quirky character and level design.

Ikuze! Gen-San: Yuuyake Daiku Monogatari follows faithfully in the footsteps of its predecessors. The hero, Gen-san, armed with his trusty oversized hammer, takes to the streets to fight off waves of construction company minions. Our hero's nemesis is an evil construction company, lead by the diabolical President Hyousuke. Hyosuke's men are overdeveloping the city, disrupting its peaceful small town tranquility and causing its citizens grief. Gen-san decides to right this wrong by assaulting the company in a whirlwind of blue collar violence not seen since the happy-go-lucky union-busting days of the 1920's.

At its heart, is the same side scrolling beat em' up that you've been playing since the days of *River City Ransom* and *Double Dragon*. Platform veterans will find themselves right at home jumping over obstacles and smashing Gen-san's many foes. What makes the game unique is the wide assortment of bizarre opponents and situations that you encounter. One minute, you'll be happily riding a merry-go-round and a ferris wheel before facing down a mad scientist's weather machine, and the next minute you'll find yourself dashing through a restaurant, dodging cooks while helping a waitress and chef find love. This variety of fun and interesting venues will help take the edge off of the naturally repetitive side scroller formula.

The game's main innovation comes from a costume change system that allows Gen-san to assume the role and skills of a variety of different professions. Each unlockable costume changes Gen-san's attributes, making him faster, more powerful, or altering his attacks. The sushi master costume turns our hero into a short order cook who can wallop enemies with a gigantic fish. The baseball costume will channel his inner Ichiro, allowing him to knock bad guys out of the park. Other personas include a beat boxin' DJ, a deep sea diver, and many more. As an added bonus, you can even play the part of hack psychologist. Gen-san can smash away NPC's troubles by using his hammer on big frowny faces that are supposed to represent their emotional trauma. The newly giddy citizens then aid him in his quest by engaging in acts of civil disobedience against their former oppressors.

As far as pure gameplay is concerned, *Ikuze! Gen-San* won't knock your socks off. The game plays a little too slowly and leisurely compared to its more famous platforming cousins. While vibrant backgrounds and large character sprites make the game aesthetically appealing, this causes framerate problems, slowing the game down at very inopportune times. The game's preponderance of one hit kills will also make for many frustrating moments.

PC Engine Best Collection

銀河お嬢様伝説コレクション

Back in the early '90s, while Nintendo was dominating the US videogame market with the NES, the PC Engine was giving Nintendo's Famicom a run for its money. Two popular genres on the PC Engine, which really showcased the console's superior 1-megabit CD technology, included 2D shooters and graphical adventures. The *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Collection* for PSP presents today's gamers with quality ports of three such classics.

Ginga Ojousama is a game franchise that spawned the development of a popular series of anime also known as *Galaxy Fraulein Yuna*. Famous for his work in the *Gundam* series and his *Mobile Suit Girls* character designs, Akitaka Mika created the concept for *Ginga Ojousama* after being approached by Hudson. Originally intending to create a shooter featuring his trademark mecha girls, the final product could be described as the opposite of an awe-inspiring shooter. Instead of frenetic, edge-of-your-seat high octane shmupness, fans of Akitaka Mika were treated to an actionless graphic novel adventure in *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Yuna*. The sequel, *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Yuna 2*, was essentially more of the same, with a few new additions, but still not much action. It was not until the third game in the series, *Ginga Fukei Densetsu: Sapphire*, that Akitaka Mika's original concept was used to create one of the PC Engine's greatest gems.

Publisher: Hudson Soft
Developer: Hudson Soft
Genre: Dating/Combat Sim/Shooter
Category: Girls in Space!

Release Date: 7/30/08
of Players: 1
Rating: 4 of 5
Review by: E. Kozo



Worth Importing?

Yes! For shooter fans looking to play *Sapphire* at about one-tenth the price of the PC Engine version, *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Collection* is a great value and a must import. Although *Yuna* and *Yuna 2* are unplayable without intermediate Japanese language skills, these should be considered icing on a delicious shmup cake. *Sapphire's* style and action make up for any of its shortcomings and this PSP port is a top notch example of a quality game withstanding the test of time.



If you have intermediate Japanese skills, *Yuna* and *Yuna 2*, starring a futuristic beauty-queen, present entertaining storylines that fans of the anime will definitely want to check out. For those who do not understand Japanese, neither *Yuna* nor *Yuna 2* have much to offer, for the action is scant while the save points are few and far between. *Yuna* allows the player to interact with the story by inputting commands such as "look," "talk" and "move." *Yuna 2* ups the ante with some basic dungeon crawling aspects as well as turn-based card battles versus rival characters. The language barrier, however, is just too great for casual import fans to endure 30 minutes of story for the few minutes of action *Yuna* and *Yuna 2* present.

That said, the *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Collection* is a must own for any gamer. Period. Why? Because it packs one of the rarest and greatest shooters ever released on the PC Engine - *Ginga Fukei Densetsu: Sapphire*. Until now, gamers wanting to experience this golden oldie needed to make an investment that makes the PS3 suddenly seem cheap by comparison. At \$300 for a used copy of the original release, not to mention hundreds of dollars worth of 20-year-old hardware from Japan, few gamers have ever experienced this frenetic shmup. Thirteen years after its debut, *Sapphire* holds its own as one of the best shooters ever made and the PSP port does not disappoint.

Sapphire can be described as a hybrid of two classics - *Raiden* and *Radiant Silvergun*. The weapon system seems like it was yanked straight out of *Raiden* featuring a primary cannon that can be leveled-up by collecting red, green, or blue power ups and bombs that can clear the screen in an instant. There is a third attack that can be discharged using the Select button, but the button configuration is so awkward that unleashing this attack is a recipe for instant death. While the four available spacecraft each have a unique weapons set, the differences aren't so great as to be a consideration in selecting your ship. Instead, you'll most likely only play with Charatte's ship, the fastest in the fleet.

The level design may well have served as Treasure's inspiration for *Radiant Silvergun*: short levels with legendary boss battles. Don't mistake the fact that the levels are short to mean this game is easy, for it's anything but. Unfortunately, much of the game's difficulty seems to be born from your ship's comparative lack of speed coupled with a large hit box. When the screen fills with bullets and enemies, success often depends more on familiarity with the level than quick reflexes. Playing with Charatte's ship helps a bit. Nevertheless, the experience is akin to navigating the Titanic through arctic waters. You're okay as long as you know exactly where the icebergs are, but... thankfully, *Sapphire* has continues, and many of them.

Similar to *Radiant Silvergun*, the short bursts of manic action climax at the end of each level with boss battles that are nothing short of spectacular. The developers certainly squeezed every ounce of graphical horsepower from the PC Engine when they created *Sapphire*. With lighting effects, parallax scrolling, spinning polygons, and tons of gratuitous eye-candy, there is hardly a prettier 16-bit shooter. *Sapphire's* art direction certainly compensates for any shortcomings in its mechanics, and at about one-tenth of the cost of the PC Engine version, this is a must own title for any shmup aficionado.

The PSP port gives the player the option to change the viewing mode for all three games, but while this is a nice feature in concept, it does not work well in practice. The original aspect ratio requires the game to be played in a tiny viewing screen that is only uses about half of the PSP's wide screen. The vertically stretched version fills a little more of the screen without much noticeable distortion, and the full screen mode is ugly and virtually unplayable. If only the developers had implemented a vertical display option, akin to what Treasure did with the GameCube port of *Ikaruga*, to optimize the PSP's beautiful widescreen display. If only...

For fans of Akitaka Mika, or for anyone who likes busty anime girls in mecha suits, *Ginga Ojousama Densetsu Collection* offers excellent bonus content. Accessible from the main menu is an art gallery featuring many Akitaka Mika originals as well as what appears to be concept art for the three games. The gallery itself is almost worth the price of admission.





trouble witches

The Good Kind of Trouble?

From Doujinsoft to Arcade Game, we take a look at what kind of wacky hijinx Bouken's upcoming horizontal shooter gets into.

An import feature by Pink Godzilla's E. Goban, with interview by E. Taragan

Are you a good witch or a bad witch?

Are you a good witch or a bad witch? Not since the days of *The Wizard of Oz* has there been such exciting witch on witch action as seen in Bouken's upcoming arcade shoot 'em up, *Trouble Witches*.

In *Trouble Witches*, you'll take control of a team of wanna-be Glindas as they take on the Daughters of Amalgram, a gang of troublemaking evil witches. However, rather than dropping houses on their foes, the good guys (or girls, in this case) instead take to the skies on their magic brooms for a good old fashioned magical shoot fest.

More akin to the *Twinkle Star Sprites* and *Keio Flying Squadrons* of the shmup universe, *Trouble Witches* is a stylistic deviation from the average fare. Departing from the gritty, futuristic space motifs of *R-Type* and *Ikaruga*, *Trouble Witches* features a cheery, colorful, and downright cute atmosphere. Don't let the pretty scenery fool you though. These unfriendly skies are filled with the same endless waves of merciless enemies, gigantic bosses and unnecessarily high concentrations of weapons fire that are found in your modern shooters.

While *Trouble Witches* exquisitely executes the standard shoot and dodge shmup formula, it features a unique innovation that skews the equation. While in play, your character is accompanied by a companion pet that follows her wherever she goes. With the push of a button, that pet creates a temporary spherical barrier that causes all enemy projectiles to slow to a crawl. If the enemy ship is then destroyed, then all of its bullets in the barrier turn to gold. That money can then be spent on power ups at the floating shops that appear mid-stage.

As you can imagine, this magic barrier system fundamentally alters the game play. Rather than relying on rote memorization of enemy patterns, the magic barrier gives players a different strategy for survival. A variable meteor shower of bullets? No problem. With the magic barrier system, you're evading bullets like Neo in the Matrix. Keep your barrier up for too long, however, and you risk creating a massive wall of angry projectiles with no escape.

Despite the game's disarming cuteness and your handy magic barrier ability, don't expect *Trouble Witches* to be a walk in the park. Enemies are just as plentiful and dangerous as in any other frantic shooter. You can also expect more than a few visits to the infamous purgatory of bullet hell. However, with a steady hand and some deft maneuvering, you will also find yourself frequently escaping certain death in one of those impossibly daring last second dodges that are the hallmark of a great shoot 'em up experience. *Trouble Witches* will be coming soon to an Akihabara arcade near you! If for some reason you don't live in Japan, you can download the demo at the game's official website. With any luck, gamers on this side of the Pacific will soon see this title magically appear on their favorite home console's download service.



Publisher: Bouken • Developer: Bouken • Genre: Shmup • Category: Witches! • Players: #1-2 • Release Date: Winter 2008





Interview: Kondou Koushi

While Bouken is a key cog in the Japanese game development industry, both digital and analog, very few American gamers have probably ever heard of the company. Founded in 1987, the company was instrumental in popularizing tabletop RPGs in Japan. Today, Bouken is trying their hand at a new type of game, the side-scrolling shooter. *Hardcore Gamer Magazine* recently sat down with Kondou Koushi, president of Bouken, to discuss his company's hottest new release, *Trouble Witches*.

Hardcore Gamer Magazine: Tell us a little about *Trouble Witches*.

Kondou Koushi: Since the days of *Sailor Moon*, manga and anime involving cute girls battling the forces of evil have been extremely popular in Japan. Developing this concept, *Trouble Witches* is a side scrolling shooter featuring cute witches who must restore peace to the strange world that they have created by battling bosses who also just happen to be cute witches.

HGM: Besides featuring witches on brooms instead of your stereotypical spacecraft, how does *Trouble Witches* differ from your typical shooter?

KK: What sets *Trouble Witches* apart from the pack is its magic barrier system. The witches can cast spells to create a magic force field.



When enemy fire enters the force field, the bullet speed slows considerably making it much easier for the player to evade enemy attacks. When the player defeats the enemy that fired those shots, however, the projectiles turn into coins. The key to a high score, of course, is mastery of this barrier system.

HGM: What are the coins for? Points?

KK: Mid-stage, your witch will encounter Magic Shops. These coins are useful for purchasing magic cards, which power up your witch with stronger attacks and unique weaponry.

HGM: So *Trouble Witches* has some light RPG elements, then. Although it seems like a strange combination, it's hardly surprising given Bouken's strong roots in RPGs. So how is it that a company famous for making RPGs ends up making a shooter?

KK: Bouken does a lot of graphic design, programming and game development for the large publishers in Japan. In creating *Trouble Witches*, we wanted to make a game that was completely different from the genres of games we typically work on. To be honest, since Bouken was founded, we wanted to make a shooter. Twenty years later the opportunity finally presented itself.

HGM: So how big is the *Trouble Witches* development team?

KK: The core team consists of just five members.

HGM: Just five?!? How long has *Trouble Witches* been in development?

KK: About one year. We probably could have finished much quicker, but everyone on the team is a gamer at heart. So whenever there was some aspect of the game that we didn't like or that we thought we could improve upon, we would take the extra time to get it right.

HGM: How is the development coming along?

KK: The PC version of the game saw a limited release in Akihabara, becoming an instant hit. The arcade version of the game is still in development, it was originally set for release this past summer, but for various reasons the launch date has been pushed back to this winter. We're currently using the extra time to make the game even better.

HGM: Sounds like you'll have a hit on your hands, though, when *Trouble Witches* hits the arcades this winter.

KK: Although we're confident it will do well in Akihabara, until recently, we were a little uncertain as to how well the game would be received elsewhere.

But we received a boost of confidence at this year's Tokyo Game Show when the public voted *Trouble Witches* into the top ten best in show.

HGM: Congratulations! So does that mean we'll be seeing a stateside release of *Trouble Witches* in the near future? On Xbox Live Arcade, maybe?

KK: Well, we demonstrated *Trouble Witches* at PAX 08, and the game seemed to be received quite well by that hardcore gamer demographic. Xbox Live Arcade is probably the ideal platform for an American release of *Trouble Witches*. The only question is whether there are enough gamers in America who would like to play a shooter starring cute witches to justify a US release.

HGM: You might be surprised.

KK: I certainly think so.

HGM: With the arcade version of *Trouble Witches* wrapping up soon, are there any plans for a sequel on the horizon?

KK: There are. The concept involves witches in sailor outfits battling their rivals, the cheongsam witches. Don't ask.

HGM: Don't worry. You had me at "witches in sailor outfits."

C'mon baby, do the...



Bejeweled Twist

<http://www.popcap.com> • \$20.00

Developer: PopCap Games • Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 10/28/08 • # Players: 1

Now this is how you evolve a series that's not only appeared on just about anything that's capable of running a game but has been cloned endlessly to boot! *Bejeweled Twist* takes the classic gem-matching formula and gives it a few tweaks, resulting in a game that not only feels both fresh and familiar but is also far better than its predecessors.

The most obvious change is how the gems move. A mouse-click causes a wheel to spin one quarter rotation clockwise, taking the four gems inside with it. It's no longer necessary to match three in a row to make a move, but taking a turn without

clearing any gems has a nasty effect on the multiplier. Each move fills in a pip on the multiplier bar, and when the bar is full the multiplier increases. The first wrong move clears all the pips and the second one knocks 1x off the multiplier. There's always at least one move available on the board somewhere, but there's strategy in knowing when to take a hit to either set up a giant combo or arrange to clear a bomb.

With a move always available, Game Over is now reliant on the bomb gems. Bombs are standard gems with a counter on them, and each move decreases it by one. The counter can be generous to start with but

it only gets crueler as the levels go by, and bad things happen when it hits zero.

What these changes accomplish is to throw the board wide open. Although combos are still arrived at by luck more than design, there's much more strategy available in move selection than ever before. This makes *Bejeweled Twist* easily the best in the series, and brain-consumingly addictive to boot.

By: James • Score: 4.5 of 5

Rakugaki Showtime

Japanese PSN (PS3/PSP) • 600 yen (~\$6)



Developer: Treasure • Genre: Action
Release Date: 6/24/2008 • # Players: 1-4

Rakugaki Showtime is just plain awesome. How could a game where you play as little scribble people that throw tons of crap at each other and cause massive property damage not be, though? There's not much more to this game than that: you pick up stuff and throw it at the other people until they die. You're given a lot of choices in weaponry, too: Black Holes, Grenades, Homing Missiles, Rocks, ICBMs, and of course the most deadly of all, smiley faces. Once you hit enough stuff with the smiley faces, an angelical chorus indicates that the next time you pick up said ball you'll activate a Super for mass damage. Wham,

bam, thank ya' ma'am. Quick to pick up, the reason it's *fun to play* is because it's *easy to play*. Cool characters and the ability to play with up to 4 friends at once are just a bonus. In tangible form, this Japanese-only PS1 game costs upwards of \$200 to buy, and at about \$6 on the Japanese PSN it's a steal. If you've ever wanted to own a legit copy of the game, this is the easiest way.

Check out <http://ashura.hardcoregamer.com> for some help picking up this game from America, some menu translations (very little Japanese knowledge required!), and more!

By: Ashura • Score: 5 of 5

Cubello

WiWare • 600 points (\$6.00)

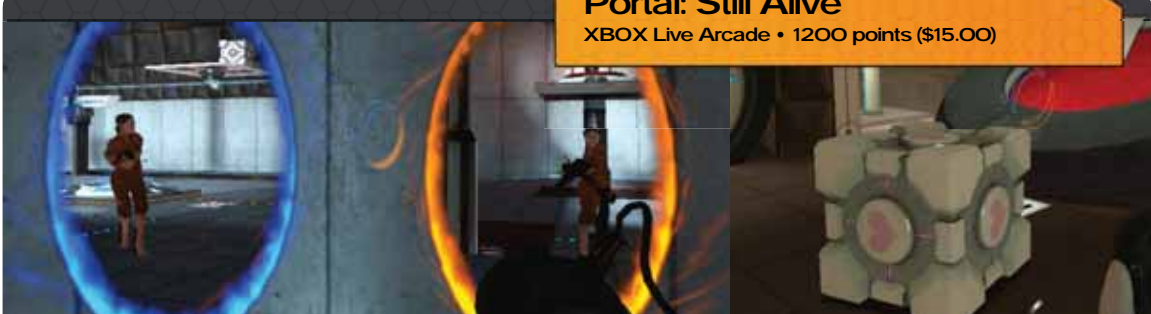


Developer: Skip • Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 10/13/08 • # Players: 1

Some puzzle games work better than others, and *Cubello* looks at them with envy in its heart. A 3D structure of cubes of various colors rotates in the center of the screen, with the Remote controlling a cursor that highlights a cube's edge. Tapping the A or B button lands a colored cube on the cursor, and also causes the entire structure to rotate in a new direction depending on the angle of the shot. Connect four cubes of the same color and they fall off, with an extra three shots added to the magazine to a maximum of ten. Run out of shots and the game's over, or clear off the center cube to complete the level. It's pretty simple and has the seeds of addiction, but the random nature of the colors added to the magazine leaves you screwed too often. The controls are smooth and accurate and there are a good number of levels, but the overly-careful strategies needed make it more work than play.

By: James • Score: 2.5 of 5

On the Download



Portal: Still Alive

XBOX Live Arcade • 1200 points (\$15.00)

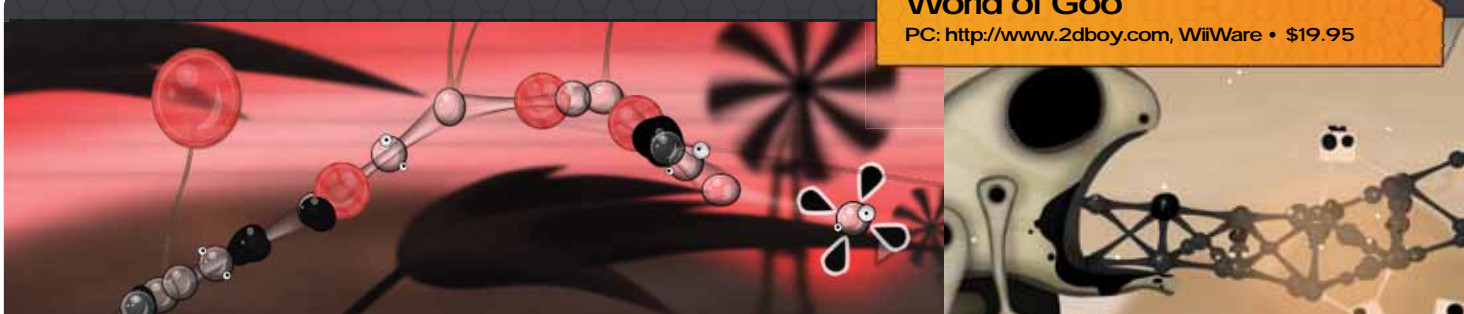
Developer: Valve • Genre: First-person puzzler
Release Date: 10/23/08 • # Players: 1

Everyone should have played *Portal* by now, but if you've been denied it due to a lesser-powered PC and a bizarre aversion to all that extra Orange Box content then it's time to rejoice. *Portal* is finally available by itself, complete with a collection of new bonus levels ranging from simple to pure evil. The central game is still as excellent as ever. Chell runs through GlaDOS's challenges in exactly the same way that

gained *Portal* more awards and fan-love in its four hour completion time than any ten fifty-hour epics. It's the promise of new content that makes this version so appealing, however, and *Portal: Still Alive* delivers a good number of levels to beat your poor, abused skull against. The maps introduce some new gameplay elements, such as the deadly red surfaces that allow cubes and portal gun shots to pass

through, and the difficulty level ramps up quick. The only downside is that GlaDOS has no new speaking parts, making the challenge levels feel lifeless. On the plus side it's new levels for one of 2007's best surprises, and that's more than enough to justify playing *Portal* one more time.

By: James • Score: 4.5 of 5



World of Goo

PC: <http://www.2dboy.com>, WiWare • \$19.95

Developer: 2D Boy • Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 10/13/08 • # Players: 1

The goo balls of *World of Goo* have a problem, but thankfully they're completely oblivious to being processed by a mega-corporation into all manner of beauty and food products. What they really want isn't clear, but they seem happy enough to link together to somehow reach the exit pipe, which draws in all the unused goo balls to be whisked away to their eventual

fate. As the levels go by new species of goo are revealed, each one adding a new wrinkle to construction. The normal black balls shoot out support tendrils to all other balls in range and, once joined, can't be disconnected. The green balls, on the other hand, can be reused as many times as needed, while the clear drool balls can only attach at one point to form a goo-rope.

On most levels, each unused ball is one point at level's end. Each ball used, however, adds to your building's structural integrity, and it's very easy to see the lack of a strut cause a wobbly tower to collapse on itself or sway just a bit too close to a destructive spinning gear. Each level either adds a new gameplay element or refines an old one in a new way, and the free-form

style of building structures gives each level plenty of replay. *World of Goo* is simply fantastic, with an excellent soundtrack and a storytelling style all its own, and passing it over will lead to a sad and empty life of regret. Play it, and be happy.

By: James • Score: 5 of 5

strategy
then.

- DEPOSIT QUARTER
- BALL WILL SERVE AUTOMATICALLY
- AVOID MISSING BALL FOR HIGH SCORE

PLAYER 2

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UNCHARTED WATERS

Before Koei became known for annually releasing two or three variations of the same historical brawler, the niche publisher with an eye on human history produced some fantastic games that made warlords and revolutions exciting and relevant in the 20th century. Efforts such as the early *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Nobunaga's Ambition* titles were the company's bread and butter in much the way that the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* franchises are today, and allowed for development of some thrilling side projects. *Uncharted Waters* is an excellent case in point.

Released on a handful of platforms but perhaps most commonly accessible on the Super Nintendo, the unconventional RPG tells the story of a young merchant who is an outcast for reasons of ancestry. His grandfather, a wealthy and valued member of society, went on an exploratory ocean expedition and never returned. Since then, the once-noble family name has enjoyed none of its former glory. As the game begins on the brink of the 16th century, you are that young

family name as you attract the attention of rival sailors, barmaids and even the princess herself. You'll face the jealous warships of Spain and Turkey, the greed of scurvy sea dogs and the most brutal winds and ocean swells that Mother Nature can throw your way. All of the ingredients necessary for a good time are on hand, but what really makes *Uncharted Waters* stand out from the crowd is the way that it places control of your virtual destiny so squarely within your hands. Much of that freedom is due to the lack of any set narration. Aside from the opening prologue and the conclusion, there's no real plot. Your fate is left to the winds and any key characters could act out their limited roles in any number of ways or even escape your notice entirely. There's the king, of course, who will sometimes give you imperial tasks that you can complete for prestige and a new title, and there's a princess who mostly just sits around looking pretty. Everything else comes down to gossip you pick up at the local tavern or the interactions you have with pirates, merchants and soldiers. That's all left up to you, ensuring that *Uncharted Waters* is in some ways a purer RPG than many in the genre before and since (with nary a slobbering monster in sight!).

The lack of narrative focus allows you to focus on actual adventure. Unless you're particularly aggressive, much of the game will be spent focusing on commerce. For example, you might start with a sugar purchase at Lisbon at the price of 22 gold per sack, then travel north to Bordeaux and sell it for twice that. That's not quite enough to double your investment, though, because you also have

merchant. Your plan is to follow your dreams by continuing the family tradition of turning to the seas... where in all likelihood you will die of starvation, too much watery brine or a cutlass slash to the gullet.

The adventure begins humbly, in the Portuguese port of Lisbon. You have only a handful of gold and a loyal sailor for company. Your job is to build the former into a mountain of wealth that will finance your own journeys across the pirate-infested seas (while making sure that your loyal companion is joined by a selection of suitable shipmates). Success will restore glory to your



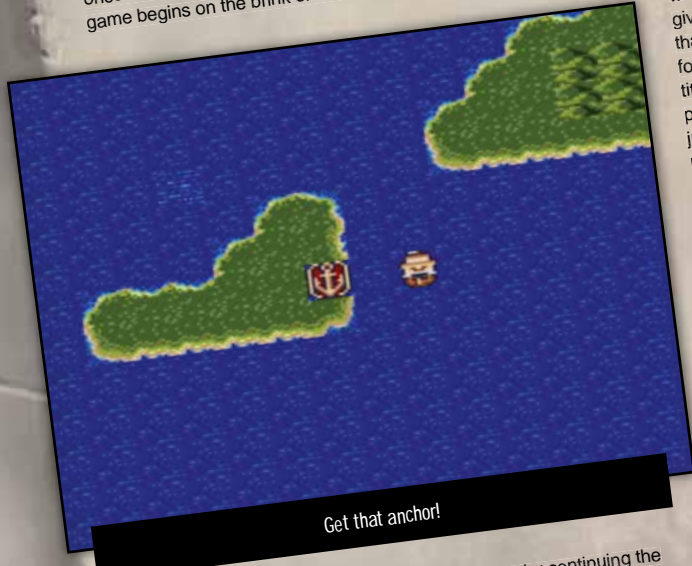
Your bald head? Oh, you said for, not at.



Damn, the Star Trek symbol is after us!



The scale seems a little askew here...



Get that anchor!



At least it's not "ke ke ke!"

to pay for provisions to make the journey. Another complication is that you can't rely on the same transaction to hold equal value if you repeat it too often; as you merrily supply a region such as Bordeaux with all of the sweet goodness it can handle, the merchant there will start to pay less for the merchandise (and your connection in Lisbon will charge more on his end). This mechanic forces you to explore other options if you want to remain profitable, which in turn encourages actual exploration as you seek out the best trade routes.

At first, that exploration seems rough, perhaps even broken. You don't simply press and hold the button that matches the direction you want your ship to float. Instead, you set the compass bearing and then take a hands-off approach until it's time to tweak your course yet again. The process is slightly passive and that's punctuated by the fact that your vessel flashes from one map tile to the next rather than passing fluidly along its course.

This design choice seems odd at first, but it adds some depth that otherwise couldn't have existed on the hardware. Koei was able to add important elements such as wind resistance and ocean currents, and to make their impact obvious. Time passes and supplies dwindle no matter what you're doing, so it's important to plan your routes carefully.

If that's not enough to excite you, there also are plenty of opportunities to battle the enemies of Portugal for a bit of variety and treasure. Confrontations begin when one ship is adjacent to another on the map and one of the captains chooses to attack. You're then given control of your fleet as the ships maneuver about the limited space to set up cannon volleys. Combat at close range is also possible. Positioning yourself next to your chosen rival allows you to unleash your swarthy crew, whereupon numbers and stats affect the outcome. If you've built up a virtual army, that approach can work well, but early in the game you'll probably value each and every member of your force and will prefer to attack from a distance instead. Either way, the battle ends when the enemy flagship is defeated (you can loot it and perhaps even add it to your fleet) or when your own flagship suffers a similar fate (game over for you!).

Another intriguing component of the game is empire building. Historically, nations financed pirates to build their wealth and hold within the world. You can play a role in those proceedings here by investing money into neutral ports. No one particularly cares whether you got that by selling stolen jewels or by legitimately distributing grain from Majorca. As an added bonus, spreading your money around key stops on favorite routes allows you to haggle with marketplaces, or to build better vessels at shipyards. Other nations may try to invest too, so building up a slew of Portuguese ports can become a nice little side challenge. If the combat, trade routes, investment and exploration wear thin, *Uncharted Waters* offers diversionary poker and blackjack games at most ports. Here you can turn a few hundred gold into a few thousand. The gambling mini-game is especially fun because your success or failure has a tangible impact on your in-game assets (something that even full-fledged gambling video games don't generally offer). Holding a full house or a flush and fleecing your cheerful opponents of their wealth can mean a lot when it finances that next journey to Bordeaux or an upgrade for your ship.

Aside from the dated production values and some occasional quirks in the interface, *Uncharted Waters* could almost have been released this year. It's easy to lose many enjoyable hours to its complexities without even realizing it, even now with all of the competition the title faces. Unfortunately, aside from a single sequel, Koei seems to be content to let subsequent installments remain only in Japan. For all of its strengths, the string of historical brawlers we've instead received makes a poor substitute for the likes of *Uncharted Waters*. Try it soon and see for yourself...



Fleet and seek was never as popular as hide and seek.



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GO LOOK HURRY

Games America forgot



There comes a point where you've got to stop wondering if a game is retro and just kick back and enjoy it.

MOTHER 3 is a Gameboy Advance game done in the style of its SNES predecessor, *Earthbound*, which itself was an NES throwback. "Retro" doesn't begin to cover it, but when an RPG is as cute, sad, fun, charming, and touching as *MOTHER 3* it doesn't really matter. What's important is that this is a good gaming.

MOTHER 3 follows the story of a family living in a peaceful village that's in for a rude awakening. As the story switches from the viewpoint of one character to another during the opening chapters, their world goes through drastic changes as the Pigmask army invades. In true RPG fashion it takes a while for the Pigmask's schemes to be unveiled, but there's no shortage of dungeons and combat to keep things going while the plot comes to a boil.

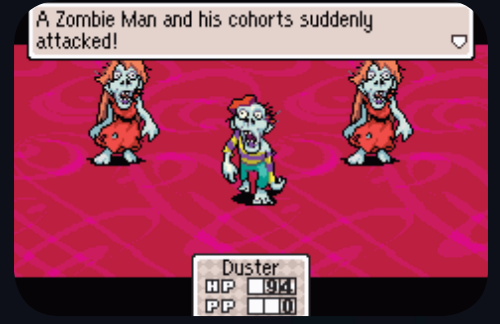
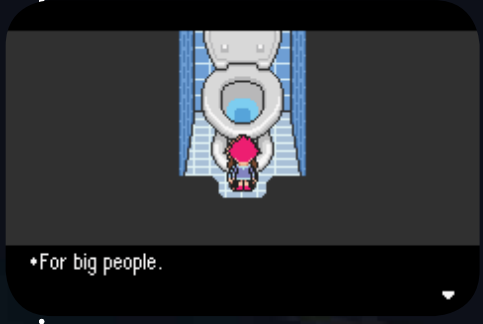
Battle is fairly basic, but in a simple rather than simplistic fashion. At the start of each round of combat you choose the commands for each playable character in the party, and the order of the actions is determined mostly by the speed statistic. Each character has a set of unique abilities, some determined by Psychic Points (PP) and others being tool or skill based. A standard attack is usually the most effective, especially when using the music beat system. It's possible to land multiple hits in a single attack by pressing the A button in time with the monster's musical theme, although figuring out the beat takes a good ear and steady rhythm. The combat is fast-paced and rarely dull, but what makes the *MOTHER* series such a standout is its story.

For example, the main character Lucas (who English gamers will recognize from *Smash Bros Brawl*) befriends a mystical being who claims to be ageless and genderless, but who dresses and talks like a 45-year-old drag queen. When she (he?) is suddenly confronted with her own impending death, she quietly accepts her fate and offers Lucas an encouraging speech. She is then abruptly carried away by the wind like a piece of paper.

This wonderfully bizarre caliber of writing is a rule with few exceptions. The glassy-eyed NPC, a staple of literally every RPG in existence, is nowhere to be found, with most characters having distinct names, personalities, and sprites. Some of them even have their own background stories that you'll never discover if you don't take time to explore the game. *MOTHER 3*'s "Fan Translation" team stumbled across dozens of such secrets during the two years they spent hacking the game. For example, there's a newspaper sitting in a junk-filled, dilapidated house which many players understandably neglect to read. In spite of its insignificance, though, the newspaper's headline changes after every small event in the game.

MOTHER 3 is filled with little touches like this that bring its world to life. The excellent story, likable characters, zippy combat, and vibrant world combine in a perfect example of RPG goodness. A Nintendo translation would have been nice but the patch is finally available, so now there's no reason to miss what should have been a true classic entry in the GBA's library.

Everyone approaches Mr. Crab for his wisdom. It gets a bit annoying sometimes, but he feels it's worth it.



I would never have guessed.

No, not his cohorts!

Forget Japan, this is European and fan-translated gaming. The English stuff you've never heard about.

The Games America Forgot.

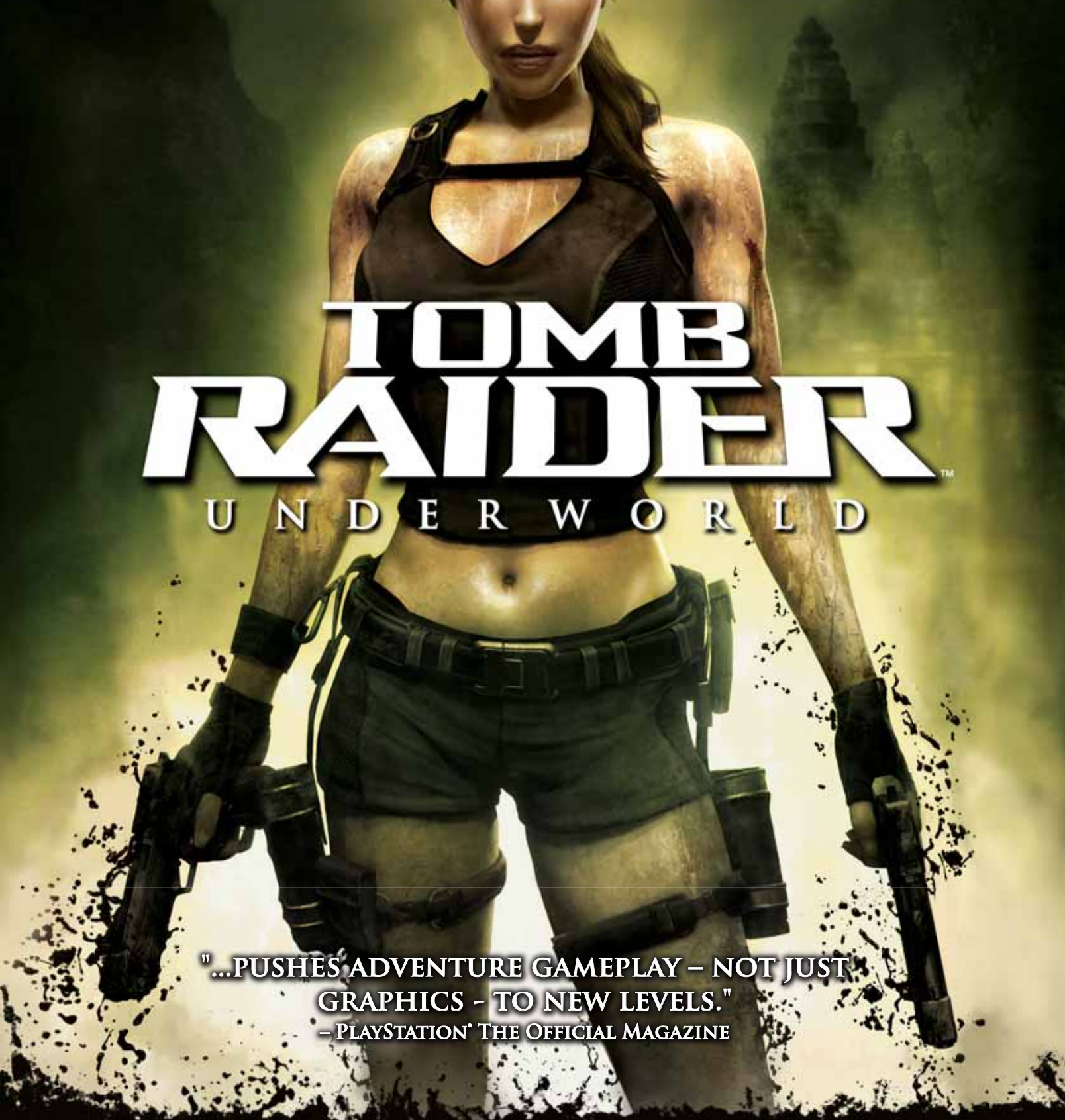
Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: HAL Laboratory • Genre: RPG • Category: Modern Bizarro • # Players: 1 • Rating: CERO A

Mother 3 (Earthbound 2)

by reid young

TOMB RAIDER

UNDERWORLD



"...PUSHES ADVENTURE GAMEPLAY – NOT JUST GRAPHICS – TO NEW LEVELS."
– PLAYSTATION THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



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WBIE LOGO, WB SHIELD:™ & ® Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (S08)

RAMBO



The 80s was the time of the 'beefcake macho soldier' movie genre that was defined by movies featuring people like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris and of course, Sylvester Stallone in Rambo.

While the 80s are long gone the Rambo legacy continues to chug along today, first with a movie released earlier this year and now with the release of a new arcade light-gun title by Sega, also called *Rambo*. And as you would expect, *Rambo* features all of the carnage and rage that you could want.

To tie everything together, Sega's *Rambo* uses actual movie clips from the series at certain parts in gameplay as it documents Rambo's one man war and the difficulty in dealing with the pain that he suffered through war and its aftermath. The game starts with *First Blood* and ends with *Rambo 3*, which is strange considering that the newest film came out well in advance of the release of this game. There are two versions of the game, where gameplay feels slightly different due to differences in the guns. The 26" LCD version uses the same guns found on *House of the Dead 4* and the 62" DLP version uses the same guns found on *Ghost Squad*. The deluxe version fits better into the *Rambo* mold because of this, as the guns are larger and 'manlier' than the standard version, and also include force feedback.

While the object of the game is nothing new: shoot them before they shoot you, and doing so rewards the player for both accuracy and timing. When enemies appear on



the screen, a timer will also appear near their heads to show you when they are taking aim. You need to take them down quickly to avoid taking damage. On some occasions you even get to use the infamous crossbow with the explosive-tip arrows, but using it requires pinpoint accuracy and timing as you only get one shot to get it right when a small red targeting diamond appears on the screen. This targeting systems also shows up for a few non-crossbow situations, such as when Rambo wrestles with another soldier.

One other game feature is the 'Rage Gauge'. As you shoot down enemies the gauge fills, and when full you hit a button on the gun to activate your Rage. Rambo belts out his war cry, and you become temporarily invincible and armed with infinite ammo. This plays straight into the *Rambo* 'god mode' cliché and it's so much fun that you might accidentally yell out the war cry yourself.

The graphics are decent for the game, as they are powered by Sega's PC-based Lindbergh hardware, but it doesn't live up to the already three-year-old *House of the Dead 4* that runs on the same hardware. The sound and gameplay make up for it though as it's a real blast to play when the volume is turned up. This game is already starting to trickle into arcades in the US and Europe, so keep an eye out for it or ask your local operator to pick it up if they don't have it.

By Adam Pratt of ArcadeHeroes.com

Score: 4.5 of 5



Publisher : Sega • Developer : Sega
Genre : Light-gun • Category: Kill 'em all!
Players: 1-2 • Release Date: 10/2008



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