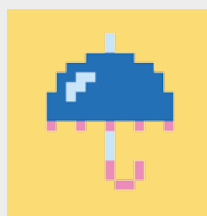
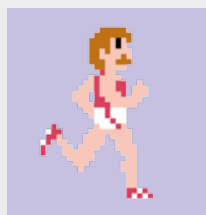
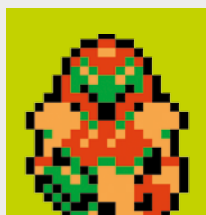
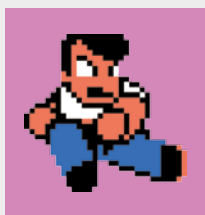
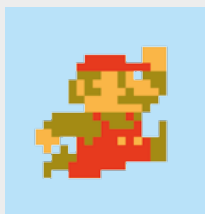
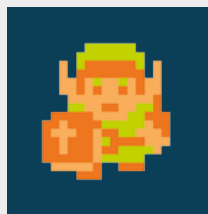
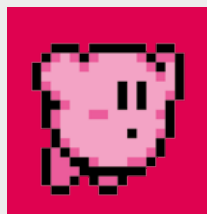
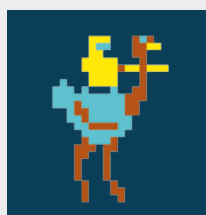
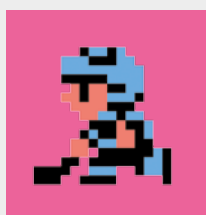
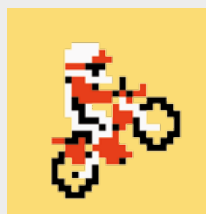
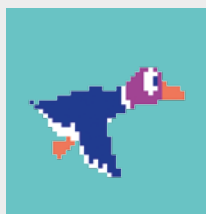
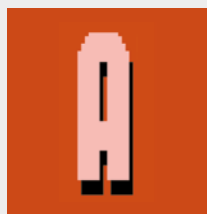

BITMAP BOOKS PRESENTS



The unofficial
NES/Famicom:
a visual compendium



The unofficial NES/Famicom: a visual compendium

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With the videogame industry in disarray, Nintendo took a huge gamble when it launched its Family Computer back in July of 1983. But by the time it finally ceased production, two decades later, it had sold nearly 62 million units and reshaped the entire video gaming landscape – not only in cementing Nintendo as one of the world’s premier game developers, but in raising standards in gaming across the board: visually, creatively and qualitatively.

Not only that but how many lives has its little 8-bit console changed? Youngsters who were inspired to become programmers and artists, writers and moviemakers – or simply to get out and explore the world, as they had done in the forests and caverns of Hyrule...

Designed purely as a games machine, the NES/Famicom enabled developers of the day to bring their visions to life, producing an incredibly diverse library of different genres (there are more than 880 games in its library!). This book is intended as a celebration of the machine, the many wonderful (and sometimes bizarre) games that it hosted, and the creativity and ingenuity of the developers who pushed the limits of what could be achieved. Imaginative use of colour, clever programming tricks and even additional cartridge processors enabled the 8-bit system to punch above its weight, leading to a wealth of games that, even today, can still amaze, amuse and frustrate in equal measure!

We hope that you’ll reminisce over games last played in your teens, be reminded of classic titles that gave rise to much-loved franchises, and discover brand new challenges you never knew existed.

Bitmap Books, 2016

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Foreword by Kevin Bayliss

Pixels. They're fantastic. Over the years we've seen this unique form of media shrink in size, grow in colour, and form iconic shapes in our minds that we'll always remember fondly.

Ever since being chased around a maze on my ZX81 by a blocky looking dinosaur, I've been hooked. There were no roaring sound effects and no blood-red particles to enhance the experience but I didn't care at the time, because it looked like a T. rex to me. I think it was probably then that I really fell in love with computer graphics in video games.

After spending a few years 'playing' with pixels on my brother's Spectrum, my Acorn Electron and beloved Commodore 64, I found myself sharing a graphics studio at Rare Ltd. with Tim 'The God of Pixels' Stamper. He was to be my mentor for the following years creating graphics for the Nintendo Entertainment System, and it was a very exciting time for me to be working in the industry. I was now a 'professional' and at last I was living the dream!

Compared with my previous hardware, the NES was a breeze to work with. Admittedly I had a great teacher to show me the ropes, but it had a great colour palette and good resolution for creating both character and background graphics. This gave me a great head start in production despite having no previous experience with the system, and it wasn't long before I'd picked up the process fairly easily.

To produce NES graphics, my drawings would be laid out beneath transparent grid paper, which I'd then trace with felt tip pens to create 8x8 pixel squares. The 'sprites' could contain only three colours, but extra layers could be applied if I needed them by adding an additional palette. Tim taught me this 'hands on' approach which is so different to how we create graphics today, and even how we'd create them for the SNES. Sure, using pixel editors and fancy 3D software is a much quicker way to do things, but drawing my characters directly onto paper first felt like a much more organic approach and was far more involving than using any editor.

Before my interview at Rare I hadn't even heard of the NES and after seeing it for the first time I thought how ugly it looked compared to my lovely home computers with keyboards. Still, I had no idea just how much its introduction would change my life, and after more than five years of 'playing with pixels' in this way I formed a powerful bond with that monochromatic slab of plastic that used to sit on my desk. Though it may look bland on the outside, beneath the grey plastic lies a beautiful machine. I've a lot of respect for the NES and like so many of us who owned or still own one, I'll always look back at mine with a smile.

Enjoy the book!

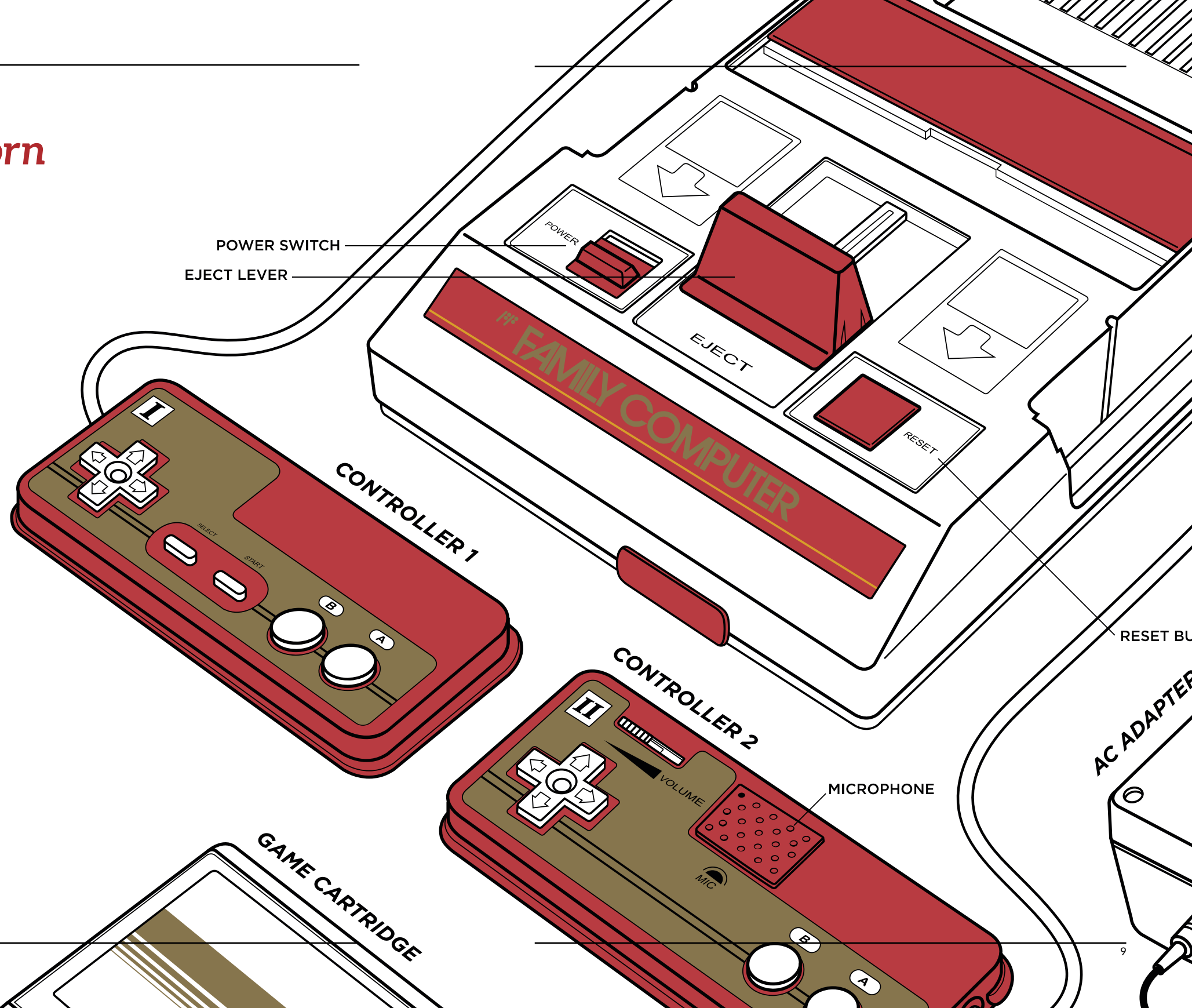
*Kevin Bayliss, graphic artist
October 2016*

An icon is born

There's a beautifully precise sense of balance to the fact that Nintendo's Famicom hit Japanese store shelves in the same year that the videogame market came crashing down in North America.

1983 saw retailers in the US desperately slashing the prices of their videogame stock while Atari - whose questionable business practices had been instrumental in driving the industry to this ruinous point - even went as far as to bury unsold games in the New Mexico desert. While eulogies for the home interactive entertainment business were being uttered in one part of the world, over in Japan Nintendo was masterminding a resurrection that would see the industry expand to previously unseen heights.

The Famicom was the next logical step for Nintendo after years of attempting to crack the lucrative arcade market. It followed neatly on from the company's previous home system - 1977's Color TV-Game - and the groundbreaking LCD-based Game and Watch range of handhelds, the latter of which would pioneer the Directional Pad or D-Pad. Codenamed 'GameCom', the system was originally envisaged as a powerful 16-bit home computer not entirely dissimilar to the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga which would arrive soon after, complete with keyboard and floppy drive. However, Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi rejected this plan as he felt that such a setup, while highly



Famicom schematic by Adam Rufino / 2016

versatile, would confuse consumers who possessed little technical knowledge. Ultimately it was decided that Nintendo's new home console would be 8-bit and focus on gaming first and foremost.

Designed by Masayuki Uemura, the diminutive Famicom - short for 'Family Computer' - launched alongside a port of Nintendo's smash-hit arcade game Donkey Kong, as well as Donkey Kong Jr. and Popeye. Small in size and boasting pads that were hard-wired into the console itself, the Famicom showcased an aesthetic charm that made it stand out from contemporary systems like the Atari 2600 and Intellivision. It also came with some unique, exclusive features, including a microphone in one of the controllers which enabled players to add their voice to the in-game sound and an eject button for removing cartridges. The famous white-and-red

casing came at the behest of Yamauchi after he spotted a billboard advertisement utilising the eye-catching colour scheme.

Early sales of the Famicom were sluggish, and the discovery of a production fault forced Yamauchi to issue a full recall of all systems. This disappointing start might have finished off any other company, but the Famicom overcame these initial teething troubles to become Japan's number one games console by the end of the following year. By the time RPGs like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest arrived, the system was near ubiquitous in its homeland, dominating a market Nintendo had almost single-handedly created itself.

By 1985 the system had sold 2.5 million units in Japan, and the next logical step was to bring the machine to North America. Following collapsed talks with

Atari about licensing the system Nintendo decided to go it alone and rebranded the Famicom as the 'Advanced Entertainment System' - later revised to 'Nintendo Entertainment System'. Like the Famicom it was initially conceived as a computer-style device complete with keyboard and tape deck, but would eventually morph into the boxy, toaster-style product we know and love today.

For American retailers, the disastrous crash of '83 remained a very raw memory, and many were intensely sceptical about Nintendo's chances; the company's Japanese origins only exacerbated the situation. Nintendo initially took steps to seemingly distance itself from the traditional notion of a home videogames system by introducing peripherals such as R.O.B. (Robotic Operating Buddy) and the Zapper light gun.

These gave the NES an appealing edge over the consoles that had come before, while the official terminology employed by Nintendo differed from that of previous console makers, such as Atari and Coleco. This was an 'Entertainment System' that played 'Game Paks' via its 'Control Deck'. Even the revised design - created by in-house product designer Lance Barr - was aimed at making the system look like a piece of cutting-edge technology rather than a child's toy - which is ironic, as Nintendo would focus its attention on selling the NES primarily to kids in the US, whereas in Japan the Famicom appealed to all ages.

A test launch in late 1985 delivered mixed results, with some retailers claiming the NES was a flop while others cited an impressive public reaction to the device. The official 1986 release was more positive as Nintendo's incredible talent

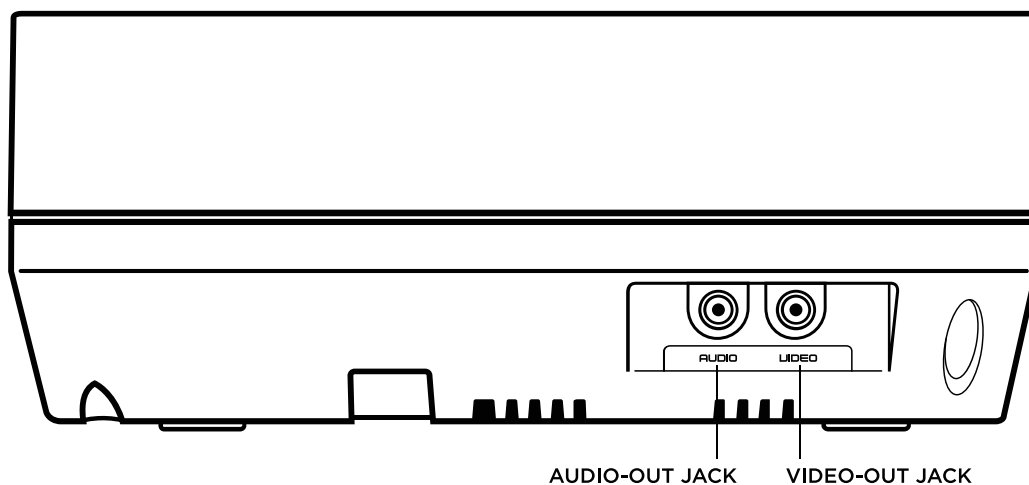
for creating winning games ensured that anyone who took the chance and tried the NES in-store would come away thoroughly impressed. The machine launched alongside an impressive selection of titles, with 10-Yard Fight, Baseball, Clu Clu Land, Duck Hunt, Golf, Excitebike, Gyromite, Hogan's Alley, Ice Climber, Kung Fu, Pinball, Soccer, Stack-Up, Tennis, Wild Gunman, Wrecking Crew and Super Mario Bros. all on store shelves in the early months of '86.

Nintendo was careful to avoid the problems Atari had fallen foul of earlier in the decade and placed an emphasis on quality over quantity when it came to software. Its in-house development teams - spearheaded by the likes of Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi - put out classic after classic, establishing a standard which other companies would try to emulate. Titles like Metroid,

“ The Famicom showcased an aesthetic charm that made it stand out from contemporary systems like the Atari 2600. ”

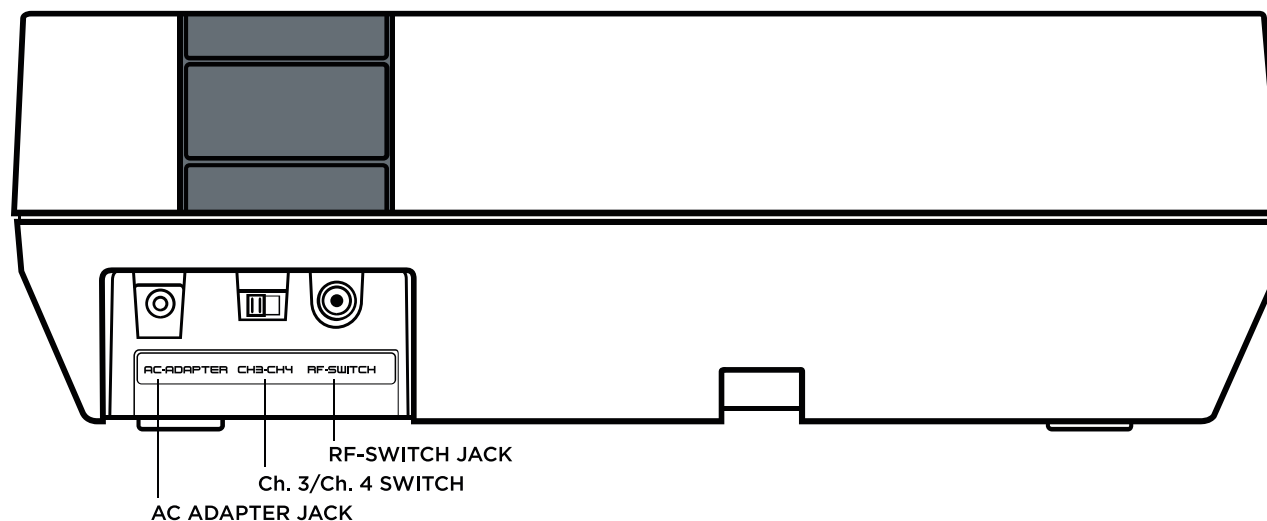
The Legend of Zelda and Kid Icarus would not only cement the company's reputation as a first-class purveyor of video gaming excellence, but would also establish franchises that continue to generate revenue for the company 30 years later.

SIDE VIEW



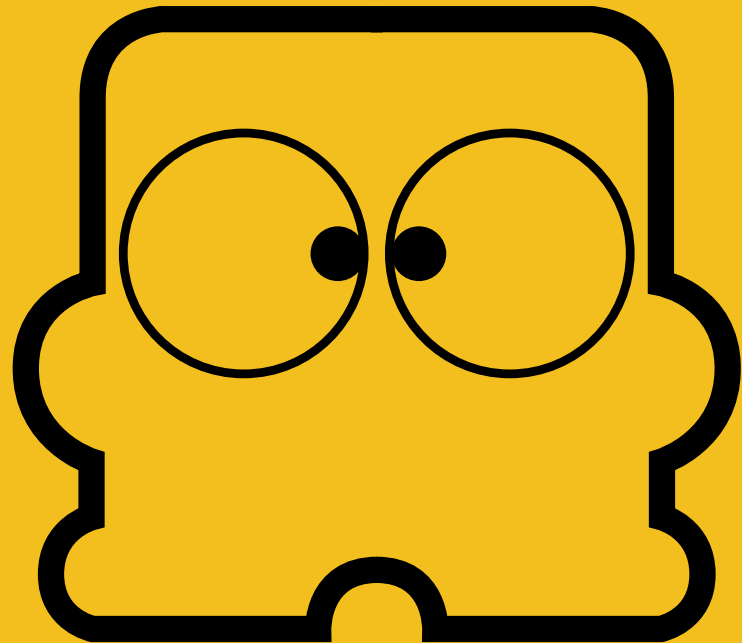
NES schematic by Adam Rufino / 2016

REAR VIEW



FAMILY COMPUTER DISK SYSTEM

ファミリーコンピュータ ディスクシステム



Interestingly, some of these games – Zelda and Metroid being two examples – actually began life in Japan on the Famicom Disk System, a device which slotted underneath the Famicom console and played software stored on magnetic media which could be wiped and re-written at special kiosks in Japanese stores.

Despite this innovative approach it was not the commercial success that Nintendo had hoped for and a Western release was never forthcoming. As a result, Zelda and Metroid were re-coded and released outside of Japan on standard cartridges. The former would break new ground by including a battery in the cart to save the player's progress in-between sessions, a system that became widely adopted during the '90s.

The dominance of the Famicom in Japan – where it claimed around 85 per cent of the games market – would be mirrored in North America. Japanese rival Sega – famous by this point for its excellent coin-op pedigree – released its 8-bit Master System to compete with the NES but struggled to obtain third-party support as Nintendo had effectively tied the hands of publishers, warning them against releasing their games on other systems.

While this nefarious practice was definitely unfair, it all formed part of Nintendo's overarching plan to avoid a repeat of the '83 crash by exerting total control over the market. Fearful that a flood of low-quality games would erode consumer confidence in the NES, Nintendo decreed that publishers would only be permitted to release a certain number of games each year, forcing some to establish spin-off companies in an effort to release more software and make more cash. At one point, Nintendo even insisted that North American retailers use its own distribution network rather than take delivery of stock at their own warehouses.

Also of note was Nintendo's famous 'Seal of Quality', a golden badge which was printed on packaging, assuring consumers that this was a product of the highest possible standard. This approach would be imitated by many other manufacturers and was another example of Nintendo trying to assuage fears that the console market would ever succumb to another industry implosion. While Atari had been slapdash during that period, Nintendo's influence was to be felt everywhere, and the incredible commercial results ensured that publishers and

“ The dominance of the Famicom in Japan – where it claimed around 85% of the games market – would be mirrored in North America. ”

retailers had little reason to complain – and even less reason to support rivals such as Sega and NEC, both of whom wanted to carve up a portion of the console market with their own platforms.

With the promise of bumper profits, third-party publishers and developers flocked to the NES. Konami bolstered its arcade reputation by releasing console titles such as Castlevania, Life Force, Parodius and Metal Gear, while Capcom had Mega Man, Duck Tales and Bionic Commando. Practically every videogame company of note supported the NES at some juncture, including Irem, Namco, Squaresoft, Taito, Jaleco, Sunsoft, Acclaim, Hudson Soft, Data East, Sammy, Bandai and Enix. All of these firms brought their most famous properties to the console in the

hope of tempting the millions of NES and Famicom owners to part with their cash, and many were able to significantly expand their business operations thanks to the profits generated on the 8-bit platform.

Super Mario Bros. 3 arguably represented the commercial zenith of Nintendo's hardware. Released in 1988 in Japan, its North American debut would be teased at the dramatic conclusion of the 1989 Hollywood movie *The Wizard*, a film about a child with emotional problems who proves to be something of an expert with a joystick. While the movie – which was packed with Nintendo games and showcased the infamous Power Glove accessory – was only a moderate box-office success and duly savaged by critics, it created an incredible level of awareness for the third Super Mario outing which, when it finally arrived in February 1990, was acclaimed by many media outlets as the best game ever made, going on to sell a staggering 18 million copies. Mario had become one of the most recognisable faces on the planet, ranking alongside Disney's Mickey Mouse and even getting his own cartoon on American television.

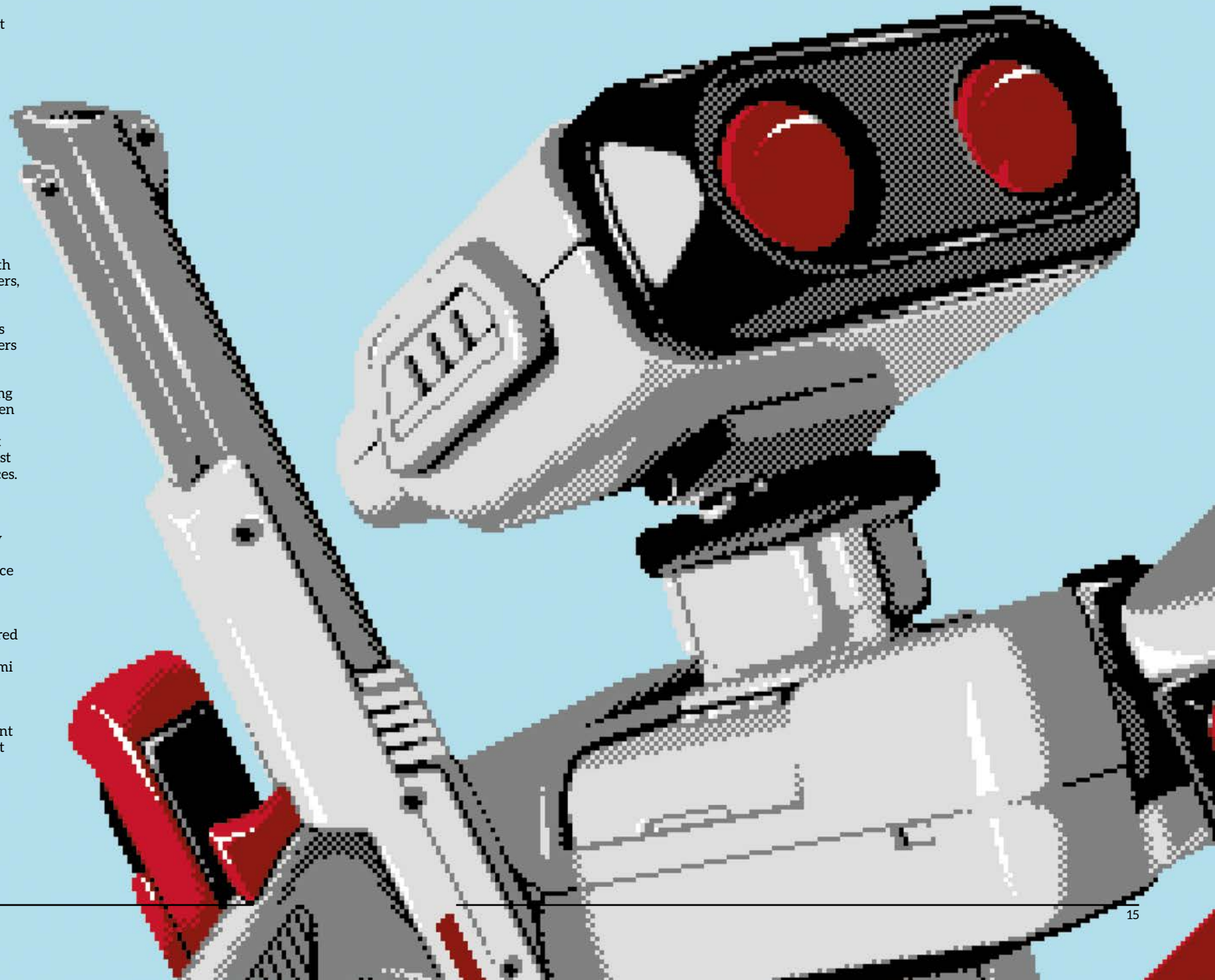
Despite the adulation, it was clear that the aging NES was fast approaching its sell-by date, especially as new and more powerful challengers – such as the NEC PC Engine (1987) and Sega Mega Drive (1988) – had arrived on the scene and were slowly but surely tempting players away with their superior visuals and sound. Of course, Nintendo's R&D teams hadn't been idle during the latter part of the decade and the 16-bit Super Famicom would hit Japanese store shelves in 1990, promptly selling 300,000 units within the


space of a few hours. It was christened the Super Nintendo in North America and received a Lance Barr redesign, just like the Famicom had done when it made the leap over the Pacific.

Nintendo still saw the value of the NES and knew that many of its customers would hold off for a few years before upgrading, so a redesigned unit was released in North America and Japan in 1993. Dubbed 'the top-loader' by Americans due to the fact that it did away with the spring-loaded 'zero insertion force' cartridge slot, the NES-101 also came with new, more ergonomic controllers, which aped the curved design of the SNES pads. However, by this stage regular software was beginning to dry up as developers shifted their attention to the more powerful 16-bit console; the NES glory days were coming to an end and the baton had been handed over to its successor, which enjoyed the same robust software support and hosted just as many memorable experiences.

The NES sold over 60 million units worldwide – a figure that would later be eclipsed by the Wii – but it's arguably the company's most important piece of videogame hardware. Not only did it establish Nintendo as one of the world's biggest entertainment brands, it restored faith in a battered industry, turned third parties like Konami and Capcom into publishing giants and gave birth to some of the most famous franchises in the interactive entertainment arena. Its impact simply cannot be overstated; without the NES, the world of console gaming would be practically unrecognisable today.

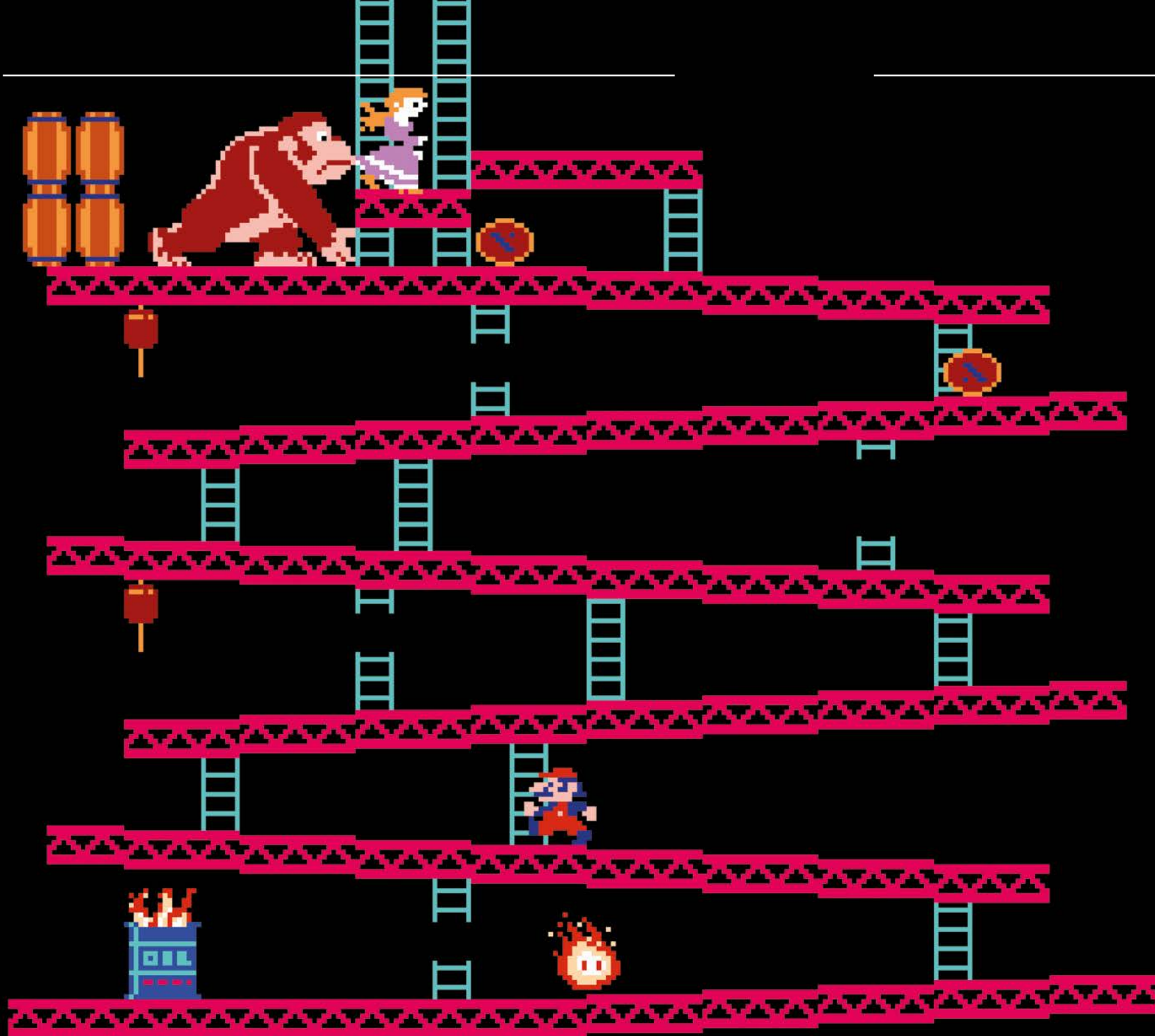
'Man was not meant to video alone' by Craig Stevenson / 2016





“At the time, Atari was having great success with home games in America and we started wondering if this would be something we could do in Japan as well.”

*Masayuki Uemura,
software engineer and designer*



Donkey Kong ドンキーコング

"I am the current Donkey Kong arcade world record holder. It was fun to watch the King of Kong documentary, but not many people can say they've lived it - both the ups and the downs! My opponent and I have traded the world record four times, and ushered in a post-'Billy vs. Steve' era of competition. I've found no score-based game with a higher learning curve, which is truly remarkable given how easy it is to understand the game's basic rules.

Donkey Kong on the NES is interesting because it's a complete rewrite of the arcade version, which also has a reputation for its quirks. For example, straight jumping over a barrel while standing on top of a ladder is supposed to only award 100 points, but it can award over 1,000 due to an issue with the game engine. It's also possible to warp directly to the top of any barrel screen, skipping the stage entirely. The 'pie factory' stage is also missing in this version, though there's evidence to suggest it was developed and excluded from the game.

There's one thing Nintendo did accidentally leave in though: the famous and elusive kill screen still exists. If you're skilled enough to clear 113 levels, the game will end due to running out of memory. Fewer than five players have ever made it that far!"

Wes Copeland

Platform
Famicom

Released
1983

Genre
Arcade

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

Popeye ポパイ

“Oh, Popeye! Mario may well owe his life to our sailor friend, for had Nintendo been able to license the Popeye characters from King Features Syndicate as originally planned, the iconic Italian may never have been conceived to debut in what became the arcade classic Donkey Kong. Imagine!

Nintendo was later granted the license for this three-scene arcade platform game in which the familiar love triangle continues. Popeye must come to Olive Oyl's rescue by collecting gracefully falling tokens of loving hearts, musical notes and cries for H-E-L-P before they sink in the water below, all the while avoiding Brutus' attacks... save for an opportune time to consume a can of spinach and knock the bully senseless! Bernard the vulture and skull-throwing Sea Hags skulls also obstruct Popeye, while Wimpy helps to launch him skyward to rescue Swee'Pea for an added bonus.

The NES version is fun and engaging, featuring two difficulty settings in both the single and alternating two-player modes, and largely plays true to the arcade game (specifically, Revision F). Its variances offer a fresh challenge, most notable being that Brutus is generally more passive and less predictable in tracking and following Popeye. His attacks are also more random, quick and aggressive, while Olive's tokens fall faster to the water and in different patterns.”

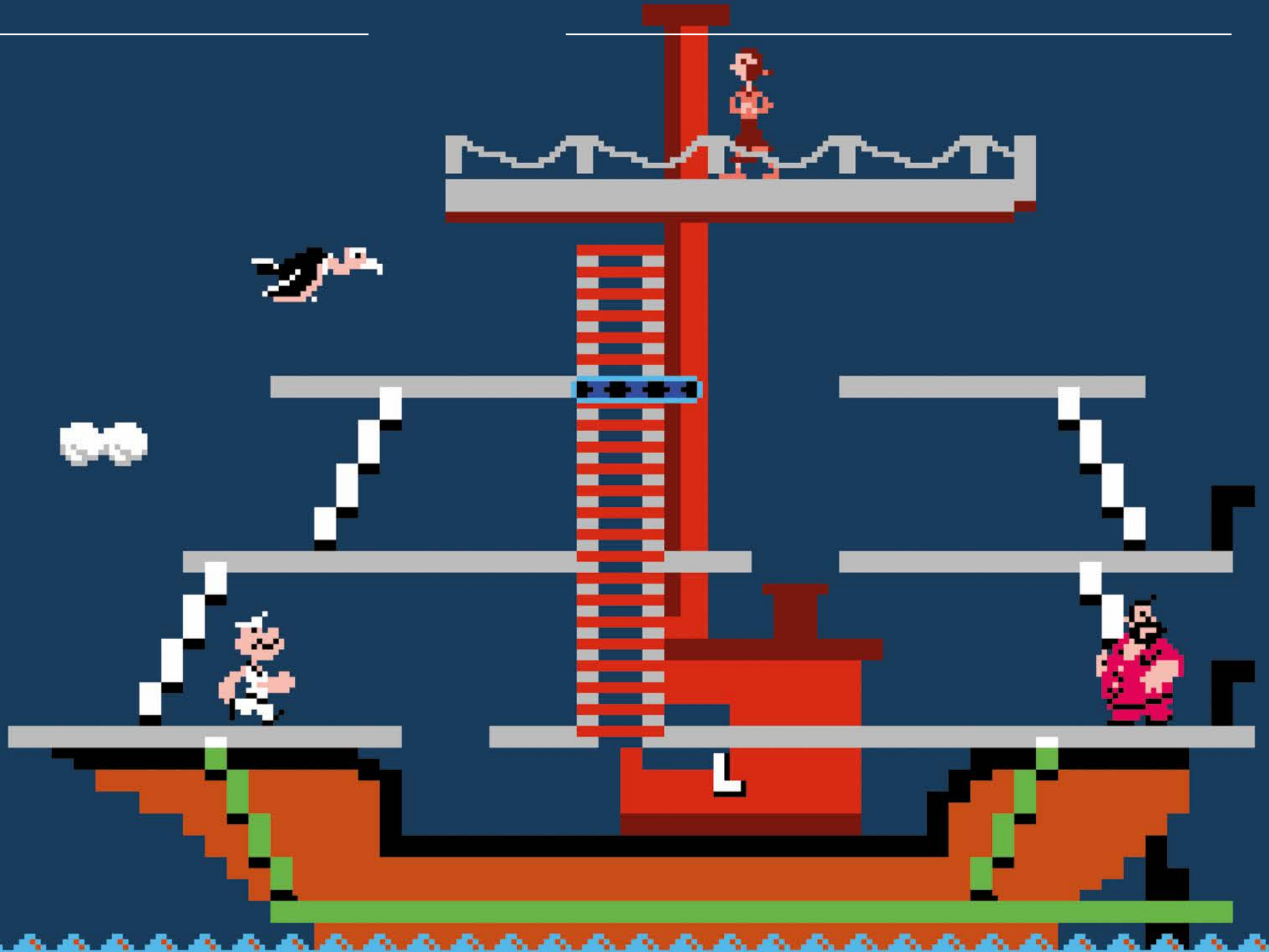
Perry Rodgers

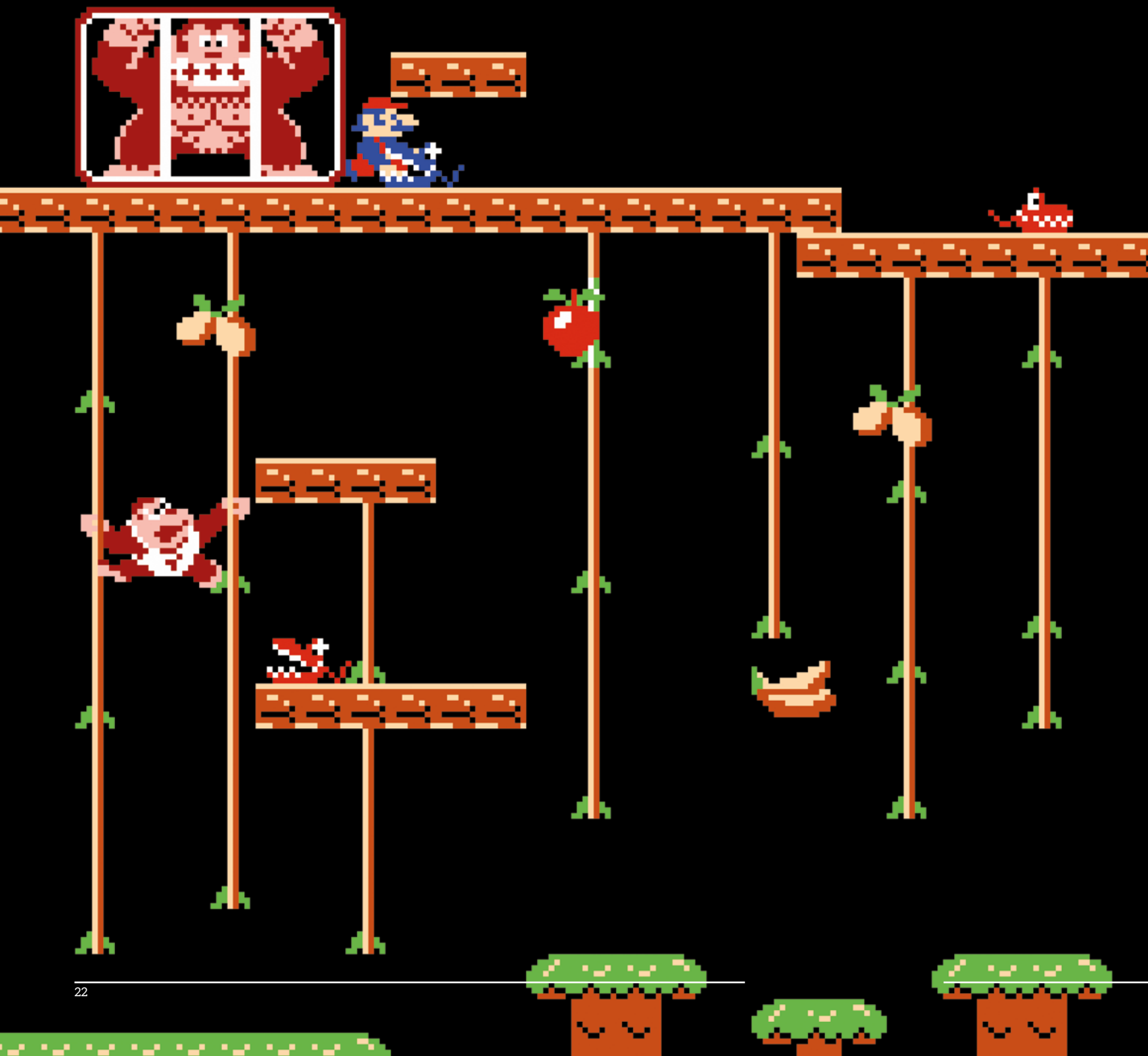
Platform
Famicom

Released
1983

Genre
Arcade

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





Donkey Kong Jr. ドンキーコングJR

The sequel to Nintendo's coin-op classic turns the premise on its head, with Donkey Kong's son out to rescue his father who's being held by Mario. So instead of the sloping ramps, ladders and barrel-jumping of the original, we get a collection of vines, chains and platforms to show off Junior's climbing prowess.

There's a constant threat from snapping creatures and egg-laying birds, where the slightest touch spells instant death. But where Mario could use a hammer to defeat his enemies (albeit briefly), poor Junior has to rely on little more than his reflexes and good timing, in order to drop fruit on his enemies' heads.

Like its inspiration, Donkey Kong Jr.'s roots are firmly embedded in the arcade, where games are designed to rid you of loose change. As such it's a tricky, often infuriating challenge, where pixel-perfect jumps need to be combined with precision timing, and where progress is more a test of memory and patience. With just four levels that repeat and no level select, this really is one for the hardened high-score chasers.

Donkey Kong Jr. is both a charming slice of '80s video gaming nostalgia and also a stark reminder of how far we've come since the golden age of the arcades.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1983

Genre
Arcade

**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo

Devil World デビルワールド

There's no mistaking the inspiration for this maze game designed - rather surprisingly - by Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka: it's basically Pac-Man with demonic overtones. Tamagon, a small green dragon, launches an assault on the eponymous Devil World armed only with the power of the Cross. Touching Crosses gives him the ability to shoot fireballs, which are used to defeat demons, and collect the dots that litter the level. Once all the dots have been gathered, Tamagon has to retrieve four Bibles and return them to a central seal. A small bonus collect 'em up stage then appears before moving on to the next, trickier maze.

What makes this blatant Pac-Man rip-off unusual is the scrolling map that threatens to squash your character if he's caught near the edges of the screen. That plus the bizarre subject matter - Devil World is the only Miyamoto game not released in the US, due to Nintendo of America's strict guidelines on religious iconography.

If you're a fan of maze games and fancy something different, Devil World delivers enough twists to be worthy of a play, but it's something of an oddity for Nintendo, and a curious blip on Miyamoto's otherwise original and innovative career.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1984

Genre
Maze

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





Originally established as a playing card manufacturer back in 1889, Nintendo's history stretches way back beyond the realms of video gaming. Founder Fusajiro Yamauchi couldn't possibly have predicted that the company he set up in Kyoto would come to dominate the world of interactive entertainment, but he sowed the seeds that would eventually lead to the name 'Nintendo' being famous around the globe.

Given that video gaming has only been a form of entertainment for the past four or so decades and Nintendo is over a hundred years old, it's unsurprising to

learn that the company tried its hand at a wide range of different businesses before settling on the one which granted it international fame. For the first 50 years of the company's life it focused almost exclusively on Japanese playing cards, or 'Hanafuda'. The rise of Hiroshi Yamauchi - Fusajiro's grandson - to company president in 1949 marked a turning point for the firm.

Tenacious and driven to succeed, the young Yamauchi was painfully aware that playing cards would never turn Nintendo into the kind of commercial giant he wanted it to be under his rule, despite signing lucrative deals

with the likes of Disney, allowing Nintendo to use characters such as Mickey Mouse on its products. The partnership resulted in a surge in sales, but Yamauchi knew he needed to cast the net wider to truly secure the company's fortune. During the 1960s Nintendo experimented with other ventures, including a taxi service, food sales and even a chain of 'love hotels', where amorous couples could check-in for a short-term stay. All of these businesses failed to make a lasting impact, but one area where Nintendo did find success was toy making.

The secret to the firm's triumph during this period was Gunpei Yokoi, who was hired in 1965 as a lowly maintenance engineer but would dream up fun inventions to pass the time. One such contraption was an extendable arm, which Yokoi had created for his own personal amusement. Yamauchi spotted the potential in this device and asked Yokoi to develop it into a proper product that could be sold at retail.

The 'Ultra Hand' would shift over a million units in Japan and kick-started the next phase in the company's history. A natural inventor, Yokoi possessed a seemingly endless number of ideas for toys and gadgets, including love testers, light guns and pocket-sized logic puzzles. He was intrigued by the new wave of videogames that began to appear in the 1970s, and when Nintendo secured the rights to distribute the Magnavox Odyssey console in 1974, it marked a significant turning point for the firm, even if commercial success wasn't instantly forthcoming.

Nintendo would branch out into arcade games with EVR Race in 1975, and produced its own domestic hardware in the form of the Color TV Game 6 and Color TV Game 15, both released in 1977. These sold well, but their limited scope meant they were quickly outmatched by consoles like the Atari VCS, which also arrived on the market in 1977, and offered interchangeable game cartridges.

To make matters worse, Nintendo's coin-op business was struggling. Yamauchi knew that Nintendo had to crack North America to become a success, but titles that found favour in Japan failed to make any kind of impact stateside. Radar Scope - the latest game to flop in the US - had left Nintendo with a large volume of unsold cabinets, and Yamauchi tasked rookie developer Shigeru Miyamoto with making use of them with a brand-new game. Working with Yokoi, Miyamoto initially planned to use characters from the famous Popeye cartoon, but when Nintendo's attempt to secure the licence failed, he was forced to dream up a new cast. The result was Donkey Kong, which was released in 1981 and became Nintendo's first bona fide smash-hit in the video game arena.

Donkey Kong became as big as Namco's Pac-Man and Taito's Space Invaders, and this gave Nintendo the revenue to expand its business. Its Game and Watch line of LCD handhelds - launched in 1980 after Yokoi was inspired by the sight of a Japanese businessman absent-mindedly playing with his pocket calculator on the train to work one morning - began to gather pace, and the inevitable Donkey Kong version was a massive success. Nintendo's next move was in the domestic arena - a playing field it would come to totally dominate, despite a rather shaky start and the fact that the 1983 videogame crash had all but destroyed consumer interest in games consoles in North America.

“Donkey Kong became as big as Namco's Pac-Man and Taito's Space Invaders.”

The Famicom - short for 'Family Computer' - hit Japanese store shelves in the same year that the videogame market came crashing down in the US. Designed by Masayuki Uemura, the diminutive system launched alongside Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr. and Popeye. Early sales were sluggish, and the discovery of a production fault caused Yamauchi to issue a full recall of all systems. This disappointing start might have finished off any other company, but amazingly the Famicom overcame these initial teething troubles to become Japan's number one games console by the end of the following year.

With success in its homeland, the next logical step was to bring the machine to North America. Following collapsed talks with Atari about licensing the system, Nintendo decided to go it alone and rebranded the Famicom as Nintendo Entertainment System. American retailers were doubtful it would make any kind of commercial impact, but by 1986 it was clear that the public's appetite for home consoles was back for good.



While the massive commercial popularity of the NES – both in Japan and the West – would ensure a steady stream of notable third-party hits from the likes of Konami, Capcom, Squaresoft and Hudson Soft, it was arguably Nintendo's home-grown releases that gave the console real momentum. Sequels such as Super Mario Bros. 2 and Zelda II: The Adventure of Link would build on what had gone before, while the third Super Mario outing not only confirmed how massive the NES had become, it also cemented Nintendo's position as one of the leading lights in the global entertainment industry. It would eventually shift a staggering 17 million copies – an incredible achievement when you consider it was not bundled with the console at launch.

By the time the '90s rolled around, Nintendo had the right to feel bullish; it had conquered the Japanese and North American markets and practically become a byword for videogames all over the world. However, the NES was showing its age – it was seven years old in 1990 – and technologically superior challengers were already circling the iconic grey box, eager for the chance to topple a giant. NEC partnered with Hudson to launch the 8-bit PC Engine in 1987, while Sega would release its 16-bit Mega Drive in Japan the following year. Both of these machines would prove to be worthy adversaries for Nintendo, but ironically in different regions; the PC Engine outsold the Famicom in Japan at one point, but failed to make a genuine impression when it was released in North America as the

TurboGrafx-16. Sega's console enjoyed limited success in its homeland but overtook the NES in the US – where it was rechristened as the Sega Genesis – thanks to edgy marketing targeted at teens and the timely arrival of Sonic the Hedgehog, Mario's first serious rival.

Fresh blood was required, and Nintendo would release its own 16-bit system in 1990. The Super Famicom was in a different league technically when compared to its rivals and was supported by the usual raft of third party titles and superb first-party releases, many of which picked up where their NES predecessors left off. Launch title Super Mario World expanded on the template laid down by the third 8-bit outing, offering a massive non-linear world to explore with over seventy stages, while Super Metroid took the exploration aspect of the NES version and amplified it considerably. The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past was another example of Nintendo refining its core franchises; it is still regarded as one of the finest videogames of all time. As the 16-bit war rolled onwards it became clear that both consoles offered their own exclusive benefits, but the SNES showcased Nintendo at the top of its game and also gave third-parties a powerful, commercially successful platform on which they could showcase their considerable talents. It didn't reach quite the same level of market penetration as its forerunner, but the SNES is regarded by many to be one of the finest – if not the finest – consoles ever made.

Nintendo would follow the Super Nintendo with another cartridge-based console – the Nintendo 64 – at a time when the entire industry appeared to be embracing optical media. Home to some amazing titles, the N64 nonetheless struggled in the face of the new kid on the block – Sony's PlayStation – which attracted many of Nintendo's former third-party allies such as Namco, Capcom and Squaresoft. While Nintendo continued to dominate the portable market with its Game Boy line of handhelds, 2001's GameCube found itself in very much the same position as its forerunner; Sony's PlayStation 2 became even more successful than the first model, eventually shifting a stunning 155 million units – more than the NES and SNES combined. The GameCube could only muster 21 million units sold worldwide.

If it seemed that Nintendo's previously untouchable aura was fading, the next console war delivered an almost unbelievable twist that placed the Kyoto veteran back at the top of the pile. The Wii was sniggered at when it was announced thanks to its amusing name, reliance on outdated hardware and introduction of gimmicky motion controls, but the console would become Nintendo's most successful home system of all time, selling over 100 million units globally. Titles like Super Mario Galaxy, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and Metroid Prime 3: Corruption once again proved that Nintendo was more than capable of resurrecting its established brands and keeping them fresh

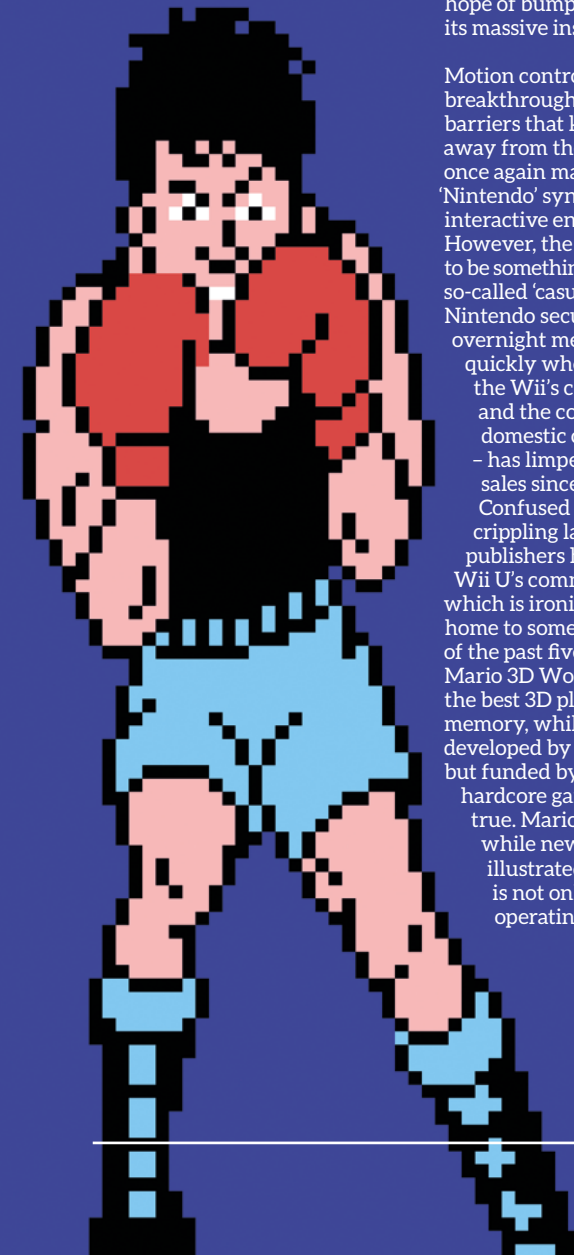
“ The Famicom overcame these initial teething troubles to become Japan's number one games console by the end of the following year. ”

in new and inventive ways, while third party developers flocked to the system in the hope of bumper profiles from its massive installed base.

Motion control was another breakthrough, as it removed the barriers that kept non-gamers away from the medium and once again made the name 'Nintendo' synonymous with interactive entertainment. However, the Wii was to prove to be something of a blip; the so-called 'casual' audience which Nintendo secured almost overnight melted away just as quickly when the novelty of the Wii's control wore off, and the company's current domestic console – the Wii U – has limped to just 12 million sales since its launch in 2012. Confused marketing and a crippling lack of support from publishers have limited the Wii U's commercial potential, which is ironic as the console is home to some of the best games of the past five years. Super Mario 3D World is arguably the best 3D platformer of recent memory, while Bayonetta 2 – developed by PlatinumGames but funded by Nintendo – is a hardcore gamer's dream come true. Mario Kart 8 is sublime, while new IP Splatoon has illustrated that Nintendo is not only comfortable operating in the realm

of online shooter, but that it is also prepared to allow its younger designers a free rein when it comes to creating fresh ideas.

At the time of writing, Nintendo is undergoing incredible change. The company is set to launch its next console – dubbed Nintendo NX – in 2017, and all evidence points to a machine which will unite the company's home and portable hardware markets, creating an all-in-one device which can be used in the home as a traditional system as well as on the road, like the classic Game Boy or more recent Nintendo DS and 3DS handhelds. Nintendo has also branched out into smartphone games – an event which would have seemed impossible not so long ago – and is looking to leverage its enviable stable of IP in order to forge new revenue streams. Nintendo's history is littered with ups and downs, and while the firm is unquestionably at a low point right now, one only has to look back at its lengthy and vibrant history to know that it is not a company you can ever write off.



“ It was arguably Nintendo's home-grown releases that gave the console real momentum. ”



Platform
Famicom
Released
1984
Genre
Platformer
Developer
Namco
Publisher
Nintendo

Mappy マッピー

“Who let the cats out! Those rascals are up to mischief and it’s up to mouse policeman Mappy to restore order by catching them as they run about the house, stashing stolen goods.

Faithful to the arcade original, you control our brave hero Mappy as he relentlessly runs, nightstick in hand, to defeat the cartoon criminal Mewkie Gang.

However, don’t touch these kitty culprits - instead lure them to the pulsating doors located in various locations in the mystery house. Hitting Mewkies with doors briefly knocks them out but also scores points as well.

Mappy moves from floor to floor using trampolines located in the corridors of the house, but he can only bounce on them twice without touching a floor or the trampoline breaks the third time causing the loss of a life.

During pursuit, Mappy has to recover the stolen items scattered throughout the screen for extra points, and the stage is cleared when all of the items have been recovered. As the game progresses, the house changes and continues to offer new challenges.

Completing stages awards a Bonus Round where balloons are collected and movement is measured and pattern-specific. Can you get a ‘Perfect’?

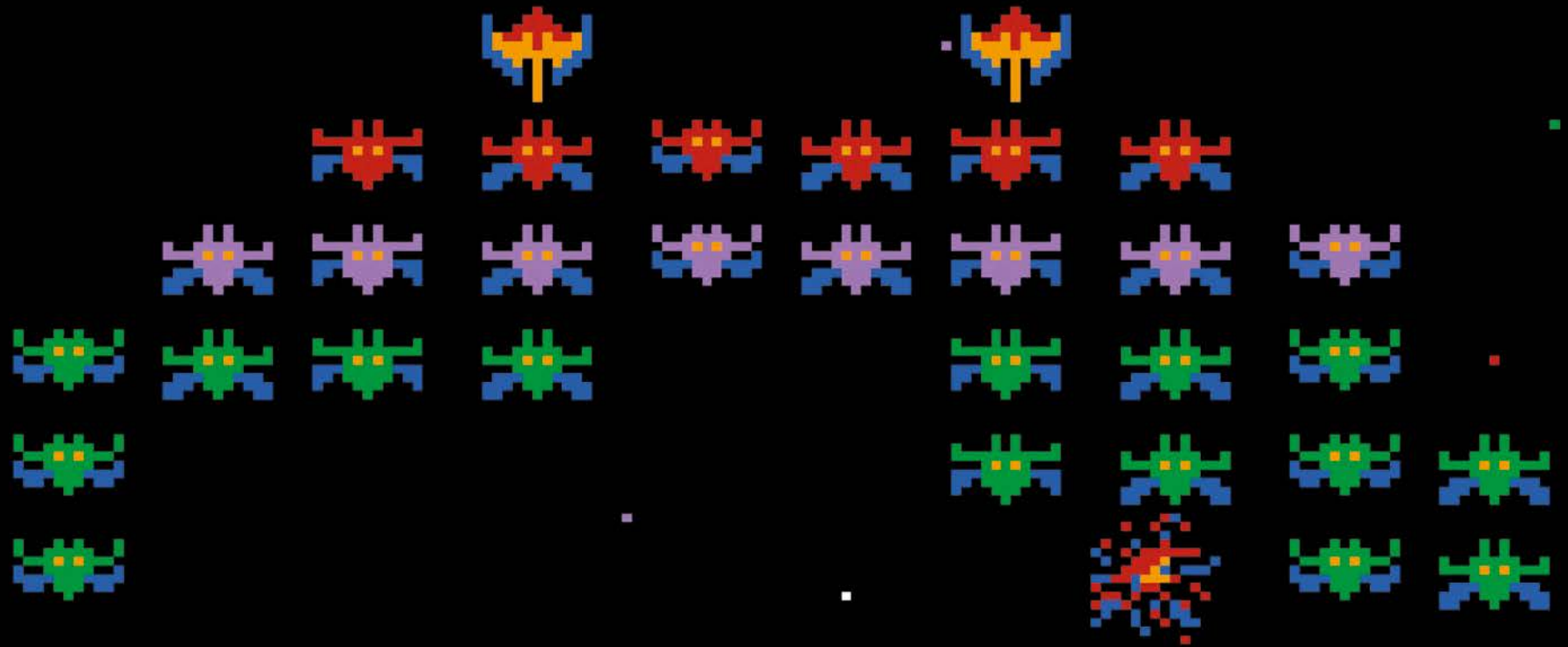
What are you waiting for? Get playing this addictive game now - or is it meow?”

David Siller

Galaxian ギャラクシアン

“When I was a university student I would play games like Galaxian in the arcades all the time between studying. To eventually end up working at Namco as a programmer after graduating was a dream come true for me! While at Namco, I remember there was someone by the name of Haruhisa Udagawa. He was a very good programmer; he went out and bought a Famicom and analysed the inside on his own. He made the very first game that Namco released on Famicom, a home conversion of Galaxian. He worked completely on his own and at that point he didn't receive any kind of technical information from Nintendo, whatsoever. Legend has it that some top executive at Namco took the game and went to Nintendo, and said: “This is the game we created. Can we sell it?” Unlike other developers, Namco didn't need any technical information from Nintendo, as they had, amazingly, pretty much worked everything out themselves. The Galaxian conversion was of such a high quality that Namco signed an agreement with Nintendo under very different terms and conditions compared to other companies!”

Professor Yoshihiro Kishimoto




Platform
Famicom

Released
1984

Genre
Shoot 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Namco





“Nintendo was looking for someone to create a BASIC interpreter for the Famicom, and Sharp knew we had the experience.”

Takashi Takebe, game producer and programmer

Family BASIC

Developed in conjunction with Hudson Soft and Sharp Corporation, and released in 1984, Family BASIC was an interesting add-on for the Famicom that enabled you to program your own games. One of the main draws was the ability to re-use many of the sprites from early Nintendo games such as Donkey Kong and Mario Bros. The cartridge (which required two AA batteries) came with a peripheral keyboard, user manual and a tape recorder to save your progress to cassette tape. Later versions of the cartridge even came pre-loaded with games made using the Family BASIC language.

"The relationship between Hudson and Nintendo began with the development of Family BASIC. First though, Hudson and Sharp developed a very close relationship because Hudson created the BASIC interpreter for Sharp's MZ-80K. Originally Sharp provided its own interpreter, Sharp BASIC, but it was somewhat slow. So Hudson designed a new BASIC that was very well-received. Sharp applied some of Hudson's ideas in its later lines of computers, such as the X1 and X68000.

Then in 1983 Nintendo released the Famicom. Sharp introduced Nintendo to Hudson and helped us establish a relationship with them. The direct catalyst was because Nintendo was looking for someone to create a BASIC interpreter for the Famicom, and Sharp knew we had the experience so they told Nintendo to talk to us. Thanks to this introduction Hudson did business with Nintendo and I created Family BASIC. I actually wrote Family BASIC using Sharp's X1 - although the CPU is different between the X1 and the Famicom, so I used a cross-assembler.

At the same time, Hudson told Nintendo that it wanted to make games for the Famicom. I believe that was right before the 'Famicom boom' began, before all the third parties started signing up. As I recall, Hudson was the first company besides Nintendo to develop games for the Famicom. Our first opportunity was with Family BASIC, and almost immediately after that we proposed Lode Runner and Nuts and Milk, and told Nintendo that we wanted to make these games for the Famicom. At that time, Nintendo had only released four or five cartridge games, such as Donkey Kong and Popeye. Our thinking was that the Famicom was an interesting machine, and if we created some games for it they would definitely sell. So we made our first two titles and they completely sold out. We later said we should have produced more copies!

The Famicom would go on to become a smash hit in Japan, but at the time, personal computer games were still dominant. Due to the relationship the companies forged in the early days - thanks to Family BASIC - Hudson was even able to acquire the licenses to Nintendo's Golf, Excitebike, and Ice Climber games, and port them to computers. Mario Bros. and Super Mario Bros. was part of this deal as well. But then Nintendo went on to create its gigantic empire, so they became more protective of their assets and stopped licensing them out."

Takashi Takebe

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Ice Climber

"Unlike its predecessors Mario Bros. and Balloon Fight, the simultaneous multiplayer of Ice Climber is intrinsically cooperative. Two skilled players working together can easily overpower most of the enemies, leaving only one truly treacherous foe: a very difficult and precise high-jump that must be expertly managed and mastered to avoid fatal falls. There's a certain methodical charm to Ice Climber's one-hop-at-a-time approach to platforming, but it's so different from the jumping mechanics in most other platformers that it takes a lot of getting used to.

Created in an era when scrolling games were still in their infancy, Ice Climber's focus on vertical traversal is an intriguing experiment. Tasked with ascending an icy peak guarded by polar bears wearing sunglasses and populated with anthropomorphic vegetables, your stiffly-moving avatar hammers blocks to clear new paths toward the top. Your handiwork can quickly come back to bite you, as the holes you create to expedite your ascent gradually drop below you and become pit hazards, transforming your footsteps into deadly obstacles.

It's one of Nintendo's most inventive early efforts, and well worth revisiting. There's really nothing else out there quite like it."

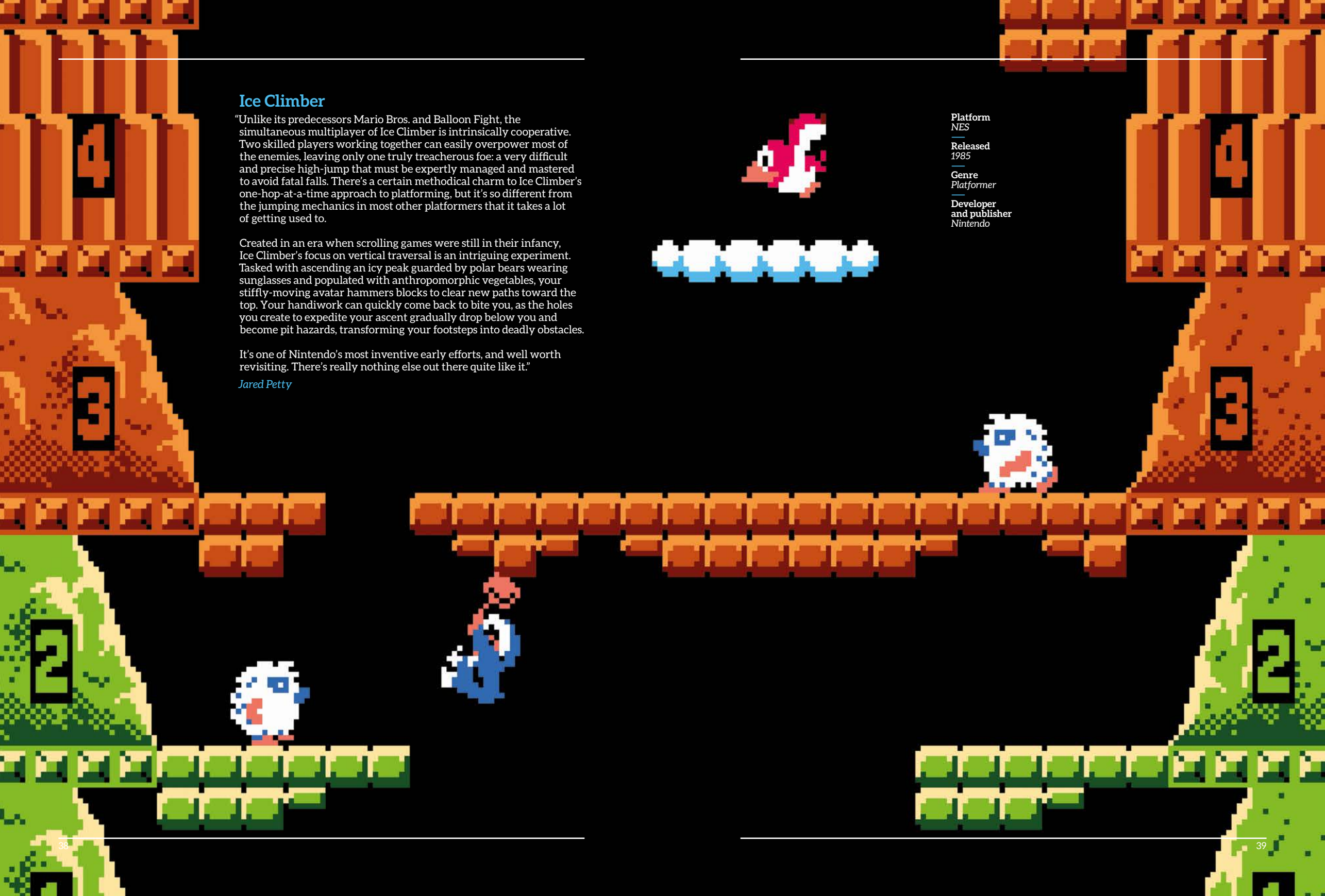
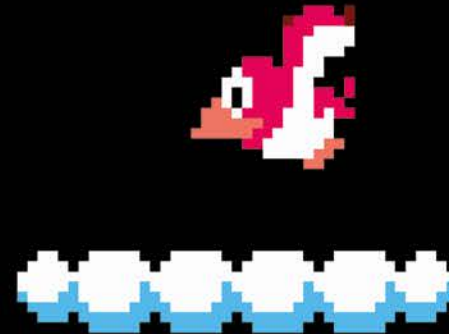
Jared Petty

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

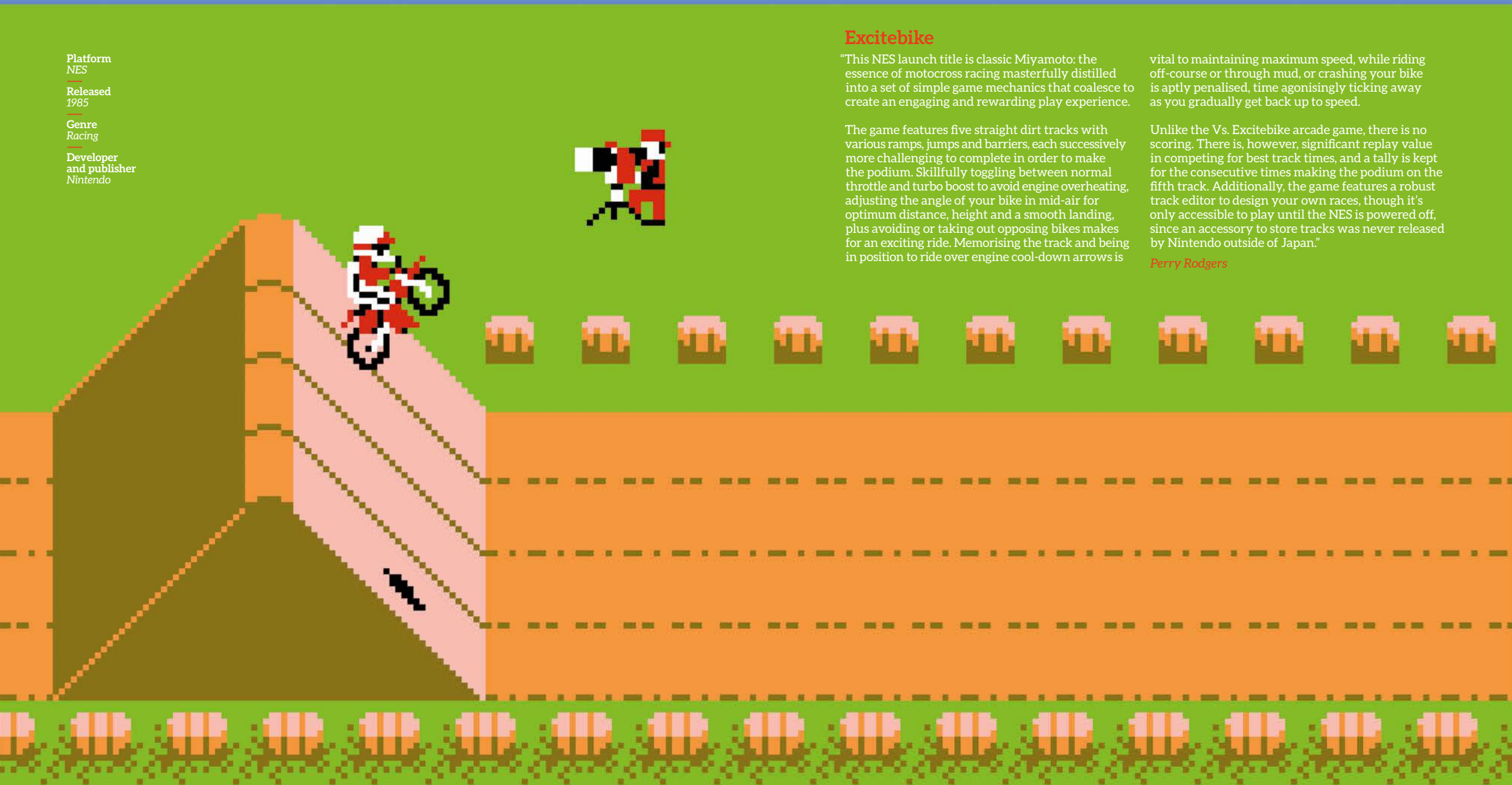


Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Racing

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Excitebike

“This NES launch title is classic Miyamoto: the essence of motocross racing masterfully distilled into a set of simple game mechanics that coalesce to create an engaging and rewarding play experience.

The game features five straight dirt tracks with various ramps, jumps and barriers, each successively more challenging to complete in order to make the podium. Skillfully toggling between normal throttle and turbo boost to avoid engine overheating, adjusting the angle of your bike in mid-air for optimum distance, height and a smooth landing, plus avoiding or taking out opposing bikes makes for an exciting ride. Memorising the track and being in position to ride over engine cool-down arrows is

vital to maintaining maximum speed, while riding off-course or through mud, or crashing your bike is aptly penalised, time agonisingly ticking away as you gradually get back up to speed.

Unlike the Vs. Excitebike arcade game, there is no scoring. There is, however, significant replay value in competing for best track times, and a tally is kept for the consecutive times making the podium on the fifth track. Additionally, the game features a robust track editor to design your own races, though it's only accessible to play until the NES is powered off, since an accessory to store tracks was never released by Nintendo outside of Japan.”

Perry Rodgers



Hogan's Alley

"A decade before Donkey Kong, Nintendo was a toy and playing card company looking to expand. Eventual Game Boy designer Gunpei Yokoi's wacky plan was to outfit closed bowling alleys in Japan with light gun ranges. While Nintendo's 'Laser Clay Shooting System' never took off in Japan's bowling alleys, the tech eventually found its way into homes as the Zapper light gun. The earliest Zapper games were recycled shooting gallery concepts: ducks, cowboys and the criminal cut-outs of Hogan's Alley.

Hogan's Alley (the name references an FBI training simulator) demands that you 'SHOOT GANGS ONLY!' while avoiding the cops with mischievous grins, a suspicious-looking professor (not a gang!), and a definitely-innocent lady. One of the criminals might be nude, sporting a Tommy Gun and a Chippendale bow-tie, although Nintendo would probably tell you that's just an illusion formed by the design of his trench coat. But under the trench coat there's no question about it: he's nude.

The main game is an arcade-style experience, with little to aim for except a high score. However, a bonus game called Trick Shot lets you bounce spinning cans on your bullets for points. This presumably wasn't part of the FBI training program.

Largely outshined by the eventual NES pack-in Duck Hunt, the cut-outs and cans of Hogan's Alley have since made small cameos in Nintendo's nostalgic series WarioWare and Super Smash Bros."

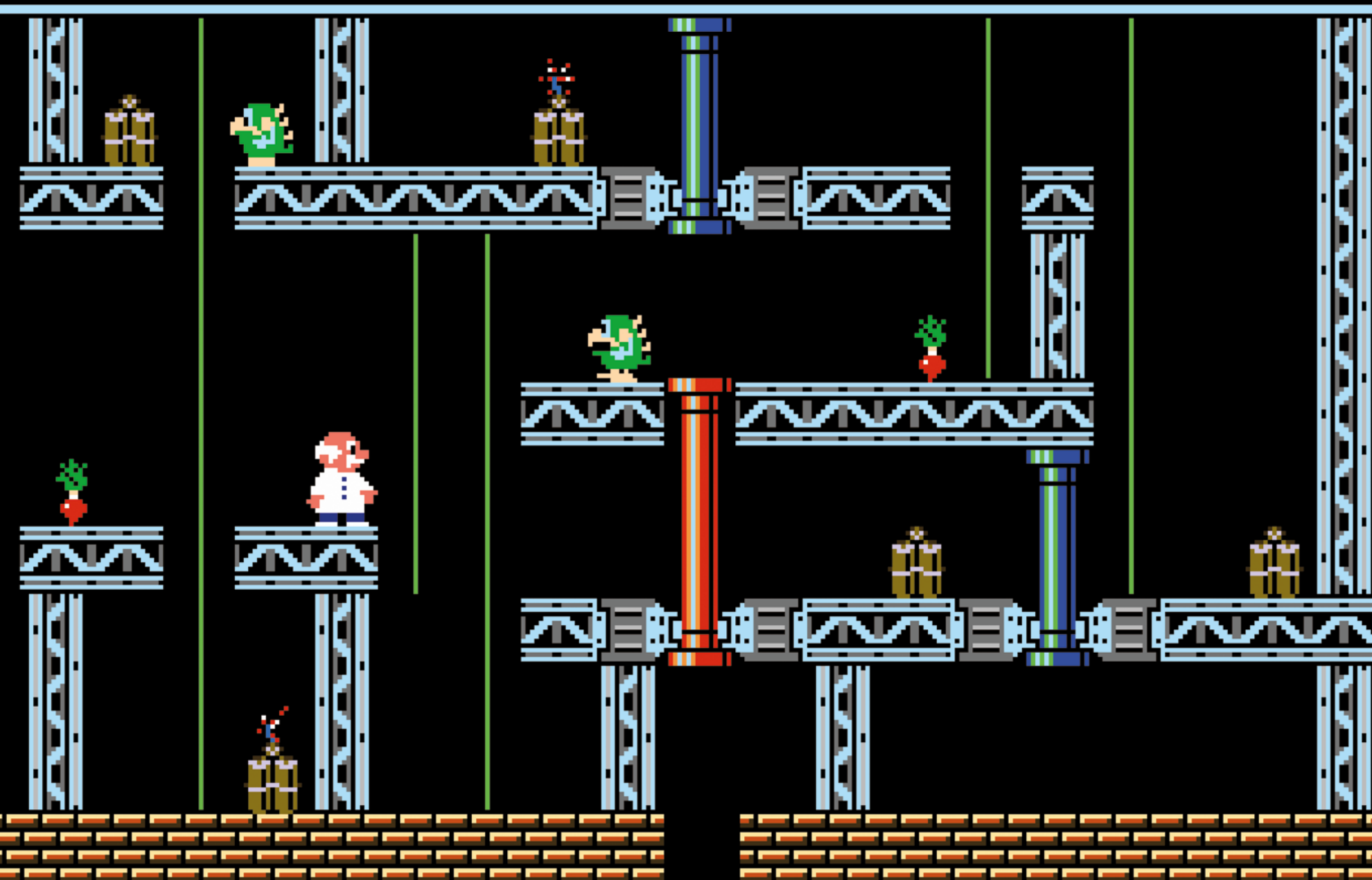
Samuel Claiborn

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Light gun shooter

**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo



Gyromite

Gyromite (known by its Famicom name of Robot Gyro on the title screen) is one of Nintendo's two 'Robot Series' games - the other being Stack-Up. It's really intended for use with R.O.B., the Robotic Operating Buddy accessory, but can be played on its own, if rather clumsily, using a second joypad.

Looking like a cross between Donkey Kong and Mario Bros, this platform puzzler features Professor Hector trying to escape each level by collecting all the dynamite that's been left lying around. Blocking his path are red and blue pillars, which can be shunted up and down to open a route or gain access to higher platforms. When playing with R.O.B. these are activated - somewhat laboriously - by placing spinning gyros on the colour-coded pads.

It's shame there's no simple R.O.B.-free control system as Gyromite is a really neat little puzzle game. Hector can't jump or attack, so you have think strategically about your route through the level, dropping turnips to distract the wandering Smicks, and ensuring you collect the dynamite in the right order. With just 40 levels - which can be selected from the main menu - it won't take long to see the entire game, but it's fun and engrossing while it lasts.

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Puzzle

**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo



Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Light gun shooter

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

Duck Hunt

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

For obvious reasons, being able to shoot the dog was removed from the NES version; this was designed to be good, clean, family fun - a Nintendo trademark. In Hogan's Alley, shooting people (though animated) probably affected its marketability.

The warm, vibrant colours used in Duck Hunt gave it a whole different feel than games like Hogan's Alley. Naturally, parents don't mind as much if little Johnny is going cartoon duck hunting versus shooting at humans in a realistic war, zombie, crime or space game.

Anyone who grew up owning an NES remembers this game fondly. Being a pack-in, nearly everybody owned the game and it's a conversation piece that people can share, the same way they talk about Super Mario Bros."

Jerry Momoda

Championship Lode Runner

チャンピオンシップロードランナー

You'll probably be familiar with Lode Runner as one of the earliest commercial videogame releases. It originally began life on the campus minicomputer of the University of Washington and appeared on a variety of 8-bit computers on the Brøderbund label, before being ported to the NES in 1984 by Hudson Soft.

The puzzle-platformer follows the adventures of a gold miner, armed with a device that can remove blocks of earth to his left or right (using the A and B buttons). This enables him to dig through platforms or make pits to trap the patrolling guards. However the pits fill up after a short time, and since our miner can't jump, falling into one is fatal and signals game over. Once all the lodes of gold have been collected, the miner simply has to reach the top of the screen to move to the next stage.

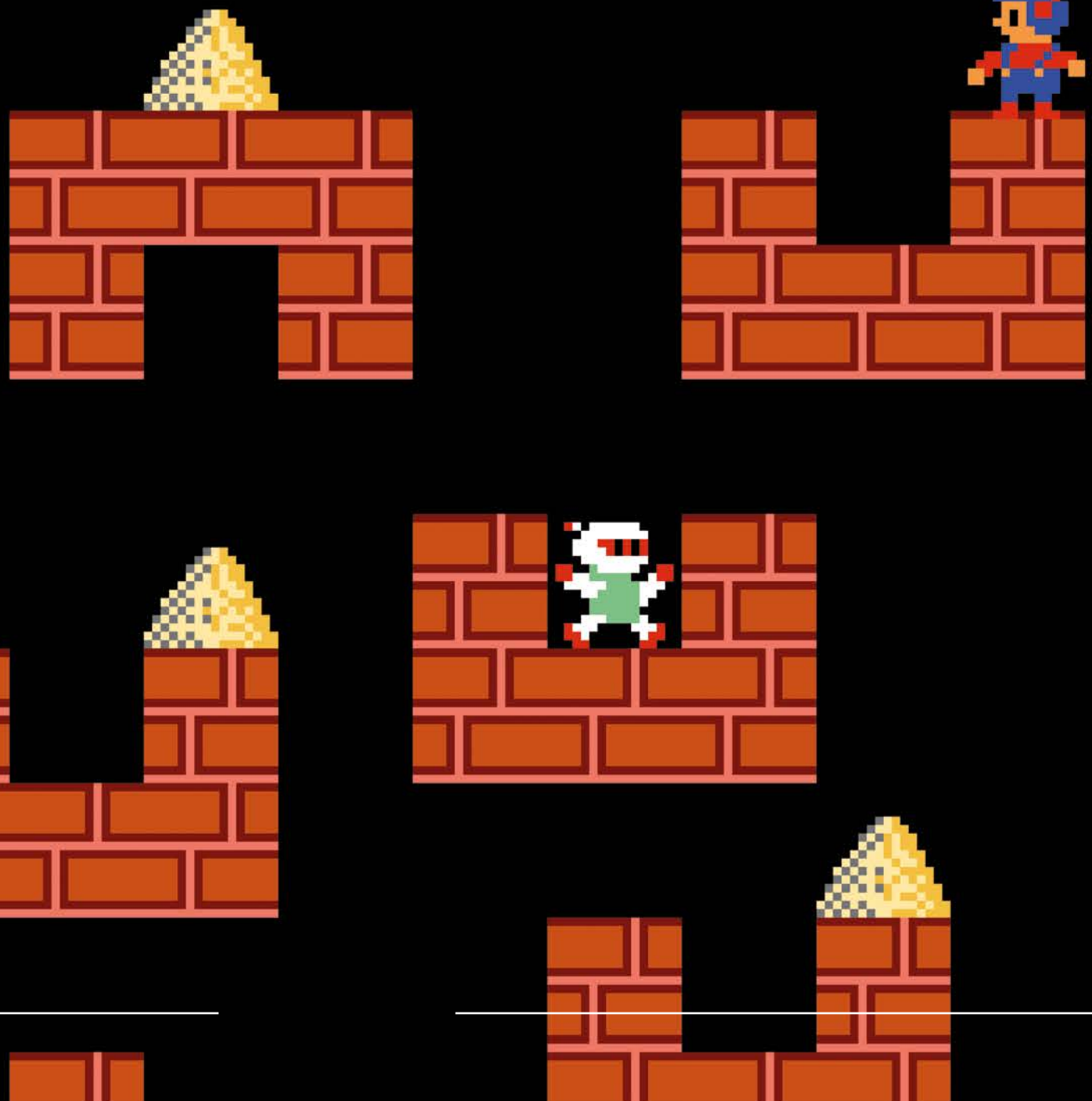
Championship Lode Runner offers more of the same, but with harder, more expansive levels. And we do mean harder - the game consists of 50 of the toughest levels designed by expert Lode Runner players, and have to be played through in order. While the original Lode Runner is an undoubted classic, this entry in the series is really only for hardcore fans or retrogaming masochists.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1985

Genre
Puzzle

**Developer
and publisher**
Hudson Soft



Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Scrolling
beat 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

HELP ME
THOMAS!



SYLVIA!



Kung-Fu

“Some say that Nintendo featured pixelated graphics on its original ‘black box’ game packaging to give consumers a realistic expectation of their visuals, as though they were trying to be proactive about the possibility that people would be disappointed if they expected photorealistic graphics.

That’s such a funny thought, isn’t it? Pixels are all the rage nowadays as we continue to see waves of indie titles released that use this old-school aesthetic, many of them to great effect. Some might say it’s a trendy thing, sure – but there’s something more inherently artful about pretty pixel placement in, say, 1990 than merely shoving textures across sharp-edged polygons as we would see just a handful of years later.

A harsh critic may say Kung Fu has simplistic graphics. Others may point to an outdated save-the-girl storyline as well; it’s an ancient artifact in terms of gaming sensibilities. But Kung Fu played an important role on the NES: with its simple brand of fun, this port of the arcade game Kung Fu Master showed that a cabinet-style experience could be had in one’s own home – a revolutionary idea for the time. We may not see these ‘get the high score’-style titles much any more, but nonetheless Kung Fu is part of a winning formula and a lasting legacy.”

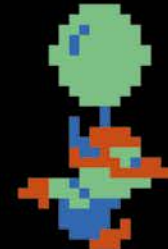
Eric Bailey

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Balloon Fight

“Not often seen in the arcades on Nintendo’s Vs. System when released in 1984, Balloon Fight found popularity as an early release on the NES, ported by none other than then-programmer Satoru Iwata during his tenure at HAL Labs. You are buoyed in the sky by two balloons, ‘flapping’ to stay aloft and competing for air space by strategically attacking airborne adversaries from above, popping their balloons and then eliminating them completely with one final blow, lest they recover and come back with a vengeance!

While unapologetically inspired by the Williams’ arcade hit, Joust, Balloon Fight has a lighter, more inviting theme and innovates further. Platform layouts are many and varied, and lightning strikes often necessitate altering your intended course. When an enemy falls into the water below, a bubble surfaces enticing you to temporarily cease attacking and collect it for extra points, providing a good risk/reward proposition. After every three stages, a potentially high-scoring bonus stage is a welcome reprieve.

Balloon Fight also features a simultaneous two-player mode that can be played cooperatively or competitively. Further, a single-player, single-life side scrolling mode in which you’re challenged to fly through a progressively difficult gauntlet of lightning provides even greater replay value!”

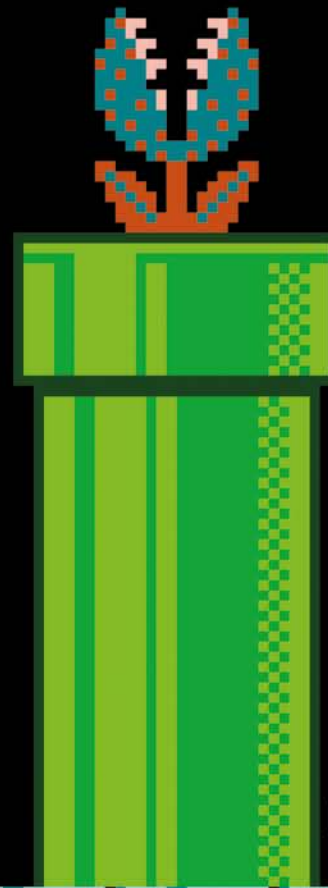
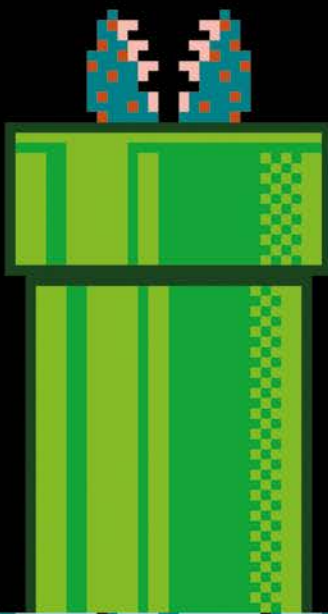
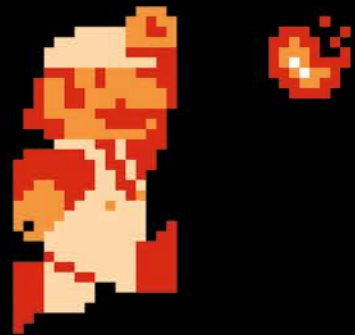
Perry Rodgers

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



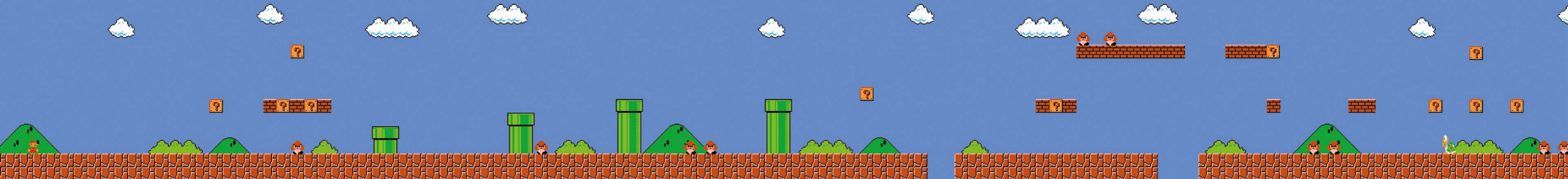
Super Mario Bros.

"I remember playing Super Mario Bros. in Makro [the UK wholesale store]. They had an M82 Demonstration unit with 12 games to choose from, but there was only one game my brother and I wanted to play: Super Mario Bros. We would take turns to play, he would be Mario and I'd have to be Luigi.

Back then Nintendo was all about Super Mario Bros. as far as I was concerned. It was like a cartoon to me; one that I could control and play through the story to rescue Princess Toadstool. I vividly remember my brother finishing the game first, and to document this monumental feat we took a picture of the end screen with the Princess using our SupaSnaps camera.

Recently on a trip to Tokyo, I popped into Muteki Mario, a Super Mario Bros.-themed bar and was delighted to see that the Wii Virtual Console was playing Super Mario Bros. I thought I'd show off my skills to the barmaid and my fiancée by speedrunning the game. This wasn't to be, however. The Japanese whisky had got the better of me, my reactions were slow and my vision slightly blurred. I didn't make it past World 8-1. Sorry Princess, you're still in another castle."

Ross Burnett



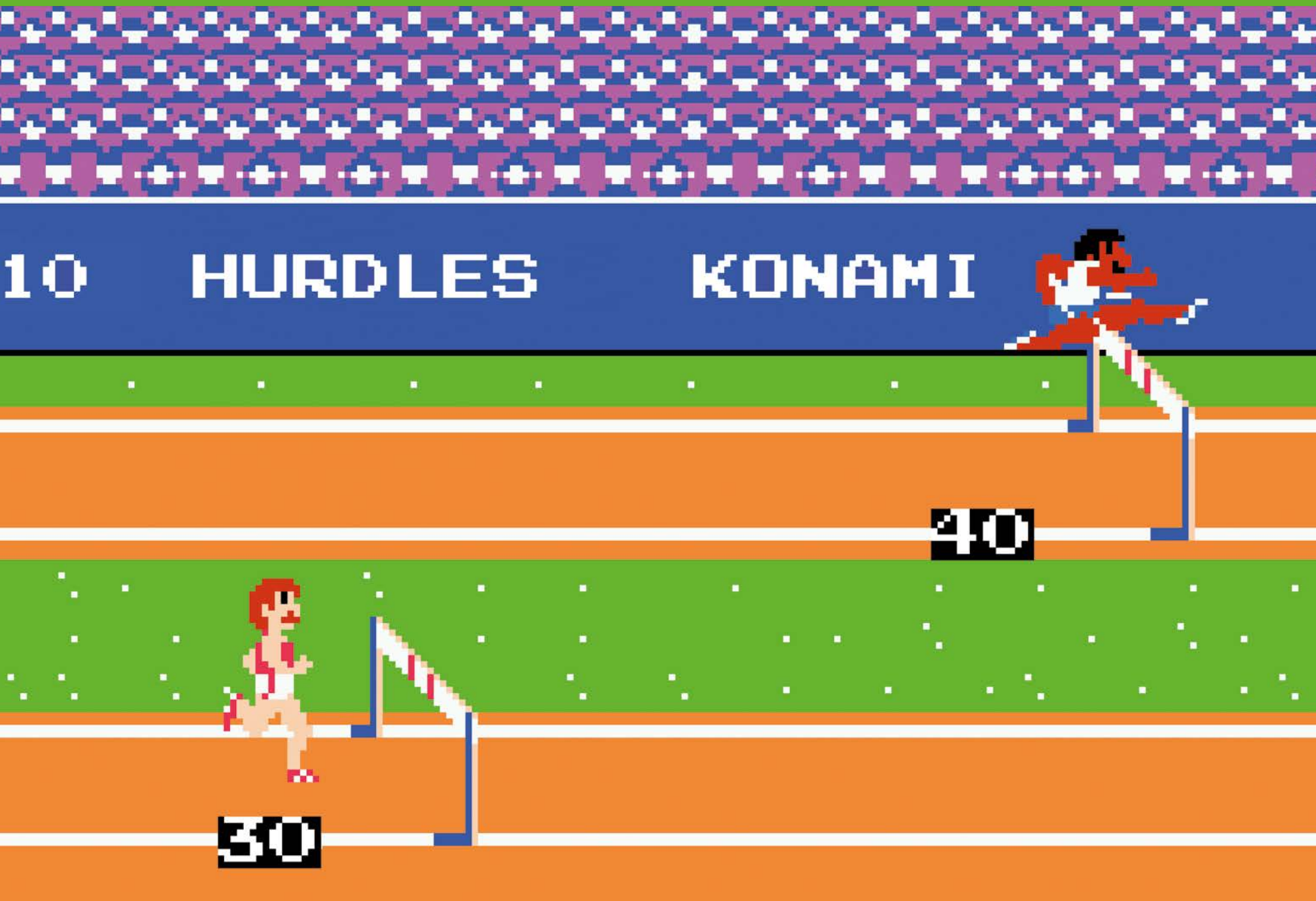
Super Mario Bros.

"When I was younger, I used to enjoy reading and drawing comics, and among the comics that I read, some were Italian. If you think about it, the big nose and the moustache isn't a facial feature that's characteristic of Japanese people, so I think that's my connection to those Italian comics - probably I drew on that inspiration when we first created the character."

In the warehouse that Nintendo was operating out of in America at that time, there was somebody related to that warehouse whose name was Mario. The staff at Nintendo of America said that the character looked like the individual in the game. They started calling the character Mario, and when I heard that I said, 'Oh, Mario's a great name - let's use that.'

In the original Mario Bros., Mario and Luigi were rather small in size and they would play and battle against each other. In the Super Mario Bros. game, those same small characters are in there, but when they get a mushroom they grow big. So we decided to call the big version of them 'Super Mario' and 'Super Luigi' because they got super-sized."

Shigeru Miyamoto



Track & Field

Konami's long legacy of sports games began in 1983 with the release of *Hyper Olympic* - better known as *Track & Field* outside Japan. Confusingly, the events in the coin-op were mixed and matched with its sequel to produce two Famicom ports, while the western NES release got an eight-sport roster, with 100-metre dash, long jump, 110-metre hurdles, javelin, skeet shooting, triple jump, archery and high jump (oddly the hammer throw of the original is absent from the collection).

Anyone familiar with the coin-op will know the routine: each sport is a mixture of frenzied button bashing, timed presses - or both. For example, the long jump requires you to alternately hit the A and B buttons and then tap the D-pad to set the angle of the jump, while skeet shooting and archery rely solely on precision timing.

The NES version of *Track & Field* is brilliantly done, capturing everything about the arcade release with the exception of the sampled speech. But while it's a blast playing with friends, either beating them in competitive play or targeting world records, the solo game is less compelling once the events have been played and mastered. Also, the physical exertion required to play always means that sessions are relatively short-lived!

Platform
NES

Released
1985

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Action

Developer
Micronics

Publisher
Capcom



Ghosts 'n Goblins

"A conversion of the popular 1985 Capcom side-scrolling platform arcade game, Ghosts 'n Goblins was one of the first NES titles released on a 128KB cartridge. Developer Micronics leveraged that extra memory to good effect, creating a faithful version of the original coin-op that's infamous for its sky-high level of difficulty.

The game stars Arthur, a knight in shining armour who's on a challenging mission to rescue Princess Prin-Prin from the evil clutches of Satan, King of the Demon World. This involves working through six levels of increasingly tough platform action, battling all manner of mythical creatures including zombies, dragons and demons. Arthur's armed with a variety of pick-up weapons that he can use in anger against the enemy hordes, but he has to be careful not to get touched by the game's denizens or their projectiles. If he does, he loses his suit of armour and has to battle on in nothing but his underwear – a precarious position that results in him losing a life if he gets hit again.

Despite its high level of challenge, Ghosts 'n Goblins sold very well, shifting 1.64 million units and making it one of the best-selling NES arcade conversions of all time."

Julian Rignall





Crazy Climber クレイジークライマー

"A classic Nichibutsu arcade game from the 1980s! This was a unique interactive attraction utilising two joysticks which proved a handful, but it was great fun and different in all the right ways.

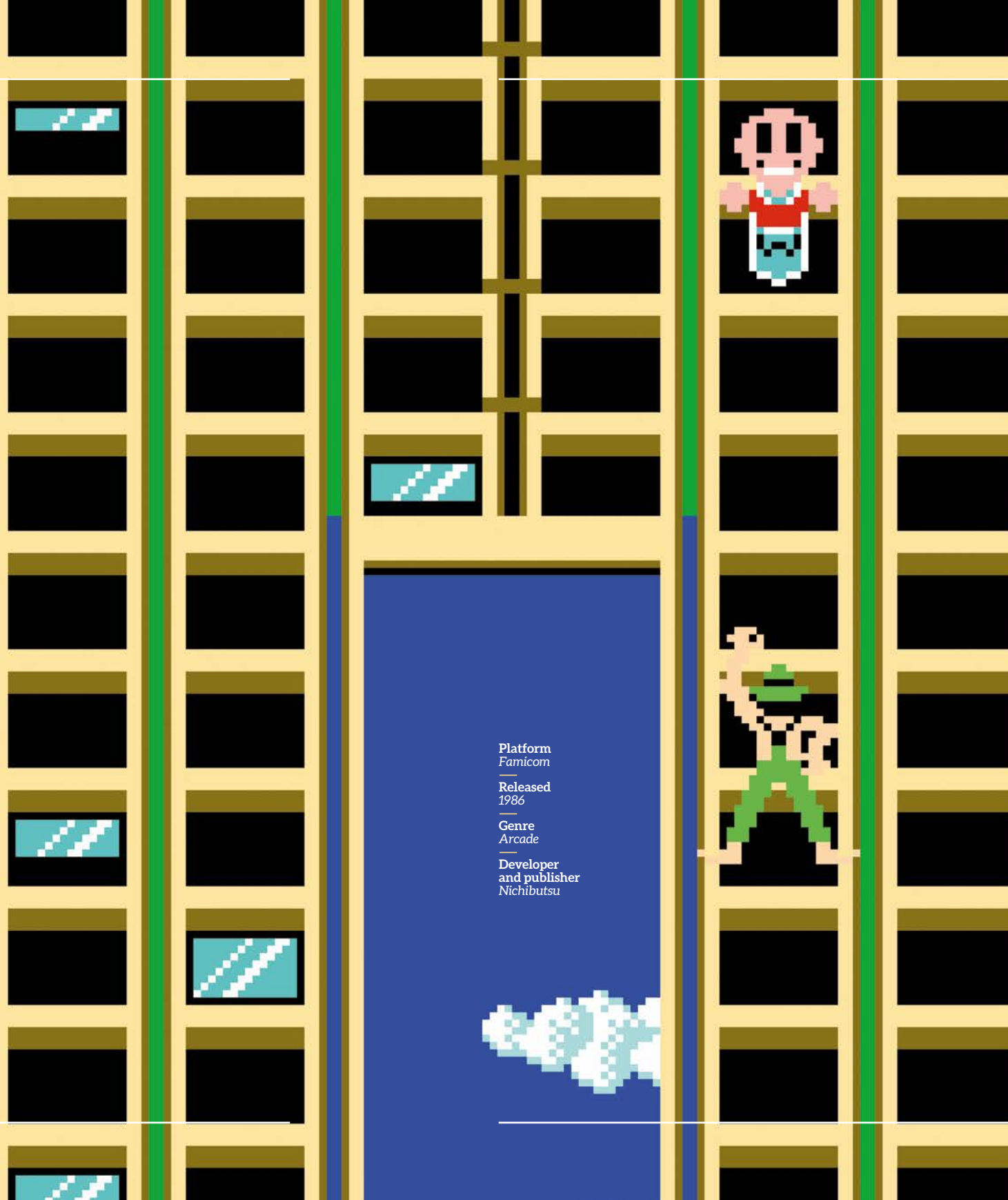
Are you crazy enough to go climbing up the sides of tall skyscrapers while nasty birds crap on you, and unfriendly neighbours drop objects on your head? Think you can sneak your way past loose electrical wires and other outlandish hazards as you bravely climb where no one has climbed before?

The game requires a pair of joypads, one for each arm, and operating them correctly is a skillful chore. As windows open and close, you work the arms and hands of your character, grabbing window ledges to climb to the top, while a small map displays your progress on the left side of the screen.

Angry tenants appear above you and drop items on your head to cause your fall, but if you hold firmly to the ledge then you will survive! When completing a stage, a helicopter awaits your arrival at the top to whisk you away.

While you may or may not fall for this game, it does offer a unique and difficult challenge unlike any other."

David Siller



Platform
Famicom
—
Released
1986
—
Genre
Arcade
—
Developer
and publisher
Nichibutsu

Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Light gun shooter

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Gumshoe

"Gumshoe completely fascinated me when I got it, together with the NES and the Zapper, as a Christmas present. I remember playing it all night long - or at least it felt to me like that as a kid.

Keeping Mr. Stevenson in the air, by shooting him repeatedly and collecting the five 'Black Panther Diamonds' to free his kidnapped daughter, had me glued to the screen. Instead of using the Zapper in a very regular and obvious way, like in Duck Hunt or Wild Gunman, Nintendo made a fantastic platformer that got me hooked on getting every single balloon in the game. Nintendo is always good at getting the most out of their hardware gadgets. To this day the amazing music and the wonderful 8-bit graphics of Gumshoe are burnt into my memory. I will always cherish this strange little gem that, to me, never got the credit it deserves.

When it comes to the NES Zapper games this is clearly my favourite, and made the Christmas of 1988 one of the best gaming experiences of my life. Considering I had always wanted a Sega Master System instead of an NES, Gumshoe turned me into an instant Nintendo fanboy."

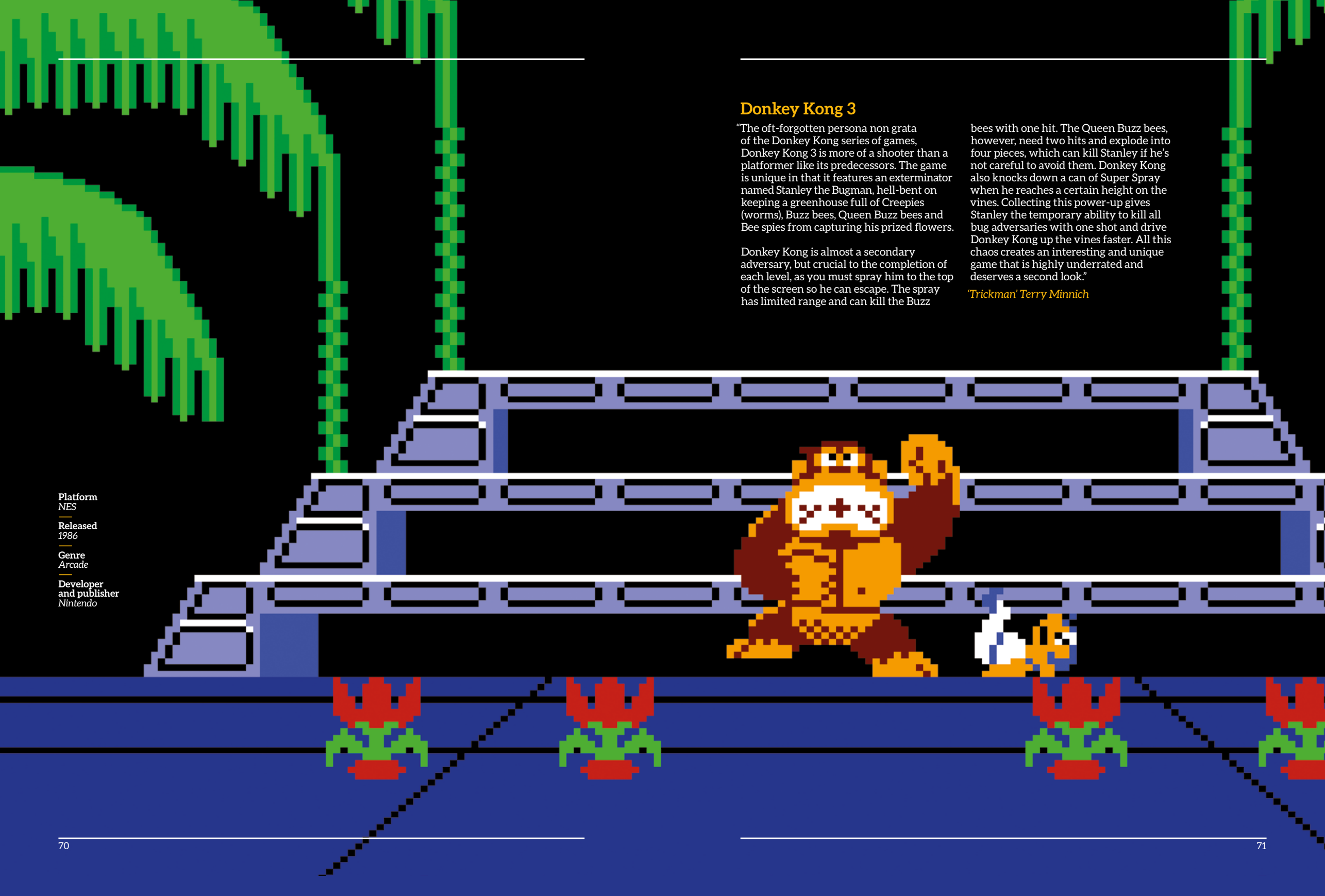
Felix Rick



“One day, Yamauchi called me in and said, ‘Make me something that lets you play arcade games on your TV at home.’”

Masayuki Uemura,
software engineer and designer

触れないでください。
故障の原因となります。



Donkey Kong 3

"The oft-forgotten persona non grata of the Donkey Kong series of games, Donkey Kong 3 is more of a shooter than a platformer like its predecessors. The game is unique in that it features an exterminator named Stanley the Bugman, hell-bent on keeping a greenhouse full of Creepies (worms), Buzz bees, Queen Buzz bees and Bee spies from capturing his prized flowers.

Donkey Kong is almost a secondary adversary, but crucial to the completion of each level, as you must spray him to the top of the screen so he can escape. The spray has limited range and can kill the Buzz

bees with one hit. The Queen Buzz bees, however, need two hits and explode into four pieces, which can kill Stanley if he's not careful to avoid them. Donkey Kong also knocks down a can of Super Spray when he reaches a certain height on the vines. Collecting this power-up gives Stanley the temporary ability to kill all bug adversaries with one shot and drive Donkey Kong up the vines faster. All this chaos creates an interesting and unique game that is highly underrated and deserves a second look."

'Trickman' Terry Minnich

Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Arcade

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

Dragon Quest ドラゴンクエスト

"Dragon Quest is a game where the concepts of the time have been passed down in a good way, and I think players have come to trust in that lore. For example, the Dragon Quest series of games has repetitive exploration and battle, but the way it was introduced to not be monotonous was essential. During development this is the area we were most careful with, and later games in the series continued along this same path unchanged.

As for the user interface, other RPG games which tended to have clumsy interfaces were complicated with thick manuals, but the focus on use of a simple, no colour design - when the hardware of the time was nowhere near as powerful compared to the hardware of today - still provided an easy-to-understand, informational view and was simple to control. This interface design is still currently in use, and lets anyone of any age easily play.

It is my hope that this tradition continues on, and many people can continue to enjoy this series."

Manabu Yamana

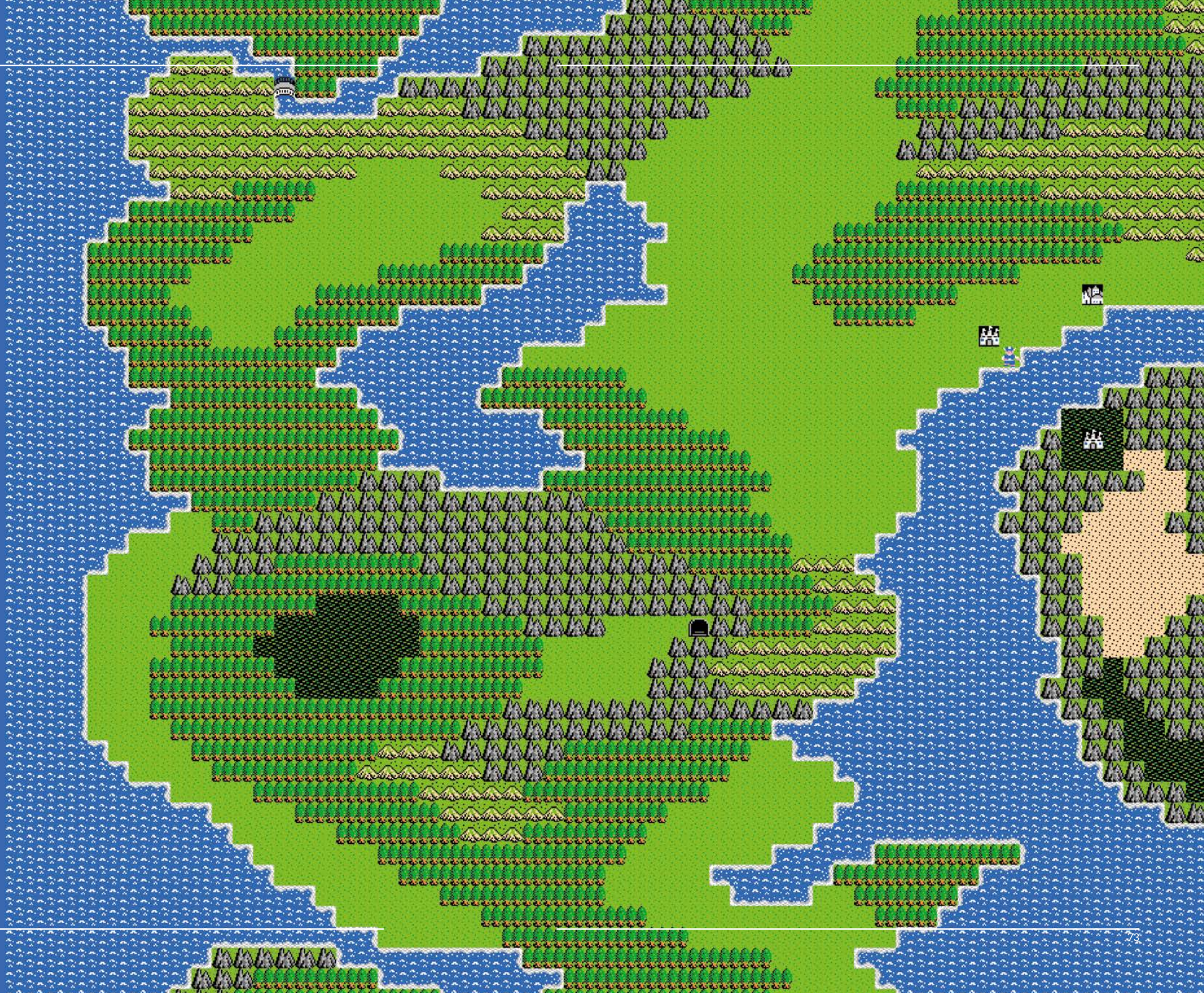
Platform
Famicom

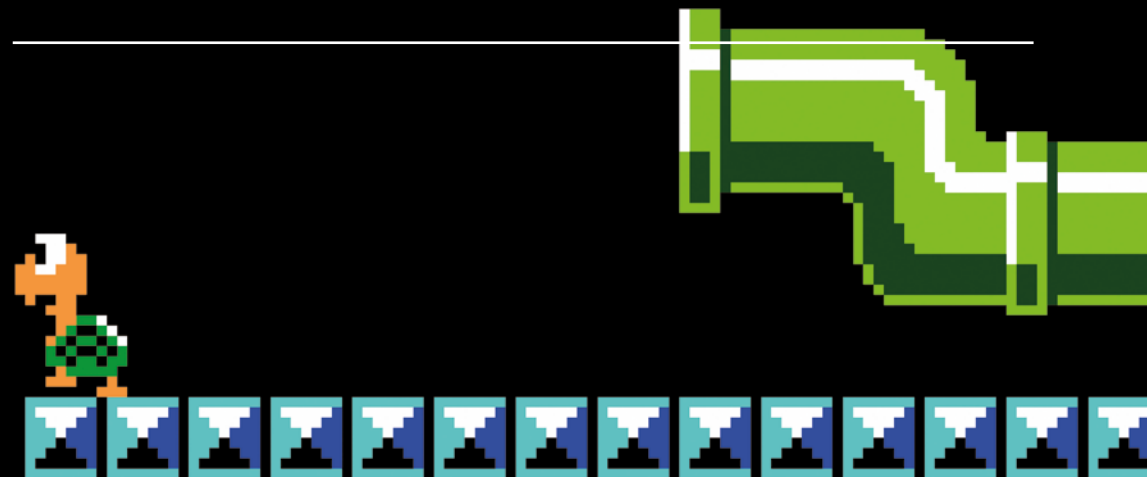
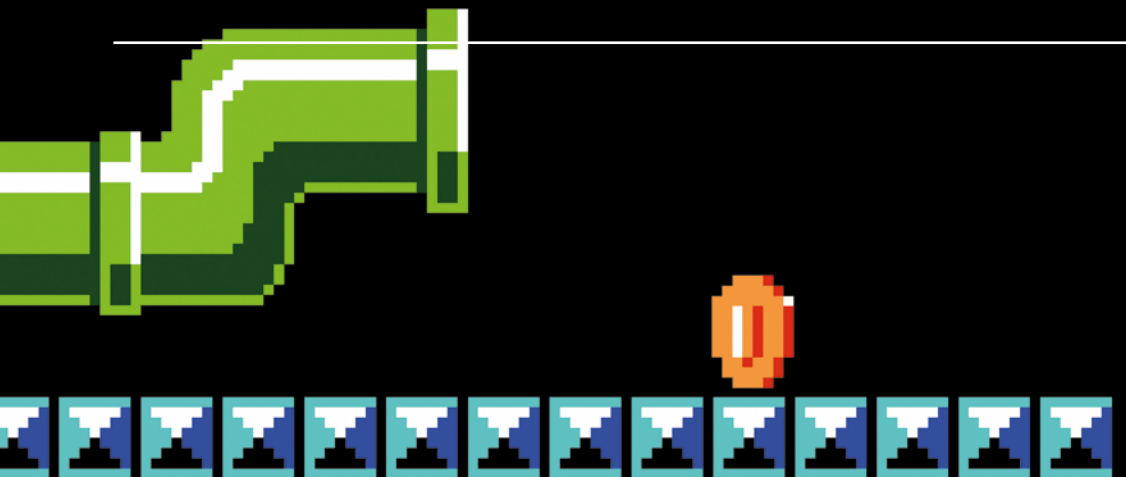
Released
1986

Genre
RPG

Developer
Chunsoft

Publisher
Enix





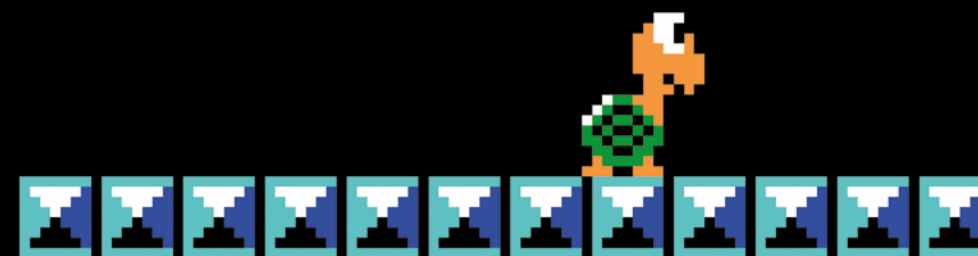
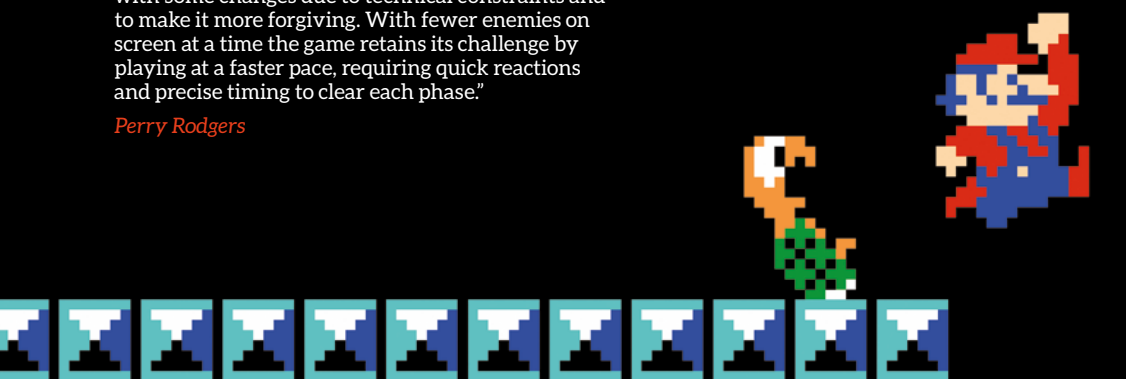
Mario Bros.

“Often mistaken for and overshadowed by the iconic NES launch title Super Mario Bros., the original Mario Bros. was first released as an arcade game in 1983. Underappreciated at the time as the arcade golden age was beginning to wane, this deceptively difficult and deep single-screen platform game finds Donkey Kong’s carpenter-turned-plumber Mario clearing pipes of pests such as turtles, crabs and fighter flies, while also being chased by fireballs and threatened by falling icicles. Akin to a game of speed chess, the game requires dynamically assessing the enemies’ paths and how they will interact, and then accordingly attacking or patiently repositioning for a better setup. Mario’s brother Luigi makes his debut in the simultaneous two-player feature designed for cooperative play, which often quickly devolves into a competitive sibling rivalry death match, and turns out to be all the more fun!”

The NES version of the game released in 1986 is faithful to the arcade game in its basic play, albeit with some changes due to technical constraints and to make it more forgiving. With fewer enemies on screen at a time the game retains its challenge by playing at a faster pace, requiring quick reactions and precise timing to clear each phase.”

Perry Rodgers

Platform
NES
Released
1986
Genre
Arcade
Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





Platform
Famicom

Released
1986

Genre
Scrolling shooter

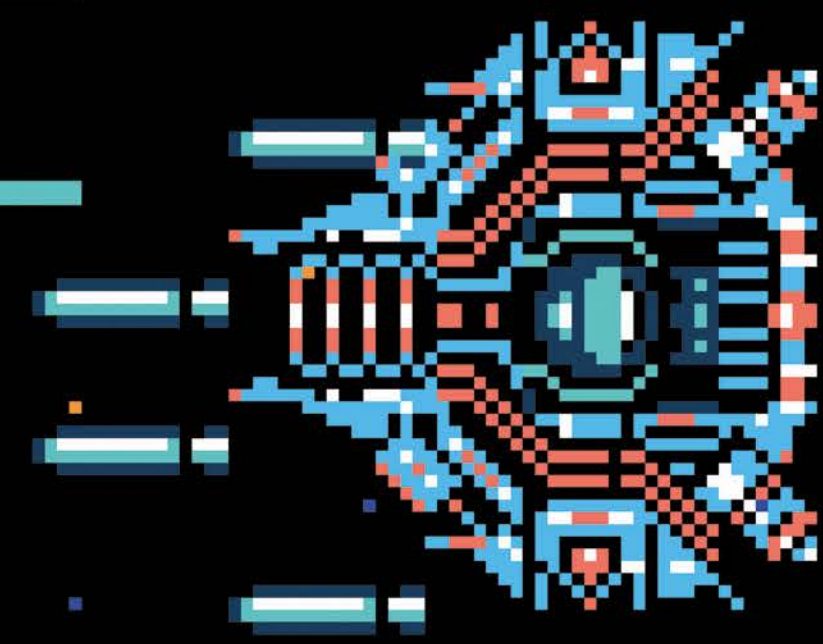
Developer
and publisher
Konami

Gradius グラディウス

"I started off by asking everyone what kind of game they wanted to make. To my surprise, everyone responded, 'A shooting game!', and with that we began planning. At that time it was the golden age of Namco's Xevious, and everyone was driven by the enthusiastic sentiment that, 'If we're going to make a shooting game, let's surpass Xevious.' As for our choice to make a horizontal scroller, it was because we had materials for Scramble and decided to reuse those as much as possible. In fact, Gradius originally started as Scramble 2.

For the world of the game, we were very influenced by science fiction movies. The popular sci-fi movies at that time were Star Wars and Lensman. Lensman had just come out when we were thinking about what kind of game we'd make, and we all went and saw it as a team. It had a huge impact on us. Not the story, but the way the plasma and lasers and such were drawn left a big impression. On the way back from the theatre we were talking, and we decided, 'Let's add something like that plasma laser to our game!' and that was how the laser weapon came to be."

Machiguchi Hiroyasu



Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Action

Developer
Westone Bit
Entertainment

Publisher
LJN



Jaws

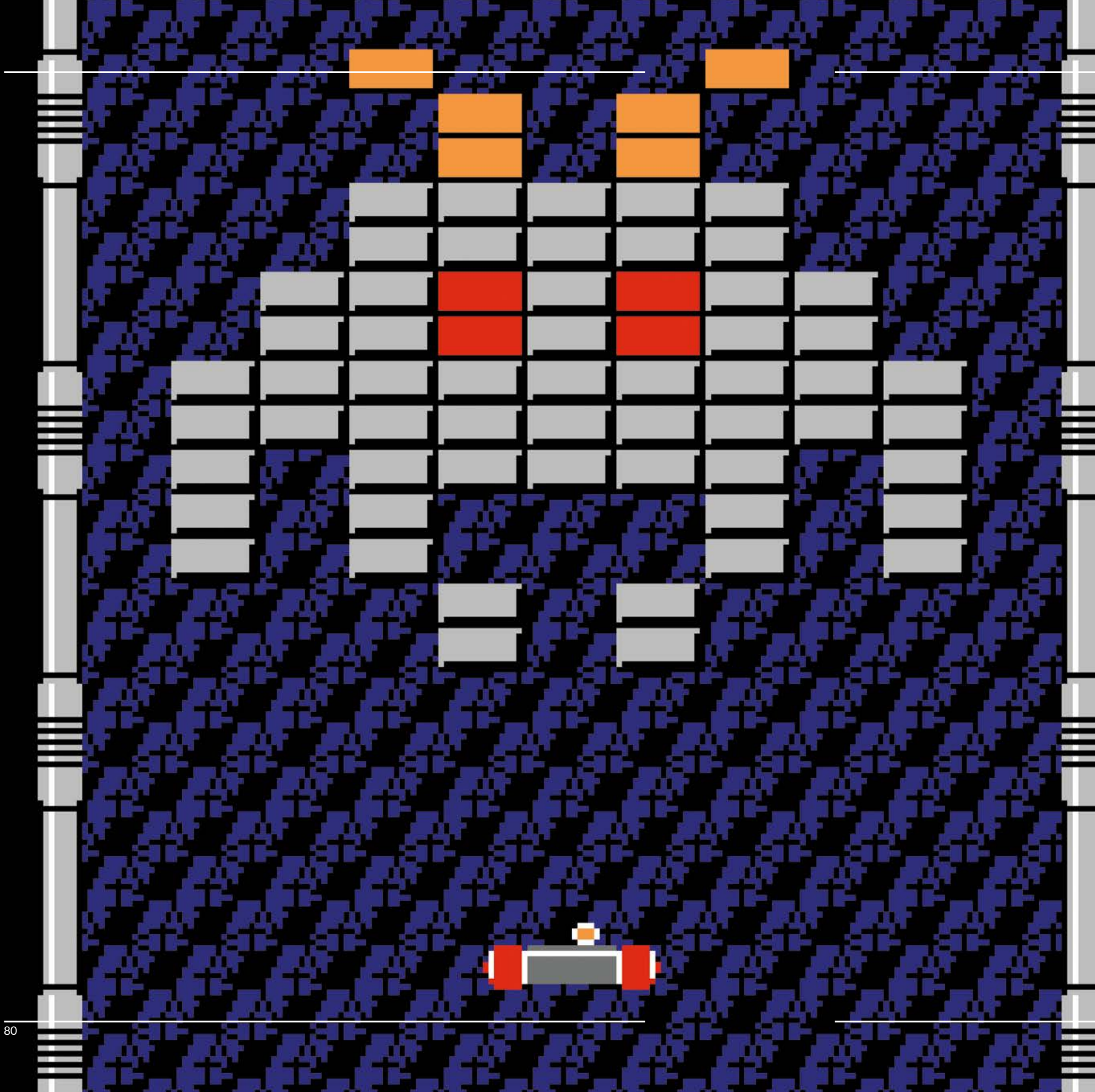
"It's all about the conch. Because of course a game based on a movie series about a great white shark would focus on collecting seashells. Odd backdrop aside, the end goal makes sense: hunt down the titular shark.

Getting to that showdown is open-ended. As a skilled diver with a limitless supply of spears, you bounce back and forth between two ports in order to power up. In between, random encounters drop the diver into open water teeming with rays, jellyfish and sharks that you spear in order to collect the game's currency: those conch shells. Collect enough for an upgrade, cash them in at a port, and repeat.

Jaws, meanwhile, morphs from initially intimidating while you're underpowered in early encounters to frustrating as you try to poke... impale?... skewer? the fish with the business end of your boat. Right.

And aside from the regular bonus stages, there's not much more to it. Yet Jaws holds a strange appeal. Perhaps it's the laid-back nature of cruising a tropical sea, taking dips with the local sea life and upgrading at your leisure as you keep an eye out for the telltale fin. Or maybe it's simply the magic of the conch."

Greg Ford



Arkanoid

“Simply described as ‘Breakout with power-ups’, Taito’s Arkanoid for the NES is a remarkable 8-bit rendition of the original arcade smash hit that laid the foundation for a host of official follow-on games and derivative works. The contrived story has you fleeing the besieged Arkanoid mothership in the Vaus spacecraft, only to be trapped in a space labyrinth comprised of 36 rounds. To escape you must deflect a ball (with your spacecraft, naturally) to break through the walls, brick by brick, and defeat the dimension-controlling Fort Doh. Got it?”

The keys to success are keeping your proverbial eye on the ball, utilising quick reflexes and, based on your skill level and the particular layout of the bricks, selectively employing the power-ups that are randomly dropped when a non-silver brick is destroyed. Starting the game with only three Vaus, and extras far between at 20K and every 60K, the grey ‘Extra Vaus’ and pink ‘Exit Round’ power-ups are especially coveted. More often, you can expect one of the five other power-ups such as the dark blue ‘Lengthen Vaus’ and green ‘Catch and Release’.

A brilliant decision was made to package the game with an inarguably necessary and responsive spinner knob controller, which can also be shared in the alternating two-player mode of the game.”

Perry Rodgers

Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Taito



Woody Poco うっていぼこ

"I'll admit, part of my liking of Woody Poco is because I interviewed the designer and programmer, Takaki Kobayashi, and afterwards we went drinking in Sapporo. We drank super strong 'demon's sake' and ate freshly prepared sea-slugs between orders, and during this encounter he explained with great passion how he tried to put everything he had into the game. Whether it was crazy ideas or making best use of the hardware, he meant everything. It was difficult not to like the game. When I later played it, I found such feelings quite warranted.

Imagine a linear action-RPG like Legend of the Mystical Ninja on the SNES, except even more bizarre, and you've got Woody Poco on the Famicom. You can equip weapons and various tools in each hand like in Zelda, buy items, sleep at hotels, gamble, bribe, and eat to reduce hunger. It also has continually changing day/night cycles, affecting non-player characters, and visually distinct seasons. Most significantly you could steal items from shops, the same as in Link's Awakening (doing so labelled you a 'thief' and enemy of shopkeepers). I like to think Nintendo saw a good thing and copied it, though Kobayashi-san just laughed when I suggested this - also, we'd had quite a few by then!"

John Saczejanik

Platform
Famicom

Released
1986

Genre
RPG

Developer
and publisher
dB-Soft

The Legend of Zelda

"We began developing the game as a launch title for the 1984 Famicom Disk System. Shortly before that, we began developing Super Mario Bros., so there was a period of about five to seven months where we worked on both at the same time. Consequently the design stage of development was a very busy time.

We were brimming with new ideas on how to fully utilise the Disk System's new capabilities: a name entry system, using better music, recording the player's progress and so forth. In that sense it was a very fun game to create. The flip side of doing something new, however, is that Zelda was a game where we were very concerned whether players would understand what they were supposed to do (much like the fear Nakamura had when Dragon Quest was first released). Once we decided there'd be riddles and puzzles in Zelda, that carried a lot of anxiety with it as well. Some of the puzzles are quite difficult to solve, after all.

Since we were working on Super Mario at the same time, once Mario was finished, we grabbed the Mario programmers and used them for Zelda in a final programming sprint. That was really tough."

Shigeru Miyamoto

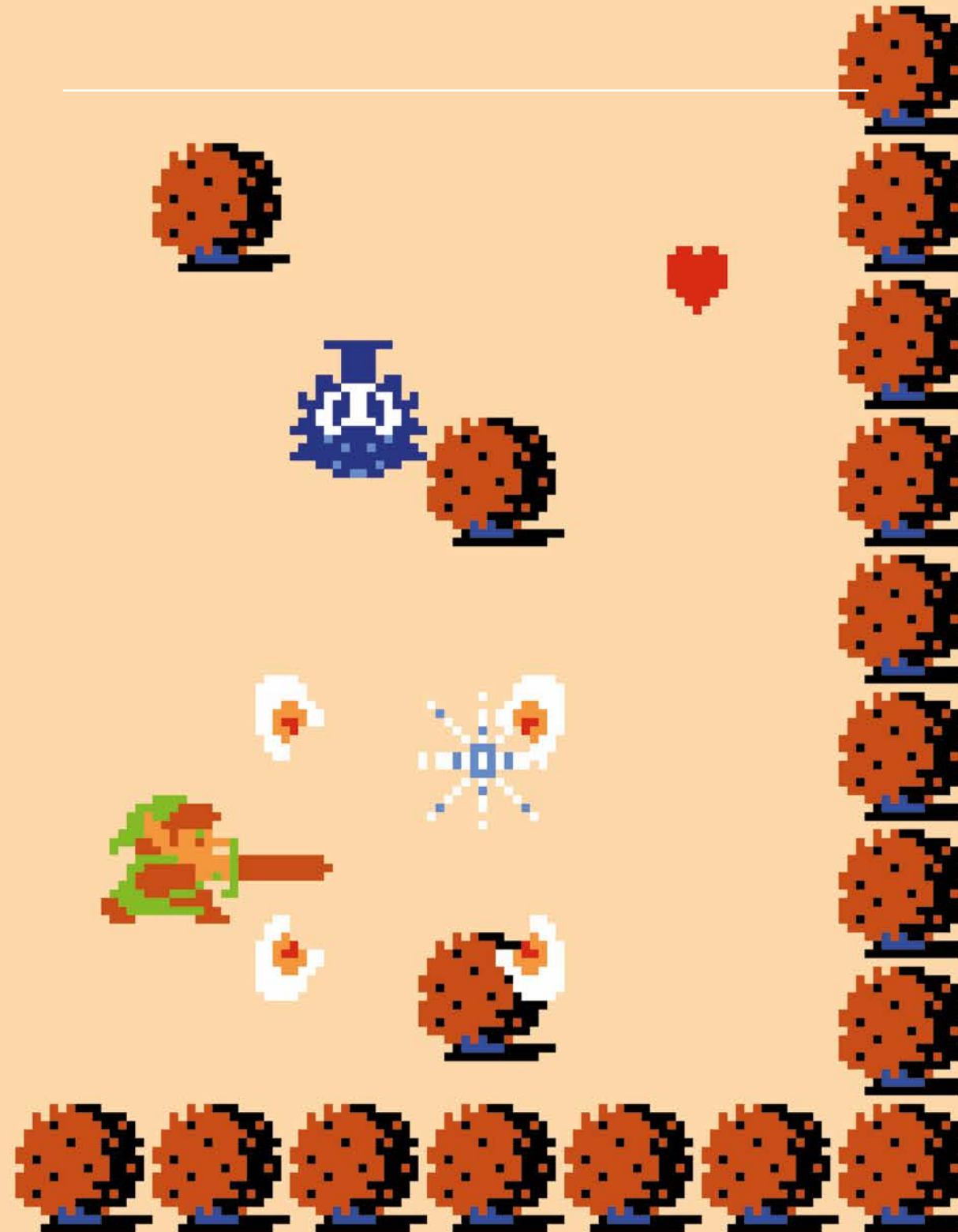
Platform
NES
Released
1986
Genre
Adventure
Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

The Legend of Zelda

“Trying to write about one of the most beloved and celebrated series in videogame history is not an easy task. The Legend of Zelda came onto the scene offering console gamers a large number of wonderful adventures and fresh experiences. Although I have dozens of fond memories of this game, my most profound memory was finishing what could be considered a huge adventure and finding out there was a Second Quest! Never before had a title so completely changed my expectations of what a videogame could be. Not only was the cartridge gold, but the contents of said cartridge were worth more than gold

to me! I distinctly remember spending hours and hours burning every tree and bombing every section of wall just to discover another secret. The feeling of being lost in another world was captivating and yet it was never too overwhelming; it was perfectly balanced. The discovery of new dungeons, the acquisition of new weapons and items, the introduction of new enemies and challenges are planned out before you with precision and purpose. The Legend of Zelda has become a legend in and of itself and will continue to entertain for decades to come.”

Martin Alessi



Hydlide ハイドライド

“While at T&E Soft I created Hydlide over a three-month period. The idea just came to me. At the time I was in love with *The Black Onyx* and *The Tower of Druaga*, so Hydlide was roughly inspired by those. I liked action games, but I also liked role-playing games, so I tried to mix them together.

Hydlide might be the first game where the character regenerates by standing still. When you're in a cave, I imagined that you'd feel tense and get tired, but when you're standing in an open field, I imagined that it would feel good and you'd be able to rest a little. I didn't think of it as a truly novel idea, it just seemed like common sense, so I included it.

By that time console games were outselling computer games significantly and for the first Hydlide the Famicom version alone sold a million copies, whereas on the computer side, the combined sales for all the different computer platforms reached one million – that's at least eight Japanese computer formats. In Japan, when a successful music artist like Yumi Matsutoya sells a million copies, Toshiba EMI gives you a plaque to commemorate it. It's like going platinum with a music album, and we received one of those for Hydlide. That may have been the only Japanese game to receive a plaque from Toshiba EMI.”

Tokihiko Naito

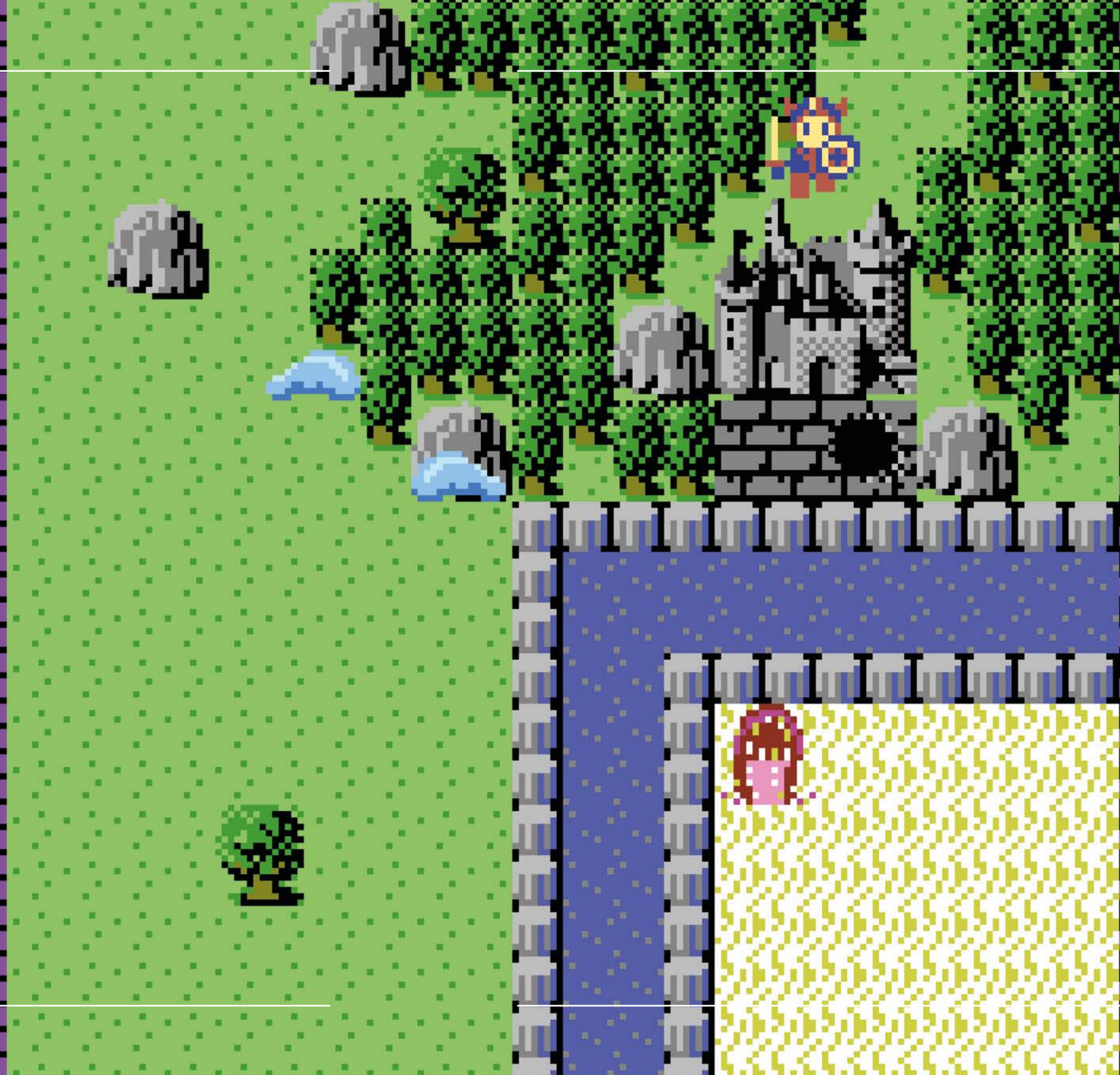
Platform
Famicom

Released
1986

Genre
RPG

Developer
T&E Soft

Publisher
Toshiba EMI





“Nintendo’s philosophy is never to go the easy path; it’s always to challenge ourselves and try to do something new.”

*Shigeru Miyamoto,
game designer and programmer*

Hudson's Adventure Island

高橋名人の冒険島

“Adventure Island was a Famicom conversion of Sega’s Wonder Boy arcade game, handled by Hudson Soft. During development it was decided to model the main character on Takahashi Meijin who, oddly, was the PR guy at Hudson! I still don’t understand why Hudson turned some middle-aged man into an idol, but surprisingly it worked! That was part of the genius of Kudo-san, Hudson’s original founder. He didn’t plan things, he just followed his instincts.

We didn’t understand the things Kudo-san made us do, and we didn’t always like it, but afterwards we would realise that he was right. He was a very innovative person. Hudson’s weak point was that we couldn’t keep it going. We were ahead of the curve, and the rest of the world didn’t catch up in time. Takahashi Meijin’s real name is Toshiyuki Takahashi, and I’ve known him since he joined Hudson doing the company’s public relations. His official position was the Meijin, meaning ‘master’, which I thought was amusing.”

Takashi Takebe

Platform
Famicom

Released
1986

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Hudson Soft



Metroid

"At the beginning of development, Samus didn't have a defined gender. During one of the meetings with the staff someone said that it would be a nice surprise if at the end of the game the player found out that Samus was in fact a woman. We thought it was a good idea so we implemented it.

Regarding Metroid's gameplay system, there are things people don't know about. It wasn't by chance that we came up with a system like that; the case was that when we started development on Metroid we were asked to create a game with gameplay unlike anything else seen before, something completely new in the world of videogames. It was also a decade in which very few games were released, so things were very different back then.

We created an interesting game concept, and before we even knew how the final product would turn out a release date was decided. A time came in which the release date was quickly approaching and the game was unplayable. The original Metroid team was composed of people that had very little experience with game development, and I was one of the few members of the team with experience, thanks to working on games like Balloon Fight. We then called for an emergency meeting and we debated how we could solve our problems without adding more to the game; we looked for a way to make it playable.

The decisions made during that emergency meeting were what made Metroid the game it is today, using a labyrinth-like system, upgrades, secret doors and abilities that would open up new areas."

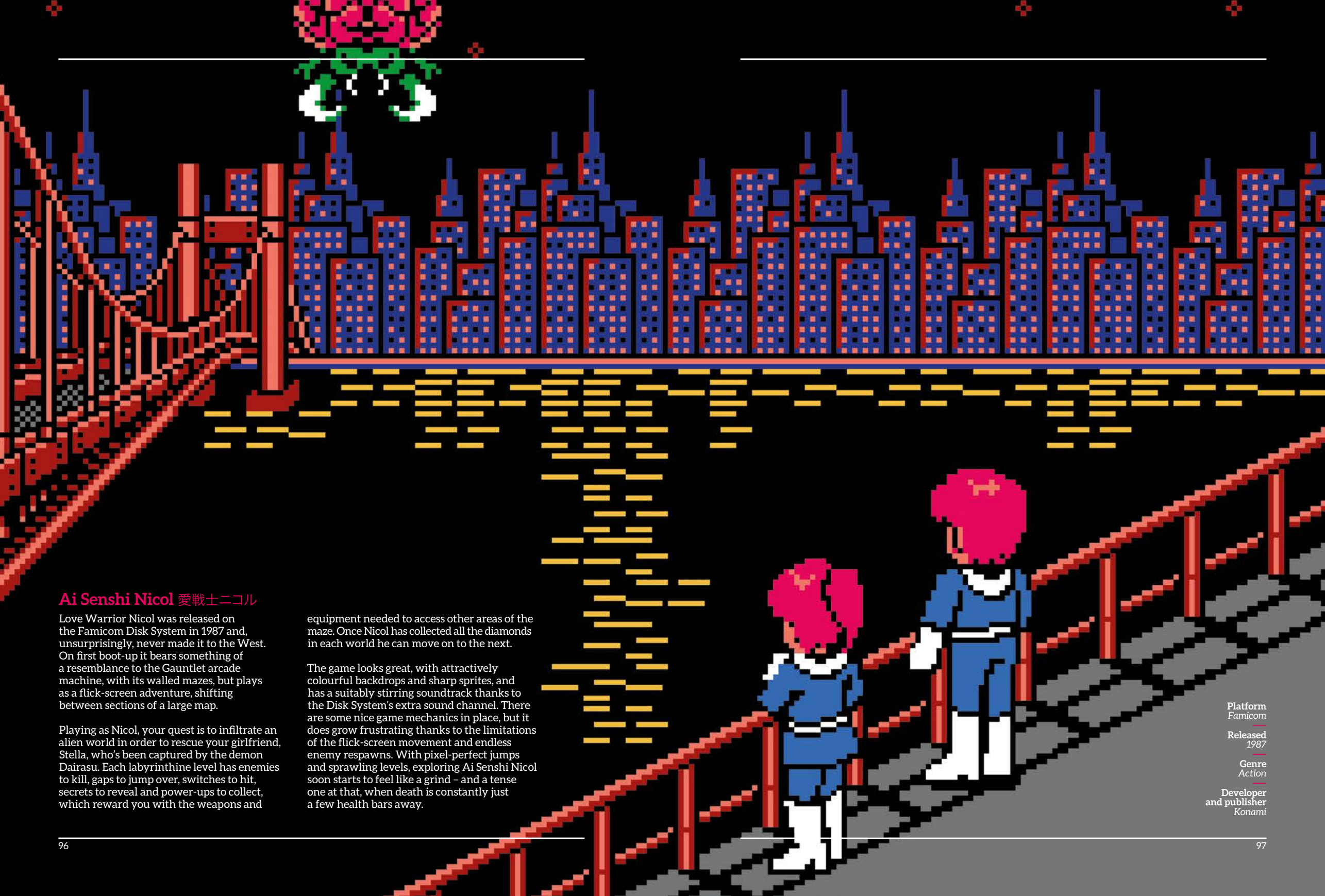
Yoshio Sakamoto

Platform
NES

Released
1986

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Ai Senshi Nicol 愛戦士ニコル

Love Warrior Nicol was released on the Famicom Disk System in 1987 and, unsurprisingly, never made it to the West. On first boot-up it bears something of a resemblance to the Gauntlet arcade machine, with its walled mazes, but plays as a flick-screen adventure, shifting between sections of a large map.

Playing as Nicol, your quest is to infiltrate an alien world in order to rescue your girlfriend, Stella, who's been captured by the demon Dairasu. Each labyrinthine level has enemies to kill, gaps to jump over, switches to hit, secrets to reveal and power-ups to collect, which reward you with the weapons and

equipment needed to access other areas of the maze. Once Nicol has collected all the diamonds in each world he can move on to the next.

The game looks great, with attractively colourful backdrops and sharp sprites, and has a suitably stirring soundtrack thanks to the Disk System's extra sound channel. There are some nice game mechanics in place, but it does grow frustrating thanks to the limitations of the flick-screen movement and endless enemy respawns. With pixel-perfect jumps and sprawling levels, exploring Ai Senshi Nicol soon starts to feel like a grind – and a tense one at that, when death is constantly just a few health bars away.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Getsu Fūma Den 月風魔伝

In this sprawling action adventure from Konami, the hero, Getsu Fūma, sets off to avenge the deaths of his two brothers at the hands of the Dragon Master and retrieve their legendary Wave Swords.

The action switches between an overhead map of the world and side-scrolling dungeons, which occasionally include 3D first-person sections. Each dungeon is a hack 'n' slash platformer in the vein of Castlevania, and you simply have to battle your way through the demons within to reach the end and continue on your quest. Defeated monsters release health potions as well as money, which can be spent in the overworld shops on projectile weapons and shields.

Graphically the game is a mixed bag: it does feature nice sprite work and detailed backdrops, but some garish colour schemes and the blocky overworld map spoil the effect.

With a large landscape, various mid-level bosses and a fair amount of backtracking through dungeons, Getsu Fūma Den poses a lengthy – if not always entirely thrilling – challenge. Fortunately a password feature keeps your items and progress intact.

Fans of the game have noticed many similarities between this and Konami's later NES game, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, which many see as Getsu Fūma Den's spiritual successor.

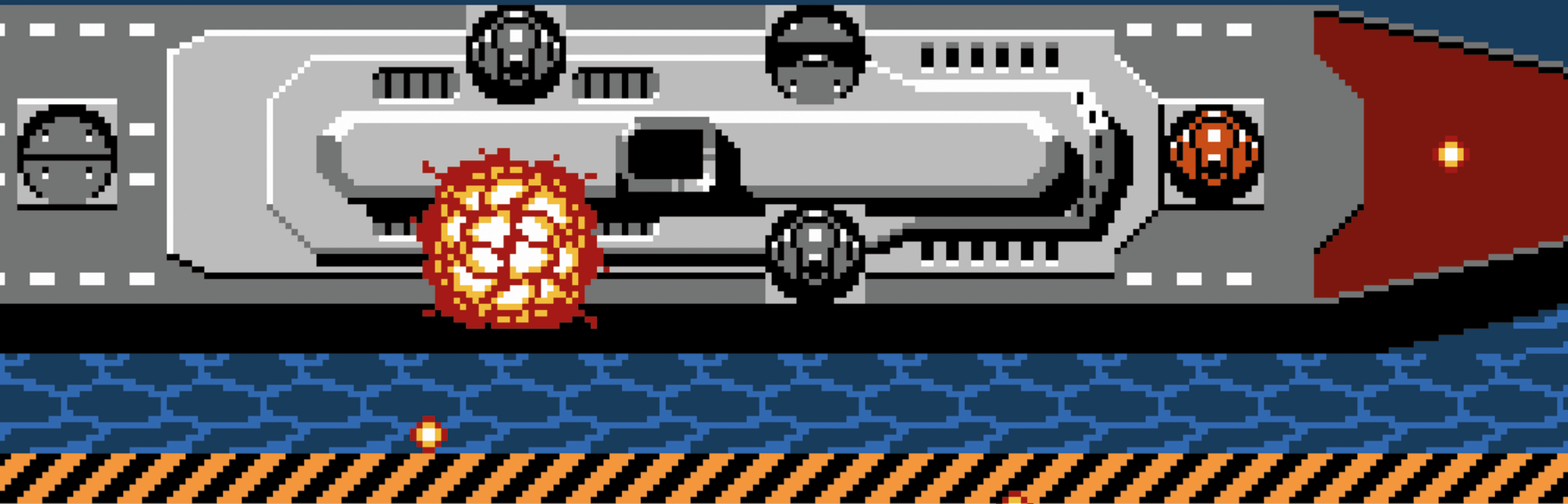
Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Action

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami





Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Konami



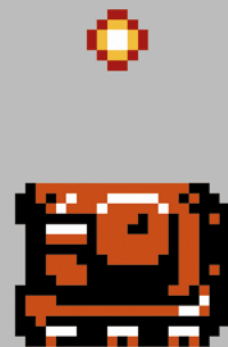
Jackal

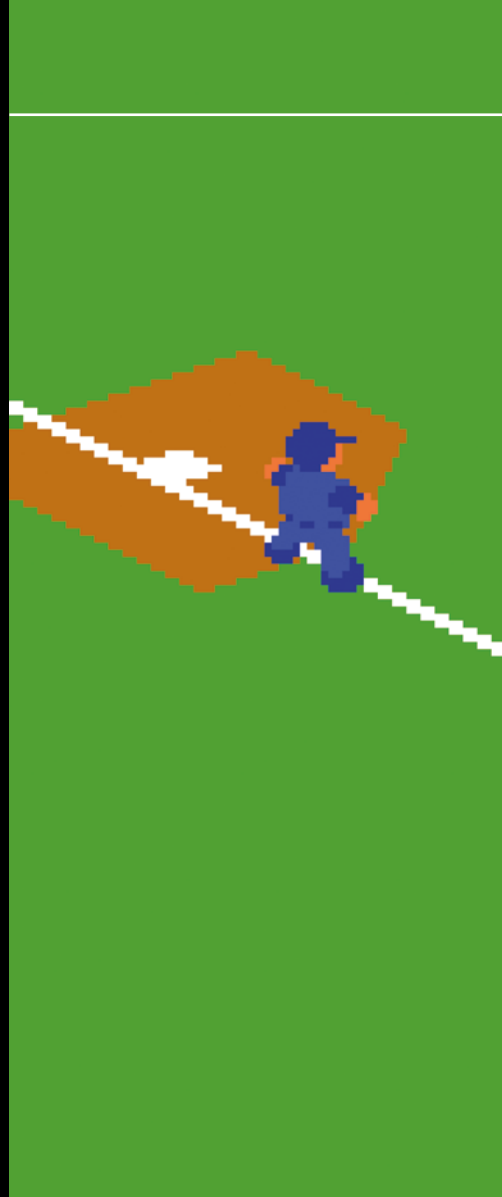
This tidy conversion of the Konami coin-op puts you in an armed Jeep on a search and rescue mission behind enemy lines, faced with an onslaught of troops, tanks and gun emplacements. Gameplay is unique in that you have an eight-way scrolling map wider than the screen, meaning that you have to carefully explore the level to reveal enemies just out of view - steam straight ahead and you're likely to run into a fatal barrage of fire.

You begin the mission armed with a machine gun and grenades, but freeing prisoners-of-war grants you a rocket launcher. This can then be upgraded to produce explosive splash damage, which is vital for later stages where enemy emplacements are less accessible.

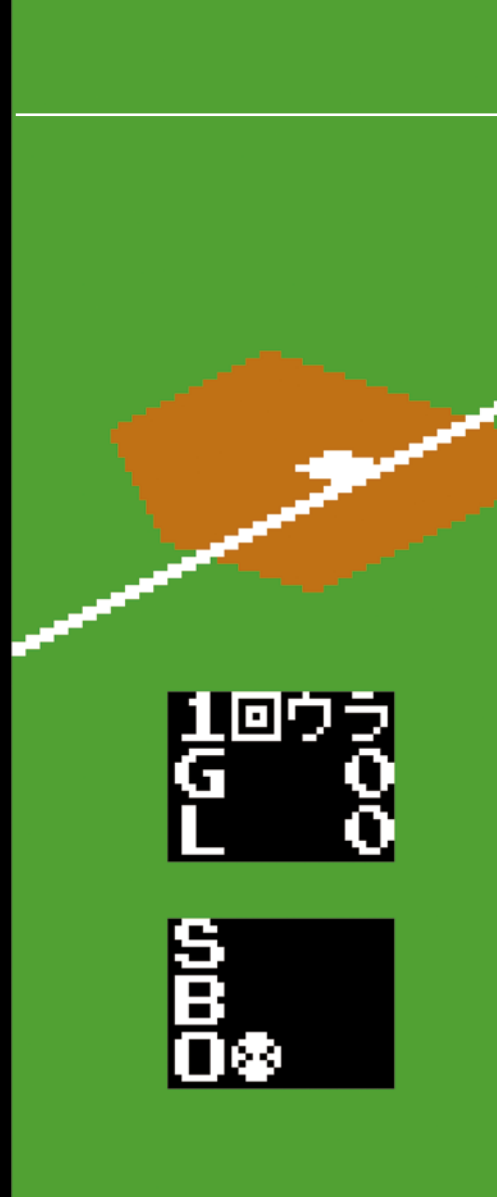
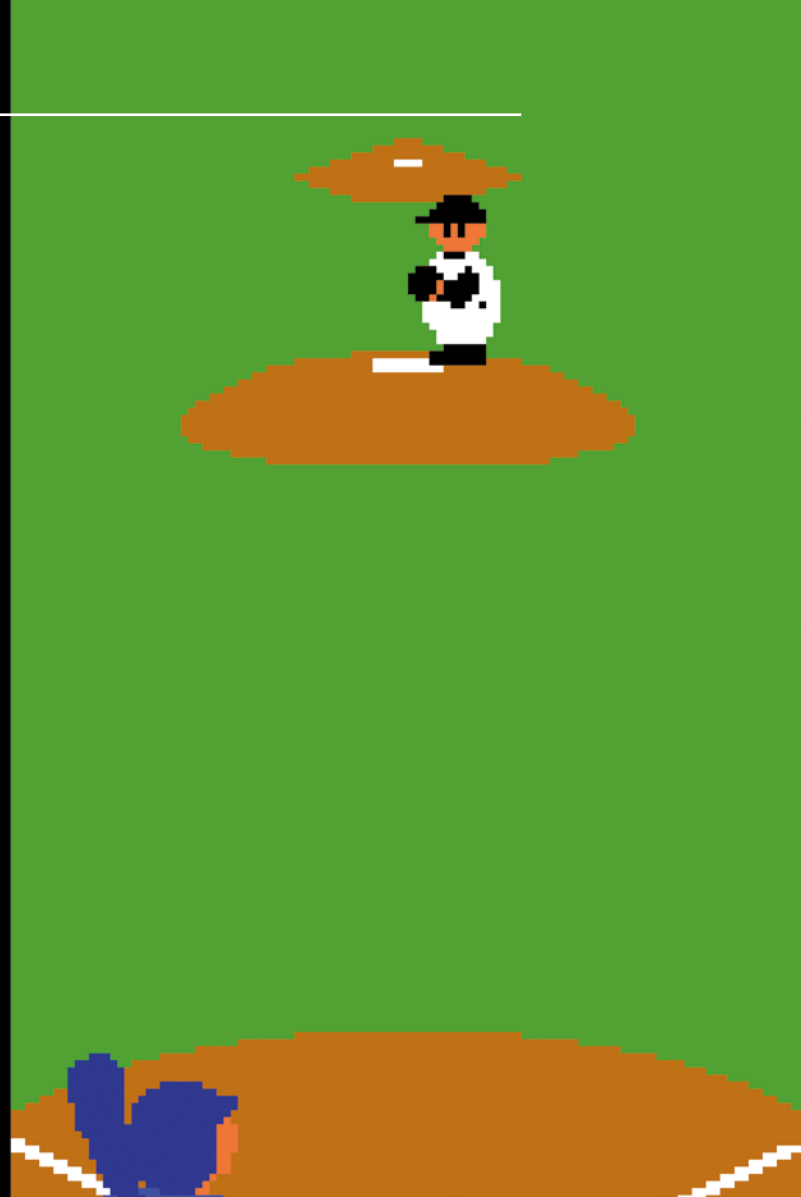
The action in Jackal is tense and relentless. Progress is a matter of learning the locations of the enemy ordnance and ensuring you get all the weapon upgrades - and don't forget to keep firing as the terrain reveals hidden bonus items including extra lives, weapon upgrades and enemy-clearing smart bombs.

With limited lives and no save points (losing all your Jeeps takes you back to the start of the level), Jackal is unforgiving, but then success is all the sweeter for it. A unique and classic 8-bit shooter.





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Pro Yakyuu Family Stadium '87 プロ野球 ファミリースタジアム'87

"I was involved from the original Famista on the Famicom, all the way until the Nintendo 64. I was a programmer in the first half of the series, and a director in the second half. It sold over ten million copies. I like baseball, so it was nice to contribute to and increase the awareness and the appeal of professional baseball in Japan!

I remember work was really slow at the time and I didn't have anything to do so every day I killed time by playing Nintendo's baseball game on the Famicom with my colleagues. As we were playing we would say things like, 'This game would be more interesting if it did this instead.' For instance, with Nintendo's game they didn't mention the names of players, and didn't give any indication of the ability of each of them. So we said it would make it more interesting if we made that information available. Another thing with Nintendo's baseball game, you couldn't play on the defence and we said it'd be better if you could play defence as well. So we were having these talks, chatting, and I went to the supervisor and asked what I should do next. I was told, 'You can do whatever pleases you.' So I said, 'I want to make a baseball game for the Famicom!'"

Professor Yoshihiro Kishimoto

Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Namco

Super Star Force: Jikūreki no Himitsu

スーパースターフォース 時空暦の秘密

“There was a Famicom game released under Tecmo when I was at the company, called Super Star Force, which was probably one of the first games to incorporate time travel. It came about when Hudson did an unofficial sequel of our original arcade game, which the president of Tecmo didn't like! He was angry and said 'they can't just make a sequel without our permission!'. So we decided to create our own bigger and better game. Building on the original arcade game, the designer really liked RPGs, so he wanted to develop it into a bigger story with more extensions.

As development started, the two of us went to see *Back to the Future* at the cinema. The idea in the film is that whatever you do after going back to the past would have an impact on the present, so this was implemented in Super Star Force - you go through the portals into the past, and you do things, and that has an impact on the present. This was expressed in the form of different topology or different geography that we built into the game.”

Michitaka Tsuruta



Platform
Famicom
—
Released
1987
—
Genre
Scrolling shooter
—
Developer
and publisher
Tecmo

Labyrinth: Maou no Meikyuu

ラビリンス 魔王の迷宮

“As a child, the film Labyrinth fascinated me with its strange denizens and mysterious locales. I was lucky to discover there was a game themed on the film released only in Japan for the Famicom. Normally I would never have known, but because my local game store imported titles for fun and would let people try them out, I had a chance to play it. While the game itself could have been any top-down action title, the idea I was playing as Sarah was enough for me to let my imagination fill in the rest.”

Buying items from the Worm and interacting with Jareth were the most exciting parts to me, and I played doggedly until I was able to rescue Toby, Sarah’s baby brother, just like in the film. When I look back on the game now I have to laugh - it hasn’t aged well, and I can’t help but wish someone had made a better one that was more exploratory and atmospheric, like the Myst series. Despite that, hearing the 8-bit rendition of the main theme still delights me to this day, and I’m grateful I got a chance to play this odd little title.”

Colette Bennett

Platform
Famicom

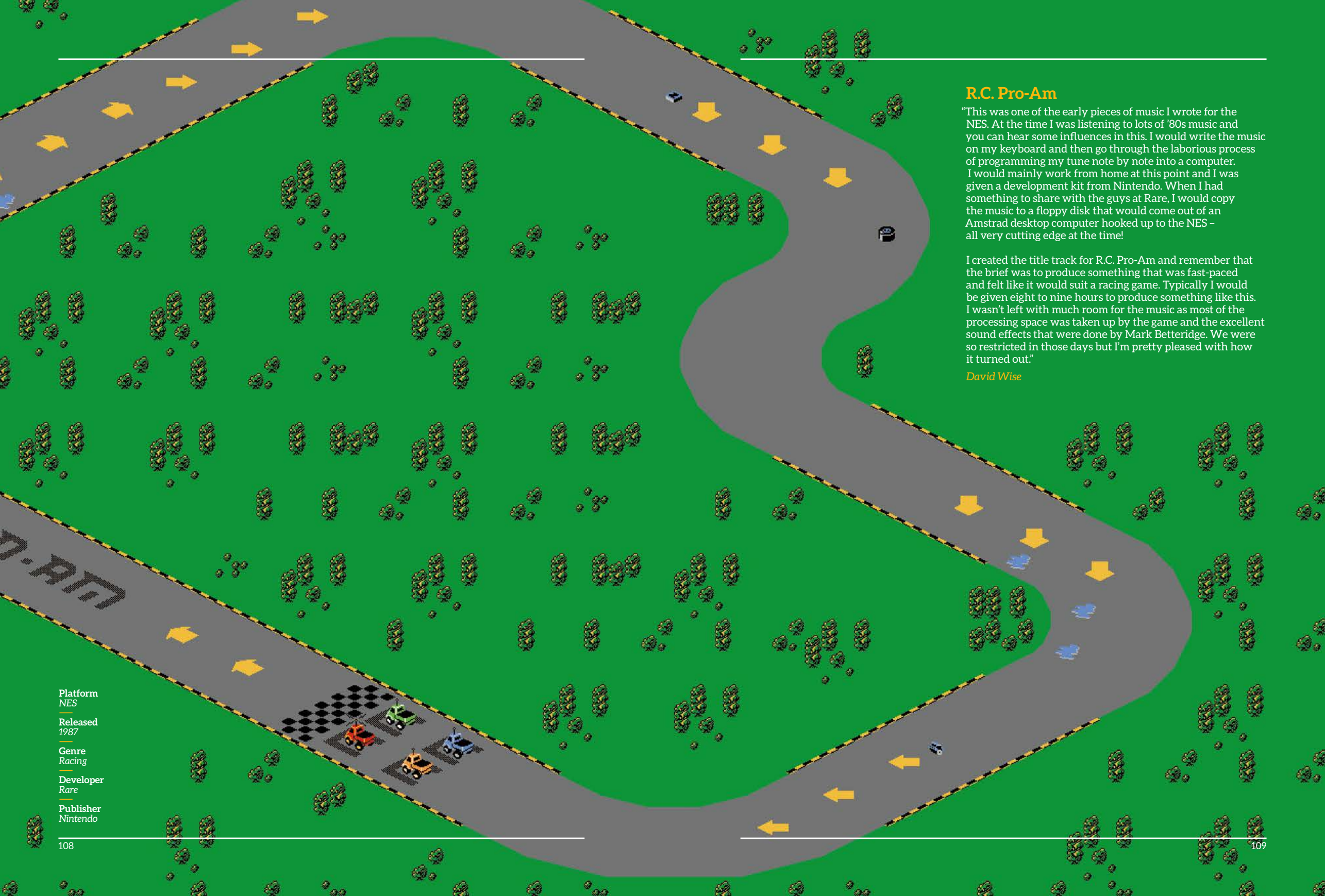
Released
1987

Genre
Adventure

Developer
Atlus

Publisher
Tokuma Shoten





R.C. Pro-Am

"This was one of the early pieces of music I wrote for the NES. At the time I was listening to lots of '80s music and you can hear some influences in this. I would write the music on my keyboard and then go through the laborious process of programming my tune note by note into a computer. I would mainly work from home at this point and I was given a development kit from Nintendo. When I had something to share with the guys at Rare, I would copy the music to a floppy disk that would come out of an Amstrad desktop computer hooked up to the NES - all very cutting edge at the time!

I created the title track for R.C. Pro-Am and remember that the brief was to produce something that was fast-paced and felt like it would suit a racing game. Typically I would be given eight to nine hours to produce something like this. I wasn't left with much room for the music as most of the processing space was taken up by the game and the excellent sound effects that were done by Mark Betteridge. We were so restricted in those days but I'm pretty pleased with how it turned out."

David Wise

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Racing

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Nintendo

Mega Man

“When I was growing up and going to school, all I really wanted to do was be an artist. I actually got my first job at Capcom through my artistic skill and it wasn’t until Mega Man was done that I really became interested in game development. When I joined the Mega Man team his outline existed, his basic pixel structure was done – kind of the skeleton, if you will – but things like his final look, as well as his jumping animation and so on, still had to be completed. He existed as a single sprite; no animations and no poses existed – they hadn’t

been designed when I joined the team. The first Mega Man had a team of six people, and we did it in about four months. Which means that, relatively speaking, there wasn’t really that much of an investment from the company. If it had not come out, if it had been cancelled, it wouldn’t have been the end of the world. Maybe for the first two-thirds of my career, I was operating under that sort of style. Obviously there was pressure, but it was a relatively free environment, because games didn’t take long to develop.”

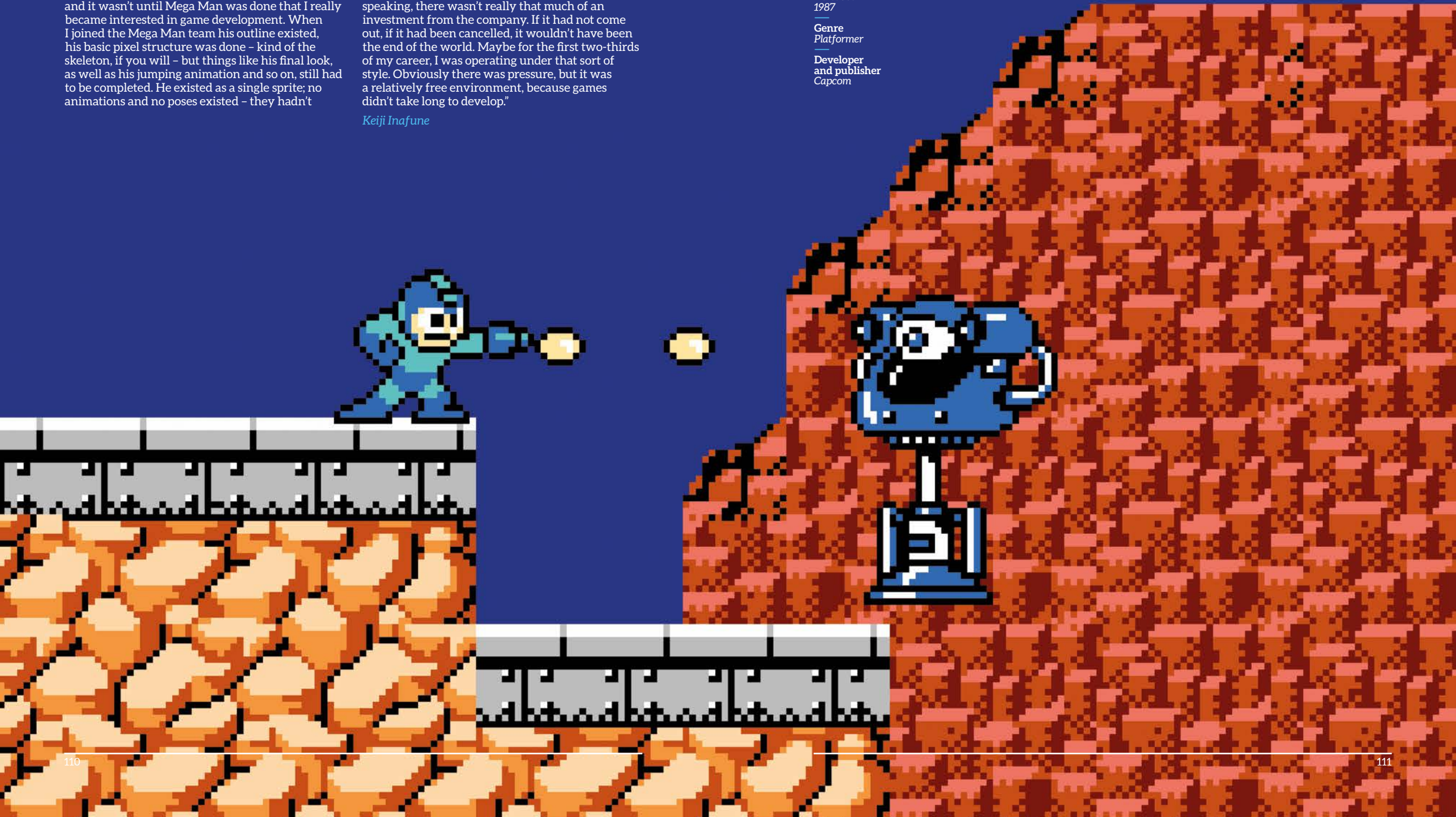
Keiji Inafune

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



The Goonies II

“The Goonies II is one of the most interestingly bizarre NES titles. While the player explores a vast open world, the game plays like a Metroidvania. However, upon entering a room, the game morphs into a first-person, menu-based adventure. Konami somehow made this contrast work.

This game also plays on nostalgia in some truly odd ways. Although it’s a sequel to The Goonies, a title only released in arcades on Nintendo’s PlayChoice-10 cabinets, this game caters to fans of the movie and includes some of the same cast. The Fratellis have captured the Goonies, and it’s up to Mikey to save them. For some unexplained reason, that includes a mermaid named Annie!

Without the internet, Goonies fans in the 1980s had many unanswered questions. There was much speculation to the game’s origin, including whether or not it was based on an unmade sequel to the film. Mikey and the Fratellis looked like the original actors, but the other Goonies did not. What happened to others? And why was Annie a mermaid?

The Goonies II is fun and challenging. The gameplay itself relies on mystery and discovery, and the game’s relaxed connection with a popular franchise creates that same mystique even when not playing. It has earned its place in videogame history.”

Zack Scott

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Konami

HEY YOU, GOONIES!





Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Racing

Developer
and publisher
Square

Rad Racer

"Prior to everything Fantasy, Square published this arcade-style driving game, putting you behind the wheel of a Ferrari 328 or F1 machine in an exhilarating high-speed race on a three-lane highway through eight scenic courses. Eager to further intrigue players with its 3D technology after the strong reception for 3D World Runner, Square included an optional 3D mode in the game and a pair of 3D glasses in the box.

The sense of immersion and speed is palpable (3D-enabled or not) as you white-knuckle it to reach multiple checkpoints and complete each course before time runs out. The gameplay blend is superb, enticing you to boost your acceleration while testing your reflexes and patience to pass other cars. Aggressive driving is most often encouraged with only modest braking needed through the sweeping or moderately sharp turns, and in allowing for some light contact with other cars before causing you to careen and crash into a roadside object. Completing the game is challenging, however, as time is likely to expire if you crash more than once between checkpoints or drive too conservatively. With no option but to restart from the beginning of the game, the reward is that much finer once you do complete the roughly 30-minute ride and cross the final finish line."

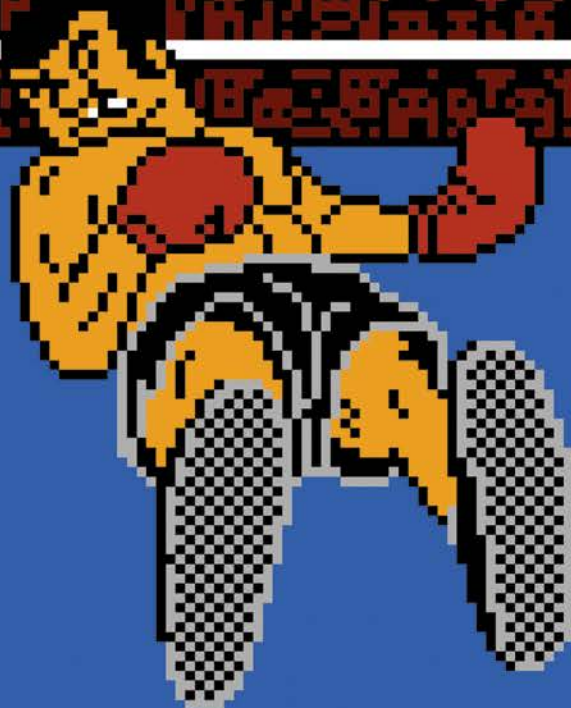
Perry Rodgers

Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

"Up until this point, I had been drawing everything myself, but I got scared when I had to draw the big boxers for Punch-Out!!, I thought there was no way I could draw them with my ability, so I drew several pictures of boxers and I took them to (Takao) Kozai-san's Studio Junio in Tokyo. That was the first time I had ever associated with an animator. I explained things to him while he looked at the pictures in a café, and he complemented me by saying, 'You sure draw interesting pictures.' No matter how I looked at them though, they were poorly done. I came back to Kyoto all excited about that, and after a week my original drawings came back as beautiful cells. They were coloured in pretty colours and I thought that now they really looked like boxers.

I remember it was really hard work when we did Punch-Out!!. It was the first time I'd gotten to work with animators and it lead to me meeting Mr. Kotabe and Mr. Maeda, who used to draw Dr. Slump. I asked him to do illustrations when we made Zelda and we worked on Excitebike together."

Shigeru Miyamoto



Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

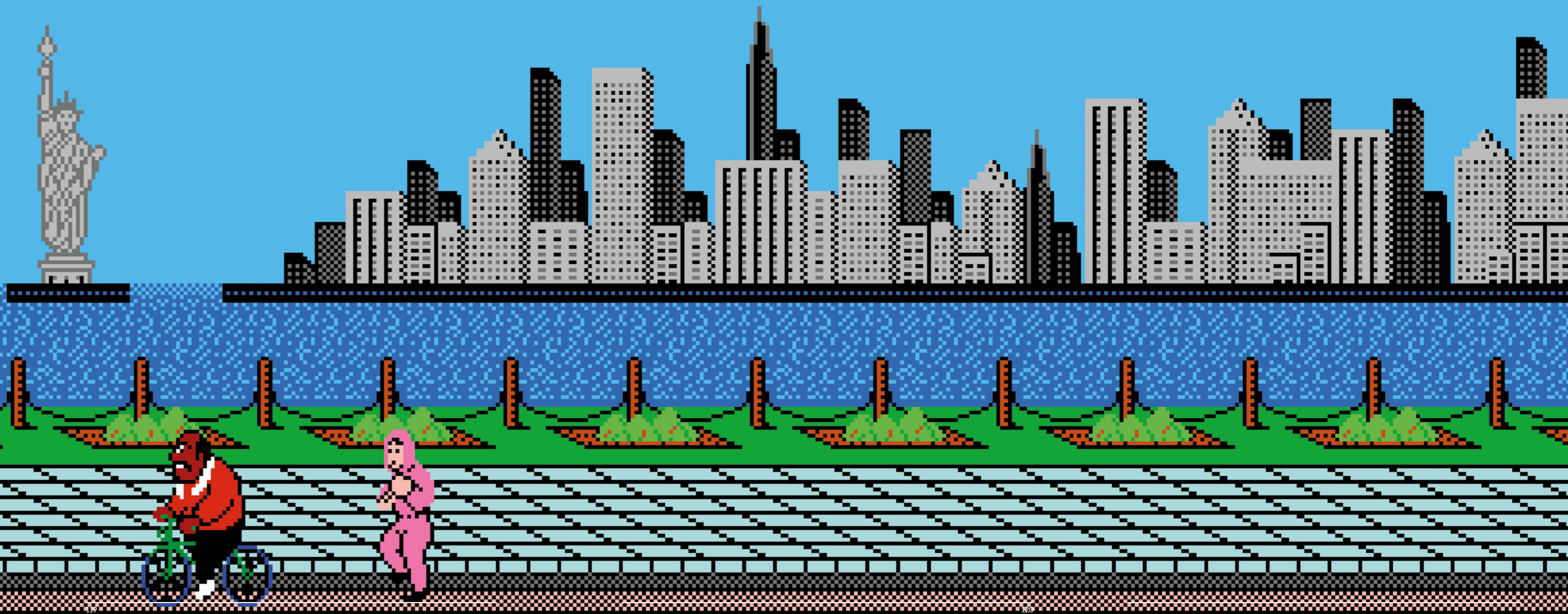
Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

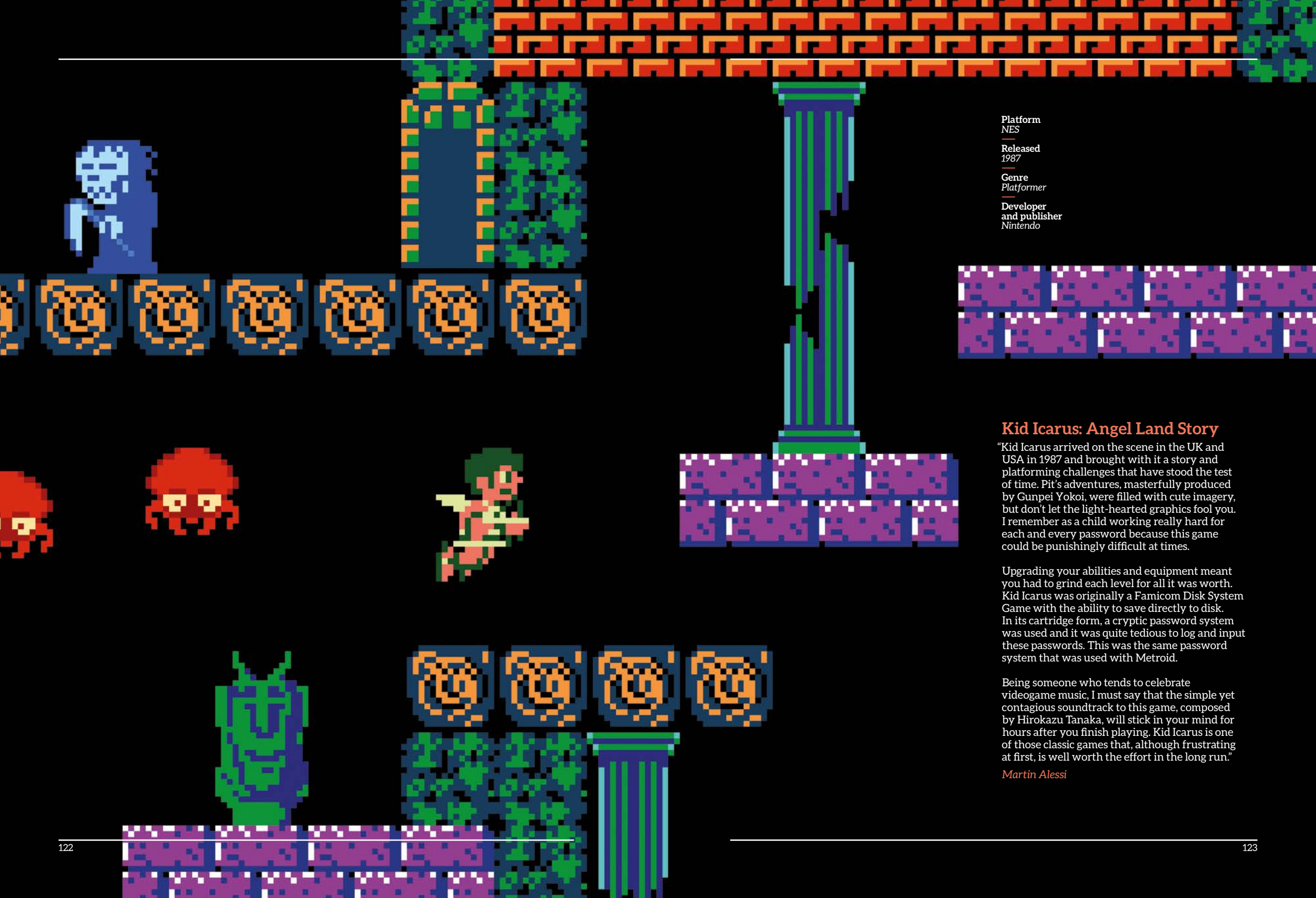
"Mike Tyson never looked so good! Back in 1987 the thought of facing Iron Mike in the ring was a nightmare. But with Punch-Out!! you could box your way up the rankings to face the then champ and with some perseverance take him out. This game originally appeared in the arcades without Tyson, but when Nintendo converted the game for the NES they added his name to help sell the game.

Punch-Out!!'s gameplay view is unique and classic – one that any long-time gamer can instantly recognise. You play your fighter from behind, standing toe-to-toe with your opponents who all appear much larger than you. Your moves are basic and a little sparse, but once you master the controls you can really get into the fisticuffs. On offence you have left and right jabs and body blows. If you counterpunch at the right time you can earn a power-up for a powerful uppercut, that eventually can become a knockout blow. On defence, you can dodge, duck and block, and you really had to master those moves to survive.

Even though their appearances were hilariously cartoonish, none of your opponents was a palooka. They each had a unique fighting style that matched their body types. Mike Tyson fell from the fight card when he was defeated by Buster Douglas, but Punch-Out!! continued its boxing prowess (albeit without Mike) with appearances on the Famicom, the Wii, the 3DS and the Wii U. While some gamers don't consider it a true sports title, it remains a boxing classic."

Wes Nihei





Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

Kid Icarus: Angel Land Story

“Kid Icarus arrived on the scene in the UK and USA in 1987 and brought with it a story and platforming challenges that have stood the test of time. Pit’s adventures, masterfully produced by Gunpei Yokoi, were filled with cute imagery, but don’t let the light-hearted graphics fool you. I remember as a child working really hard for each and every password because this game could be punishingly difficult at times.

Upgrading your abilities and equipment meant you had to grind each level for all it was worth. Kid Icarus was originally a Famicom Disk System Game with the ability to save directly to disk. In its cartridge form, a cryptic password system was used and it was quite tedious to log and input these passwords. This was the same password system that was used with Metroid.

Being someone who tends to celebrate videogame music, I must say that the simple yet contagious soundtrack to this game, composed by Hirokazu Tanaka, will stick in your mind for hours after you finish playing. Kid Icarus is one of those classic games that, although frustrating at first, is well worth the effort in the long run.”

Martin Alessi

NAMCO®

Like so many veterans of the Japanese games industry, Namco started life manufacturing mechanical 'amusement machines' before the concept of videogames even existed. The company started life as Nakamura Manufacturing in 1955, taking its name from founder Masaya Nakamura, a former naval engineer who used \$3,000 to start his business by purchasing two second-hand mechanical horse rides. Because many locations in and around Tokyo already had exclusive deals with other amusement vendors, Nakamura was forced to set up his machines in the rooftop garden of a Yokohama department store, where he cleaned, maintained and operated them personally. As his business grew, Nakamura renamed the firm Nakamura Amusement Machine Manufacturing Company - or 'Namco' for short.

In 1970 Namco produced a mechanical driving simulator simply entitled Racer, which, despite not being a videogame in the strictest sense, would foreshadow the company's preoccupation with the racing genre. It wouldn't create an original videogame for another eight years, but became intimately involved with the industry via Atari's struggling Japanese branch, which Nakamura was

keen to acquire in 1974. Namco paid \$500,000 for Atari Japan and was duty-bound to cover the firm's existing debts, but it gained an exclusive license to handle the distribution of Atari's games in Japan for the next ten years, ultimately a very wise investment, especially as many of the company's games - such as Breakout - were incredibly popular in the Land of the Rising Sun.

So popular in fact that Atari couldn't keep up with Namco's demands for more machines, and in order to combat the flood of counterfeit units Nakamura began producing his own Breakout machines; he insisted that Atari founder Nolan Bushnell had given permission during a meeting in London but Bushnell has refuted this claim. It was to be the first in a long chain of events that would lead to litigation between the two firms, but the legal ramifications were arguably worth stomaching; Namco had used Atari's expertise in the creation of arcade titles to become one of the biggest games companies in Japan.

However, Nakamura wasn't content to merely ride on the coattails of another firm - he wanted Namco to become famous for its own brands. 1978 would see the arrival of Namco's

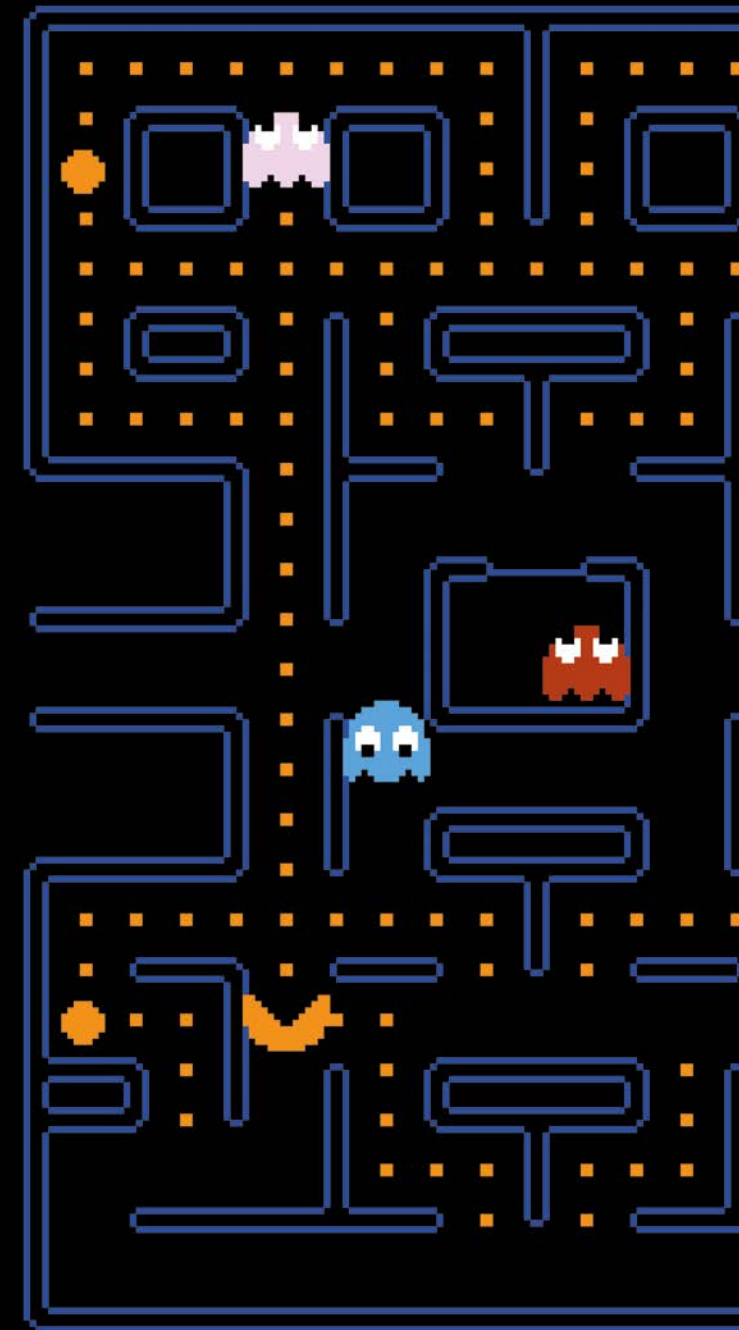
first original game, Gee Bee, designed by Toru Iwatani, who had only joined the company the year before. Iwatani would follow this title with Cutie Q and Bomb Bee in 1979 but it would be Kazunori Sawano's Galaxian - released in the same year - which really put the company on the map with arcade players. A clear clone of Taito's smash-hit Space Invaders, Galaxian improved on the concept by offering complex enemy movements as well as more detailed colour graphics. Galaxian inspired several sequels, the most famous of which was 1981's Galaga.

If Galaxian marked Namco's true arrival in the videogame arena, then 1980's Pac-Man established the firm as a world leader in the industry. Designed by Iwatani and released in Japan under the title 'Pakkuman' ('Paku-Paku' is a Japanese onomatopoeic term which describes the sound of eating), Pac-Man became a global phenomenon, inspiring a pop song, cartoon show and - of course - a flood of related merchandise. Pac-Man was the first true videogame icon, and Iwatani states that the friendly character and cute, almost non-threatening ghost enemies were part of an intentional drive to attract more women to the male-dominated amusement arcades.

“ Pac-Man took over \$1 billion in quarters after a year. ”

It clearly worked: Pac-Man took over \$1 billion in quarters after a year of release in North America, and by the end of 1980 it had overtaken Star Wars - then the largest-grossing film of all time - in terms of revenue. Some amusement arcades in North America ordered rows of identical machines to satisfy demand, and it remains one of the most commercially successful videogames of all time with sequels and revisions continuing to appear, the most recent being Pac-Man Championship Edition 2 on the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. Ironically, of the four games that Namco released in 1980, most of the company's executives assumed that Rally-X would be the most popular - even Nakamura himself has admitted that he did not anticipate the astonishing success of Iwatani's creation.

Despite Pac-Man becoming a pop-culture icon, Namco was not content to simply rely on a single franchise. In the early '80s the company released several other well-received titles in arcades, including Dig Dug, Bosconian, Mappy, Libble Rabble and Xevious, the latter being an early example of the vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up. 1982's Pole Position - another Iwatani masterpiece - was the firm's next big coin-guzzling success, and became the



Pac-Man / 1984

highest-grossing arcade game in North America a year after launch. Pole Position spawned a sequel and even a cartoon show (albeit one which had very little connection outside of sharing the same title), and it laid down some of the most basic tenets of the racing genre, including qualifying laps and checkpoints. It was also the first racer to include a real-world circuit – the legendary Fuji Speedway in Japan.

As its arcade fortunes grew, Namco looked to the home market for additional revenue streams. Its early arcade hits were released under licence on Atari's consoles in the late '70s and early '80s, but following the videogame crash of 1983 it focused on handling this process personally. It released games on home systems under the Namcot label, and – alongside Hudson – was one of the first licensees to sign up to create software for the Nintendo Famicom, which was released in Japan in 1983. Like many other early supporters of the console, Namco received special terms and was initially permitted to produce its own cartridges rather than rely on Nintendo.

Namco duly ported over several of its arcade hits to the Famicom, including Dig Dug, Mappy, Rolling Thunder, The Tower of Druaga and of course Pac-Man. It supplemented these offerings with games which were exclusive to the home, such as Battle City, Super Dimension Fortress Macross, Devilman, Digital Devil Story: Megami Tensei, Super Xevious, Family Stadium, Star Luster, and even a somewhat loose adaptation of George Lucas' Star Wars, notable for featuring a shape-shifting Darth Vader.

Like Capcom, Konami and Square, Namco benefitted greatly from the dominance of Nintendo's hardware in Japan and North America. By 1989, 40 per cent of the company's total sales were down to Nintendo, and when it came to renew the licence Nakamura expected the favourable terms to continue, given Namco's status as a very early supporter of the format. He was sorely mistaken, and Nintendo boss Hiroshi Yamauchi insisted that Namco must sign for the same terms as every other licensee. Incensed, Nakamura did what no one else in the industry dared do at that time, and publicly criticised Nintendo's 'monopoly' on the industry and its business practices. In addition to this, Nakamura pledged support to Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive console and also produced games for the NEC PC Engine – two of Nintendo's big rivals – but neither could offer the same rewards when it came to market share. Namco eventually re-signed as a licensee for the Famicom and NES, unable to turn its back on the massive audience Nintendo controlled.

Even so, the relationship between the two companies had been soured and the '90s saw a notable increase in the number of Namco titles appearing on non-Nintendo systems. The Mega Drive would get Burning Force, Dangerous Seed, Marvel Land, Rolling Thunder II, Phelios, Powerball, MegaTrax and Splatterhouse 2 between the years of 1990 and 1992 alone, while the PC Engine received numerous ports and original titles, including Pac-Land, Galaga '88, Final Lap Twin, Dragon Saber, Wonder Momo, Ordyne and Pro Tennis: World Court. Several of these were released in North America for the TurboGrafx-16, the US version of the PC Engine.

Namco's fascination with racing games gathered pace towards the end of the '80s. 1987's Final Lap was the first game with a multi-player cabinet that featured multiple screens and controls; up to eight people could race simultaneously, and this arrangement has been a staple of the coin-op industry ever since. However, the game landed Namco in legal hot water when tobacco conglomerate Philip Morris – which was then under investigation for its role in underage smoking – filed a copyright infringement lawsuit because Final Lap featured a Marlboro billboard, a common sight in real-life F1 racing at that time. Namco paid a settlement to close the case, and Final Lap 2 and Final Lap 3 followed in 1990 and 1992 respectively, both free from such questionable imagery.

In 1988 Namco released the groundbreaking Winning Run, its first racer to use 3D polygon-based visuals. Powered by the company's System 21 'Polygonizer' hardware, it showcased 60,000 polygons a second at a time when rival Sega was still relying on scaled 2D sprites to give the impression of depth and speed. A Suzuka-focused update arrived in the following year while proper numbered sequels were launched in 1990 and 1991 respectively. 1990's Driver's Eyes was a spin-off of Winning Run which spread the action across three screens, offering a panoramic perspective. The series predates the more famous Virtua Racing from Sega, often regarded as the game that truly sold 3D visuals to the general public; Sega would also imitate the multi-screen approach seen in Driver's Eyes when it released F355 Challenge in 1999.

Namco's output for the Super Nintendo was noticeably smaller than it had been for the NES – an indication of lingering animosity – but the firm's next move could be perceived as Nakamura's ultimate revenge for public humiliation he received at the hands of Yamauchi in 1989.

When electronics giant Sony announced its intention to enter the games market with its 32-bit PlayStation in 1994 – a machine which coincidentally had initially been intended as a collaboration between Sony and Nintendo before the latter left the former at the altar – Namco enthusiastically signed up as a key third-party developer. The resultant domestic port of Ridge Racer – a 3D racer released in arcades to incredible success in 1993 – was seen as the system's killer app and ensured the machine enjoyed an incredibly successful launch, upstaging

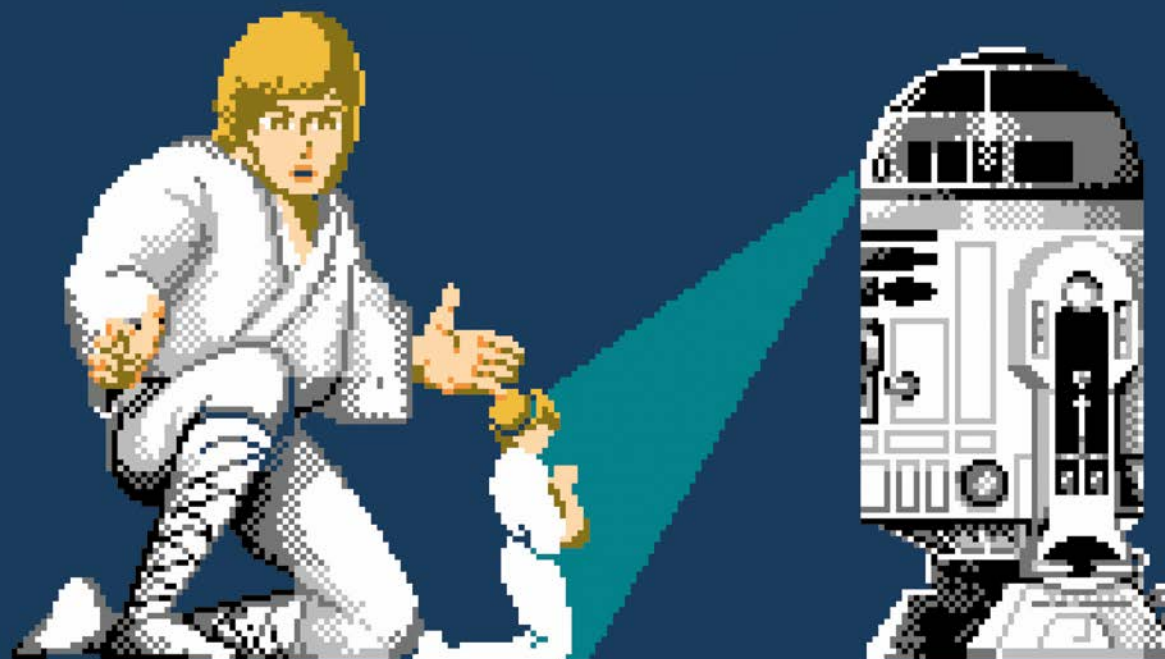
Sega's 32-bit Saturn console in the process. Namco also released Ace Combat, Tekken, Starblade, Cyber Sled, Soul Blade, Time Crisis and many other titles during the PlayStation's lifespan as Sony's machine effortlessly gobbled up the market share at the expense of old rivals Nintendo and Sega.

That's not to say that Namco remained utterly loyal to the PlayStation after this point: it continued its platform-agnostic approach by releasing games on the Nintendo 64, Game Boy, Dreamcast, GameCube and Xbox, as well as the PlayStation 2, a console which maintained Sony's seemingly effortless dominance of the games market. During this period franchises such as Ridge Racer, Tekken, Soul Blade and Ace Combat were refined with timely sequels, while the 'Tales' series of RPGs – which started life on the Super Famicom in

1995 with Tales of Phantasia – began to acquire a global audience thanks to excellent localisation work.

In 2005, it was announced that Namco and fellow Japanese videogame publisher Bandai would be combining their operations to create Bandai Namco Games, now known as Bandai Namco Entertainment. One of the biggest publishers of videogames, Bandai Namco's vast stable of properties includes Dragon Ball, Digimon, Tamagotchi, Klonoa, Naruto, One Piece and – of course – all of Namco's classics from the past few decades, such as Pac-Man, Tekken, Ridge Racer and Katamari. While it's no longer simply 'Namco', the company's legacy lives on and its brands are just as memorable today as they were back in what many deem to be the 'Golden Age' of the games industry.

Star Wars / 1987



Yume Kōjo Doki Doki Panikku 夢工場ドキドキパニック

You may not recognise the name, but you've almost certainly played the game. Dream Factory: Heart-Pounding Panic was co-produced by Nintendo and Fuji Television to promote Yume Kōjō '87, a huge public 'communication carnival' held in Osaka and Tokyo featuring the latest media technologies. The characters in the game – Imajin and his family – were the mascots of the event, and the masks that cover the faces of the enemies and act as portals also featured heavily in promotional material. With Shigeru Miyamoto at the helm, this coin-collecting, vegetable-throwing platformer already had the feel of a Mario game and so a year after its release it was reskinned and released outside Japan as Super Mario Bros. 2.

While Mario purists snub the conversion, Doki Doki Panic is an excellent platformer in its own right. The mixture of characters' abilities requires a bit of strategic thinking as you progress through the varied landscapes, and each of the 21 levels is full of the usual secrets and surprises you'd expect from a Miyamoto title. It also introduced several mechanics that are now Mario canon, such as the ability to lift items or enemies and throw them, and vertical scrolling sections, which became a key component of subsequent titles.

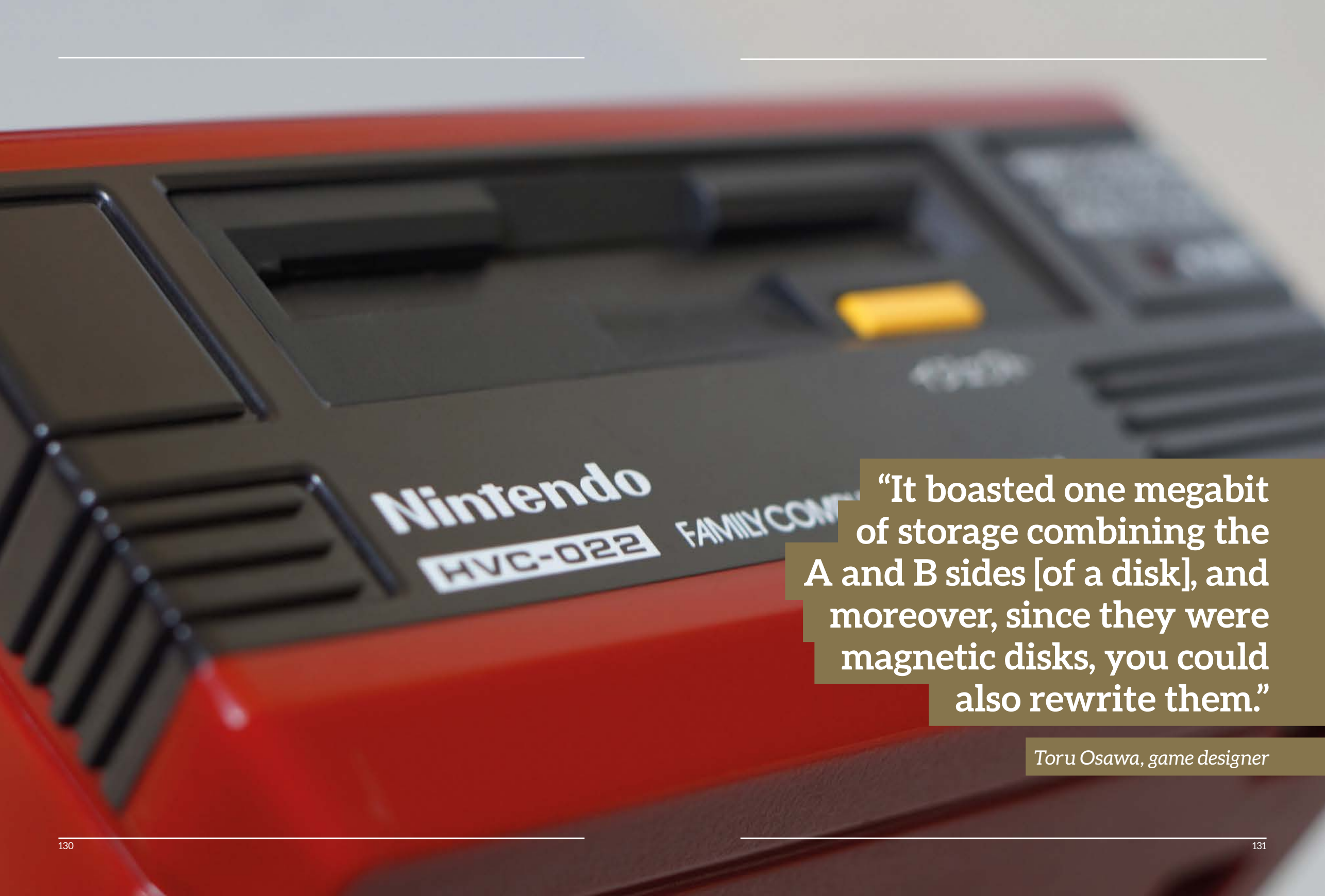
Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





“It boasted one megabit of storage combining the A and B sides [of a disk], and moreover, since they were magnetic disks, you could also rewrite them.”

Toru Osawa, game designer

Famicom Mukashibanashi: Shin Onigashima

ふぁみこん昔話 新・鬼ヶ島

Famicom Fairytales: New Demon Island is a graphical text adventure, coded by Pax Softnica and released by Nintendo for the Famicom Disk System in 1987. The game is spread across two disks and follows the tale of a pair of youngsters, the blue-haired boy Donbe and his older sister Hikari, on a quest to save the souls of their adopted parents stolen by Oni demons, and to discover their own true origins.

The story unfolds using a set of text commands, enabling the game's protagonists to move around, talk to other characters and use objects. A panel on the left narrates the character dialogue and describes any effects of your commands, while major events are portrayed graphically in the small window on the right. The game progresses in traditional text adventure fashion, but offers few hints and choosing the wrong commands can bring an abrupt end to proceedings.

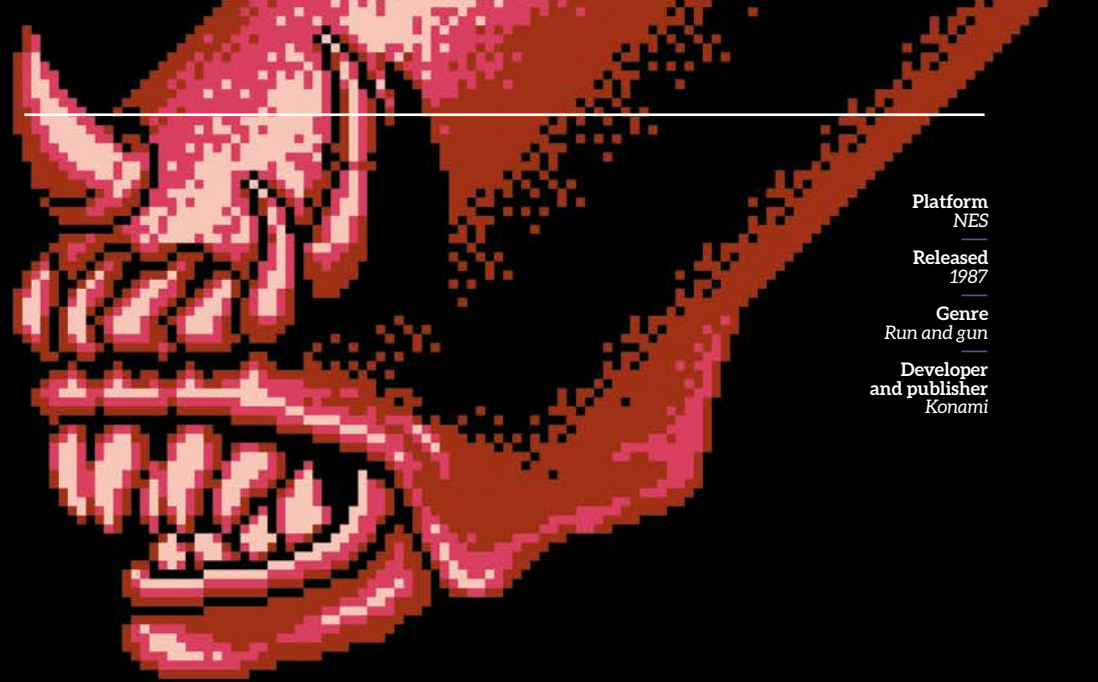
Despite its difficulty level, Shin Onigashima's blend of Japanese fairytales proved popular among gamers and led to a sequel, broadcast on the Super Famicom's Satellaview system, as well a re-release on the Game Boy Advance and Wii Virtual Console. For Western gamers, however, unless you're totally fluent in Japanese, it's of limited interest to anyone but hardcore Famicom collectors.

Platform *Famicom* / Released 1987 / Genre *Adventure* /
Developer and publisher *Nintendo*



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Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Contra

"I believe that there are very few perfect videogames. I believe Contra is one of them.

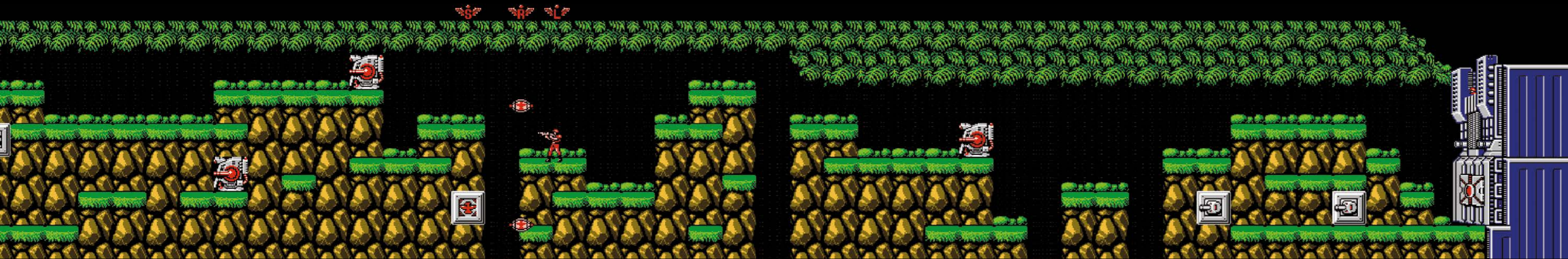
Contra is an adrenaline-pumping, pulse-pounding, relentless run 'n' gun action game. It's a pure dose of fun, bestowed to us mortals in the form of a grey plastic cartridge. If you changed anything about it, it would be a different thing than its true form. It is, unto itself, a revelation.

The Spread Gun is a sexy exercise in alien-massacre efficiency, and the allure of this game only begins there. It winks at you from across the room with its luscious, varied environments. With its enormous, nasty boss creatures, you stand no chance at resisting its temptations.

Heck, it even uses a clever graphical trick (alternating projectile sprite animations between being visible and invisible) to avoid overloading the NES hardware limitations, thus avoiding a measure of flickering and slowdown you would usually see with such ambitious gameplay. They did this just so we could enjoy it even more. Back then, the Konami brand really did mean quality.

Contra is great. It's beautiful. And, I dare say, even decades from now it will still stand on its own merits for sheer enjoyability."

Eric Bailey



Contra

"If ever a list of 'perfect' videogames were to exist, Contra (aka Probotector to some of you) would get my nomination. I struggle to find a better example of a game in which every aspect was so expertly crafted and came together so harmoniously. To this day, I still wouldn't change a thing. While admittedly on the shorter side, Contra's lack of depth gave way to incredibly tight design; nothing was mediocre or superfluous. Its visuals were iconic, from the side-scrolling platform-jumping of jungles and waterfalls to the vertical-scrolling 3D-emulating base incursions. Contra's catchy music fit each setting to a tee and remains infinitely hummable even 30 years later.

Sam Kennedy

And in terms of its challenge, Contra was the game that popularised the Konami code for more lives, and beating the game without it became a rite of passage for a generation.

Subsequent Contra titles amped things up with longer campaigns, bigger bosses, more advanced effects, etc. But there was something elegant to the minimalistic simplicity of the original Contra that's never been bettered - it's the one in the series I return to most often. To me, Contra remains a shining example of a perfect game."

Final Fantasy

“With Final Fantasy I and II, we only had two people to do all the graphics, so I did the menus. I also did the spell and item effects. Doing that gave me experience with all the different aspects of graphics work that go into a game.

I think it was Sakaguchi or Tanaka who said, ‘When they cross the bridge, I want to show a cut-scene picture.’ But I remember we didn’t have enough memory to draw a whole picture like that, and we struggled with how to display it. We ended up doing some major economising: for the top part of the picture we left it blank, and we layered many of the same sprites for the hills and ocean.

We’d draw a single sprite, then repeat it over and over in a line. If we wanted a certain accent in the scenery, we’d try flipping the sprite first. As further space-saving measure, we made the foreground all black, depicting only the hill and the characters standing there.

Even when I look at it today, I can still tell who is standing where. It turned out that working within such limited means was a good thing for me.”

Kazuko Shibuya

Platform
NES

Released
1987

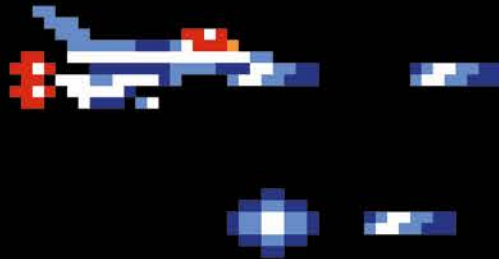
Genre
RPG

Developer
Square

Publisher
Nintendo

The image shows a pixelated title screen for the video game Final Fantasy. The title "FINAL FANTASY" is written in a large, stylized, blue font with a pink outline, set against a light blue sky. The background features a dark, pixelated landscape with a green field in the foreground, a black silhouette of a hill, and a small green tree on the left. A small, pixelated character is visible on the right side of the hill. The text "TM" is located to the right of the main title.

FINAL FANTASY™



Life Force

“Konami’s Gradius is one of the defining 2D shooters of the ‘80s, a fact evidenced by the large volume of domestic ports which exist across a wide range of formats. The 1986 coin-op release, Salamander, was never intended as a direct sequel, but is unquestionably part of the same lineage and shares many similarities. Success in arcades resulted in a Famicom version in 1987 and a North American release the following year under the name Life Force (the European edition - released in 1989 - would bravely attempt to cover all possible bases by having ‘Life Force: Salamander’ on its cover).

The 8-bit port was perhaps my first introduction to the entire Gradius series; I recall visiting a school friend’s house and being instantly captivated by the fact that it mixed horizontally-scrolling and vertically-scrolling levels - a trick that Konami would later repeat in the sublime SNES shooter Axelay. Life Force’s bizarre organic levels and enemies also caught my attention, largely because I was utterly obsessed with R-Type on my Atari ST at the time and this was the only other shooter I’d witnessed which boasted a comparably twisted aesthetic. Life Force is a unique and enjoyable blaster from a company that was really hitting its stride in the genre at the time.”

Damien McFerran



Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Hi no Tori Hououhen: Gaou no Bouken

火の鳥 鳳凰編 我王の冒険

This Japan-only title – translated as Phoenix Chronicles: Gaou's Adventure – is loosely based on the 12-book manga, Phoenix, by Osamu Tezuka. The lead character Gaou is tasked with retrieving 16 pieces of an image of the mythical phoenix. This is simply accomplished by negotiating each level and either retrieving the segment by overcoming a minor puzzle element or defeating a boss creature.

This all sounds like standard platform fare, but the play mechanic is quite ingenious. Gaou jumps with the A button, while the B button causes him to throw spears at oncoming enemies when standing, or create stone blocks while squatting.

These are used to block or trap enemies, or as a means of reaching higher platforms, so progress is an absorbing mixture of combat plus strategic placement of blocks. There's no prescribed method; each step can be achieved as you like, with the only condition being a limited number of blocks – although killing certain enemies replenishes your supply.

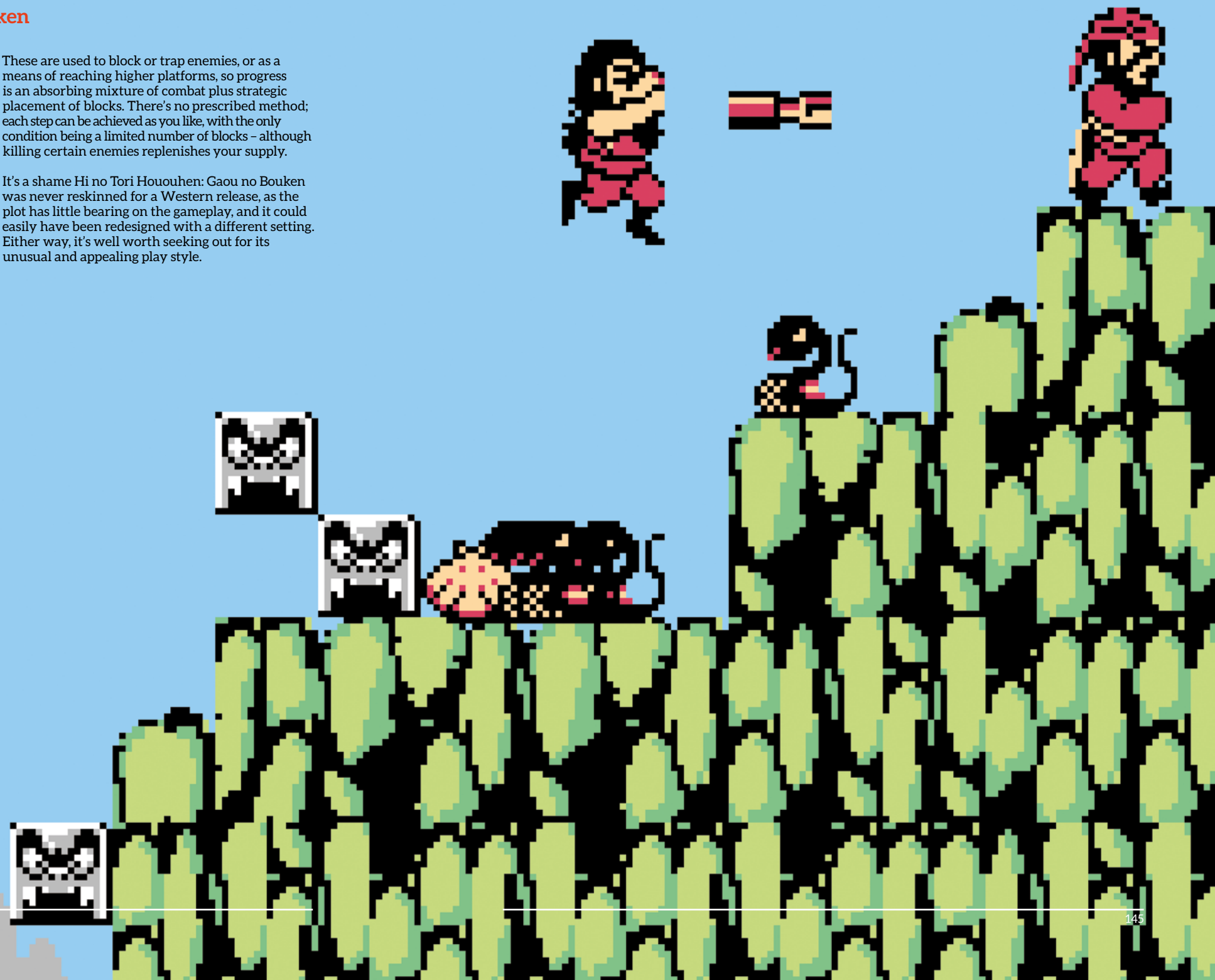
It's a shame Hi no Tori Hououhen: Gaou no Bouken was never reskinned for a Western release, as the plot has little bearing on the gameplay, and it could easily have been redesigned with a different setting. Either way, it's well worth seeking out for its unusual and appealing play style.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Konami





Platform
Famicom

Released
1987

Genre
Scrolling shooter

**Developer
and publisher**
Sunsoft

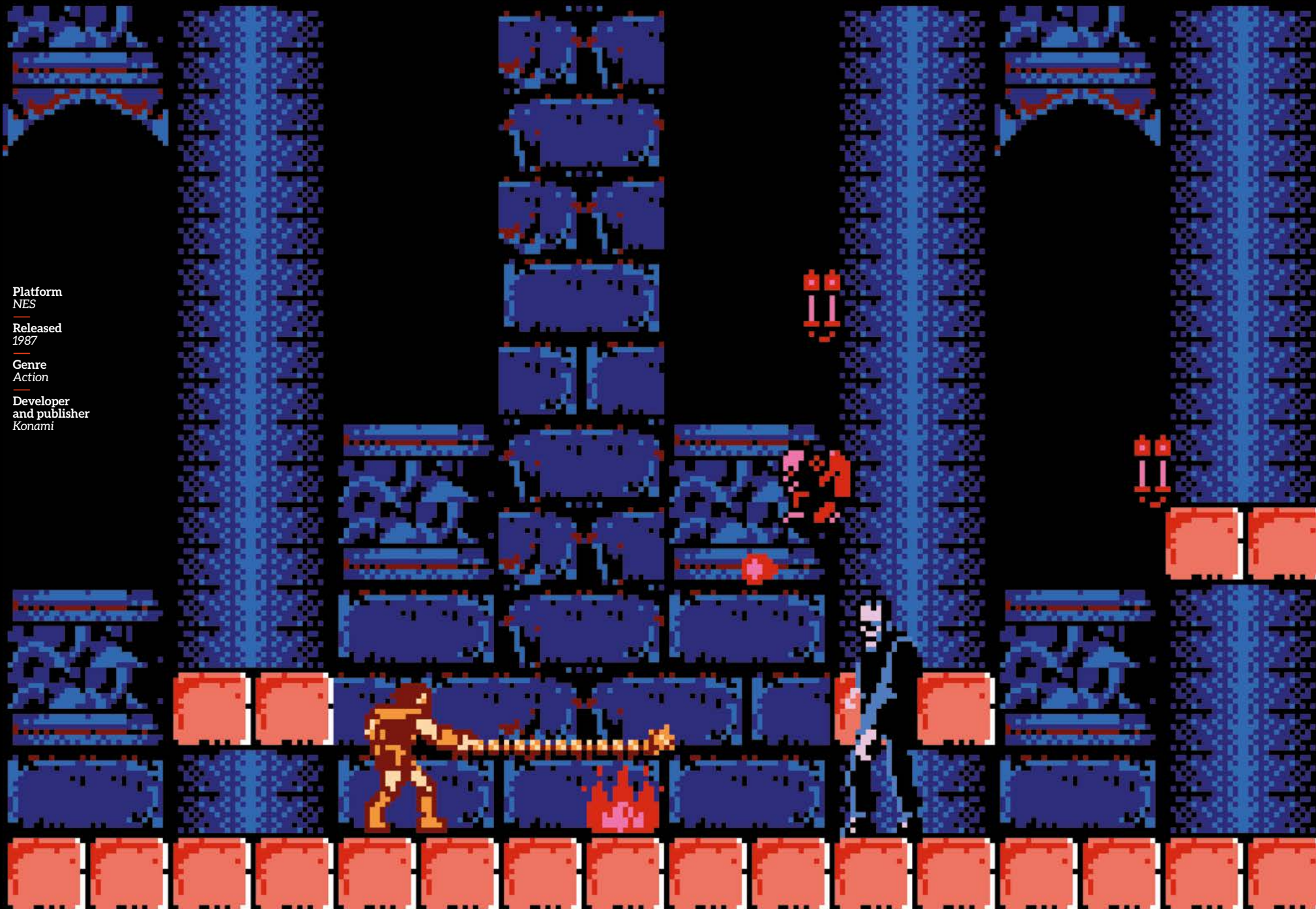
Fantasy Zone ファンタジーゾーン

Don't let the pastel-hued backdrops and cutesy characters fool you: Fantasy Zone is rock-hard. Inspired by Defender, the original was a Sega System 16 coin-op, released in 1986 and ported to a variety of consoles. The Famicom and NES got their own conversions – by Sunsoft and Tengen respectively – but unfortunately NES gamers got the poorer version, which is slow and flickery with anaemic-looking backdrops. The Sunsoft port is much more vivid and snappier to play.

However they both offer a really tough challenge, due in part to the ship's movement: rather than remain centered, you're allowed to roam the screen, which can cause you to fly into enemies that approach practically without warning. Throw in some

unpredictable flight patterns and the occasional, unexpected barrage of fire, and this cute little shooter suddenly takes on a much more menacing personality.

End-of-level bosses are tough and unforgiving (death prompts a whole level restart) and even the power-ups are designed to frustrate, since weapon upgrades – bought using coins released by defeated baddies – run out before you've really done any major damage with them. Unlike some games converted from arcade machines and tweaked to be home-console-friendly, Fantasy Zone bears its coin-swallowing heritage just a little too aggressively.



Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Castlevania

"At Konami, there were a range of people working in the sound team. Some focused entirely on programming, others focused entirely on composing, and others like me could do all things sound-related. Kenichi Matsubara, a person who exclusively composed music, took charge of the score for the sequel.

After I had joined Konami, Castlevania (aka Akumajō Dracula) was actually my first work. I aimed to create music suitable for the image of the game, particularly noting the dynamism with which the player moves and the gothic images of the background. In terms of the rock approach, it came naturally from me. I didn't compose the soundtrack with an initial plan, but gradually composed what seemed natural and fitting. I think the music has become so loved because it was a complementary aspect of the game. The scenario, gameplay, characters and everything else were so good and the score fitted in nicely. Because the game was so perfectly made, the music for it also became more memorable.

After I had left Konami, the Castlevania series continued to be produced. I think later scores in the series were considerably different from the original scores that I composed. There were numerous composers in later instalments and they each offered their own individuality into the music."

Kinuyo Yamashita



Wizards & Warriors

"My first job was in a music shop, selling drums, until a Yamaha CX5 music computer came into stock. I learned how to use it, and using MIDI I was able to hook it up to several drum machines and synthesizers. It helped me to sell a lot of music computers, but the best deal was when demoing the unit to two brothers: Tim and Chris Stamper. They asked me who had written the demo music and, upon explaining that they were listening to my compositions, they offered me a job at Rare.

The music for Wizards & Warriors was inspired by the classical composer Bach, and was actually based on a tune I wrote when I was just 15. When the brief came along for Wizards & Warriors, we felt that it would suit the medieval style of the game – with it being written on the piano and harpsichord it seemed to fit. I was working at home at the time and this was my second job for Rare after Slalom. I always thought Wizards & Warriors was really interesting and the main character, Kuros the knight, was pretty cool."

David Wise

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Action

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Acclaim

An interview with Tim Girvin

Tim Girvin is an award-winning designer who has been working in the field of branding and packaging for the past 40 years. He founded Girvin in 1977 and can list companies such as Coca-Cola, Disney, Kraft Foods, Yves Saint Laurent and MGM among his clients. Girvin was instrumental in the branding and packaging design of the NES when it launched in North America.

How did it get started? Did you always have an interest in design? My mother is a fine art painter and my father is a retired surgeon, so in a manner, my early upbringing was art and science. I used to draw with my mother. And to the science, it was an early exploration of nature that got me interested and a kick-off to a vast capacity for curiosity – exploring the natural world. I'd professed a journey to science, particularly marine biology and comparative invertebrate physiology; in college, that's where my studies took me. But in rendering research and lab journals – I combined illustrations, type design and notations – my professor suggested that I should be exploring book design and illustration, so I started to explore that direction, which led to studies in art history, architecture, interiors and design. From there, I began to study that legacy – which, in book design, literally, is the history of the book, the history of design, the letterform and the illustrative content that brings messaging and visual content together. From there, shopfronts,

packaging, vehicular graphics, painting schemes and interiors and sign-writing. Add calligraphy and type design and you have my history – to packaging.

Did you always intend on working within the video game sector? I never intended to get into gaming design and packaging – it happened by way of a request from the leadership team at Nintendo and Minoru Arakawa, who'd asked us to create a Christmas card. And from there, the journey began. It all started with that Christmas card. I'd memorised a full Japanese opening to present at the kick-off of the opening pitch to the then CEO, Arakawa-san, which I recall to this day was presented in a smoke-filled room of executives. I was asked to design a Christmas card involving Mario. It was a no-budget project. I have no idea where a copy of that might be in our archives! That was a real foot in the door for us and from there we built a pathway to becoming the Design Agency of record for Nintendo in the '90s, designing all their packing solutions across multiple systems.

Did you go to Japan at all to present designs? While Nintendo Japan was the key leadership in all decision-making and strategic direction for Nintendo of America, we didn't go to Japan much for business. Our presentations and partner teams were at their American office in Washington.

How did you create your designs? Was it early days of the Apple Mac or was it all done by hand? Most of our work during that time was pre-digital, though we worked with Nintendo on supporting a move to digital with their internal design teams. But the core NES packaging design in the early days was conventionally photo-typographically set font work that we rebuilt by hand and customised. Hardware was straight shot work, colours for press were full colour with Pantone colours, laminated cardboard and protective varnishes. Dielines were built from engineered die-forms for packaging lines, shelf limitations, stacking and shipping/freighting allowances.

How did you go about designing the NES packaging? The first NES package they gave us to redesign was an existing Japanese box, and we remade it for the US market. We just made some basic design decisions, like aligning elements and making sure consistent colours were being used for each seal, logo, mark and so on. Sometimes the Japanese packaging looked as if a different person had designed each of the six sides, without consulting the other designers! When they saw what a difference that made, they said, 'We would like you to redo our whole NES packaging system'. That opened the door for us to look at all the type-forms, system of colour usage and backgrounds across the whole range. We then applied the design style to everything, including peripherals such as the NES Advantage and NES Max. Importantly, the design style was consistent across everything.

The sleek black box and futuristic-looking font and graphics on the NES packaging are really iconic. Where did this design style come from? The overarching strategy for Nintendo packaging was assertion and shelf dominance – we pushed the button to support a more integrated and systemic approach, modernizing typographic rendering of titling to compress and accelerate the messaging. Given that the product is white with luminous highlighting, we built that as a model to render the group of offerings for what it was – a system – and the innovative thinking that went into designing this technology. Back then, this was high-tech. We boosted that presence, since we were selling to parents as much as we were their game-playing youth.

Your relationship with Nintendo then moved onto creating game box art and logos. How would you approach a typical brief? We'd meet with the player teams, product testers and enthusiasts. We also studied prototype software cartridges and played the games ourselves, looking for key gaming scenes for back panel portrayal, as well as looking to conceptualise the game concept in graphic treatments of the name, building illustrative solutions and combining them as holistic branding, shelf-worthy consumer presentations.

Many times, we would receive the Japanese version of the game, and our initial task was to immerse ourselves in it – there was a small group of us that spent every lunch hour playing Nintendo – then we needed to

think of what name it should have for the US audience. Often the Japanese game would have a name that just seemed very obscure. I remember one that was simply titled 'Mother', which in our hands became 'EarthBound Beginnings'. I think our game-naming efforts are what grew into a whole design segment for Girvin – name development, the group we call 'Ideator'.

When creating A Legend of Zelda, we approached that design strategy as more mythic in character – we tried to build on the legendary conception of the game, creating an iconic crest in metallic silver which contained a series of icons that represented aspects of the game. The font, like most of our game logos, was completely



NES 'Control Deck' packaging / 1985

hand-drawn and customised. The background solid golds supported that legendary and adventuresome principle of the game. It's also one of the only games I've ever seen that came on a gold cartridge.

Game packaging is designed very much with the consumer in mind. They need to see the design and the concept quickly in a compressed and highly complicated selling environment. To that end, we designed the Final Fantasy lettering as a taller and more condensed rendering, since there is a need for illustrative space beneath – this became a single line message. The more characters in the title, the more verticality is required in the design treatment. We didn't want to play it out as a conventional 'gaming title' but tried to bring out the RPG and adventuresome character of the premise.

In both Zelda and Final Fantasy, we studied and played the games to learn about their details and what elements we could pull for maximising shelf storytelling and player epiphany.

Did you create any other game logos or box art for the NES? Too many to list! Off the top of my head, we created artwork for games such as Punch-Out!!, Kirby's Adventure, Tetris, Dragon Warrior and many, many more. We also created the masthead for Nintendo Power, which started out as an internal magazine at Nintendo.

Did you enjoy your time working for Nintendo? Was it challenging?

It was a great time. And it was challenging, since we were perpetually exploring new territories of technology and entertainment for millions of gamers. Girvin was at the forefront of videogame packaging and I feel like we really raised the bar with the projects we worked on.

You then went on to have a strong relationship with Nintendo for years. Did you do any future packaging designs? We designed the full NES packaging systems for all products and throughout the years after, did the same for the Game Boy, Super Nintendo, Virtual Boy, N64 and the set-up of many gaming products. The Super Nintendo followed right on after we'd redesigned the NES packaging system. The black and red game box packaging was designed to stack in such a way that it would build a bigger pattern across the display wall. Nintendo people affectionately referred to it as the 'Wall of Doom!'

What do you remember most fondly about those early days working for Nintendo?

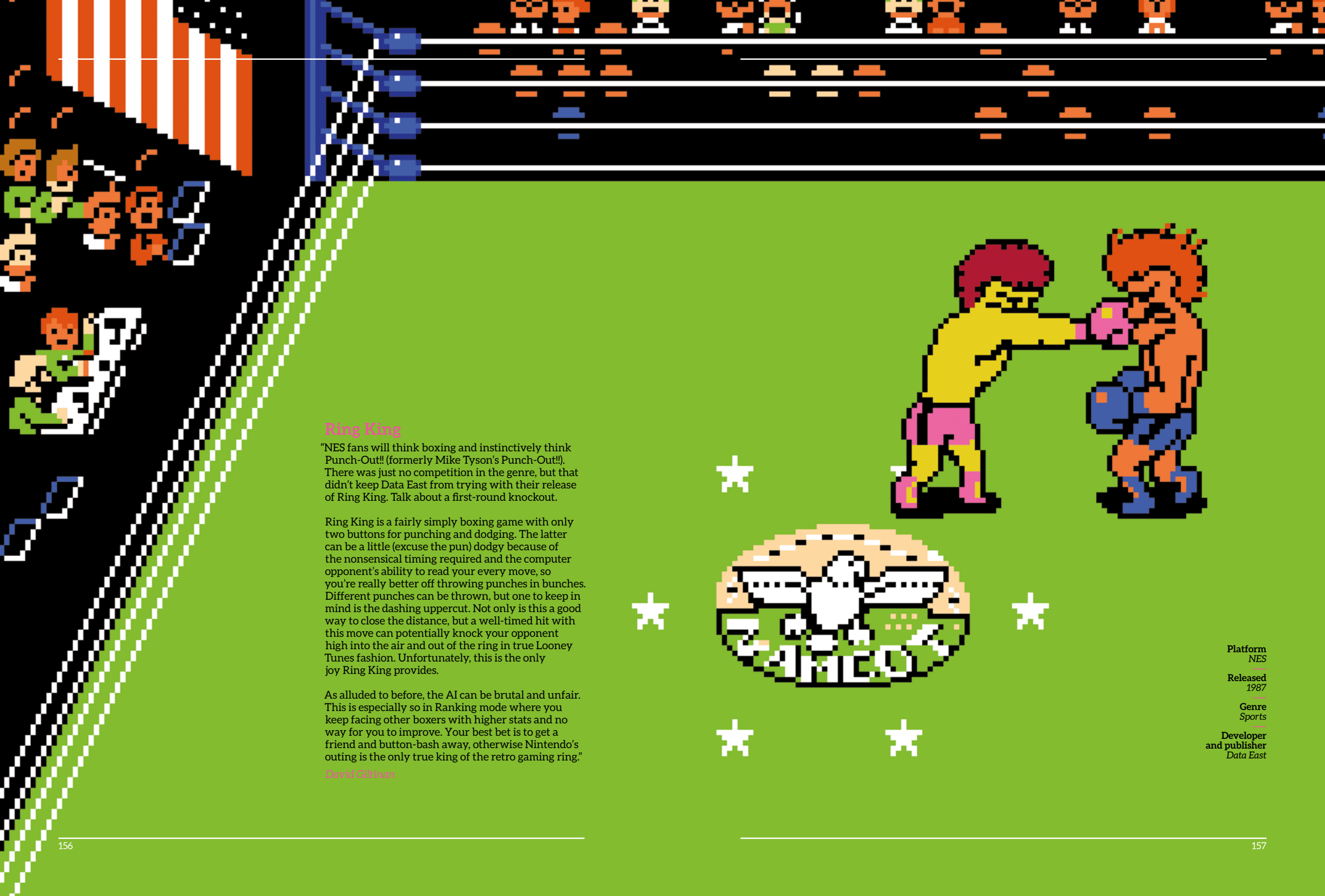
We felt like we were participants in the entire gaming world; it was intense, challenging and we were always trying to stretch the edge of what consumers expected – pushing harder, deeper and better into the psyche of gaming experience design, packaging and presentation.

What are you up to nowadays?

We're still deeply involved with packaging in all categories, as well as building design environments like restaurants. For us, it's all about the story; what's the visual character, the voice and plot-line of the narrative, what's its meaning, who will embrace it and what does it feel like – what's the emotional reach?



Various game packaging / 1985 - 1989



Ring King

“NES fans will think boxing and instinctively think Punch-Out!! (formerly Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!!). There was just no competition in the genre, but that didn’t keep Data East from trying with their release of Ring King. Talk about a first-round knockout.

Ring King is a fairly simply boxing game with only two buttons for punching and dodging. The latter can be a little (excuse the pun) dodgy because of the nonsensical timing required and the computer opponent’s ability to read your every move, so you’re really better off throwing punches in bunches. Different punches can be thrown, but one to keep in mind is the dashing uppercut. Not only is this a good way to close the distance, but a well-timed hit with this move can potentially knock your opponent high into the air and out of the ring in true Looney Tunes fashion. Unfortunately, this is the only joy Ring King provides.

As alluded to before, the AI can be brutal and unfair. This is especially so in Ranking mode where you keep facing other boxers with higher stats and no way for you to improve. Your best bet is to get a friend and button-bash away, otherwise Nintendo’s outing is the only true king of the retro gaming ring.”

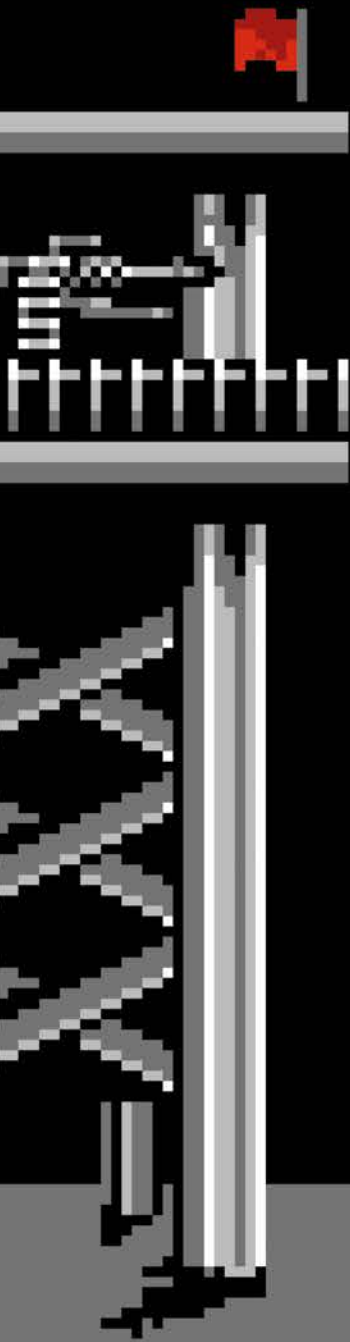
David Gilbinan

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Data East



Rush'n Attack

How can a game so modest in its premise be so hard to play? Based on the 1985 Konami coin-op, *Rush'n Attack* - known in Japan and Europe as *Green Beret* - is an action-platformer in which a US special-ops soldier has to knife his way through six stages full of running, jumping enemy troops. You stab with one button, fire collectible weapons with the other, run left and right and jump using the D-pad - simple. But by the gods it's not; there's something about the timing of the enemy attacks that makes this game infuriatingly tricky.

The main culprits are troops who suddenly do a running drop-kick, negating your knife attack and removing one of your four precious lives. So progress is utterly reliant on learning enemy patterns and precisely timing your attacks. Playing *Rush'n Attack* is a bit like *Edge of Tomorrow: Live. Die. Repeat.* You try a plan of attack and fail. Then you try again, remembering when and how you died. And you just do it over and over, making incremental progress each time.

There's no denying *Rush'n Attack's* brilliant design, which generates an obsession borne of frustration and a refusal to give in. Just be aware, it's the kind of game that brings grown men to tears and has caused no end of broken joypads.

Platform
NES

Released
1987

Genre
Run and gun

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami





Famicom Wars ファミコンウォーズ

The legendary forerunner to Advance Wars is a beautifully compact turn-based strategy game in which the forces of Red Star and Blue Moon compete in battle. Players begin on either side of the map with a handful of buildings and factories. Buildings produce cash, which pay for the factories to produce soldiers, tanks, aircraft and ships. In simple terms, infantry is sent with armour support to capture neutral buildings, which generate money to build more units, and so on.

As the game progresses and specialised units come into play, it becomes a war of attrition as you try to outwit and outmanoeuvre your enemy. It's like rock, paper, scissors, but with artillery, fighters and warships. The battle is won when one side destroys all the opposing forces or captures the enemy HQ.

A two-player option is included, but the core game is played against the ruthless AI computer opponent, with 15 increasingly complex maps to choose from. Later entries in the series would spice this up with a proper storyline and a cast of dialogue-spouting characters.

Famicom Wars is the strategy war game distilled to its purest essence. Fans of the series – or war-gaming in general – should definitely check out this slice of turn-based brilliance.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
Strategy

**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo



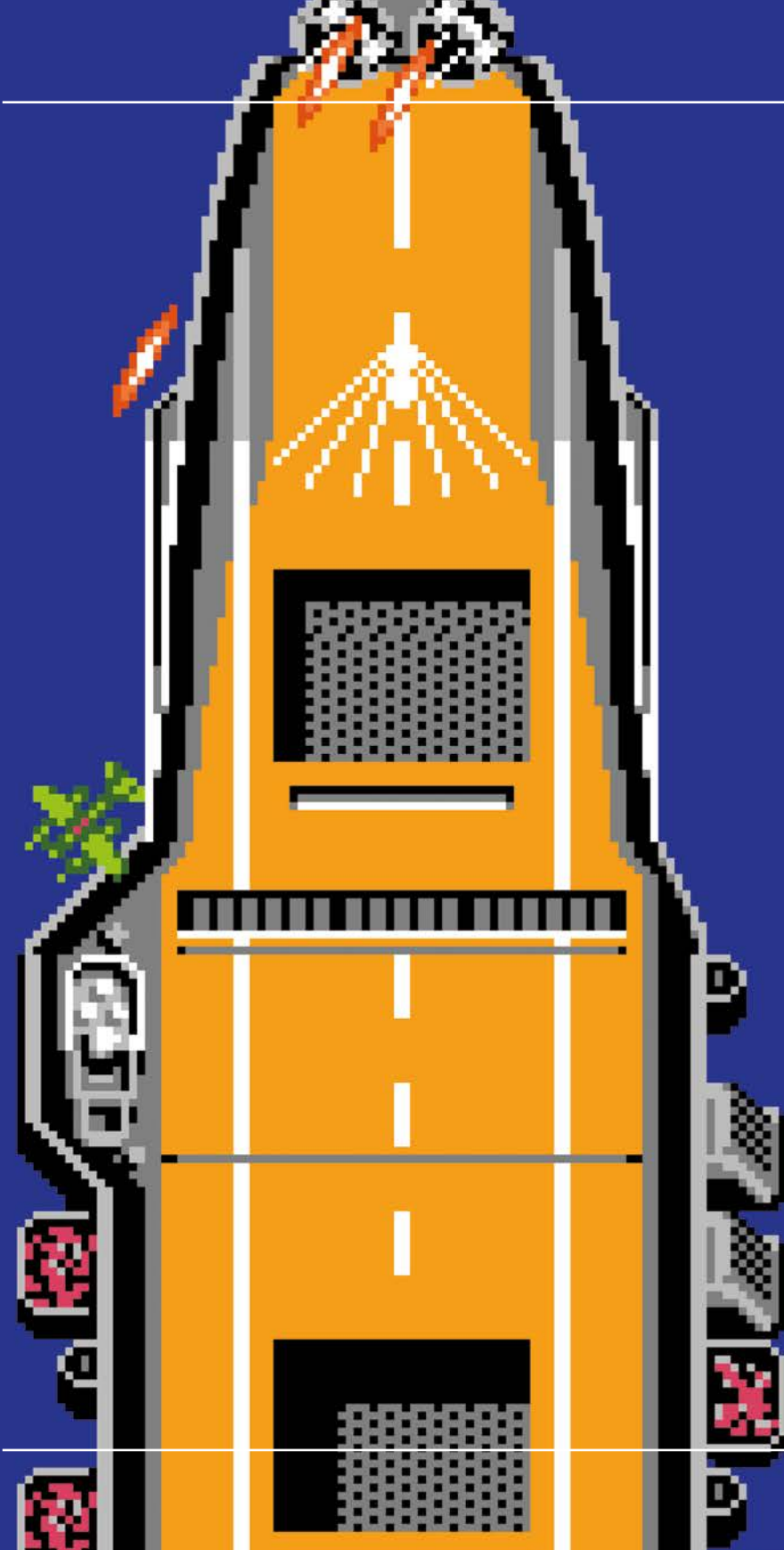


1943: The Battle of Midway

While this conversion of Capcom's 1987 coin-op suffers a few compromises - there's no two-player option for example - the heart of the game beats strong in this great vertical blaster.

In classic shoot 'em up style, your P-38 fighter starts with a simple machine gun, but by destroying squadrons of red fighters and shooting objects hidden in the scenery you release power-ups. These grant a variety of items, such as weapon add-ons that fire a spread of bullets, extra weapon energy, or points that can be used to permanently improve your fighter's abilities. You're also armed with a smart bomb that freezes enemies for a short time, and is best used on the end-of-level battleships that bristle with gun emplacements.

With a single life that's topped up by pick-ups, you need to think strategically: is that icon best used for a weapon upgrade or toggled for extra energy? In later stages the action gets suitably frantic (albeit with some slow-down), but it's a thrilling, white knuckle, sore thumb blaster, and with a neat password system you will at least get a chance to play all 23 levels on offer. 1943 is a terrific, adrenaline-fuelled shooter that offers a pure hit of just-one-more-go addiction.



Platform
NES
Released
1988
Genre
Scrolling shooter
Developer
and publisher
Capcom

Dragon Quest III: The Seeds of Salvation

ドラゴンクエストIII そして伝説へ

“When starting Dragon Quest III, all of the source code from I and II was discarded and we basically started from scratch. It was my first project at Enix as programmer; for the US market I did some sub-programming on the translated Dragon Warrior I and II, and was director on Dragon Warrior III’s localisation.

At that time, to adapt Dragon Quest for the American public, we thought the graphics needed to be more realistic for that market. We changed the game’s intro sequence significantly, but another major problem was the proportions of the characters. The head-to-body balance in Japan is 1:1, with the head the same size as the body. We call it ‘nitōshin’ [which roughly translates as ‘two-heads tall’] in Japan. But Enix mentioned this would be difficult to accept in the American market. They wanted us to use more life-like proportions, so we went with a head-to-body ratio of 1:4. The other thing we discussed at this time was the English translation with the person in charge of translating. We brainstormed on what would be the best English rendering. But mostly, I just remember putting a lot of effort into making the new intro movie.”

Manabu Yamana

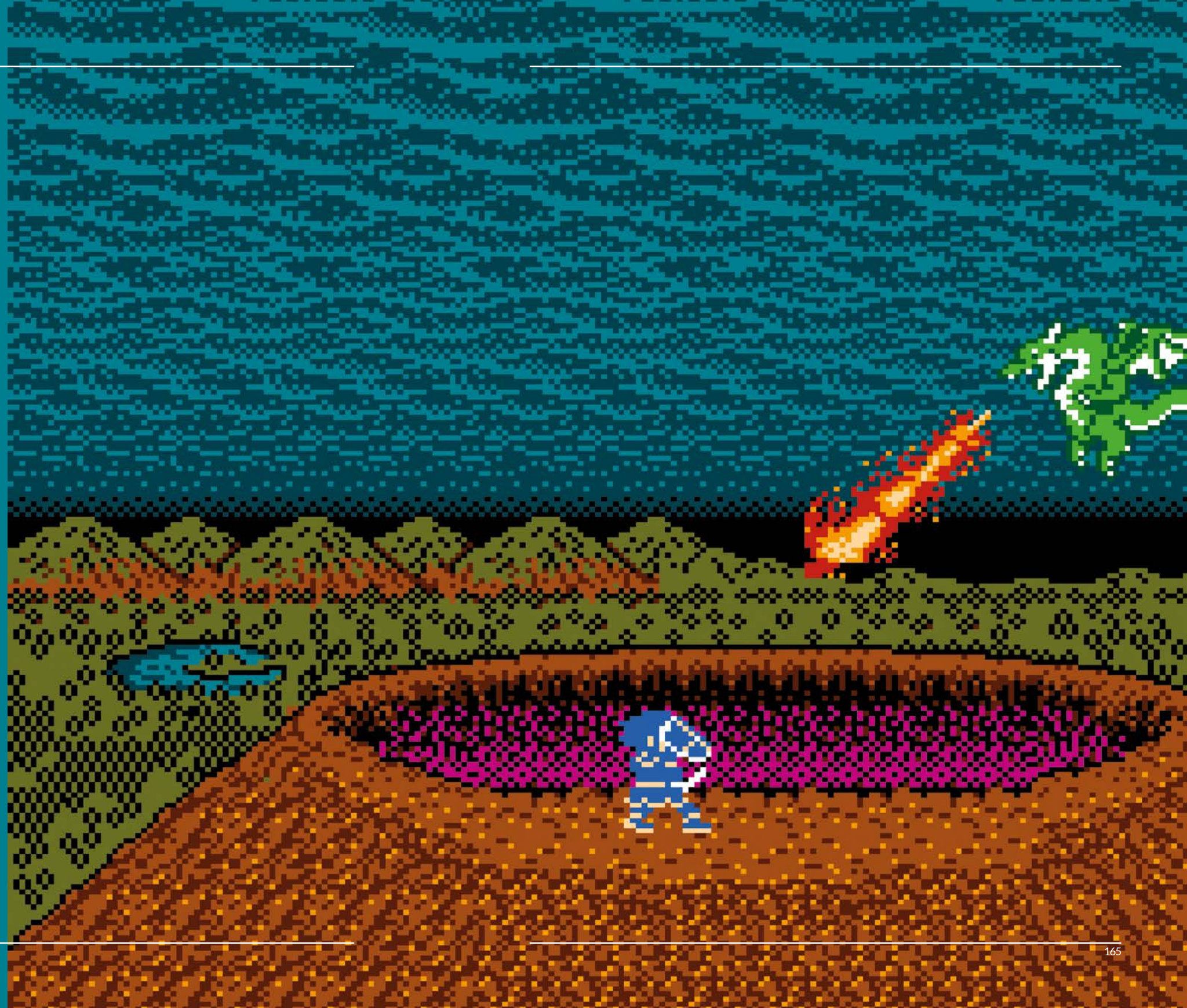
Platform
Famicom

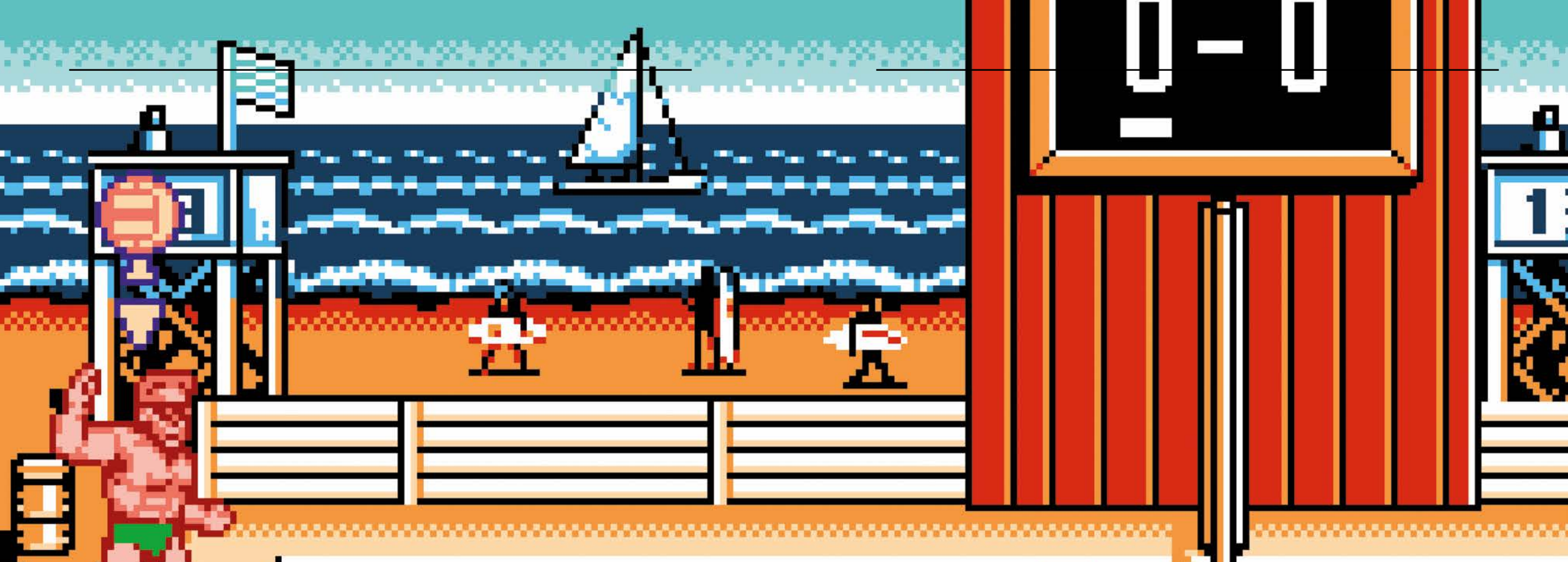
Released
1988

Genre
RPG

Developer
Chunsoft

Publisher
Enix





Super Spike V'Ball

It's time to hit the beach, show off your guns and smash some volleyball in Technōs' sports sim. Derived from the two-player coin-op, US Championship Volleyball, it's one of 25 titles that support the Four Score multitap, offering one-on-one, two-on-one and two-on-two play modes. Once you've selected your teams (including Billy and Jimmy from Double Dragon) you can embark on a single exhibition game or play through a tournament on the America Circuit or World Cup.

Play is straightforward with the ability to bump, set and block, but you can also perform different types of spike, plus a super spike, powered up by hammering the B button. But as with many sports sims, the major downside is the lack of depth: once you've mastered the controls, the only elements that change are the backgrounds and difficulty level. So while the single player game is okay (if a bit soulless), SSVB's real strength lies in its riotous multiplayer modes – not only is it way more fun against human opposition, but it also helps nullify any issues with the not-terribly-bright computer players.

For fans of beach volleyball, this is as good as it gets on the NES, although there are better sport sims for solo players.

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Sports

Developer
Technōs

Publisher
Nintendo



Mega Man 2

"Akira Kitamura was the leader of the team for Mega Man and Mega Man 2 – nowadays you would call this role 'the director'. He was an incredibly strict person but this was because he had a real love for games. He taught me that you can't slack off; you have to do your best all the time. Kitamura-san would sleep through the night, at his desk, and then the next morning he would do the checks for the content that I had produced the day before. Obviously he didn't sleep so well, and he would say, 'This is no good, and this is no good,' and so on. You could say he was a perfectionist. He was incredibly hard to please, with incredibly high standards, and his rules towards character development were so obsessively careful – true perfectionism. That bled over into his approach to game development as a whole. My team in particular really bore the brunt of his drive and his demand for perfection but Mega Man 2 wouldn't be the game it is without this and I'm incredibly proud of the game."

Keiji Inafune

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



Guevara ゲバラ

“The original title is enough to put a blip on everyone’s radar. As a Commando clone set during the overthrowing of Fulgencio Batista from Cuba, this is the only iteration of the popular genre with such an outspoken anti-imperialist setting. Surprisingly, the Western localisation does very little to conceal the game’s identity, except for renaming Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as ‘Player One’ and ‘Player Two.’

The game is far from being just a political curio, however; rather, it’s a prime example of how to re-engineer a coin-op for a home console. The SNK team retooled the controls, redrew the graphics, increased the pace, and made sure to keep the all-important two-player mode. The arcade was clunky, whereas the port is sharp, resulting in a bona fide NES classic. It ends up being the best representative of its genre on the system, ironically leagues ahead of SNK’s own flagship Ikari franchise.

Cuba is rendered in luscious detail, with farms, random piglets running wild, clothes hanging on wires... in the playful mine cart sequence, they even pull out a virtuoso pseudo-Mode 7 moment. Aged gracefully, it’s still a blast to play; with unlimited grenades and continues, it’s truly hasta la victoria, siempre.”

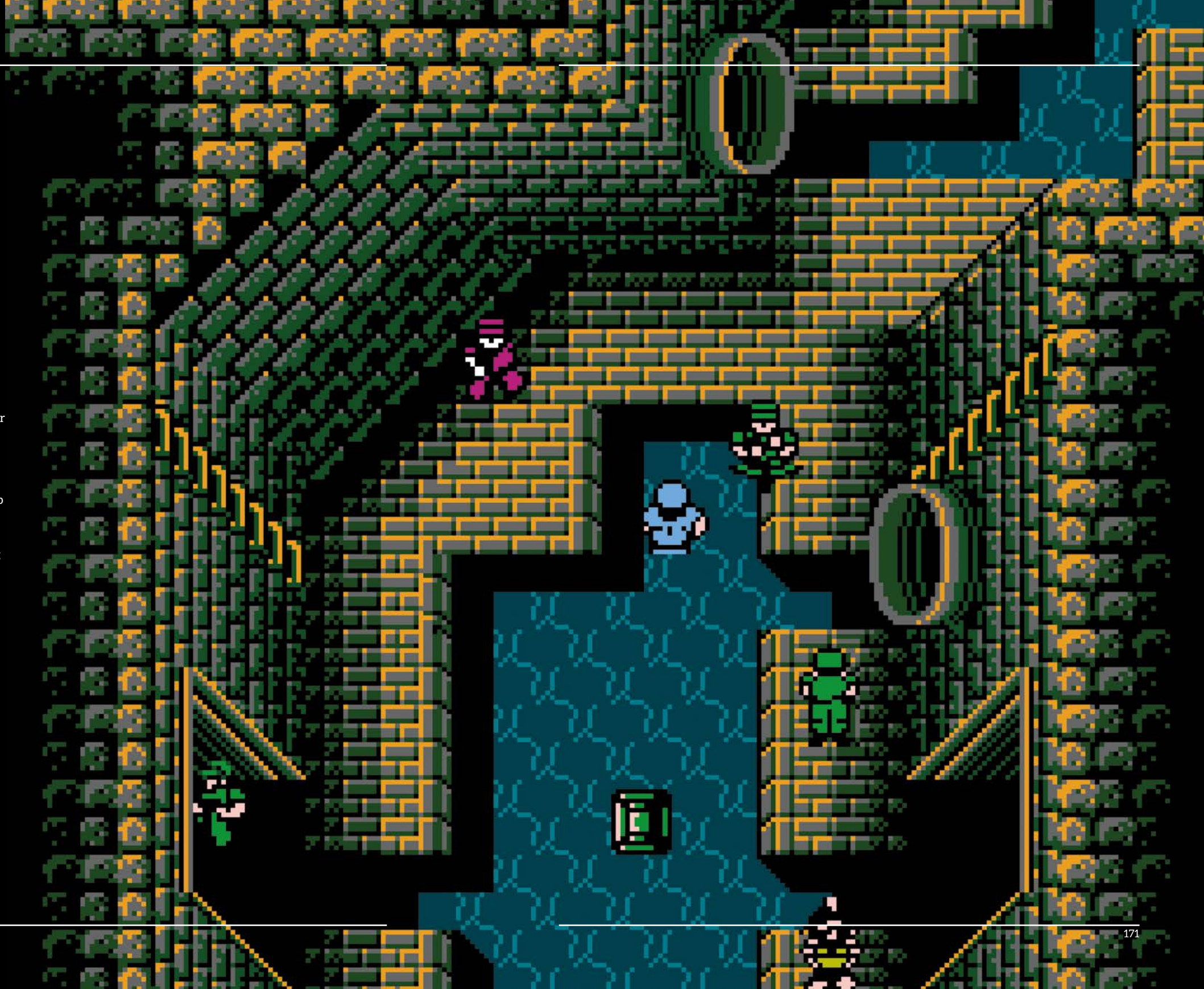
Carlo Savorelli

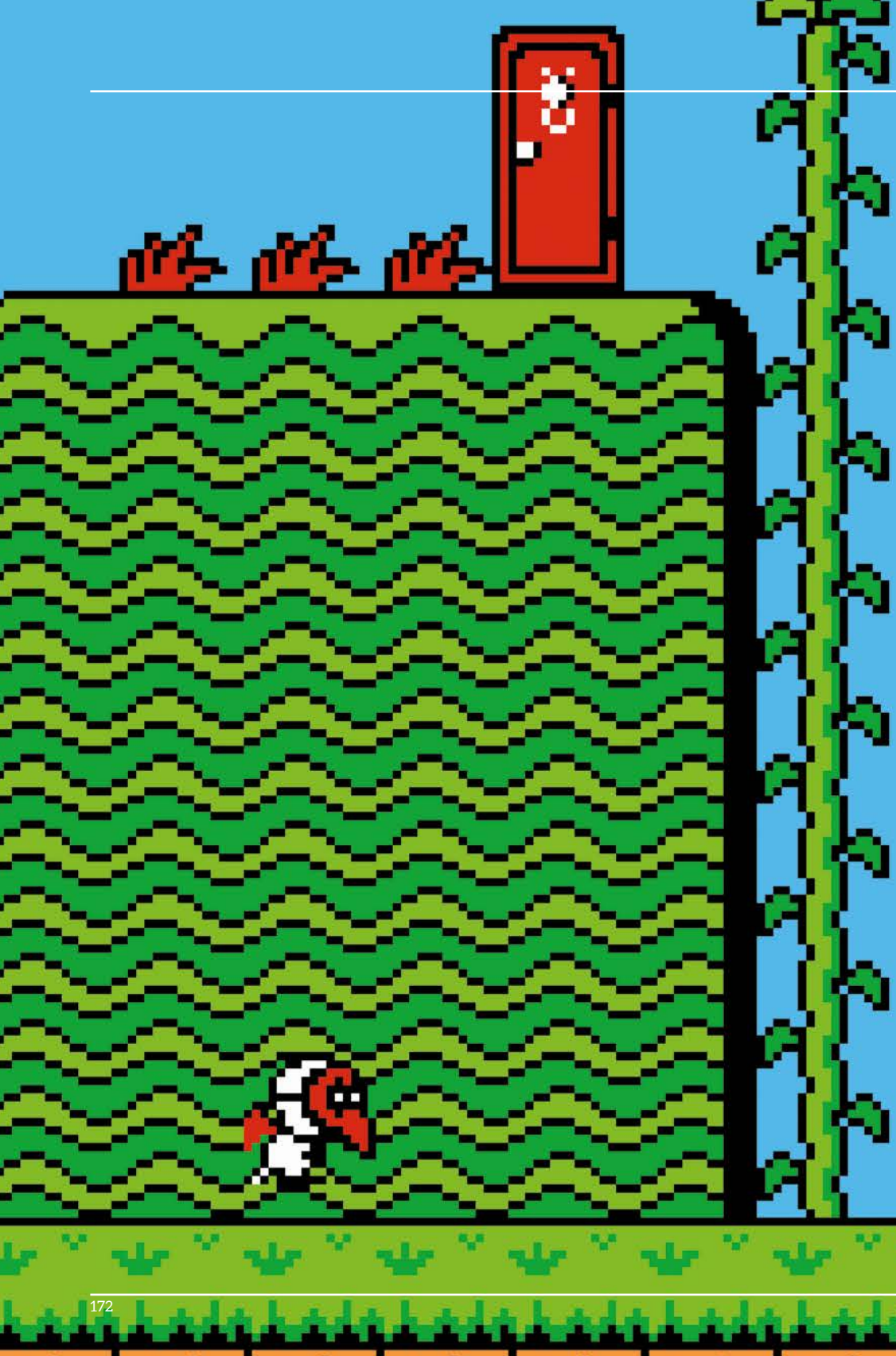
Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
and publisher
SNK





Super Mario Bros. 2

"Super Mario Bros. 2 had significant challenges ahead of it before it even released for the NES. Gracing the cover of the first issue of Nintendo Power and following the reputation of the outstanding original title, SMB2 had hype behind it like no videogame sequel before its time. Expectations were beyond high and Nintendo had decided the Japanese sequel to Super Mario Bros. was too difficult for US audiences. Because of this, they took another Famicom Disk System game called Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic and redesigned it with Super Mario characters for the US market. The result was a success and Super Mario Bros. 2 went on to become one of the best-selling NES titles of all time.

The more cartoon-like graphics and unique gameplay options - like playing as Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach or Toad - made this a one-of-a-kind adventure! Each character has different jumping and throwing abilities, and my preferred character is Luigi because of his enhanced jumping. Although the game is only 20 levels long, there are tons of unique platforming challenges, from the beginning levels to the final battle with Wart. SMB2 is a timeless classic that proves that sometimes going in a different direction is a good thing."

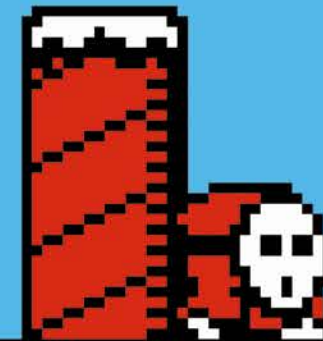
Martin Alessi

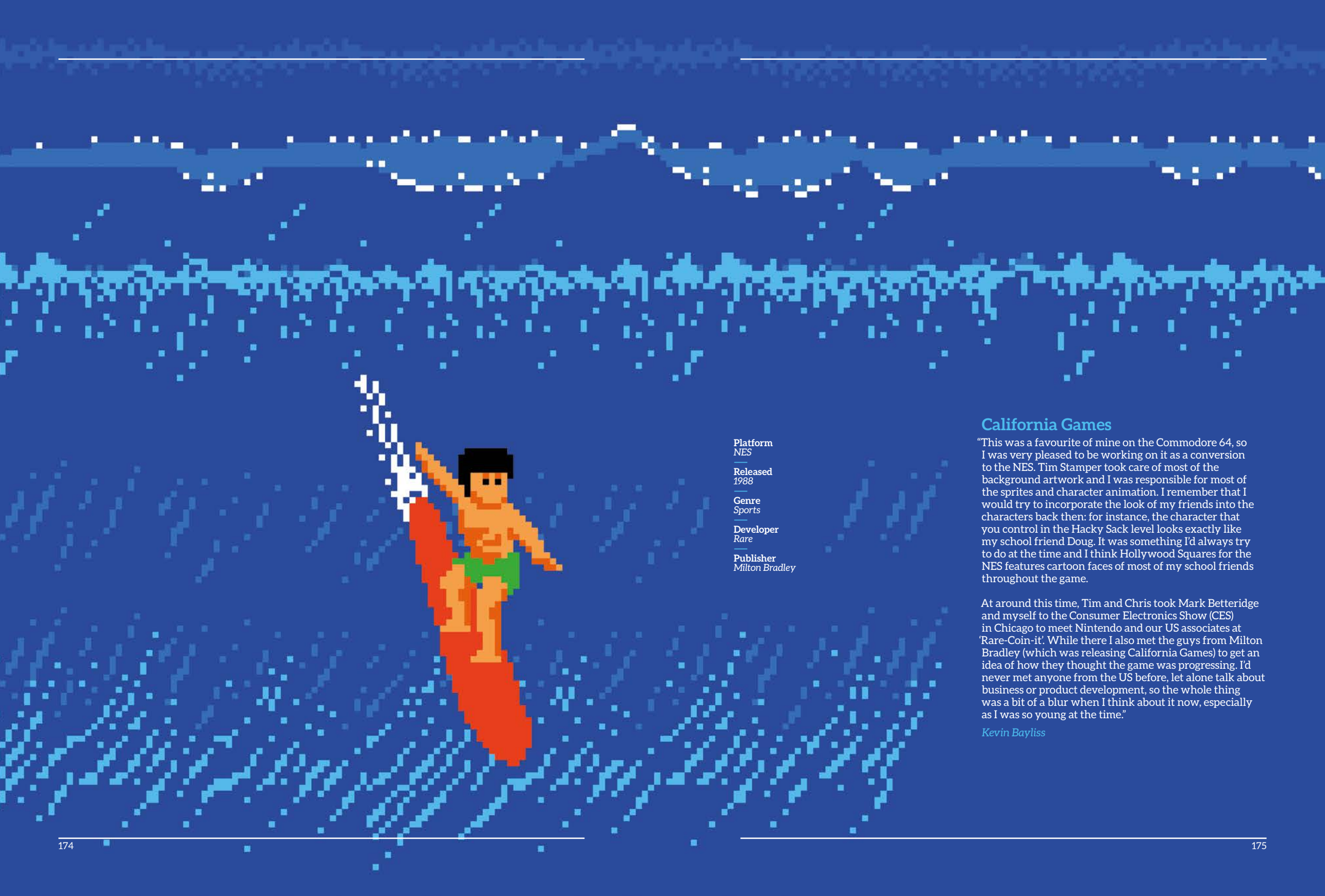
Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Sports

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Milton Bradley

California Games

“This was a favourite of mine on the Commodore 64, so I was very pleased to be working on it as a conversion to the NES. Tim Stamper took care of most of the background artwork and I was responsible for most of the sprites and character animation. I remember that I would try to incorporate the look of my friends into the characters back then: for instance, the character that you control in the Hacky Sack level looks exactly like my school friend Doug. It was something I’d always try to do at the time and I think Hollywood Squares for the NES features cartoon faces of most of my school friends throughout the game.

At around this time, Tim and Chris took Mark Betteridge and myself to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Chicago to meet Nintendo and our US associates at ‘Rare-Coin-it’. While there I also met the guys from Milton Bradley (which was releasing California Games) to get an idea of how they thought the game was progressing. I’d never met anyone from the US before, let alone talk about business or product development, so the whole thing was a bit of a blur when I think about it now, especially as I was so young at the time.”

Kevin Bayliss

Captain Tsubasa キャプテン翼

“This was the first soccer simulation game with a real ‘continuity system’ and was developed over a very long period of time, initially for the Famicom Disk System.

It was more similar to Dragon Quest than soccer, so the player would be running along, and like when a monster appears in Dragon Quest, there would be a message saying, ‘A defender draws near!’, and the player decides whether to pass, dribble, or shoot. I worked on the technical specifications for the matches, the structure of the continuity system and created the data for the system.

Around that time, Tecmo had outsourced the development of a sumo game to another company, but when it came back it was awful! So we decided to remake it internally and the Captain Tsubasa team was assigned to it temporarily. Behind schedule, we then went back to developing Captain Tsubasa, but in the meantime the Famicom’s cartridge chips had evolved beyond the Disk System. We decided to go back and further evolve the game with this new technology which gave us more room to play around and the game expanded over time.”

Michitaka Tsuruta

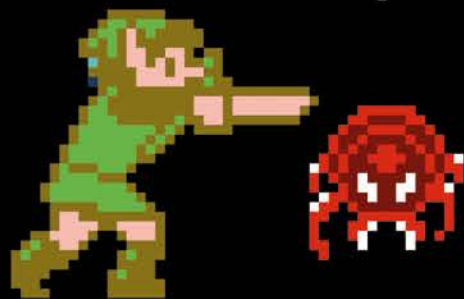
Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Tecmo





Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Adventure

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

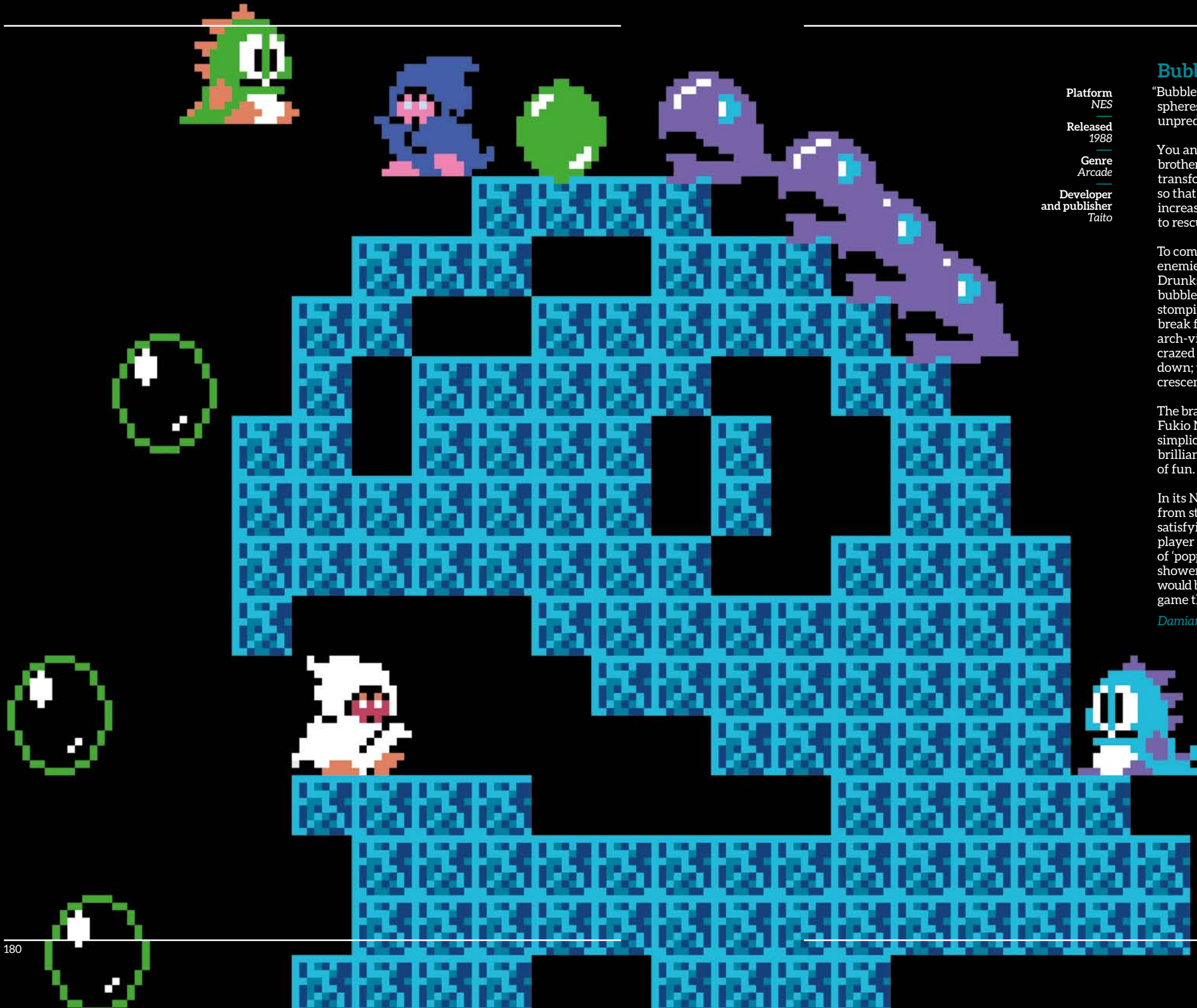


Zelda II: The Adventure of Link

"The Adventure of Link has always prompted fierce debate. Cited as the 'most different' and 'difficult' game of the series, Nintendo completely overhauled the play mechanics of the original Legend of Zelda. Opting for a side-scrolling adventure with role-playing aspects via a top-down enemy encounter map, the game completely shuts down its own roots. That's not to say the game is totally different - you still need to save Princess Zelda and restore peace to Hyrule - however, many players became disorientated and confused with the game's lack of focus and its drastic change of gameplay style.

But for all its faults, the game introduced some staple Zelda ideas and fundamental concepts to the series that we know and play today. We see the 'magic metre' introduced, Akito Nakatsuka hits all the right notes with a stupendous soundtrack that's still influential to this day, and 'Dark Link' makes a shockingly abrupt debut to the series. At a time when sequels were used as platforms to test developers' new ideas and sense of direction, Zelda II really did cause a stir. With a stupendous soundtrack, flawed yet sustainable action and a truly preposterous difficulty level, the game's qualities remain ferociously debated to this very day."

Daniel Major



Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Arcade

Developer
and publisher
Taito

Bubble Bobble

“Bubble Bobble is an orgy of soap-sudded spheres, frenzied platform-based action, unpredictable peril, and bizarrely... fruit.

You and a friend (or in my case like-minded brother) play as Bub or Bob – two boys cruelly transformed into bubble-blowing dinosaurs so that they can battle through 100 levels of increasingly elaborate platforms on a quest to rescue their beloved girlfriends.

To complete each level, creatively named enemies such as Pulpuls, Mightas, Banebous, Drunks and Rascals must be encased in bubbles and then literally popped by stomping or piercing them before they break free. Take too long to clear a level and arch-villain Baron Von Blubba, an albino crazed pink-eyed beluga whale, hunts you down; the earworm theme tune reaching a crescendo to indicate the impending danger.

The brainchild of Japanese game design guru Fukio Mitsuji, Bubble Bobble’s genius is the simplicity of its gameplay, its deceptively brilliant level design, and enormous sense of fun.

In its NES incarnation it remains pure joy from start to finish – whether it’s the deeply satisfying physics, the power-ups to enhance player abilities, or the sheer endorphin rush of ‘popping’ a cluster of monsters and being showered with outsized bonus treats, you would be hard-pressed to find another platform game this addictive on any system.”

Damian Butt

Xevious ゼビウス

“When I joined Namco there was only one bank of computer workstations in the computer room, allowing up to five people to work simultaneously. Then four new people joined, so if someone senior was using one of the five stations, we had to wait at the back of the room for them to finish. So using this set-up we would develop five games in parallel.

Back then, sometimes games were cancelled or turned into something completely different mid-development, and Xevious was the most famous example at the time. Originally with Xevious they were going to use a very realistic looking fighter plane, like the F-4. The game was supposed to be a realistic flight game, involving cutting edge fighters and the most advanced weapons. This was before I joined the company, so this is something I heard from somebody else. One day, the planner for the game suddenly resigned from the company and took off to travel to Africa. At that time Masanobu Endou was the programmer, and he wanted to make the game into something set in a sci-fi world – which is what you now see in Xevious. So he changed the whole thing, and that's Xevious as we now know it.”

Professor Yoshihiro Kishimoto

Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer
and publisher
Namco



Blaster Master

"The Japanese Famicom version of Blaster Master, whose name roughly translates as Super Planetary War Records: Metafight, features a complex sci-fi plot set in 2052. For its 1988 Western release, however, the storyline was changed to something far more offbeat: it follows the adventures of a young lad called Jason, whose pet frog Fred has escaped and somehow discovered a radioactive chest, which has caused him to grow to a massive size. Fred falls into a hole in the ground, and Jason follows him down into what becomes a sprawling, eight-level subterranean maze filled with radioactive creatures. Fortunately for Jason, he finds a tank called Sophia the 3rd that he can use to drive around the environment and battle the bad guys as he attempts to locate Fred – and in the process destroy the leader of the enemies, the Plutonium Boss.

Apart from its bizarre plot, Blaster Master is notable for combining two different gameplay modes. When Jason is driving Sophia the 3rd, the game becomes a side-on, multi-directionally scrolling platformer. However, there are times when he has to leave the tank to explore the environment, whereupon the action is viewed from a top-down perspective. It makes for a game that feels a little like a mash-up of Metroid and Zelda. Despite being a seriously tough game to beat, Blaster Master is a much-loved NES title, and deservedly so. It's a great adventure game that packs a large environment to explore, varied gameplay and some memorable tunes."

Julian Rignall

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

Developer
Tokai Engineering

Publisher
Sunsoft

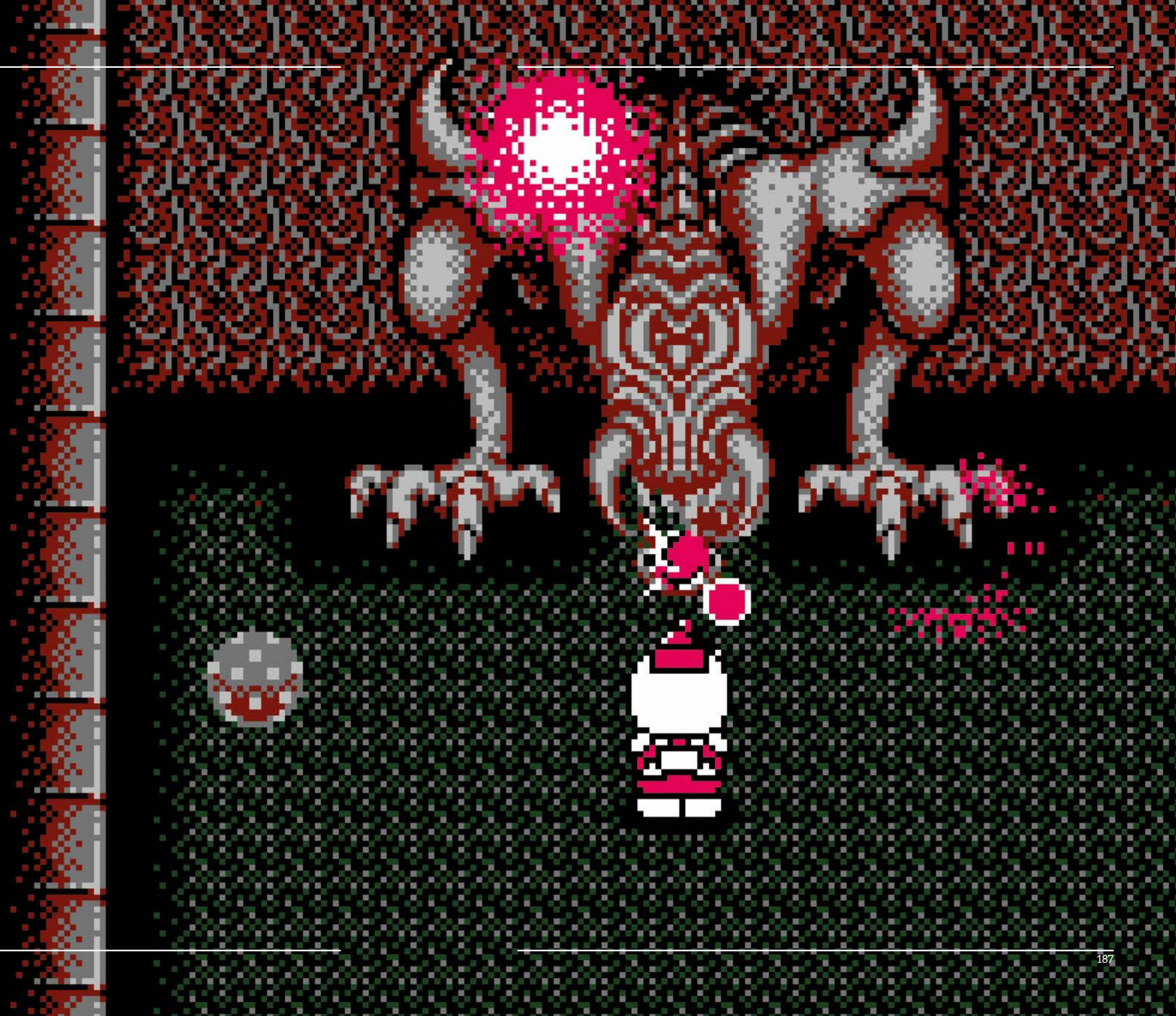
Blaster Master

"For the original Blaster Master I came up with the title, designed the opening, handled the map design and layout, did the boss design... aside from the game's character design I was pretty much involved in all areas of the game's production.

We were trying to make the best action game to date, with all that entails. With Sophia (the game vehicle), we wanted to bring to life a sense of action that incorporated all 360 degrees of the environment in a way that players hadn't really experienced up to that point. Along with that, we wanted large, expansive maps so that we could support that vision.

Graphically we tried to push the limits of what the NES was capable of, and one way we tried to express that was with the game's bosses. We wanted to really emphasise a sense of scale, bring out the difference between Jason, the small character that the player was controlling, and these massive boss characters that players wouldn't expect to appear on the hardware at that time - having these giant, imposing bosses that would feel overwhelming on the screen, and then evoking in the player that great feeling of success from overcoming what felt like an insurmountable battle."

Yoshiaki Iwata





Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom

サラダの国のトマト姫

"For Princess Tomato I handled the scenario and shaped the overall game, and another person did the programming. By this time Hudson was making games in teams of three or four. Things were still very small in scale, but we would divide the work. In the beginning, a single programmer working alone could create a new action game every two weeks or so. As long as you had an idea, some graphics, and a packaging illustration, you had a complete game. The constant pressure to create new titles every month was very stressful.

Adventure games for the Apple II started appearing from the US and these were very popular, so I obtained several from overseas and played them. Since action games weren't selling well, Hudson changed direction and started making adventure games such as Princess Tomato. Meanwhile, we established a relationship with Nintendo and released games on the Famicom. This was risky territory, because manufacturing cartridges required significant money. Meanwhile, from Nintendo's perspective, we were the first third party to negotiate a licence, so Nintendo didn't really know what to do either!"

Michitaka Tsuruta

Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
Adventure

Developer
and publisher
Hudson Soft



Nintendo
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
NES VERSION

“The NES was a game changer (pun intended) for gamers as it brought authentic coin-op experiences into the home for the first time since the Atari VCS.”

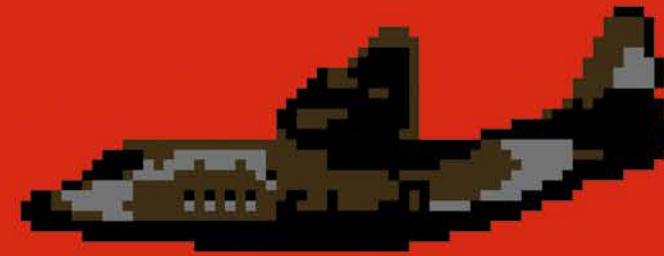
Gary Bracey, ex-development director at Ocean Software

Metal Gear

"I worked on Metal Gear for NES when I was with Konami in Tokyo, which is still an important IP for Konami. My team was asked to port the original MSX2 version to NES in three months and we had to make some changes per management's request and due to the hardware limitations. What I did was simply port the game, so I can't claim credit for the gameplay. I was a fresh graduate when I worked on Metal Gear. I actually worked on an educational game for the Famicom Disk System before, but it was cancelled, so Metal Gear was my second project, but my first shipped game.

As for why the start of the game was changed to parachuting into a jungle, the management wanted to differentiate the Famicom version a bit since the MSX2 version had already shipped. Having a different intro was the easiest and most efficient way for us to do that since we only had the three months. The final boss was changed from a robot to a computer simply due to the hardware limitations. It was probably possible to implement the robot if we used a better chip such as VRC4, but it wasn't available for us back then."

Masahiro Ueno



Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

Developer
Konami

Publisher
Ultra Games

Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode

“Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode thrusts players into the role of the titular manga assassin moments after he’s framed for murder. Now on a search for answers, Golgo 13 travels the world to burn through numerous cigarettes, bullets, bodies and broads. On paper, it sounds like a terrible B-movie. In execution, it’s one of the most diverse and ambitious titles on the NES.

It all comes down to story, presentation, and mechanics. Peppered throughout the game are dialogue exchanges that feature manga-esque sprites and an over-the-shoulder camera angle. These act as cut scenes to break up an unprecedented amount of gameplay variation: side-scrolling exploration on foot and underwater, first-person shootouts with 360 degrees of aim, shoot ‘em up helicopter stages, first-person sniping segments and 3D mazes. This moment-to-moment action has the occasional pixel splash of digital blood and, yes, a couple of sex scenes to literally refill your health bar.

In today’s industry, sex, drugs and violence are synonymous with M-rated games. However, back in the ‘80s, these topics were largely taboo due to Nintendo of America’s censorship policies. Fortunately for gamers, Golgo 13 slipped past these strict rules (mostly) unscathed to deliver an unforgettable cinematic experience.”

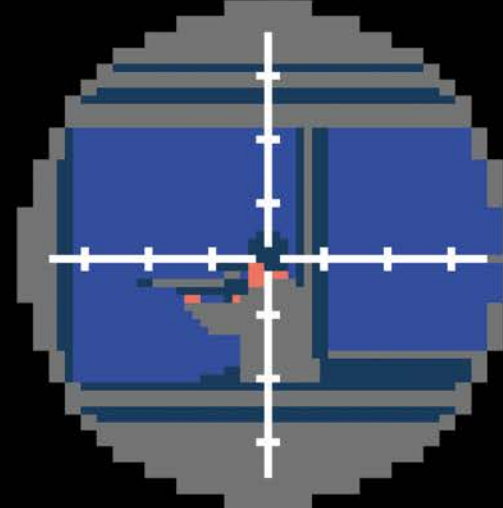
Chas Pangburn

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

**Developer
and publisher**
Vic Tokai



An interview with Mitchitaka Tsuruta

Former Tehkan/Tecmo employee Mitchitaka Tsuruta is perhaps best known for creating Bomb Jack, Fire & Ice, Captain Tsubasa and Solomon's Key, all of which found commercial success on the NES and Famicom. He currently works on iPhone games and has released Maxwell Gate, Astro Zill and Astro Shift on the App Store.

Were you artistic as a child? What is your earliest memory of being artistic or creative?
I got good marks in art class. When I was an elementary school student I used to enjoy drawing mazes and playing Pentomino.

Did you take any formal art education?
Yes, I have received some education. I graduated from the Department of Film, College of Art, Nihon University, where I studied animation. My professor was Sadao Tsukioka, who is regarded as one of the legendary animators in Japan.

How did you first get started with computers and the Famicom in particular?
In the first place, I bought a PC-8001 as I was interested in CG art, then I worked on programming with BASIC. When it comes to the Family Computer, I bought it because one of my colleagues, who was a programmer, encouraged me to try it.

Tell us how your career in games started.
I came across a part-time job of drawing pixel art for Tehkan, which is the former name of Tecmo, during my spring vacation before my third year began. I passed though their interview, started to work for them, and then as a result continued my career as a full-time employee there. In the interview, I was required to come up with and draw many characters for Swimmer, a game that they were developing. In the middle of the interview they went back to work and I stayed there for roughly two hours drawing.

What were the best and worst aspects of creating art for the Famicom?

Back then, the videogame industry was just starting to emerge. So I found it very meaningful to create something that had not existed before. If I describe the sensation I had, it was like having a magical fire in my hands and from that a new type of videogame appeared. This excitement is something that motivates me even now. On the other hand I was pretty exhausted from working with almost no days off. I used to stay at an apartment close to my office on weekdays and only go back home to wash my clothes on Sundays.

What was your process? Did you plan on paper first, or dive straight into the work?
I worked as a member of the project planning team, where I hand-wrote specifications of videogames. When it comes to pixel art, after preparing a draft it was required to convert it into pixel art format using a light pen device named 'Ediputer', which was developed by Tehkan.

How did your process change throughout your career?
The process used for preparing specifications was gradually switched from handwriting to a tech editor on PC and a word processor. It was time-consuming

to revise hand-written documents but it has dramatically improved with the emergence of PCs.

What was the development time for a typical game?
It depends on the title. The shortest period allocated was three months for Tsuppari Ōzumō. When it comes to Solomon's key, it took around a year to complete both the arcade and Family computer versions.

Did you receive much artistic direction, or did you have complete freedom?
We often opted for moving forward without thorough planning, as our development scale was rather small. When you work on developing arcade titles, it's necessary to make them stand out compared to others in the market, so it's far from a flexible work environment. The same goes for working on the Family Computer. We also didn't have flexibility because of its strict colour restriction.

Did you have much input in terms of game design? Was it a collaborative process between the various members of the team?
I collaborated with my team members. The initial plans I used for development tended to be influenced by my favourite titles – I enjoyed playing Lode Runner. In this title you can make holes on both right and left sides of the floor. It inspired me and I thought

about the idea of creating stones and then erasing them in an open space. That led to Solomon's key.

Was there anyone in the industry whose work was inspirational to you?
I respect Alexey Pajitnov, creator of Tetris. When I discovered that Tetris had been inspired by Pentomino, I was shocked as I had played Pentomino so many times in my childhood but couldn't even associate it with that. I also used to play war games from Avalon Hill and learned battle tactics, which were afterwards utilised for Captain Tsubasa.

Of all the games you've worked on, which are you most proud of and why?
I'm especially proud of Solomon's Key and Captain Tsubasa. There's a reason for each of them. It's been 30 years since Solomon's key was released and we have some fans playing it even today. Tsunekazu Ishihara from The Pokémon Company once told me, 'Titles with characters tend to end up with nothing, just with characters, but Captain Tsubasa is an exception.'

Which project(s) caused the most nightmares?
The hardest title was TUBE. It's about racing in space. It didn't go well and someone took over my position. As a result the project was suspended.

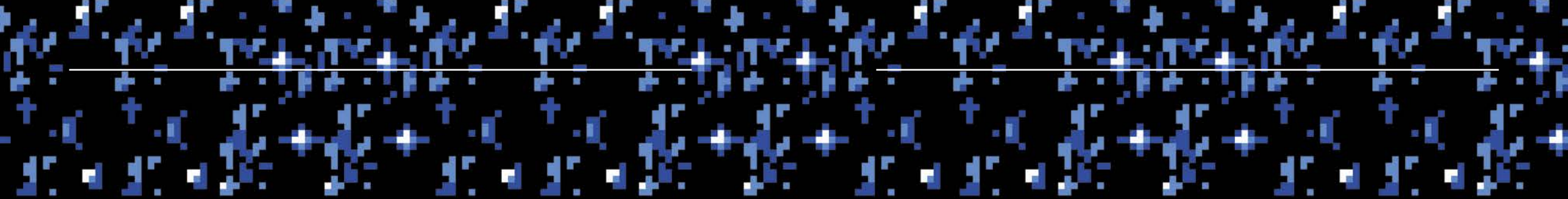
What was your favourite Famicom game, and why?
Well, my favourite would be Dragon Quest. It's hard to explain because there are too many reasons!

If you had to choose just one of your Famicom games to include in your portfolio, which would it be?
It has to be Solomon's Key.

Why do you think the Famicom is remembered so fondly today and do you still own one?
Yes, I still have my Family Computer. Its restriction on colour and sprites led to stylistic beauty. We beat our brains to make games that were flexible enough so each player can enjoy them in their own way.

What are you up to these days?
Recently I have been developing iPhone apps as an independent developer and also working on planning consumer games on a small scale. I'm still working on the Fukuneko series, which is a vertically-scrolling action game.





Final Fantasy II ファイナルファンタジーII

"I was really into the Apple II when I was a student. The innovative and creative game titles that were coming out of America for that system really stimulated my interest in all aspects of game development. When playing the games hours on end was no longer enough, I began to teach myself of their contents and to create my own similar contents in new games. This is how I started making my own game software. I remember opening the disk covers just to see which tracks were being read. I wanted to understand each aspect of what went on behind the game and recreate something similar with my own imagination. But most of all, I played and played and played."

I think there are several reasons as to why the Final Fantasy series has become so popular. The game itself is fun to play, but its strongest characteristic is the visual entertainment the game provides. I think this is one of the main factors that drew users to the series. We put 100% of our resources and effort into developing games that don't just keep up with the evolution of game consoles, but also surpass previous works."

Hironobu Sakaguchi

Platform
Famicom

Released
1988

Genre
RPG

Developer
and publisher
Square



KONAMI

Konami, one of Japan's oldest game developers, started life in 1969 renting and repairing jukeboxes. Kagemasa Kozuki – who remains the chairman to this day – refocused the business in 1973 to cater for the growing amusement machine market, and gave the company its present name, which is derived from co-founders Kagemasa Kozuki (Ko), Yoshinobu Nakama (Na), and Tatsuo Miyasako (Mi). In wasn't until 1978 that the firm began producing its own arcade games, starting with the quartet of *Block Game*, *Block Invader*, *Space Ship* and *Space King*, the latter of which was a clone of Taito's popular *Space Invaders*.

It would be 1981's *Frogger* – that sees the player navigating the titular amphibian across a busy section of road – which gave Konami its first genuine taste of commercial success, and this was swiftly followed by the likes of *Scramble*, *Amidar*, *Time Pilot*, *Super Cobra* and *Gyruss*. During this period Konami tended to rely on external companies such as Sega, Centuri and Stern when it came to global distribution, but as its brand gained traction it took more control over its arcade output. By the time 1983's *Track & Field* arrived in amusement centres, it had the name 'Konami' proudly displayed on the cabinet and the company's reputation understandably grew as a result.

In the same year, Konami pledged support to Microsoft's MSX computer standard. While it was primarily pitched as a home computer, MSX attracted a lot of game developers and gained significant support in Japan and Europe, although it remained virtually unknown in North America. Konami produced 70 different titles for MSX in total – including *Vampire Killer*, *Metal Gear* and *Antarctic Adventure* – and arguably learned a lot of lessons that it would put to good use when it decided to support Nintendo's 8-bit system.

Like fellow Japanese arcade firm Capcom, Konami began porting its coin-op hits to the Famicom in 1985, releasing *Antarctic Adventure*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Track & Field*, *Road Fighter* and *Pooyan* that year. In 1986 the firm converted its arcade hit *Gradius* to the console – a landmark release in the development of the horizontally-scrolling shoot 'em up – but it would be original titles *Ganbare Goemon!*, *Karakuri Dōchū* and *Akumajō Dracula* that truly defined what the company set out to achieve on home systems. The former would see one of its sequels localised in the West as *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja* on the NES's successor, the SNES, while the latter – released on the Famicom Disk System in Japan – would be renamed *Castlevania* for its Western debut.

The *Castlevania* franchise is one of Konami's most recognisable brands and has seen entries on a wide range of systems, the most recent being *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2* on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Combining gothic visuals with atmospheric music and a stern challenge, this 2D platformer proved that there was more to the NES than cute and cuddly titles like *Super Mario* and *Donkey Kong*. A sequel was inevitable, but 1987's *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* deviated from the linear level-by-level template to present a more open-ended adventure with quests to undertake and non-player characters to converse with. As was the case with the original, this second outing was released on the Famicom Disk System in Japan but was published as a physical cartridge in the West, as the add-on never made it out of Nintendo's homeland. Konami reverted to the format of the first title with 1989's *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*, but augmented the experience with additional playable characters and branching routes through the game.

“Konami quickly saw that the massive audience available on Nintendo's hardware afforded it an opportunity to maximise profits.”



Contra / 1987

Konami quickly saw that the massive audience available on Nintendo's hardware afforded it an opportunity to maximise profits, and as well as continuing to convert its subsequent arcade hits – such as *Rush'n Attack*, *Life Force/Salamander*, *Contra*, *Jackal*, *Blades of Steel* and *Gradius II* – it also created home-exclusive outings for the system. The *Adventures of Bayou Billy* (originally released on the Famicom as *Mad City*), *Konami Hyper Soccer* and *Konami Wai Wai World* all found fans on Nintendo hardware, while 1988's *Metal Gear* – a conversion of the existing MSX2 game – would mark the Western debut of *Solid Snake*, who would later star in the 1998 PlayStation bestseller *Metal Gear Solid*. While the NES version of *Metal Gear* was far from the definitive edition of the game and both it and its 1990 sequel *Snake's Revenge* were developed without the input of series creator Hideo Kojima, these titles were the first exposure Western players had to the franchise and ultimately laid the foundations for its future success worldwide.

Interestingly, *Metal Gear* was not published by Konami in the West, but by a firm called Ultra Games. This was in fact a shell company established by Konami in 1988 in order to circumvent Nintendo of America's draconian rules regarding the number of releases permitted each year by a single NES licensee. Worried that a flood of low-quality games would

cause the industry to crash as it had done in 1983, Nintendo decreed that each firm could only launch five games per year. Given Konami's prolific output in Japan - where no such limitations existed - the company established Ultra Games and Palcom, a similar shell company which released games in Europe, in order to produce more NES games and boost revenue.

Ultra was responsible for publishing another of Konami's big NES hits, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Part of the company's new licensing strategy - which included creating video games for existing media properties such as Top Gun, Mission: Impossible and The Goonies - this 2D platformer was a case of utterly perfect timing. Starting as an underground comic in 1984, the Turtles had, by the end of the decade, matured into a staggering multimedia powerhouse, boasting a cartoon show, toy line and even Hollywood movie. Konami also produced a popular side-scrolling fighter for arcades, which was eventually ported to the NES in 1990. This title would see associated sequels in the form of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project on the NES, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time on the SNES and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist on the Sega Genesis/Mega Drive. Konami's association with the brand continued until 2005, when it released TMNT: Mutant Melee on the PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox.

While rival Capcom inked a deal with Disney to produce NES games based on characters such as Scrooge McDuck and Chip 'n' Dale, Konami collaborated with Warner Bros. Animation and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment to create a series of titles based on Tiny Toon Adventures, a reimagining of the

famous Looney Toons cartoons. Like Capcom, Konami used this popular licence to create tightly-structured 2D platformers which were of a much higher standard than typical tie-ins of the period; Tiny Toons would see three outings on the NES in total as well as sequels on the Game Boy, SNES and Genesis/Mega Drive, the majority of which were critically lauded.

As the '90s rolled on it became clear that the NES was losing market share to its successor the 16-bit SNES, as well as Sega's Genesis/Mega Drive system. Konami supported the SNES from the outset with the release of Gadius III, and in 1992 released its first Sega titles, Sunset Riders and the aforementioned TMNT: The Hyperstone Heist. While its NES output dwindled as interest in the aging system began to dry up, Konami continued to release titles long after other companies had abandoned the format. 1993 saw Zen the Intergalactic Ninja, Batman Returns and the Japan-only racer F1-Sensation, and the company went out with a bang by launching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters - its NES swansong - in 1994.

During the NES years Konami was canny enough to spread its resources across several different machines, and would support the aforementioned MSX as well as NEC's PC Engine. With the arrival of 32-bit systems in the middle of the '90s the company continued this platform agnostic policy, bringing its substantial library of games to the PlayStation, Saturn and N64.

Many of the company's 8-bit hits were updated during this period, including Castlevania, Track & Field, Gadius, Goemon and of course Metal Gear, but new IP arrived in the form of critically-acclaimed RPGs such as Vandal Hearts and Suikoden, and the

company followed in the survival horror footsteps of Capcom with the disturbing Silent Hill in 1999, which would emulate Capcom's Resident Evil to a degree by inspiring its own Hollywood movie adaptation in 2006. Konami's interest in soccer - forged with Konami Hyper Soccer back in the '80s - also blossomed during this period, with International Superstar Soccer 64 and ISS Pro laying down the groundwork for the Pro Evolution franchise (known as Winning Eleven in Japan), which would make its debut on the PlayStation 2 in 2001. Pro Evo remains one of Konami's most famous brands right up to the present day, with combined worldwide sales in excess of 80 million units.

“ During the NES years Konami was canny enough to spread its resources across several different machines. ”

In 2012 Konami purchased a slice of gaming history by acquiring Hudson Soft, the creator of such NES classics as Adventure Island, Bomberman and Star Soldier. Hudson was the first third-party publisher to sign up for the Famicom and its large stable of intellectual properties is now wholly owned by Konami. Hudson also worked with electronics giant NEC on the internals of the PC Engine system, a console that would give the Famicom a run for its money in Japan.

Despite the incredible sales of Pro Evo Soccer, the Metal Gear franchise must surely rank as Konami's tentpole series at the time of writing, with over 40 million units sold across all of the games in the lineage. Titles such as Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty and Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater racked up solid reviews and impressive sales, and spin-off releases on consoles such as the GameCube, 3DS and Sony PSP helped grow the brand further.

The unique combination of 'tactical espionage action', unusual characters and labyrinthine plotting have made Metal Gear one of gaming's most beloved properties, but 2015's Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain would prove to be the final game that series creator Hideo Kojima would work on personally. He parted company with Konami in the same year and has since

established the former Konami subsidiary Kojima Productions as an independent studio.

Nevertheless, Konami plans to release Metal Gear Survive in 2017, the first title in the series to be created without input from Kojima. Silent Hills - a reboot of the Silent Hill franchise which would see Kojima collaborate with Hollywood director Guillermo Del Toro - was also cancelled around this time, hinting that the working relationship between Kojima and his employer had become untenable, hence his departure.

The Konami of today isn't just concerned with videogames and has interests in the world of fitness, distribution, real estate and manufacturing, as well as overseeing brands like the trading card game Yu-Gi-Oh!, which is supported by a range of toys and animated productions.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game / 1990





Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Blades of Steel

The two things that immediately hit you on loading up Konami's ice hockey sim is the digitised speech that introduces the game - something of a novelty for an NES title - and the weirdly grey ice that the action takes place on (maybe a glaring pure white screen didn't go down well in testing). Play starts by picking a team from the eight US and Canadian cities on offer, and you can opt to play an exhibition match with a two-player, one-on-one option, or a enter the three-round Stanley Cup tournament.

Play is simple and quick: you control the player nearest the puck while defending, automatically pass to the nearest player using B, shoot at the goal with A while in possession - and that's about it. Repeatedly bumping into one of the opposing skaters initiates a fistfight where you can take down the player and gain a brief six-on-five advantage, and it also features penalty shots for infringements.

Blades of Steel was well received on its release in 1988 and age hasn't dimmed its appeal. It still plays a mean game and is full of neat, innovative touches, such as the digitised sound effects and even a mid-game intermission with an advert for Gradius!

Fan art

The world of videogames provides a rich seam of inspiration for gamers, many of whom enjoy creating their own tributes to the characters, vehicles, worlds and stories portrayed in pixels on their TV screens. This translates into a host of fan-created imagery, and talented artists the world over continue to deliver fresh visions of their gaming heroes – often illustrated to incredible levels of quality.





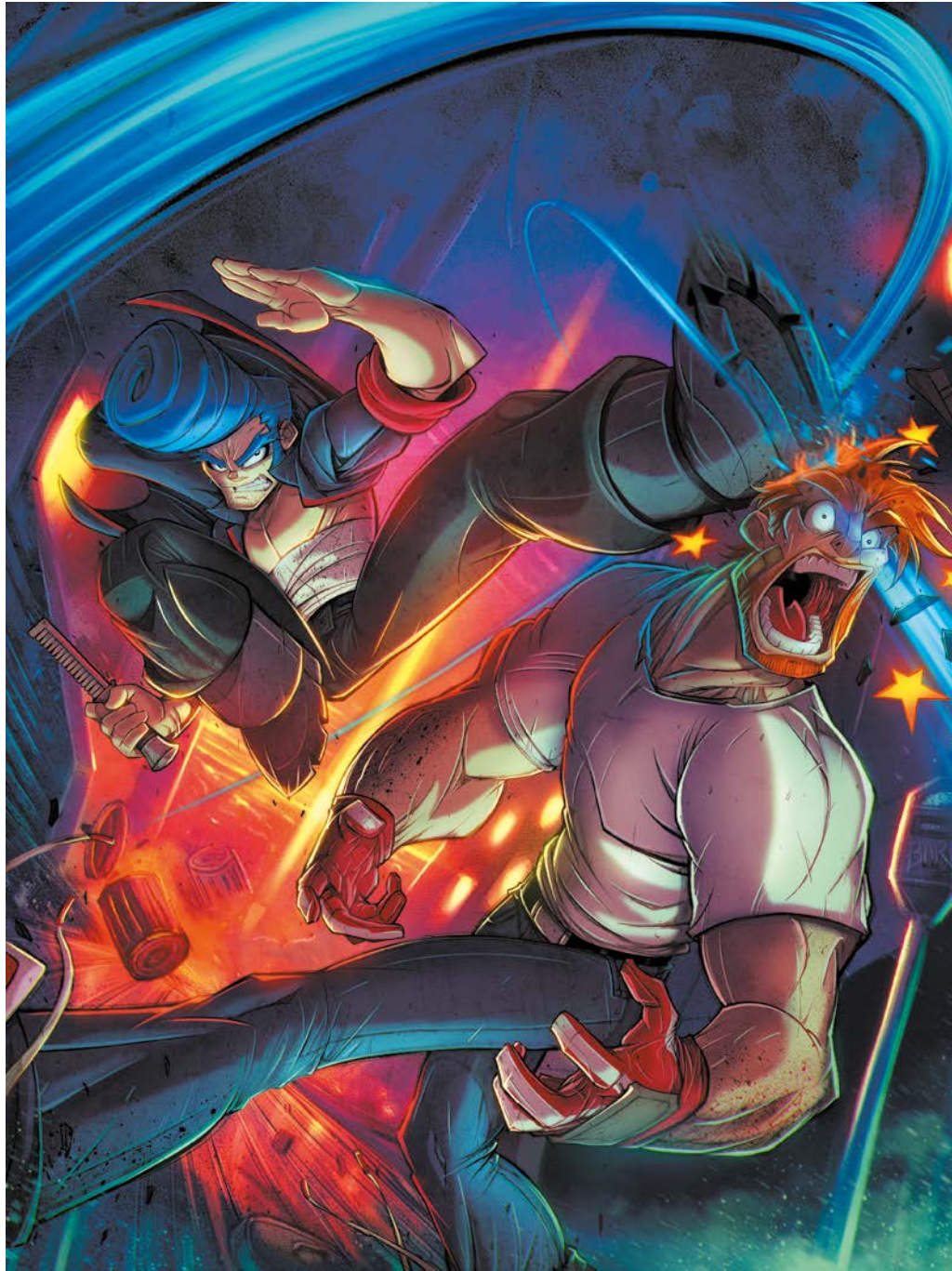
The 8 Bits of Subcon / Artist Radio Gosha / Year 2014

www.radiogosha.com



The Legend of Zelda / Artist Van Orton Design / Year 2014

www.vanortondesign.com



River City Ransom / Artist Sketchcraft / Year 2014

www.sketchcraft.tumblr.com



Mega Man 2 / Artist Thor Thorvaldson / Year 2013

www.thormeister.deviantart.com



NEStalgia / Artist João Victor G. Costa (aka JinnPixel) / Year 2011

www.jinndev.deviantart.com



"Vampire Killer" (Castlevania) / Artist Gabe Swarr / Year 2015

www.gabeswarr.com



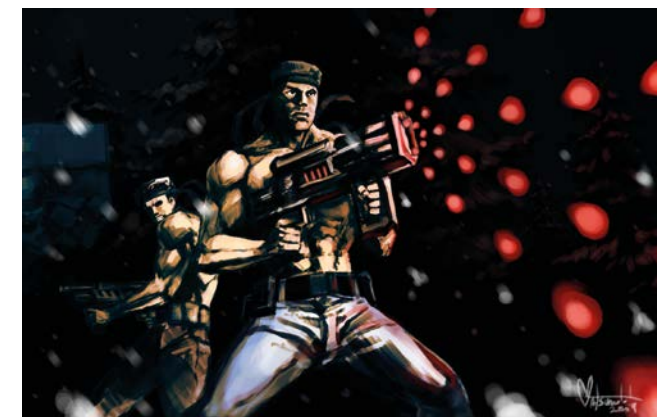
Various 10-Doh! figures / Artist Squid Kids Ink / Year 2016

www.squidkidsink.bigcartel.com



Samus - Badass Bounty Hunter /
Artist Josh Carter / Year 2014

www.joshcarterart.deviantart.com



Contra: Snowfield /
Artist Space Coyote / Year 2009

www.spacecoyote.deviantart.com

Castlevania II: Simon's Quest

"Konami's NES follow-up certainly wasn't without its faults, but most fans still consider it a worthy entry in the franchise, and one that served as a rough blueprint for many elements of the Castlevania games to come. A marked departure from the standard platforming fare of the original, Castlevania II focused on exploration in a huge non-linear world with day/night cycles, while also introducing rudimentary RPG elements. While often frustrating as an experience, Castlevania II is revered for what it attempted and remains an important touchstone in the series.

Visually, Castlevania II was a clear upgrade over the original. Its explorative world would cycle between daytime and nightfall, which in turn would impact Simon Belmont's encounters. At night, enemies would gain in strength and inflict more damage, while townsfolk would be replaced by zombies.

Unfortunately, the game was an utter slog without the help of a guide. Cryptic puzzles lacking any meaningful clues often led to frustration. Contributing to the challenge, NPCs offered little help and subtle hints from the Japanese version were lost in translation. Still, despite its frustrations, Castlevania II offered plenty of the tried-and-true Castlevania gameplay and great signature tunes, and should be commended for its ambition."

Sam Kennedy

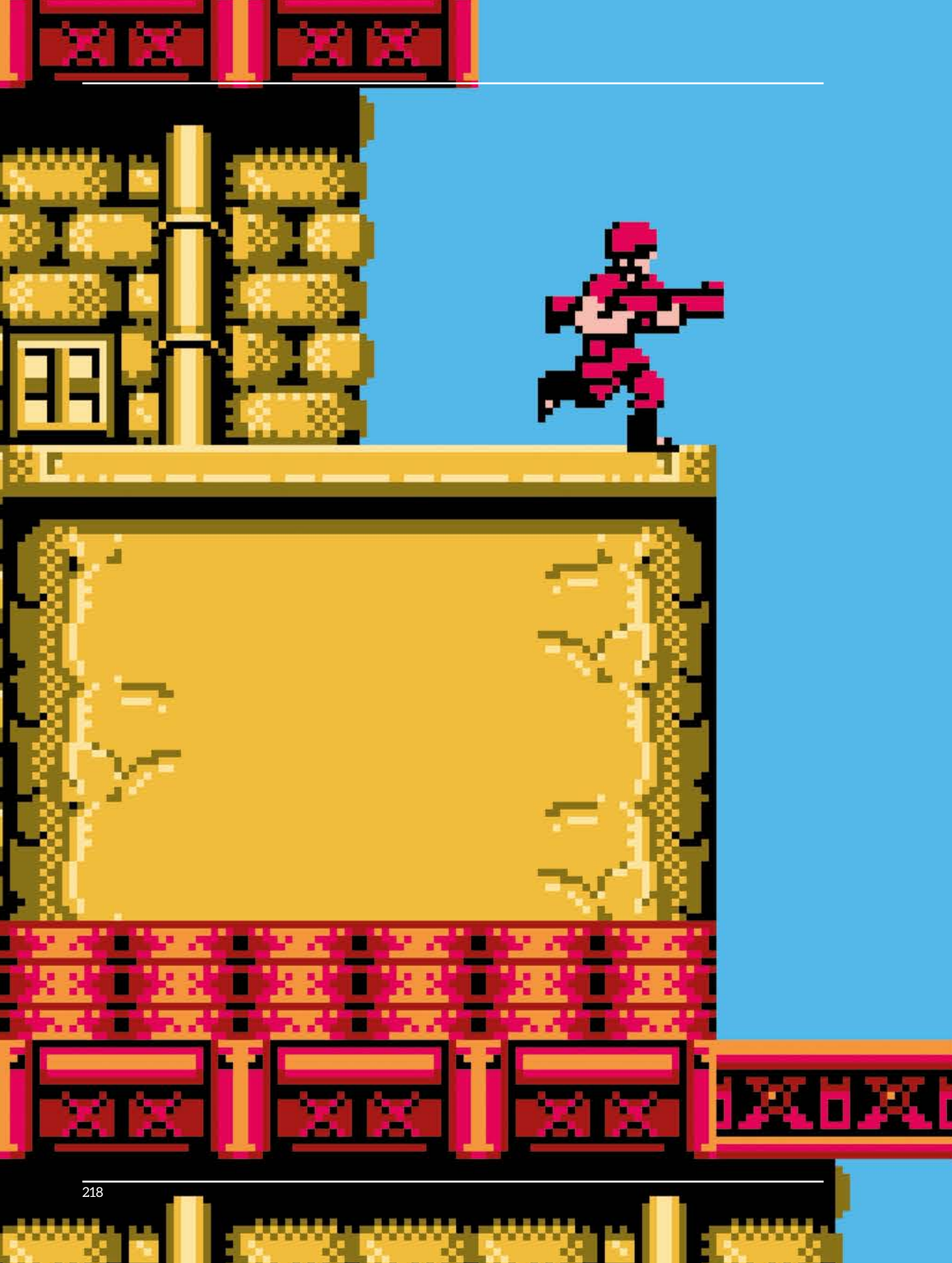
Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami





Bionic Commando

“Originally released as a Japanese Famicom game called Hitler’s Revival: Top Secret, Bionic Commando is a 1988 NES title that’s loosely based on Capcom’s 1987 coin-op of the same name. It’s a multi-directionally scrolling platform shoot ‘em up adventure that’s unusual in the fact that protagonist Ladd Spencer is unable to jump. Instead he uses a mechanical arm that doubles as a grappling gun to pull himself up ledges and swing across gaps and obstacles in the landscape. He can also use his extendable arm to pick up items that drop from downed enemies.

There are two objectives to Ladd’s mission: firstly to rescue his fellow commando Super Joe, whom the enemy has captured, and secondly, to uncover what’s behind the enemy’s secret ‘Albatross’ project.

There are tasks that involve working through the game’s numerous environments, gunning down threats, and using communication rooms to talk to comrades, as well as tap into enemy conversations. Each of the game’s levels also has an objective to destroy; successfully doing so awards the player with additional useful weapons, and items that allow access to new areas of the game.

Bionic Commando is a real joy to play. It takes a little while to get used to the arm mechanics, but once you do, it’s possible to deftly swing through the game’s maze-like levels at an impressive clip. Combine that with the game’s surprisingly robust action-adventure elements, and you have a NES title that stands tall as a genuine classic.”

Julian Rignall



Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Capcom

An interview with Tom duBois

The name Tom duBois might not be instantly familiar, but NES fans will almost certainly have appreciated his work in the past. A prolific artist and illustrator, duBois was responsible for practically all the cover artwork of Konami's NES, SNES and Game Boy titles in the West, and his eye-catching, dynamic style really made the company's games stand out on store shelves.

How did you get started as an artist? Have you always been interested in illustration?

I remember when I was 4 years old playing with my new toy race car on the kitchen floor and thinking, 'I would like to draw this!' So I grabbed a piece of paper and pencil and drew it. To this day I still can see that drawing I drew on the kitchen floor in my head. It wasn't good at all! After High School, I started Art School at the American Academy of Art on State & Adams Street, downtown Chicago in the fall of 1975.

How did you end up working for Konami?

Chicago was reeling and rocking in the 1980s. After graduating from the Academy in 1979, I started working in a large art production studio downtown drawing storyboards for television commercials. After a year of this I decided to go off on my own and freelance. Most of the friends I had in Art School went on to get jobs as Art Directors in the big ad agencies in town and they were kind enough to send a lot of work my way to help me get started.

One friend in particular was at an agency working on a Gatorade commercial showcasing the NASCAR Racecar that Gatorade

sponsored. He wanted to produce one of his concepts as an animatic – an animated storyboard. He wanted me to do the illustration work on his spot so he sent me to this place called Sinnott & Associates, who were the only guys in town producing these animatics. It turned out these guys at Sinnott liked the work I did so much they started using me for all the animatics they had coming in. I spent so much time there I decided to move into a tiny space they offered me on the top floor of their building. I slept in a sleeping bag I would roll out on the floor next to my drawing board. Sinnott's production reputation got to be so good that the big agencies began to use them to produce not just animatics, but television-ready fully animated commercials. This was a really big deal because at this time all the animated work done at this level was being done on the west coast in Los Angeles.

One afternoon I was returning from the art store picking up some supplies, and I was just about to walk in my building and head upstairs when I heard someone yell at me from across the street. My Mom told me my cousin Dave recently moved to Chicago from Indiana and he was involved in photography somewhere downtown. Unfortunately, being so busy I never had a chance to look him up. Amazingly, he was a representative for a photographer whose studio was literally one block down the street! After reminiscing about the family for a bit, Cousin Dave got right down to business and said he just finished doing a project with this agency in town who needed an

illustrator right away to create some 'exaggerated-type characters' for an ad in a comic book. They asked him if he might know any illustrators because they weren't having much luck finding someone they liked. Cousin Dave, who has this uncanny knack for running into people he knows, just so happened to run into me that day!

I grabbed a couple of samples for Dave to take to the head Art Director at this place he was talking about. This was a relatively new agency in town who recently signed a new account with a new client they were really excited about. That serendipitous interlude was early in the week. By the end of the week – actually I remember it was late Friday afternoon – Cousin Dave gets back to me and says, 'Cuz, I have good news and bad news. Good news... you got the gig! Bad news... they need it by Monday! Use this Jackal box as a guide, add a couple more soldiers and have the jeep crashing through a videogame screen. Do you think you can do it?' So Monday morning comes along and I delivered an illustration to this new agency called Michael Meyers for their new client with a weird name called 'Konami' – that illustration was used for the 'Konami's hits are coming home' advertisement.

“ I delivered an illustration to this new agency called Michael Meyers for their new client with a weird name called 'Konami'. ”

Blades of Steel / 1988





What did you think about videogames at the time?

I can appreciate their impact now, but you have to remember I'm a child-product of the '60s and '70s. We had to improvise our play-time for the most part. A videogame for me as a kid would be to cut grass or paint a fence to earn some money so I could walk uptown to Tiny-Tots and buy a model of a hotrod or battleship, spend two weeks building it and meticulously painting it and then pour some gasoline on it and set it on fire. Or if I could find where my older brothers were hiding their firecrackers I would blow them up. By the time I was doing the illustrations of the cover art I'm now in my early 30s so I'm in the generation that generally doesn't fully understand what these videogame thing-a-ma-jigs even are, so it didn't have much impact on me!

What were the best and worst aspects of creating game box art?

I would say the best aspect was to get paid to illustrate the same type of stuff I was imagining and drawing when I was a kid. The worst aspect definitely was the fact that I never made it clear and had it written in stone from the start that all the art I created would be returned to me. It is widely known in the illustration industry that the art created by the illustrator remains the property of the illustrator and added compensation is given to the illustrator when the artwork is not returned.

When you consider the years an illustrator puts into developing the necessary skills for the extremely difficult problem solving, the composing and rendering efforts, the time put into completing each particular assignment, the expense of supplies, the dangerous chemicals you are exposed to and the ridiculous

stress you are under to meet the deadlines, the compensation the illustrator gets for the work they do is beyond inadequate. At least that's how it was in my case. Being busy and preoccupied getting work completed and doing the best job possible on each project was no excuse for not giving my due diligence to this matter and an oversight I really regret.

What was your process for creating the artworks? Did you plan on paper first, or dive straight into the work?

Sometimes the Art Directors prepared layouts they wanted me to follow so I would use this direction and develop a tighter pencil drawing of their layout. Then I'd bring it in and if there were any revisions I would take care of them and after that was approved I would transfer this layout to the board and draw out a more precise, tonal version that I would paint over for final art. It seemed to work out better when I would develop the layouts and when this was the case I would compose three or four options they would choose from.

Did Konami have much say over what you did?

I suppose they did, but I was never involved in that communication. All I remember about this dark overlord was that whenever I heard they would be coming in to the agency I had to rush and get everything they had me working on finished. Whatever Konami had to say they said it to Michael Meyers and then the agency would pass that along to me.

What was the development time for a typical piece?

Did you have strict deadlines? That would vary depending on the complexity of the assignment. But I would say typically about a week. **Strict deadlines? Hmm, does bacon taste good?**

“ **Strict deadlines? Hmm, does bacon taste good?** ”

Did you receive much artistic direction from the actual game images or design documents?

That varied also. For some games I had more and some less. I think it mostly depended on how busy the Art Directors were with other assignments as to whether or not they would let go of the leash.

If you had the chance to revisit any of your previous artworks, what would you change?

I could find things in all the illustrations of the box art I would like to change but if I had to pick one, I would go back and fix that dislocated right shoulder on Bayou Billy. Looks like he was wrestling too many alligators!

Are there any other artists that inspire you?

All artists inspire me but I will answer the question by narrowing it down to two visual artists who are titans of their respective industries: Simon Bisley and Drew Struzan. These guys blazed new trails with their unique and effective techniques; we are talking off-the-chart ability in the hands of these two masters of visual art.

Of all the NES games artworks you've worked on, which are you most proud of and why?

I'll pick Bayou Billy, mostly for nostalgic reasons. It's one of the first covers I did and I liked being able to use my '47 Willy's Jeep as a reference. Also, I'm a glutton for punishment and I appreciated the opportunity to design and illustrate the lettering for that assignment.

Were there any NES artworks you worked on which never saw the light of day?

I don't think so, but I could be wrong about that. I did a lot of this work in those days and I'm still having guys remind me about games I totally forgot I worked on.

Do you have any funny stories or anecdotes to share?

The only thing I can really recall from that era was how busy I was. I suppose the funniest thing about it all is that I have never played a videogame! They gave me VHS tapes a couple times to use for reference but that's as close as I ever got to playing a game at home. I remember playing Space Invaders at a bar once but after a few times getting crushed and blasted by those little space bugs I walked away to go ask a girl to dance with me. Sadly, I was terrible at that too!

What are you up to these days?

I recently moved back home to look after Mom and Pop. They need some back-up these days. So I'm back where I started, still illustrating and busy at the moment working on assignments for a Christian publication.

These days I have been doing the work digitally due to the quick turnover time and relentless revisions but it still all begins with that pencil and piece of paper. Also, been kind of forced into this process; in 2007 I was diagnosed with cancer. The doctor said it was most likely caused by the highly toxic chemicals and solvents I carelessly used over the years. Several very serious surgeries later, I'm still kickin' & scratchin'!

“ I suppose the funniest thing about it all is that I have never played a videogame! They gave me VHS tapes a couple times to use for reference but that's as close as I ever got to playing a game at home. ”



The Adventures of Bayou Billy / 1988



Silent Service / 1988



Double Dragon

"In terms of arcade ports to the NES, Technōs' handling of Double Dragon was admirable, but certainly wasn't without a few key drawbacks and curious changes. Its alterations resulted in a port unique to itself, however, and one certainly worthy of the franchise's great nostalgia.

Many of the arcade-to-home sacrifices were made due to the inferior NES hardware and Technōs' relative inexperience with it at the time. The most glaring omission was the lack of a two-player co-op mode, but there were also other limitations, such as the game only displaying two enemies on-screen at a time and both being the same character. (Removing co-op also altered the plot: instead of both Lee brothers as protagonists, Jimmy Lee now served as the main antagonist). Not all of the changes were technology-based, however; the game also introduced a leveling-up system through experience points as an attempt to introduce a semblance of player progression.

Most interesting, however, was the inclusion of Mode B, a completely separate mode that switched the gameplay to a one-on-one fighting game (years before Street Fighter II ignited the genre). Utilising a different graphical style with larger on-screen characters, the popular assumption is that this was an initial prototype for the game."

Sam Kennedy

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

Developer
Technōs Japan

Publisher
Tradewest





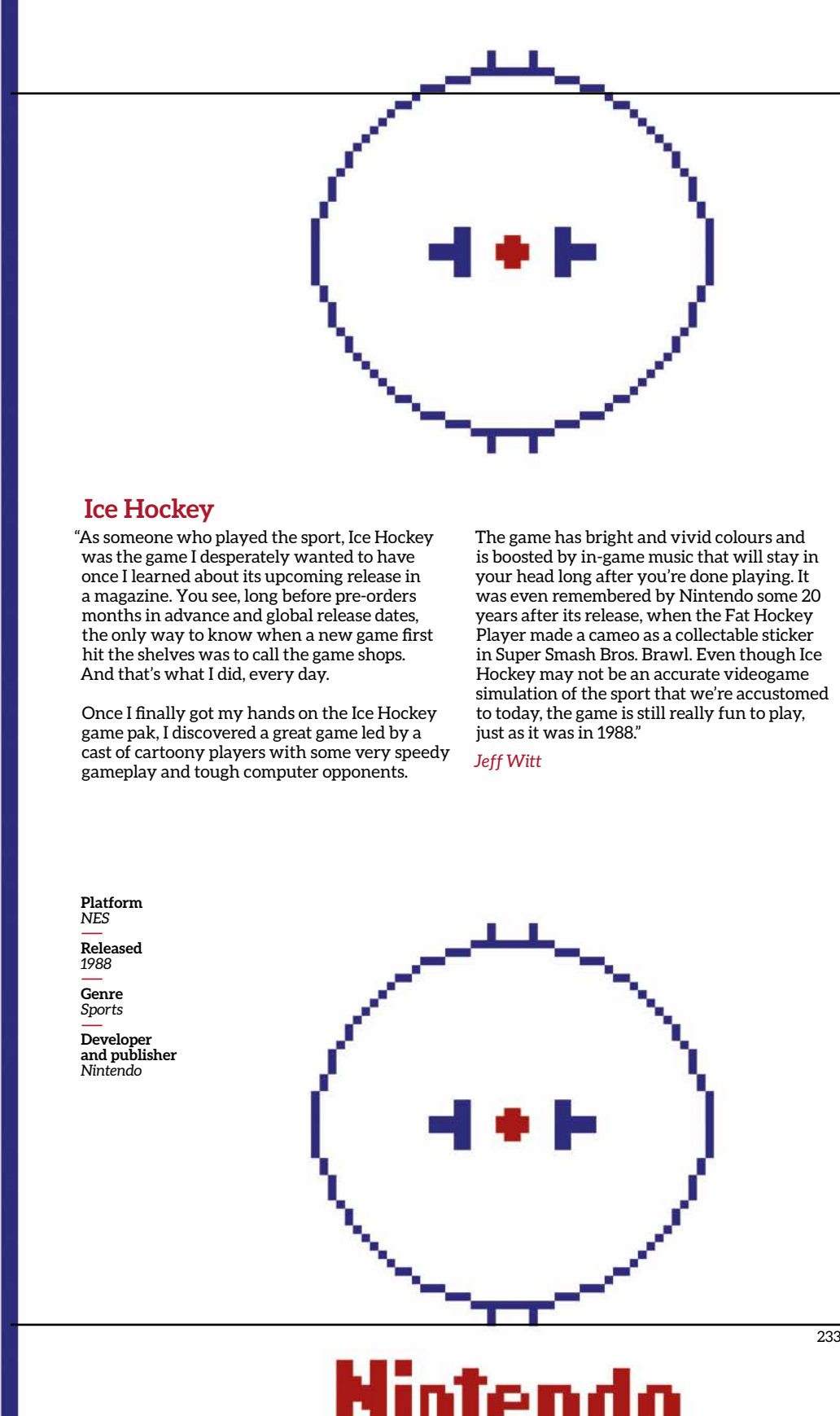
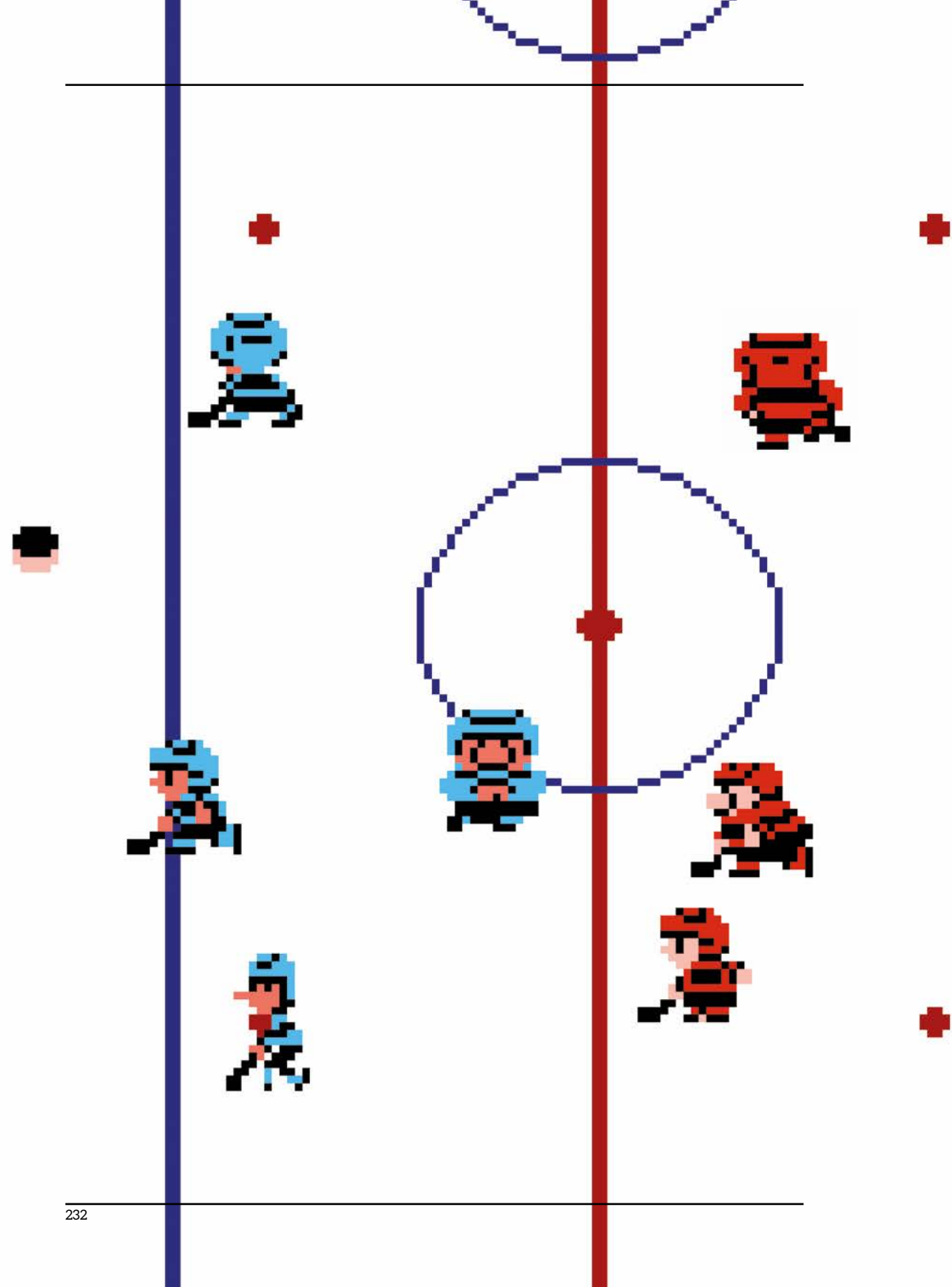
Double Dragon

Unleashed on the arcades in 1987, Technōs' classic scrolling beat 'em up proved to be a massive hit and went on to spawn three sequels and endless ports to 8- and 16-bit machines. The NES conversion was handled by Technōs Japan and it shows, with smooth movement, great sprite animation and colourful, detailed backdrops.

Martial artist Billy Lee is on mission to rescue his girlfriend Marion from the Black Warrior gang - sadly the simultaneous two-player mode is absent, so Jimmy only appears in alternate games. Still, even though it's more Single Dragon than Double Dragon, the action is great - solid,

brutal and relentless (there's a special type of sadistic glee when you relieve your opponent of their whip or baseball bat and use it against them). The NES version also has a unique system in which progress unlocks new techniques. So in later levels Billy learns how to dropkick an opponent, grab them by the hair and smash them in the face, and also how to pick up assailants and throw them.

It may be of dubious moral value, but Double Dragon is great fun, and the only reason you might overlook it is to play one of Technōs' other NES brawlers, such as River City Ransom or Double Dragon II: The Revenge.



Ice Hockey

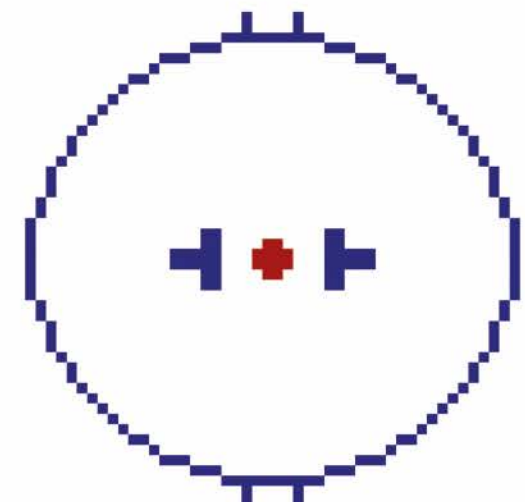
“As someone who played the sport, Ice Hockey was the game I desperately wanted to have once I learned about its upcoming release in a magazine. You see, long before pre-orders months in advance and global release dates, the only way to know when a new game first hit the shelves was to call the game shops. And that’s what I did, every day.

Once I finally got my hands on the Ice Hockey game pak, I discovered a great game led by a cast of cartoony players with some very speedy gameplay and tough computer opponents.

The game has bright and vivid colours and is boosted by in-game music that will stay in your head long after you’re done playing. It was even remembered by Nintendo some 20 years after its release, when the Fat Hockey Player made a cameo as a collectable sticker in Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Even though Ice Hockey may not be an accurate videogame simulation of the sport that we’re accustomed to today, the game is still really fun to play, just as it was in 1988.”

Jeff Witt

Platform
NES
Released
1988
Genre
Sports
Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Rygar

"The NES version of Rygar is one of those memorable games that require a lot of determination to play through to the end. This side-scrolling platform game is a very challenging action-adventure where you take control of a resurrected warrior who wields the weapon known as the Diskarmor. As you play, your weapons and health get upgraded in a similar fashion to most role-playing games. This mechanism made level-grinding throughout the earlier stages necessary to finish the game.

In my youth I quickly figured out a trick, once I understood how important leveling up early was to success in the game. I found an area where I could grind and not be attacked, next to a pit early in the first level. I actually taped down the B button on my NES Advantage controller with Turbo turned halfway up. Then I switched off the TV while leaving the NES on, so Rygar could grind all through the night. In the morning I was strong enough to finish the game in one sitting with minimal effort.

Rygar is a classic adventure that rewards players with great gameplay and a challenging quest that's well worth your time."

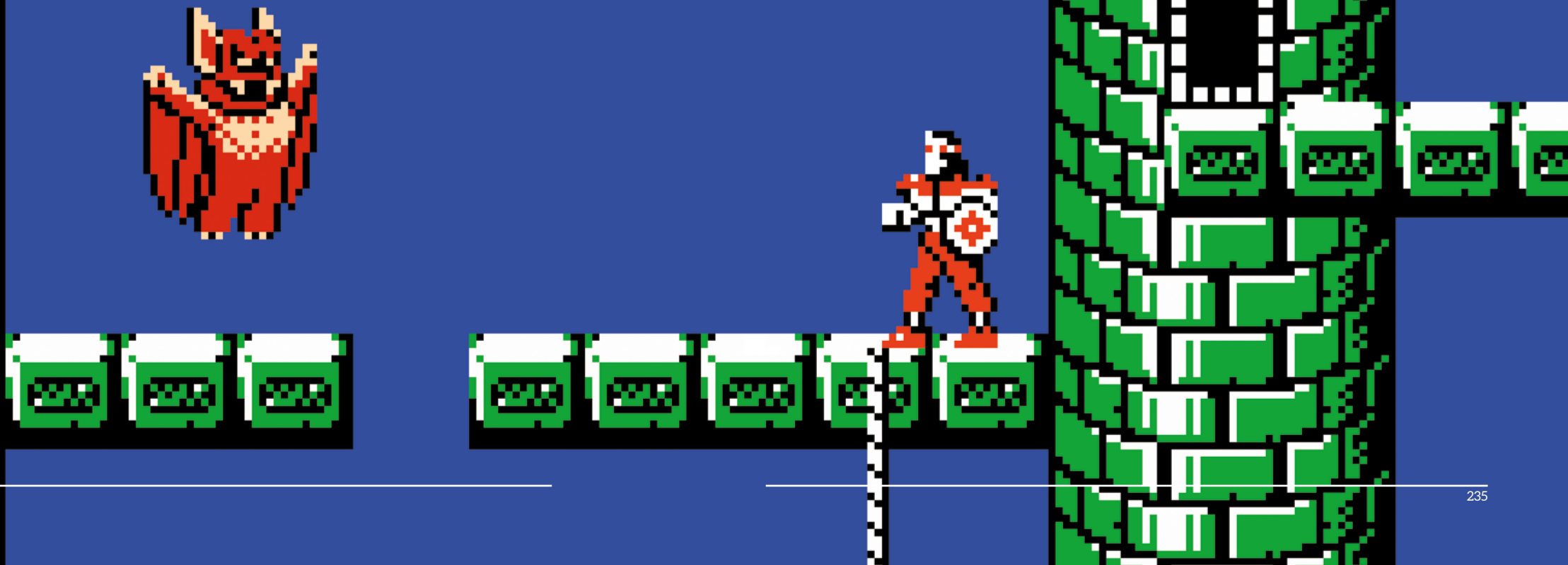
Martin Alessi

Platform
NES

Released
1988

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Tecmo



Legacy of the Wizard

"I'd always wanted to try making a Famicom game at Falcom but was told I couldn't work on it during normal work hours due to my workload. In my spare time, Legacy of the Wizard began to take shape and people thought it looked interesting! Mr Kato, the company president, then went to Namco and sold them on the game. We didn't get any development hardware from Nintendo - basically I made it myself. We got a Famicom cartridge, broke it open, switched the chip for the game with an in-circuit emulator, and then connected it to a computer.

I remember one particular challenge was creating the large map. We decided to go back to basics and built it screen by screen. We would print each screen, cut it up, stick them together and ended up making one huge map like that. It worked really well!

Someone showed me the American sales charts at the time, and it was released around the same time as Dragon Quest, and I saw that Legacy of the Wizard actually sold more. I was really happy about that!"

Yoshio Kiya

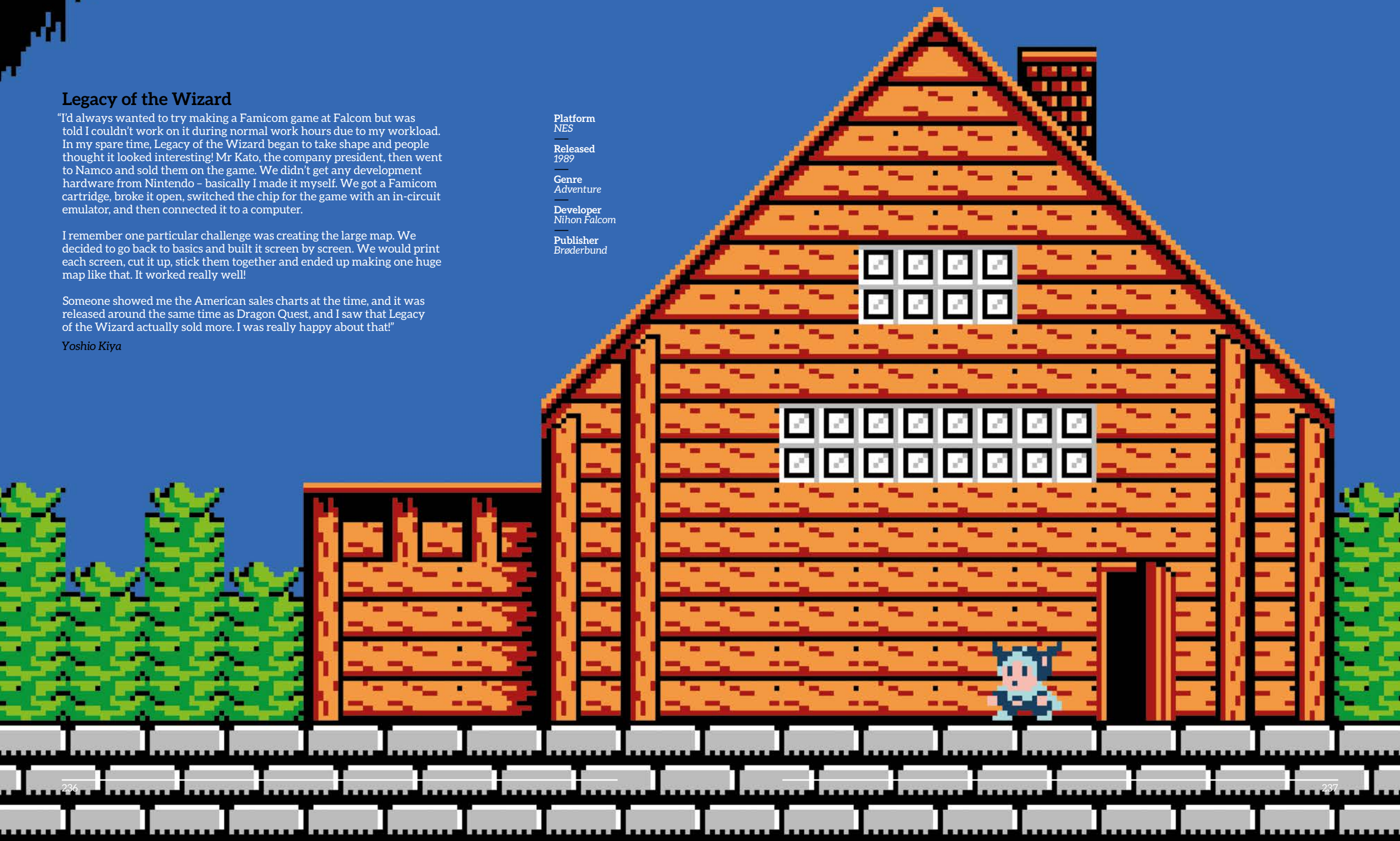
Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Adventure

Developer
Nihon Falcom

Publisher
Brøderbund



The Battle of Olympus

"From the forests of Arcadia to the rocky cliffs in Argolis to the white temples of Attica, Orpheus will have to travel all of ancient Greece to find the entrance to Tartarus and save his betrothed from the clutches of Hades.

Kneel before the gods for their advice; learn the secret of fire from Prometheus; use olives as local currency; poach salamanders for their fireproof skins. Defeat the Lamia, the Minotaur, the Harpy... This game has it all and then some. I have fond memories of playing this - on the monochrome Game Boy, initially - and feeling compelled to see it through to its end.

Olympus' developers had a very clear idea of their aims: in its restrained approach and strict adherence to Greek myth reside the game's lasting charms. Forget *Altered Beast*, *Rygar*, *Kid Icarus* or *God of War*: this is the only game that doesn't treat mythology like a disposable commodity. In movie language, we're talking more Pasolini's *Medea* than Harryhausen's *Argonauts*.

At its core, of course, there's *Zelda II*, which *Olympus* is a constant love letter to. As they say, if you have to copy, do it with style: the result may just surpass the inspiration source."

Carlo Savorelli

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Adventure

Developer
Infinity

Publisher
Brøderbund



RoboCop

“Ocean licensed RoboCop for all game formats and then collaborated with Data East who saw the potential and wanted to make the coin-op version. The game they developed was then adapted and converted for computer and console use. Ocean re-designed the coin-op game to make it more suitable for home users on computer, adding a few mini-games to align it more with the movie narrative. Data East took this version and ported it to the NES (probably referencing the 8-bit computer versions). RoboCop was probably the first game to be released – simultaneously – across so many different platforms. There was even a pinball game made by Data East!

It became the title that significantly changed Ocean's profile in the global market. Having taken the licence just on the basis of the working script and a little concept art (this was before the movie went into production) it was the most successful gamble the company had made at the time. The film became a mainstream success and the game was released concurrently with the video (pre-DVD!), which also allowed a number of cross-promotion marketing opportunities. In the UK, this became the first million-selling computer game.”

Gary Bracey

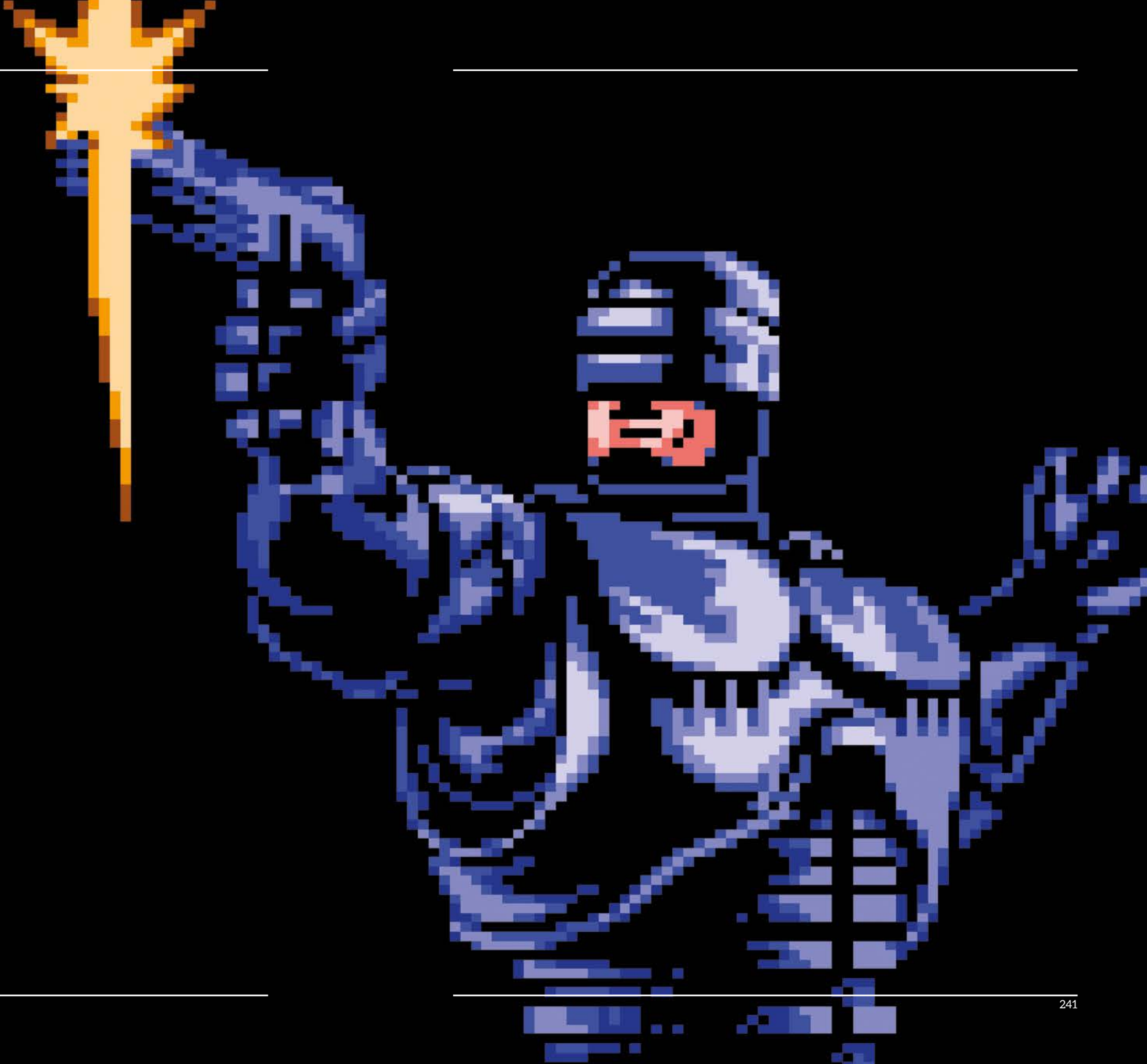
Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Ocean Software

Publisher
Data East



Fan memories

For many, the NES/Famicom was an entertaining distraction; an amusing way of passing the time or having fun with friends. But for some, the little console helped them through dark times, signalled a turning point in their lives, or just holds a very special place in their hearts. Here are just a few of their stories...

'Do Not Blow On The Edge Connector' by Craig Stevenson / 2016



Roisin Craig

"One of my earliest childhood memories was watching my dad play Super Mario Bros. on the NES, and I'll never forget the excitement every time he got to a new level or discovered a new shortcut. Although it eventually ended up packed away in the loft, it was those moments that have blossomed into a lifelong love for Nintendo."

Oliver Hale

"We had never been allowed a computer in our house. Then came Christmas 1987 and in the corner sat one final present. Despite our knack for finding where presents were hidden, we had no idea what this one was. It was a Nintendo NES Action Set. I had never known excitement like it. We were finally a computer household! Needless to say we spent the majority of the Christmas holidays stomping Goombas, eating chocolate and shooting ducks."

Chad Eckert

"When I was young my little sister was hospitalised with a rare form of leukemia. Nintendo was an outlet for me and playing Super Mario Bros. with my father became something of a bond between us - I suppose it was a way for us both to cope. When my sister beat dire odds and survived the cancer, she was able to take part in the fun too."

Senibo Myers

"My fondest NES memory is waking up super-early every Saturday morning to play Track & Field with my brother with the Power Pad! We would run ourselves to the point where we were dripping with sweat and couldn't walk let alone run anymore!"

Matthias Böhmer

"I still remember playing Super Mario Bros. for the first time, mastering the pogo jump, beating Zoda and turning Mario into a raccoon. The NES made me fall in love first with Nintendo and then with Japan. I have to thank that little grey box not only for the fun it brought directly but also for making me study Japanese and thus my work today. I wouldn't have thought so back then."

Bruno Tabbi

"I grew up on NES and I was hooked. To the point where my parents had to take it away from me because I wouldn't stop playing or talking about it. I ended up giving a neighbour kid \$20 to let me play as long as I wanted for the day. When my parents found out I'd paid someone to play out they were not happy."

Rob DiPietro

"I received my Nintendo for Christmas in 1987. My grandfather was very ill, but in spite of that he managed to spend a few hours with me that Christmas. It was, for me, one of the best Christmases ever. He sadly passed away a month later. He was a great person, and I'm grateful to have seen him that one last time. My Nintendo always reminds me of that time."

Gaetano Crisafulli

"I could never forget the moment in which I was playing the last levels of Super Mario Bros. with my father cheering for me. When finally I succeeded and completed the game, our joy was uncontrollable! Without his support next to me it would not have been the same!"

Gonçalo Lopes

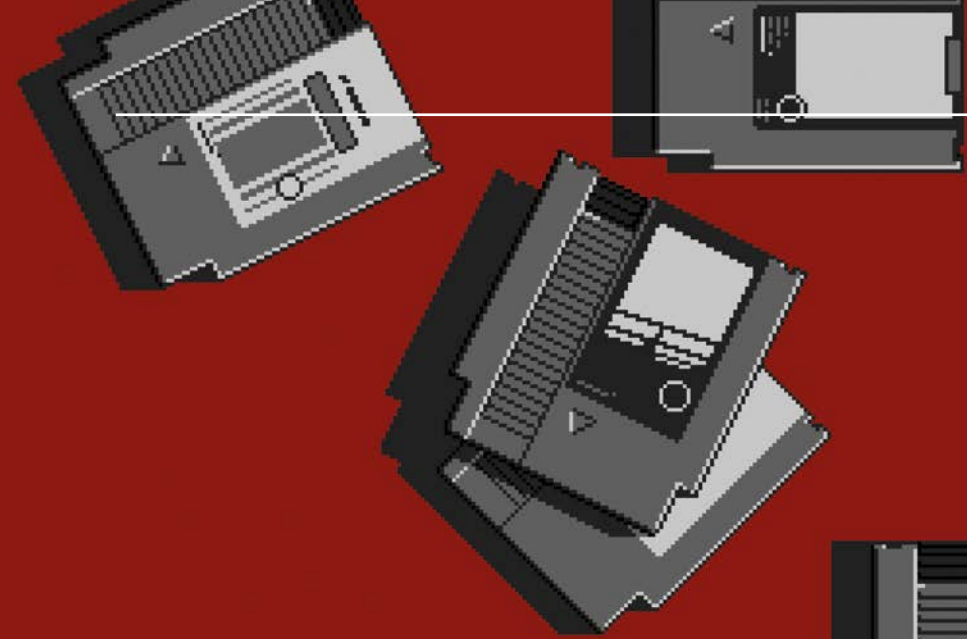
"The Famicom introduced my favourite videogame character of all time. No, it's not Mario, Samus, Link, Ryu Hayabusa or even Mega Man, despite loving all of their respective games. It's Kunio and his addictive, over-the-top fighting and sports games. Despite the series turning 30 years old this year, Technōs' series never fails to put a smile on my face. Truly in the case of the Famicom, less is more. A lot more!"

Mike Hendrickson

"When videogames were in their beginning stage of life, so was I. As they matured, so did I. As an adult, I am able to reflect on how videogames influenced the man I am today. They taught me financial skills, like the importance of savings and optimal 'item' utilisation. They encouraged me to go on adventures, gain experience, and 'level up'. They inspired me to be a hero. I have a lot to be thankful for because of videogames, and it all started with the NES."

Jonathan Leung

"After shopping at the mall one day, my mom took a misstep at the curb by the bus stop. The pain got worse and she had fractured a bone in her foot. Unable to take my brother and me anywhere, to keep us entertained while she healed, that very day she made my dad buy us an NES, which we'd been asking about for months. We became Nintendo fans for life! Her foot soon healed - so that day impacted me and my brother more than it affected her."



Makoto Honda-McNeil

"My fondest NES memory would definitely be watching my grandma play Dr. Mario when I was young. She would play a little bit every day and could beat anyone who ever challenged her. My brother and I would constantly watch her and my mom duke it out, with my grandma remaining undefeated."

James Thomas

"It's no exaggeration to say that receiving a NES for Christmas back in 1990 was a pivotal moment in my life. Until that point I'd never really been exposed to games, so as my brother and I settled in with Super Mario and Duck Hunt we were blown away. This set my path. It not only started a lifelong love but was also the catalyst for me learning to code and pursuing a career in games development. If it weren't for the likes of Solar Jetman I'd have turned out very different."

Alex Kain

"Out of all the NES games we would always come back to Tetris, and for good reason: my mom and my aunt competed viciously for the top score. Most parents kick their kids off the TV to watch a sporting event or primetime special - but those summers, it was because our moms had a mean Tetris rivalry!"

Andrew Simpson

"One summer day when I was about ten I decided to turn on Metroid and not stop until I had beaten the game. I'll admit, I used the Game Genie for a few small areas of support. It got to be 4am and my mother had woken up and realised I was still playing. She was yelling at me as I approached the Mother Brain. While yelling at my parents, explaining how important this moment was, I was fighting and winning against the mother Brain. Then... the game reset itself. Everything stopped. I calmly went to bed and haven't played the first Metroid seriously since."

Brad O'Hearn

"In 1989, as a very bored finance major during my junior year in college, I discovered the NES belonging to a fraternity brother who lived across the hall from me, and let's just say something had to give. The eventual aftermath: I transferred to a better college and changed my major to computer science, which led to a great career in software development - all thanks in part to becoming somewhat superhuman at Tecmo Baseball that semester of my junior year."

“Players
are artists
who create
their own
reality within
the game.”

*Shigeru Miyamoto,
game designer and programmer*





Nintendo
ENTERTAINMENT
NES VERSION

“The design was conceived as a wireless, modular system, designed to look more like a sleek stereo system rather than a electronic toy.”

Lance Barr, product designer

Mitchell Holt

"For those times my NES wouldn't work, I did the blow-on-the-cartridge trick. Most of the time that would work, but on the rare occasion it didn't there was only one solution: call for my mom. To this day I have no idea what she did, but every time she touched the NES, it would work flawlessly."

John-David Cowan

"The NES was the system that saved videogames, but it managed to show us all worlds of imagination that were never possible before. All these years later, and it still impresses now just as much as then. The NES epitomises the best of videogames. Always has, always will."

Anthony Micari

"The NES was quite simply my childhood. It involved itself in every facet of my life through its epic games and the shared experience among friends. Memories like riding our bikes down to the local video store on a beautiful summer day to rent River City Ransom, then playing it cooperatively all evening into the night; or a group of us huddling around a friend's television so he could show off his saved game at the end boss of Final Fantasy; or perhaps one of us navigating the other through a tricky maze with the help of a Nintendo Power."

Andrew Dickinson

"The NES caused and resolved so many arguments between us siblings, and the franchises that originally began on the console continue to be much-loved by me to this day, often because they bring back treasured childhood memories. The NES sparked my gaming flame. Thank you Nintendo."

Marc Maessen

"It wasn't until I received the NES as a birthday present from my parents in the winter of '89 that I got addicted to gaming. The vast catalogue of insanely great games, which I rented from the local video store, kept me busy for many years and I quickly became the video store's best customer. I've been a gamer ever since and own almost 30 consoles, but it was the NES that truly turned me into a gamer for life and for that I am forever grateful. Thank you Nintendo for so many amazing childhood memories!"

Dan Sandler

"I remember the intense rivalry I had with a neighbour over Codemasters' Micro Machines. We got so good, levels would last forever because we would just go back and forth on the tug-of-war style points. Years later after we graduated college we went back and started up the rivalry again for fun."

Tony DelMonte

"My favourite memory is when I first discovered the Warp Zone in Super Mario Bros. I remember messing around in World 1-2 and decided I wanted to try and go down the pipe that is connected to the exit pipe. I was upset that I couldn't down, but I saw the level continued past the pipes. I went to see what was over there and I saw the numbered pipes and the words 'Welcome to the Warp Zone'. I picked number 4 and went straight to World 4. I was amazed. I told kids at school and no one believed me!"

Frank Provo

"At first, I loved the NES because I was a lonely kid and it brought Super Mario Bros. home. Soon, I discovered making new friends was as easy as asking, 'Have you played Legend of Zelda?'. Every new game brought more friends! Maybe I missed chances to play outside, but I'll never regret the time my friends and I spent passing around a control pad or teaming up to beat games like Castlevania, Double Dragon and River City Ransom."

Carl Pettinato Jr.

"The NES system was revolutionary to gaming. When it came out it gave me an outlet to escape the parts of life I had no control over. The NES system and its family of characters brought me into a newly created realm where I ruled and could live in my own world where I had control. My love for gaming has never ceased, I'm a gamer for life and the best part of it is I get to share this love with my daughters who have loved the Mario Bros. franchise just as much as I did growing up."

Derek Morris

"My favourite childhood memory is playing Tecmo Super Bowl with my best friend Chris. We would play seasons together and stay up all night getting our teams to the Super Bowl. This occurred at a critical time in my life, right after my father died. I needed this distraction and the greatness of Nintendo and my best friend Chris provided me that. Just last summer, Chris and I got together and played a season together. I would give anything to go back!"

Mark Snodden

"I remember waking up one Monday morning to find a NES console Mario bundle lying on the sofa. My dad, a taxi driver, was given it as payment as the passenger didn't have any money bar the new console to pay. I played Super Mario Bros. for the first time that morning before going to school and couldn't stop thinking about it all day."

Tim Smith

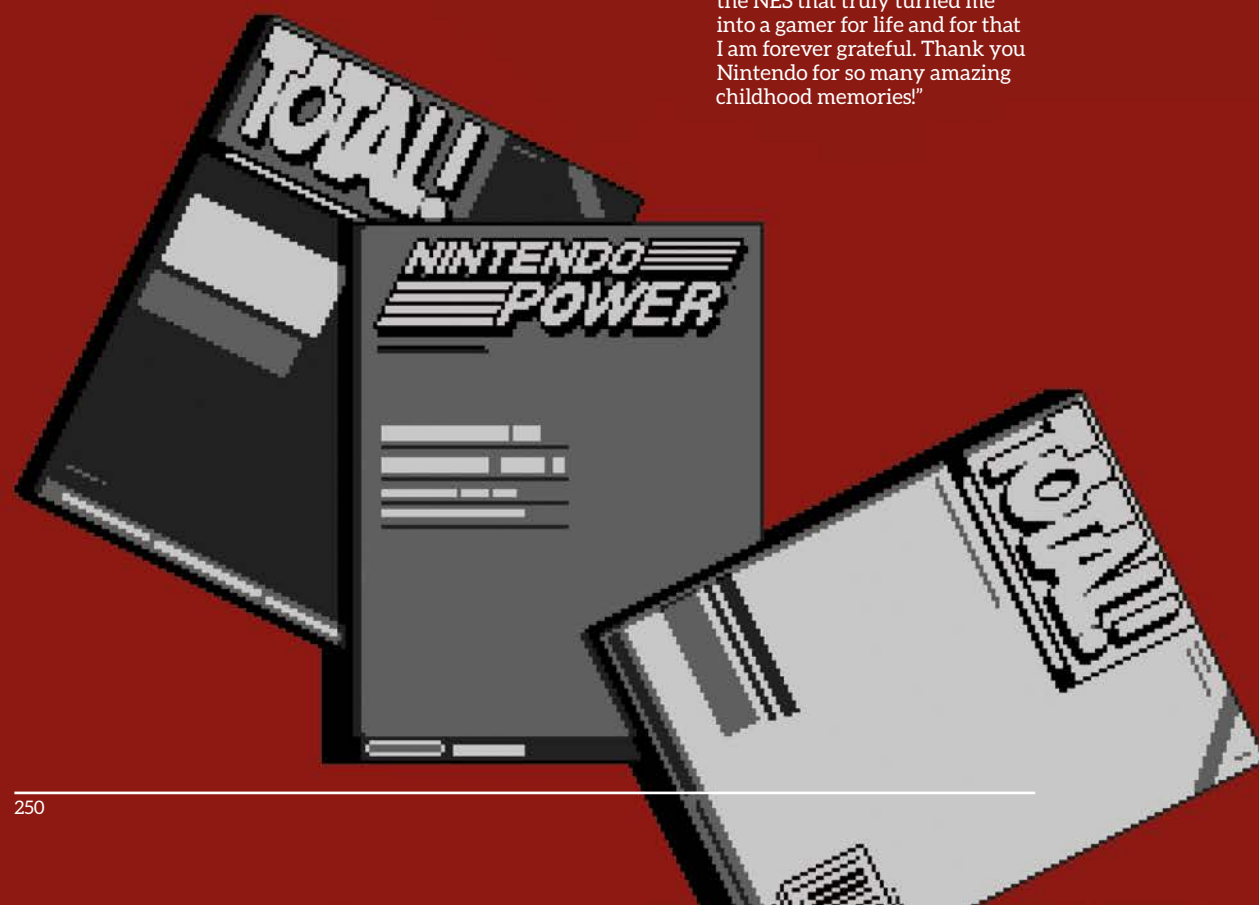
"Nintendo was the coolest toy the neighbourhood had ever seen. All the kids would swap games, go to each other's houses, and trade secrets and tips. Aside from the magic of the system and the games themselves, it was the spirit of community and the summers spent bonding that made the NES so special."

Logan Bush

"My dad raised me on the NES and I started playing Super Mario Bros. 3 as soon as I could pick up a controller. I was never able to beat it, but I knew my dad had. Him telling me about the end fight with Bowser seemed near-mythical. One night my best friend and I persuaded him to stay up and beat the game. We rooted and cheered as he used warp whistles and power-ups as he made it all the way to World 8. Late that night, way past our bedtimes, we watched him beat Mario 3. It was really exciting! As an adult, every time I beat Super Mario Bros. 3, I think of that night."

Jeff Brown

"The NES was the first system I ever owned. I remember going with my parents from store to store trying to find one in the Christmas of 1992. It's hard to believe that every store was sold out, even though the system was in its eighth year! That is unheard of these days. I will never forget the magical feeling I felt when I first had the system hooked up. I would wake up at 7am before school to play every day. The happiness I felt as a kid, knowing that I ACTUALLY OWNED a NES was truly magical, and to this day, that feeling has not been duplicated with any other system!"



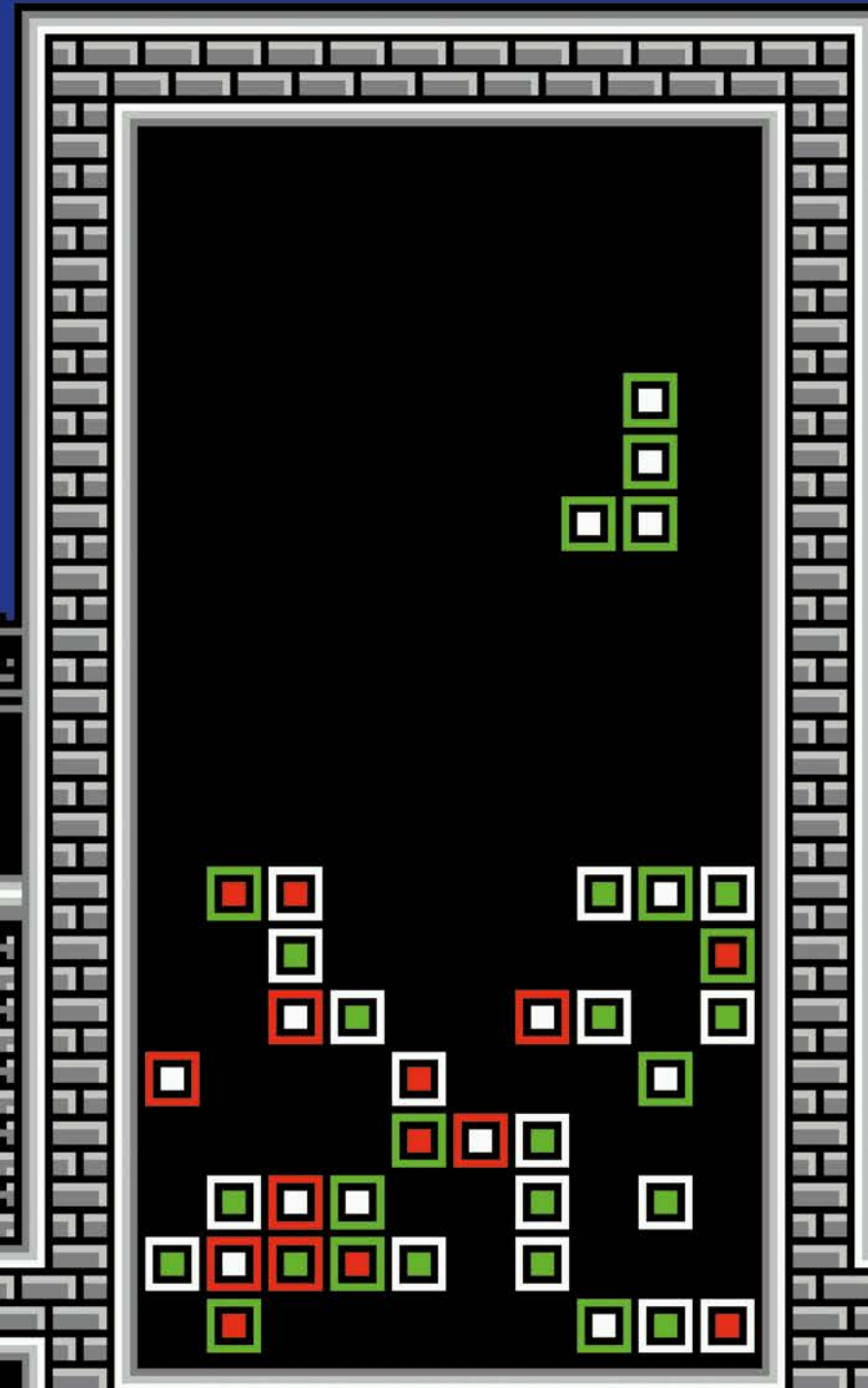
Tetris

"Tetris: You could define it mathematically, but you likely cannot summarise it adequately. This is the ultimate 'easy to learn, difficult to master' game; the quintessential simple-yet-profound example. And it's all done with geometric shapes. The player controls one falling 'tetrimino' at a time. Each of these shapes is composed of four squares connected orthogonally. Each line of the field of play is ten squares wide. The field is 20 squares tall. Within these constraints is woven a sublime tapestry of the puzzle-game genre boiled down to its bare, original essence, and the wit's end of many players who dare try to conquer it.

It's crazy, really. Tetris, like baseball, could theoretically go on forever, but it will inevitably come to an ending every time nonetheless. Countless have gone to the well of Tetris for relaxation, despite Game Over looming as their only possible result. There is a lesson there, perhaps.

Tetris can be seen as an exercise in discipline for discipline's sake, a truly Zen-like test of living in the moment. 'Our successes fade, but our failures remain,' Tetris seems to tell us. And we love it. Now if could just get a line piece soon..."

Eric Bailey



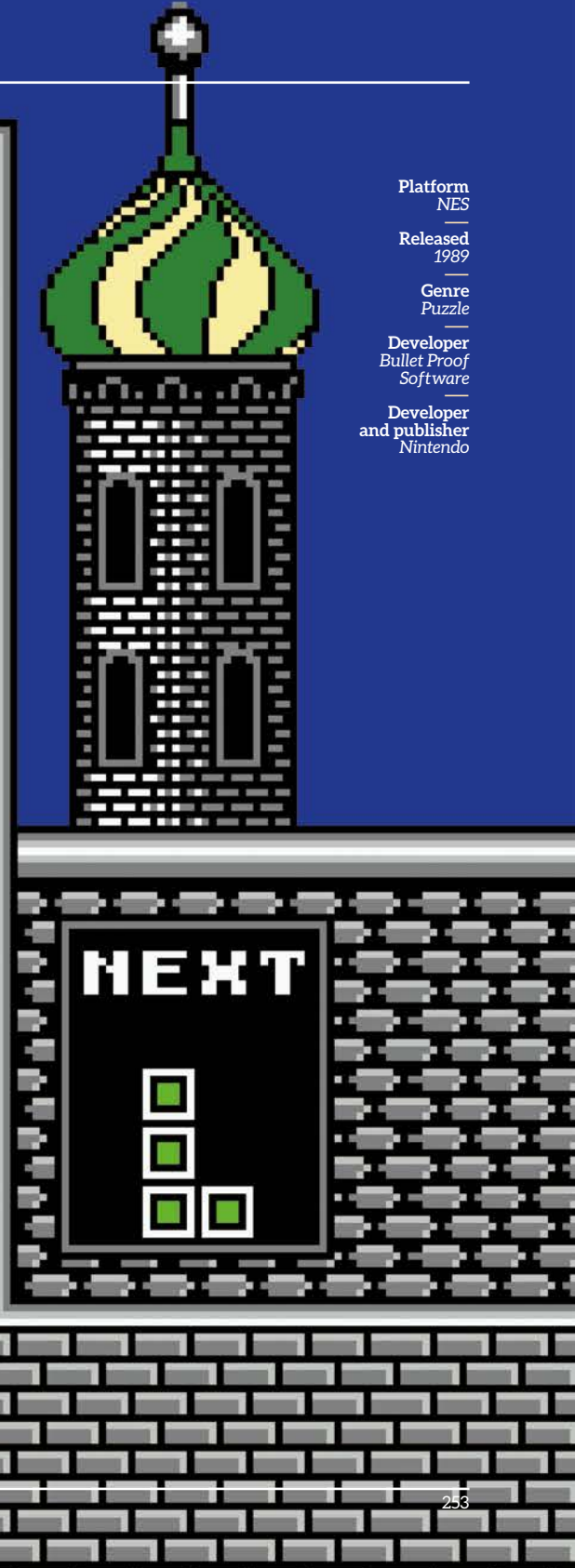
Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
Bullet Proof
Software

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Heavy Barrel

At first glance, this port of the 1987 Data East coin-op appears a bit underwhelming. The backgrounds are sparse, character sprites bland and flickery, and as a top-down shooter – in much the same vein as *Commando* and *Ikari Warriors* – it all feels a bit too familiar. But if you stick with it, *Heavy Barrel* gradually starts to grow on you.

Sent on a mission to infiltrate a terrorist facility, you have to blast your way past waves of enemy soldiers, machine gun nests, tanks, choppers and other, more nefarious mechanisms. Shoot the enemy grunts dressed in red, and they drop keys, which are used to unlock metal boxes containing weapon

upgrades, plus parts of the eponymous 'heavy barrel', a powerful gun which kills anything with one hit but lasts a meagre 30 seconds. There are more boxes than keys, so you'll need multiple play-throughs to figure out your preferred combo of power-ups or secret weapon parts.

Heavy Barrel is oddly paced, repetitive, has some lame bosses and also suffers from annoying technical issues. Yet it still manages to offer a solid dose of exciting, fast-paced action. Throw in a two-player co-op mode and it's an unexpectedly entertaining package.

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
and publisher
Data East



Platform
NES
Released
1989
Genre
Action
Developer
and publisher
Tecmo

Ninja Gaiden

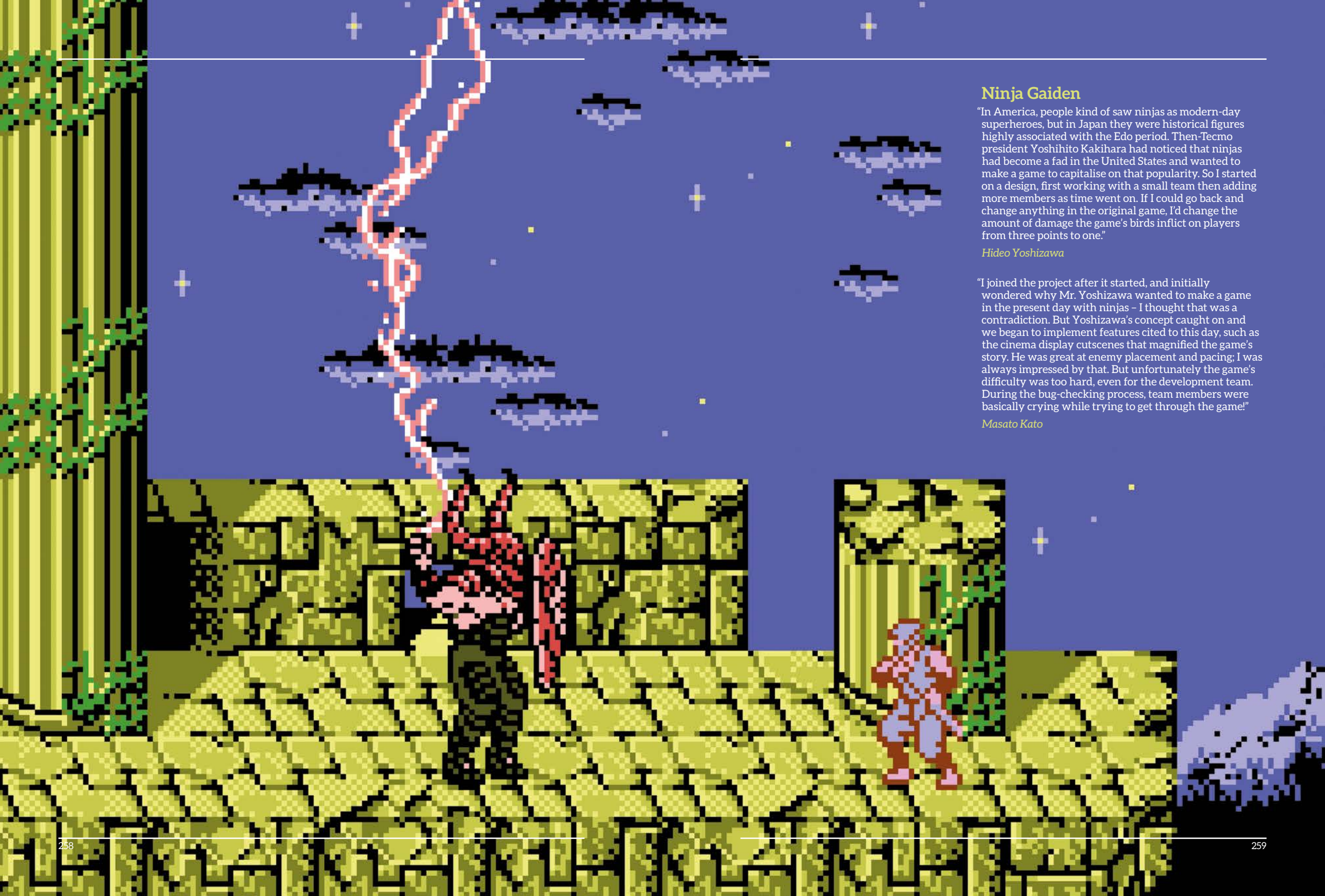
“Known as Legend of the Ninja Dragon Sword in Japan, and titled Shadow Warrior in Europe, Tecmo’s Ninja Gaiden is a 1989 side-scrolling platformer that follows the story of Japanese protagonist Ryu Hayabusa as he travels to the United States to investigate the mysterious death of his father.

The plot, articulated through a series of excellent cut scenes, soon thickens, however: Ryu is shot and captured by a mysterious woman who hands him a statue before turning him loose. He quickly discovers that the effigy is one of a pair that has been imbued with the power of a demon, and that someone called The Jaquio is planning to use them to turn the monster loose upon the world. This kicks off a six-act adventure that sees Ryu athletically leaping, jumping and wall-climbing his way through 20 levels of top platforming action as he takes on an army of ninja bad guys using a variety of different weapons, including a Dragon Sword, throwing stars and spinning fireballs. The proceedings are intense, exciting and challenging, with boss characters to defeat, and some decidedly tricky landscape hazards to navigate.

It all adds up to a great game that’s very fondly remembered by its players for its bright and colourful graphics, thumping good soundtrack – and tough-as-nails gameplay.”

Julian Rignall





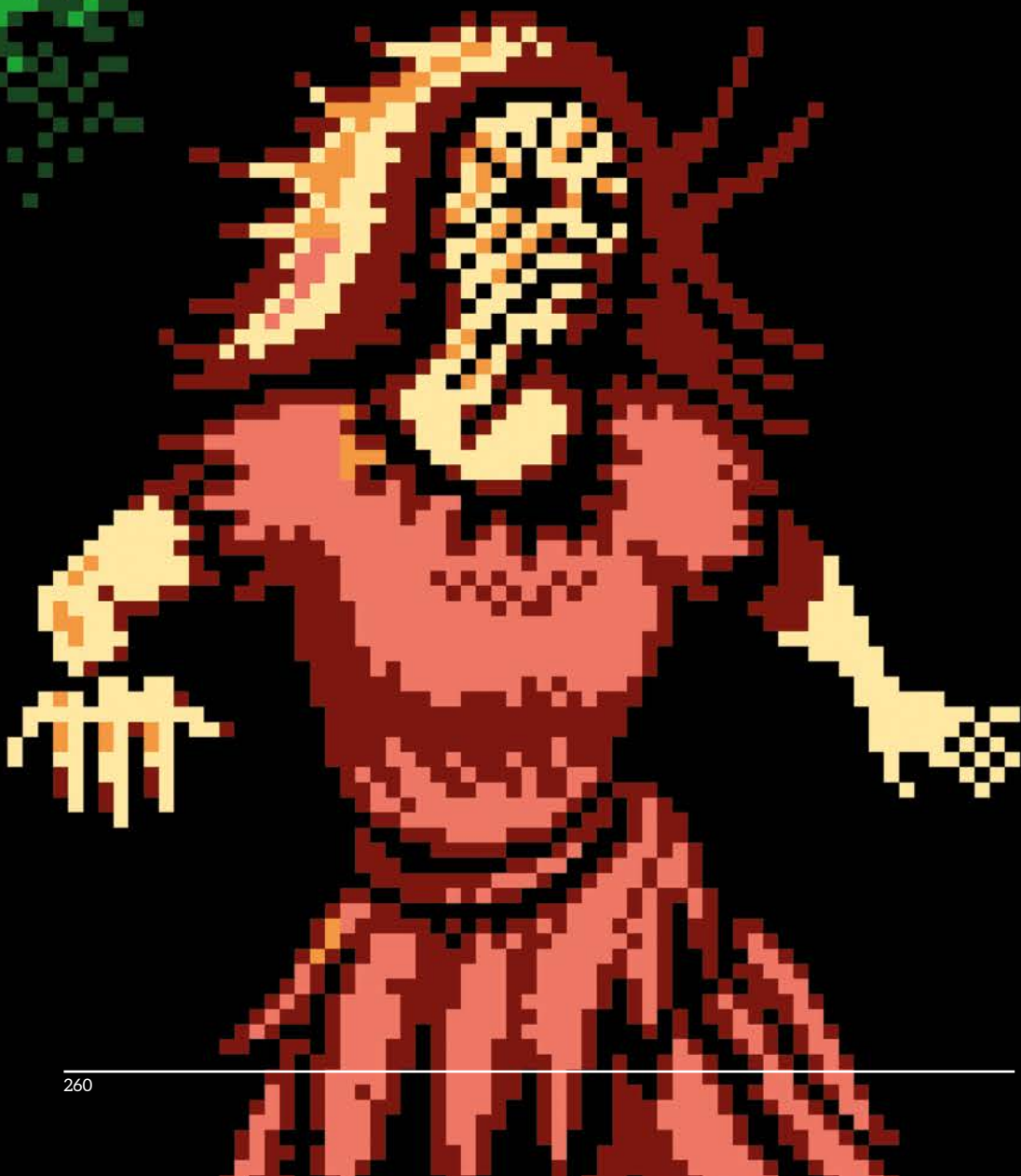
Ninja Gaiden

"In America, people kind of saw ninjas as modern-day superheroes, but in Japan they were historical figures highly associated with the Edo period. Then Tecmo president Yoshihiro Kakei had noticed that ninjas had become a fad in the United States and wanted to make a game to capitalise on that popularity. So I started on a design, first working with a small team then adding more members as time went on. If I could go back and change anything in the original game, I'd change the amount of damage the game's birds inflict on players from three points to one."

Hideo Yoshizawa

"I joined the project after it started, and initially wondered why Mr. Yoshizawa wanted to make a game in the present day with ninjas - I thought that was a contradiction. But Yoshizawa's concept caught on and we began to implement features cited to this day, such as the cinema display cutscenes that magnified the game's story. He was great at enemy placement and pacing; I was always impressed by that. But unfortunately the game's difficulty was too hard, even for the development team. During the bug-checking process, team members were basically crying while trying to get through the game!"

Masato Kato



Sweet Home スウィートホーム

Something of a rarity on the NES, this survival horror game is based on the cult 1989 movie directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. The plot follows the exploits of a team of documentary filmmakers entering the home of artist Ichirō Mamiya to uncover five hidden frescoes. Once inside, they're trapped by a ghost and must work in teams to solve the mysteries of the mansion and ensure their own escape.

Viewed top-down, the house provides a sprawling map full of items to collect and monsters to fight in typical JRPG combat style. Cleverly, you can group team members together in order to explore, collect and share items via a slick menu system. Team members possess their own special tool (camera, vacuum, lighter etc.), and so there's some strategic to-ing and fro-ing around the mansion to solve puzzles or access new areas.

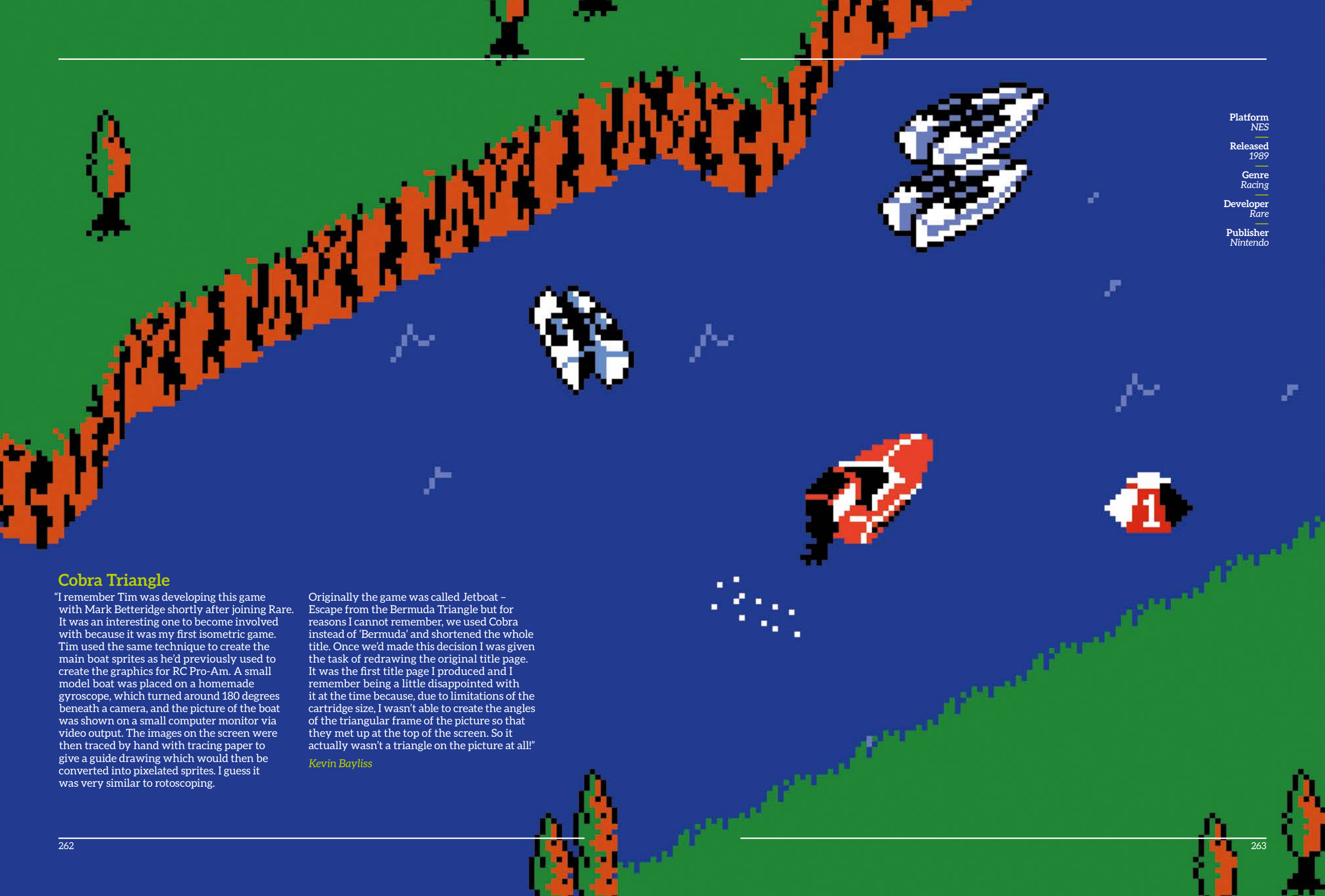
Sweet Home is a decidedly spooky undertaking, but even with its best-in-breed graphics it's never quite downright scary - although it does have a few unexpectedly gory moments. It's notable for being the inspiration behind the Resident Evil series, recognisable from its door-opening sequences, and although the Japanese release will be unfathomable to most Westerners, there's an excellent fan-translated version available online.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1989

Genre
RPG

**Developer
and publisher**
Capcom



Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Racing

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Nintendo

Cobra Triangle

"I remember Tim was developing this game with Mark Betteridge shortly after joining Rare. It was an interesting one to become involved with because it was my first isometric game. Tim used the same technique to create the main boat sprites as he'd previously used to create the graphics for RC Pro-Am. A small model boat was placed on a homemade gyroscope, which turned around 180 degrees beneath a camera, and the picture of the boat was shown on a small computer monitor via video output. The images on the screen were then traced by hand with tracing paper to give a guide drawing which would then be converted into pixelated sprites. I guess it was very similar to rotoscoping.

Originally the game was called Jetboat - Escape from the Bermuda Triangle but for reasons I cannot remember, we used Cobra instead of 'Bermuda' and shortened the whole title. Once we'd made this decision I was given the task of redrawing the original title page. It was the first title page I produced and I remember being a little disappointed with it at the time because, due to limitations of the cartridge size, I wasn't able to create the angles of the triangular frame of the picture so that they met up at the top of the screen. So it actually wasn't a triangle on the picture at all!"

Kevin Bayliss

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Sports

Developer
Electronic Arts

Publisher
Ultra Games

Skate or Die!

"Skateboarding was raging in the streets long before Skate or Die! made the NES scene. But, developed by Electronic Arts and then published for NES by Ultra Games, this game enabled skaters and posers of all skill levels to bust all the moves they might never attempt on real life streets. Skate or Die! was simple by any gaming standard but its multiple challenges made you go for it! There were ramp events, downhill runs, a pool joust and mano-a-mano jams. The sideview halfpipe events were addicting, but the three-quarter overhead view downhill jams were where you really had to master your moves.

The control schemes were unusually diverse and the gameplay physics decent. In the halfpipe, for example, you could build up speed and momentum by pumping the D-pad back and forth to launch into higher jumps. During the downhill challenges you could switch any time from a regular stance to an opposite 'goofy foot' stance which made some turns and obstacles easier to master, just like actual skateboarding. One of the cool features for the times was the multiplayer mode where up to eight gamers could sign in to compete.

No doubt the design boys at Electronic Arts went overboard trying to make the game hip with their funky interpretation of skater culture, but Skate or Die! was one of those games where the fun never ends. You just returned to the skate shop to replay any event to beat your highest scores. Skate or Die! was easy-to-play, good times for you and your boys."

Wes Nihei





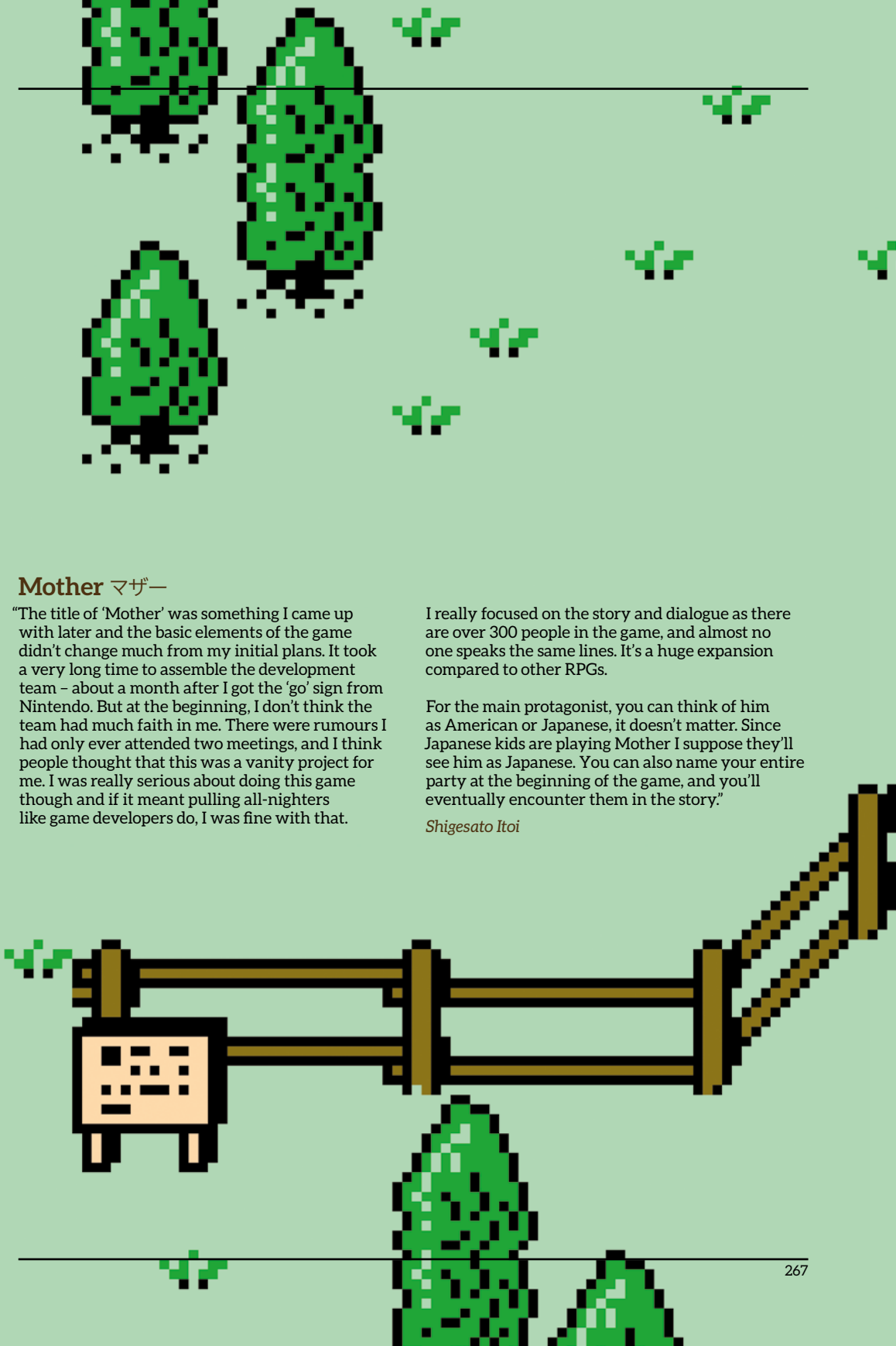
Platform
Famicom

Released
1989

Genre
RPG

Developer
Ape

Publisher
Nintendo



Mother マザー

"The title of 'Mother' was something I came up with later and the basic elements of the game didn't change much from my initial plans. It took a very long time to assemble the development team - about a month after I got the 'go' sign from Nintendo. But at the beginning, I don't think the team had much faith in me. There were rumours I had only ever attended two meetings, and I think people thought that this was a vanity project for me. I was really serious about doing this game though and if it meant pulling all-nighters like game developers do, I was fine with that.

I really focused on the story and dialogue as there are over 300 people in the game, and almost no one speaks the same lines. It's a huge expansion compared to other RPGs.

For the main protagonist, you can think of him as American or Japanese, it doesn't matter. Since Japanese kids are playing Mother I suppose they'll see him as Japanese. You can also name your entire party at the beginning of the game, and you'll eventually encounter them in the story."

Shigesato Itoi



**“The NES brought
with it a new respect for
interactive entertainment
due to its high-quality
software library.”**

*Martin Alessi, ex-Electronic
Gaming Monthly senior editor
and art director*

Super Dodge Ball

"A cult classic in its day, Super Dodge Ball was an over-the-top, stylised take on the sport of dodge ball and the first in Technōs' 'Kunio' line of sports titles, known for their comical animations and violence.

The object here was pretty simple. In a six-on-six match, you'd control members of your team and basically attempt to pound the crap out of your opponents by throwing the ball as hard as possible. What made the game so great were the comically insane animations. Winding up and taking out an opponent with a powerful attack wouldn't just register as a hit, but rather send them flying into the air and across the screen. I still fondly remember these super moves and the damage they'd inflict as some of the most rewarding in all of gaming.

Unfortunately, Super Dodge Ball suffered from a fair amount of on-screen flicker, with character sprites often dropping in and out of visibility and disrupting the gameplay experience (due to the NES hardware's inability to display more than a few sprites on the same horizontal row at the same time). But the simple-yet-deep gameplay and utterly rewarding mechanics easily made up for the graphical shortfalls."

Sam Kennedy

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Sports

**Developer
and publisher**
Technōs Japan



Faxanadu

“Developed by Hudson Soft under licence from Nihon Falcom, Faxanadu is part of a much wider lineage of fantasy RPGs which are incredibly popular in Japan; even the exotic-sounding title traces its origins back to Falcom’s work – ‘Xanadu’ was taken from the sequel to the original Dragon Slayer game, and the ‘F’ was added to reflect that the release was on the Famicom. Not that I was

aware of any of this backstory when I played the game after hungrily digesting glowing reviews in various Western videogame magazines.

Faxanadu’s similarity to titles like *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* and *Castlevania II: Simon’s Quest* made it an intriguing proposition for seasoned NES owners, and its mixture of platforming action and light RPG elements lent additional appeal for those who wanted a slightly more engaging experience from their trusty 8-bit console. The moody visuals and excellent music instantly ensnared those who took the chance, and it’s somewhat ironic that Faxanadu is considered by many to be a far superior product to both *Zelda II* and *Simon’s Quest*. Whether you agree with that stance or not, there’s no denying that this is one of the gems of the console’s RPG selection.”

Damien McFerran

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Adventure

**Developer
and publisher**
Hudson Soft



Rescue: The Embassy Mission

“This was an odd game in my collection – one that most friends had never seen before. We were used to other games, side-scrollers in particular, that mostly rewarded a fast-paced approach and catered to short attention spans. Here was a somewhat obscure gem that rewarded patience and restraint, which in turn helped burn the visuals into memory.

While relatively short, the different gameplay modes were refreshing to behold and modestly impressive at the time. The stealth level looked gritty and pressing, with enemy searchlights hounding you, making you seek out the dark corners of the background and foreground, and granting a layer of depth to the screen. The sniper mode had a spy thriller visual with a touch of voyeurism, not yet seen much in other games, especially when combined with the following rappelling SWAT-style infiltration level. The final portion settled into more of a traditional over-the-shoulder maze crawl – claustrophobic, bright, stark.

Although not long in length, it was high in replay value. In turn it was easy to demonstrate to others, not only for gameplay but also for the grim imagery. In today’s troubled times, we all need a hero like Jumbo back on our side.”

Ryan Soloby

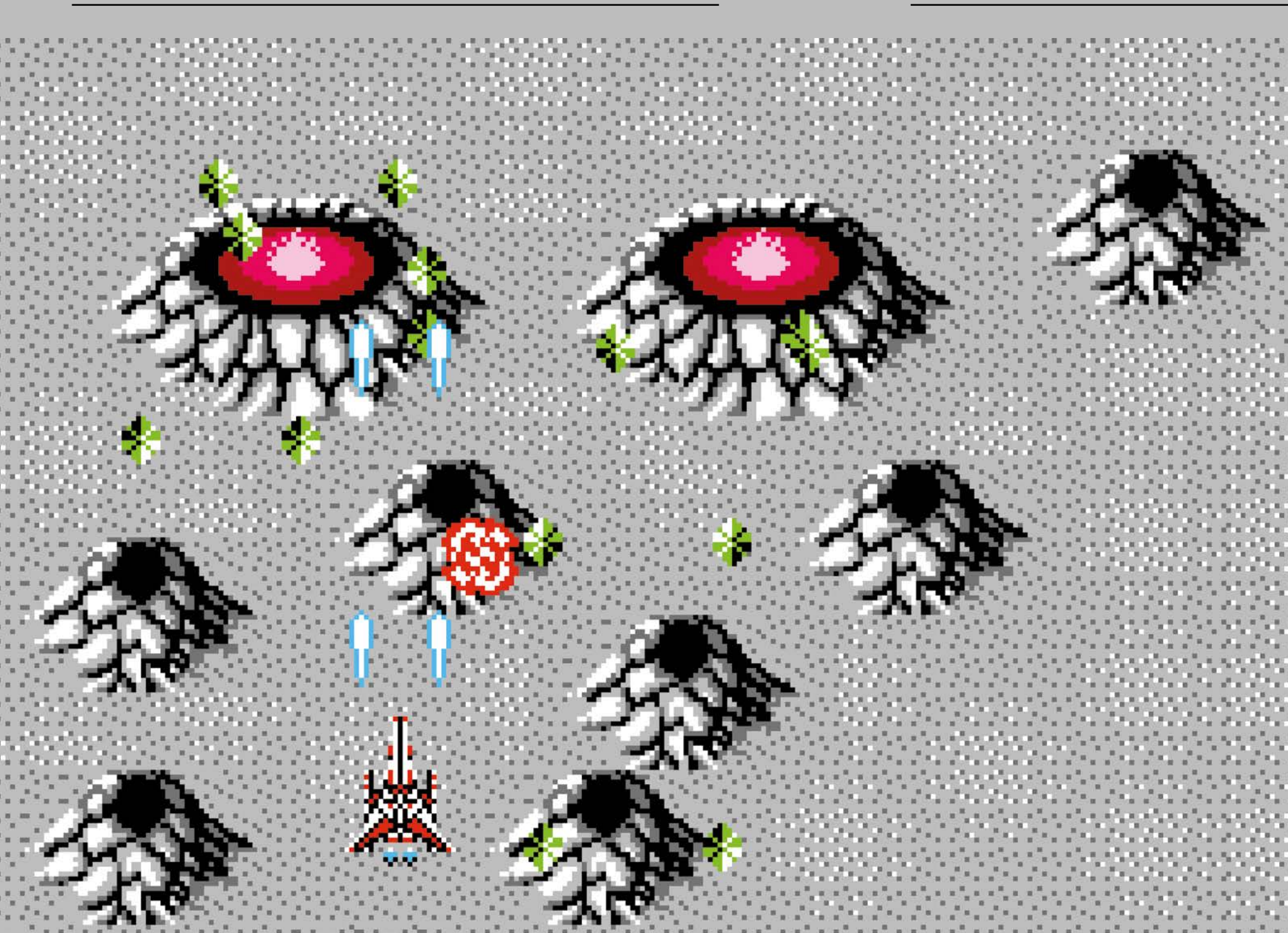
Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Infogrames

Publisher
Kemco



The Guardian Legend

Compile's classic title *The Guardian Legend* cleverly fuses two genres to create a game that's both unique and influential. The Guardian of the title is an 'aerobot transformer', capable of switching between humanoid and spaceship forms.

You're thrown right into the action at the start of the game with an unexpectedly frantic vertical shooter section. Defeat the bullet-spewing emplacements at the end and you enter the Naju, a planet-sized construct sent on a collision course with Earth. The Guardian has to infiltrate Naju - alternating between 'Labyrinth' exploration and 'Corridor' shoot 'em up sections - activate the self-destruct sequence and save Earth.

The top-down shoot 'n' explore sections are solidly entertaining, with portals to find, mini-bosses to defeat and lots of variety in enemies and backgrounds, which are tidy if unspectacular. Collecting the right power-ups in the Labyrinth gives you a better chance of defeating the bosses in the Corridor levels, so it's worth exploring before pushing on further into the game. Fortunately, hitting Select brings up a map, and you can store your progress with a passcode (albeit an unwieldy 32-digit one).

There's something of a difficulty mis-match between the alternating sections of the game, and its multilayered approach won't appeal to everyone, but *The Guardian Legend* does at least attempt to provide NES gamers with something different - and to large extent it succeeds.

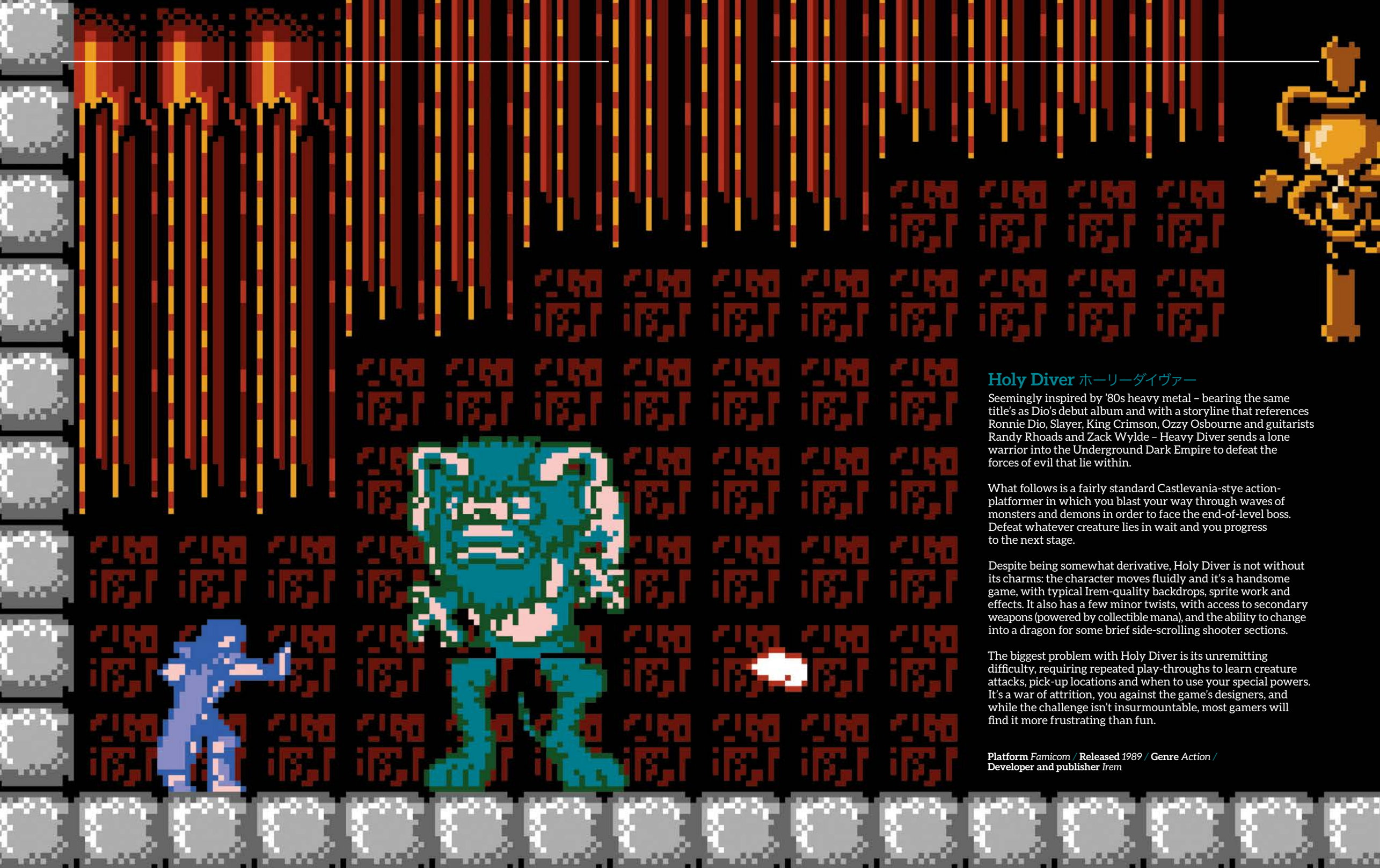
Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Compile

Publisher
Brøderbund



Holy Diver ホーリーダイヴァー

Seemingly inspired by '80s heavy metal - bearing the same title's as Dio's debut album and with a storyline that references Ronnie Dio, Slayer, King Crimson, Ozzy Osbourne and guitarists Randy Rhoads and Zack Wylde - *Heavy Diver* sends a lone warrior into the Underground Dark Empire to defeat the forces of evil that lie within.

What follows is a fairly standard Castlevania-stye action-platformer in which you blast your way through waves of monsters and demons in order to face the end-of-level boss. Defeat whatever creature lies in wait and you progress to the next stage.

Despite being somewhat derivative, *Holy Diver* is not without its charms: the character moves fluidly and it's a handsome game, with typical Irem-quality backdrops, sprite work and effects. It also has a few minor twists, with access to secondary weapons (powered by collectible mana), and the ability to change into a dragon for some brief side-scrolling shooter sections.

The biggest problem with *Holy Diver* is its unremitting difficulty, requiring repeated play-throughs to learn creature attacks, pick-up locations and when to use your special powers. It's a war of attrition, you against the game's designers, and while the challenge isn't insurmountable, most gamers will find it more frustrating than fun.

Platform *Famicom* / Released 1989 / Genre *Action* / Developer and publisher *Irem*



Platform
Famicom

Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Now Production

Publisher
Namcot

Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti

スプラッターハウス わんぱくグラフィティ

In 1988 Namco released the Splatterhouse coin-op, a gory side-scrolling hack 'em up, featuring Rick, clad in an ice hockey mask and wielding a fearsome meat cleaver. The game sired two sequels and a series of ports to various home consoles, but for the family-friendly NES version Namcot took a different approach, delivering Splatterhouse: Naughty Graffiti - a parody on the franchise with cute monsters, super-deformed characters and the occasional homage to '80s horror flicks.

Rather than simply walk from left to right, slicing an assortment of monstrosities to death, our diminutive hero has platform sections and a number of mid-level mini-boss-rooms to contend with. For the most part his only weapon is the meat cleaver, though later on he does pick up a shotgun, which is entertaining but miserably short-lived.

The game's strongest point without doubt is its graphics, which are colourful, varied and occasionally quite humorous. But despite its unusual structure, the action is a bit staid, and some of the mid-level boss sections - in which you have to defeat a number of respawning enemies - go on just a bit too long. Fortunately, there are four continues for each game, plus a password system so you can sample each of Splatterhouse's seven stages.



 **GOODS**

 **KEY 1**

 **TORCH=3**

 **KEY 2**

 **TORCH**

 **SLING**

 **SWORD**



Shadowgate

Originally written for the Apple Mac as part of the MacVenture series, this point 'n' click adventure mixes a menu system with animated images and text narration. And although the D-pad controls aren't as accessible as using a mouse, you soon adapt to its slightly cumbersome interface.

The game is typical dungeon-crawler fare, in which you embark on a quest to prevent the Warlock Lord from unleashing a dark creature, entitled the 'Behemoth', upon the world. However the finer details of the plot unfold as you discover clues, read books and via the descriptive text.

Castle Shadowgate is laced with magic, monsters, puzzles and traps, but death is a constant companion: the wrong solution to a puzzle is usually fatal and so progress is as much about discovering the variety of grisly ways you can die - including suicide - as it is completing the quest. You may well end up dying in the same room three or four times before you figure out the right sequence of actions.

Burdened by your own fragile mortality, torches that burn out at inconvenient moments, and unpleasant surprises around every corner, Shadowgate's gameplay is tense and cruel. It may be too slow and impenetrable for action gamers, but adventurers will be drawn to its macabre charms like moths to a fatal flame.

WATER CASCADES OVER A
SUBTERRANEAN CLIFF INTO
A COOL, CLEAN STREAM.

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Adventure

Developer
ICOM Simulations

Publisher
Kemco

Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom

Duck Tales

“Duck Tales, woohoo!” And with three simple words, I can almost guarantee you are now singing the rest of the wonderful theme song. Duck Tales would see the beginning of Capcom’s specific licence relationship with Disney, and what a wonderful partnership it would be, producing nary a duff game over the next few years. As it turned out, Duck Tales would be Capcom’s best-selling game on the NES, and one of its most popular overall.

The aim of the game, rather unsurprisingly given its themes, is to retrieve five hidden treasures (and two secret ones if you look hard enough) so Scrooge McDuck can increase his fortune. Despite the game’s brevity, it oozes class and superb level design, the result of an inspired decision to assign key Mega Man staff to its production. There are a few liberties taken – such as having an octogenarian duck bouncing around on his cane like a pogo stick for example, or the certain lack of a space suit – but why complain when it plays this well!? And looks this well too. All the graphics are excellent, including the bosses, but Scrooge himself has a certain charm that the Capcom artists managed to capture perfectly.”

Mat Allen

CAPCOM

One of the most recognisable names in the Japanese videogame sector, Capcom has a stable of intellectual property which is the envy of the industry, and like so many of its rivals it owes a massive debt to the NES. Nintendo's 8-bit console was home to several of the firm's biggest franchises, and the machine's dominance in Japan and North America ensured that Capcom's coin-op conversions gained a level of fame and notoriety which would have been unattainable otherwise.

Capcom's history can be traced back to 1979 when Kenzo Tsujimoto founded I.R.M. Corporation, named after IREM Corporation, the firm which Tsujimoto had previously established in 1974 under the moniker IPM (International Playing Machine). IREM is of course famous for creating R-Type and Kung-Fu Master, but Tsujimoto parted company with the organisation to focus on I.R.M. before either of those games appeared. I.R.M., along with subsidiary Japan Capsule Computers Co., Ltd., focused on electronic games machines, and in 1983 – the same year that Nintendo launched the Famicom in Japan – they evolved into Capcom, the name being derived from 'Capsule Computer', a term created by the company to describe its self-contained arcade entertainment machines.

Ironically, Capcom's first coin-op videogame would be published by SNK in North America, a company it would lock horns with in the '90s over dominance of the 2D fighting arena. 1984's *Vulgus* was a somewhat inauspicious start for such a legendary developer but was neatly timed, given the explosion of interest in the vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up genre thanks to Namco's seminal *Xevious*. It also marked the arrival of Tokuro Fujiwara, a key figure in Capcom's history who, in 1983, had jumped ship from rival Konami. Fujiwara would be intimately involved in many of the company's major coin-op and domestic hits over the next decade; titles which would shape the way Capcom was perceived by the gaming public and do much to solidify its reputation.

Just as Capcom was finding its feet in the highly competitive coin-op sector, it also tentatively dipped a toe into a home console market energised by the arrival of Nintendo's Famicom. While it had allowed third parties to adapt its coin-op games for home systems under licence, it wasn't until December 1985 that Capcom tried its hand at porting one of its games to a domestic platform. Nintendo's console was the obvious choice, as it provided a massive installed base of players hungry for new titles, yet Capcom

opened its account with a rather lacklustre port of its arcade hit 1942.

Originally released in arcades in 1984, this vertically-scrolling shooter was the company's first genuine franchise and was followed by the run-and-gun classic *Commando*, another Fujiwara creation which was also ported to the NES. Domestic editions of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* and *Bionic Commando* followed, with the latter being a comprehensive reimagining of the 1987 coin-op original. Along with the port of *Section Z*, *Bionic Commando* marked a turning point in Capcom's domestic strategy. Rather than simply port over existing arcade titles, the company focused on adding content to enrich the experience or – as was the case with the NES version of the cult classic *Strider* – creating an entirely new game that shared only a core premise with the coin-op original.

Despite the variable quality of Capcom's early NES releases, the company enjoyed commercial success during this period largely due to the almost unquenchable demand for software in both Japan and North America. Players were desperate for new product and Capcom's burgeoning fame in amusement centres ensured that its titles had an advantage over other NES games. Capcom would

use the power of its brand to create original experiences for Nintendo's system, and it would be 1987's *Mega Man* – known as *Rockman* in Japan – that really established the firm's credentials with home console players.

Mega Man was Capcom's first attempt to make a game focused entirely on domestic players with no arcade counterpart – a fresh approach given its prior strategy of taking existing coin-op concepts and adapting them for the home environment. Directed by Akira Kitamura and programmed by Nobuyuki Matsushima, *Mega Man* would also showcase the artistic talents of Keiji Inafune, who would later go on to steer the series through its critical and commercial zenith. Surprisingly, the game was not a bestseller in North America at launch – something which some fans blame on the terrible cover artwork, which showcases a rather out-of-shape *Mega Man* in a lurid yellow suit – but the game nevertheless performed well overseas and beat Capcom's initial projections. It would even be re-released in the '90s following demand from players.

1988's *Mega Man 2* is widely considered to be one of the best entries in the series, and the NES would play host to another four sequels, with 1993's *Mega Man 6* proving to be the final outing for the 'Blue Bomber' on the 8-bit console. Despite the fact that he hasn't starred in a major release for quite some time, *Mega Man* is considered by many to be Capcom's primary mascot and the series has sold over 30 million copies across all formats – an impressive achievement that would have been impossible were it not for his speculative NES debut.

With *Mega Man* proving that catering for the home market made solid business sense, Capcom ploughed resource into crafting more console exclusives. Towards the end of the 1980s the Japanese firm saw the benefit of working with licensed properties to give its games additional recognition, and struck a deal

with American animation studio Disney to gain access to some of its franchises. This proved to be a canny move, as these licenced brands and characters ensured international appeal at a time when many Japanese developers were choosing to ally themselves with anime and manga series, which had no recognition in the West.

“ One of the most recognisable names in the Japanese videogame sector, Capcom has a stable of intellectual property which is the envy of the industry. ”

Mega Man 6 / 1994



Arguably the most successful of these was DuckTales, which arrived in 1989 and swiftly became a fan-favourite thanks to its tight gameplay and appealing setting; in fact, the game has become so beloved over time that it was recently updated for modern systems in the form of 2013's DuckTales: Remastered. Scrooge McDuck's thrilling escapades would be followed by a NES sequel in 1993, as well as Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers (1990), Adventures in the Magic Kingdom (1990), TaleSpin (1991), The Little Mermaid (1991) and Darkwing Duck (1992). What made these titles stand out from similar

licensed fare encountered not only on the NES but other systems was the attention to detail and high level of quality – elements which really stood out when compared to the generally poor cartoon and movie tie-ins which permeated the industry at the time. Capcom used the massive installed base of the NES as a testing ground for some of its more off-beat ideas. Gargoyle's Quest II was a 1992 console-only spin-off from the Ghosts 'n Goblins franchise, while Street Fighter 2010 took Capcom's 1987 arcade fighter and turned it into a 2D platformer set in the (then) future. In Japan, the company would dabble in the world of horror with Sweet Home, a 1989

Movie Shinsha's Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland – was another example of the firm seeking to leverage the popularity of external brands.

Outside of arcade hits and Disney tie-ins, Capcom used the massive installed base of the NES as a testing ground for some of its more off-beat ideas. Gargoyle's Quest II was a 1992 console-only spin-off from the Ghosts 'n Goblins franchise, while Street Fighter 2010 took Capcom's 1987 arcade fighter and turned it into a 2D platformer set in the (then) future. In Japan, the company would dabble in the world of horror with Sweet Home, a 1989

“Capcom would continue its alliance with Disney well into the 16-bit era but it honed the template on the NES.”

Famicom-only title by Tokuro Fujiwara, which is often cited as a major influence on Resident Evil – a series which has sold over 50 million units and allowed Capcom to take its place as one of the world's biggest publishers of videogames. Sweet Home's horrific and gory visuals – shocking despite their 2D nature – ensured that it never saw release outside of Japan, with Nintendo of America's family-friendly stance denying it any chance of a Western localisation.

As Capcom's home console aspirations blossomed, in the arcades it was making waves with a series of seminal side-scrolling fighters, of which Final Fight is arguably the most famous. The genre had been popularised by the likes of Double Dragon and Renegade, but Capcom's 1989 brawler took things to the next level with more complex moves and massive sprites. Given that Final Fight proved tricky for Capcom to port to the 16-bit SNES, a straight conversion for the still-popular NES was understandably out of the question, but the company proved its commitment to the 8-bit console with 1993's Mighty Final Fight, a scaled-down version which boasted cute characters and an RPG-style experience system.

Capcom produced several other variations on the scrolling fighter concept over the course of the '90s, including Cadillacs & Dinosaurs, Captain Commando, Knights of the Round, Dungeons & Dragons: Tower of Doom and Alien vs. Predator, but it was

1991's Street Fighter II that marked the next phase of the company's evolution. While the 1987 original had laid the foundations for the series, the sequel became a worldwide phenomenon which spawned numerous sequels, a flood of merchandise and even a Hollywood movie starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, Kylie Minogue and Raúl Juliá in his final major starring role. It was not a critical hit but it proved the pulling power of the brand by taking almost \$100 million at the box office on a budget of \$35 million. Across the next few years Capcom would pour its energy into maximising the earning potential of its legendary one-on-one fighter, and to date it remains one of the company's most popular IPs.

Towards the end of the '90s the public's appetite for one-on-one fighters began to wane, but thankfully Capcom's Resident Evil franchise – which began in 1996 – had grown to the size where it could comfortably pick up the slack. As the new millennium came and went other new properties were introduced including Devil May Cry, Viewtiful Joe, Ace Attorney, Lost Planet and Power Stone, and in 2004 the company published Monster Hunter on the PlayStation 2 as part of a drive to explore the possibilities of online gaming. Over the past decade it has evolved to become one of the company's tentpole franchises, with over 20 million sales worldwide – equal to that of the Street Fighter series, which began many years earlier.

The Capcom of today is entering a period of change, with the impact of smartphones triggering a shift of development resource and focus – a process which is being replicated within many other Japanese videogame firms. However, the company is still committed to consoles and continues to expand and iterate its core series. 2016's Street Fighter V uses modern HD visuals to update the classic 2D action we all fell in love with back in 1991, while Monster Hunter continues to gain fans with each sequel and spin-off, the most recent of which are Monster Hunter Generations and Monster Hunter Stories, both of which were released in 2016 on the Nintendo 3DS handheld. Resident Evil – by far and away Capcom's most popular series in terms of sales – has undergone a dramatic transformation for its seventh mainline instalment, adopting a new first-person perspective and even incorporating virtual reality on the PlayStation 4.

Capcom has weathered many storms over the past three decades but remains an agile and influential creator of interactive entertainment – and it owes a massive debt to the NES for giving it the solid foundation it needed to get to this stage.

Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers / 1990





Platform
NES

Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Human
Entertainment

Publisher
Bandai

Monster Party

Mark is on his way home from a baseball game when he encounters Bert, a winged creature from the Dark World. Bert explains that he needs help in ridding his home world of evil monsters and, rather than run, screaming and terrified, Mark casually agrees.

Armed with just his baseball bat, Mark can either strike monsters directly, or swat their missiles back at them. He can also jump and duck, enabling him to dodge enemy fire and traverse the platform-strewn levels. Pick-ups include health to boost his copious energy bar and a pill that causes Mark to temporarily swap places with Bert, who flaps around in mid-air and shoots powerful fireballs. To move from one area to the next, Mark needs a key, which is gained by defeating either all of the mid-level bosses or, later on, a single end-of-level boss.

Monster World is notable for its weird and wonderful graphics and collection of bizarre bosses, which include a pumpkin-headed ghost, bouncing fried food, a punk rocker, a snoozing caterpillar and the grim reaper himself. The game was overlooked on release in the US, and while it's far from being one of the NES's must-play classics, it's worth seeking out if only for its bizarre aesthetics.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

"The heroes in a half shell made their smash debut onto the world's most popular videogame console in 1989, and made the dreams of children around the world come true with huge graphics, stellar animation and solid gameplay to boot. The adventures of the anthropomorphic ninja turtles made for a perfect videogame, and throughout its six stages there are familiar locations, characters and music cues to enjoy, with all four turtles available for play. The game itself is a loose conversion of Konami's Getsu Fūma Den, a Japan-only action game for the Famicom.

While popular in its day, it has been the target of a great number of angry critiques on video websites over the last decade citing lack of representation from the cartoon show, difficulty and more. While packing a hefty challenge, the game began development in 1987, prior to the debut of the TV show, and rather takes inspiration from the original comic book, in particular Shredder & Splinter. The game's cover art is taken from the reprint of issue #4 of the original comic book, featuring all red headbands.

In Europe, the game was known as Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles due to sensitivities over the word 'ninja' in the UK."

Audun Sorlie

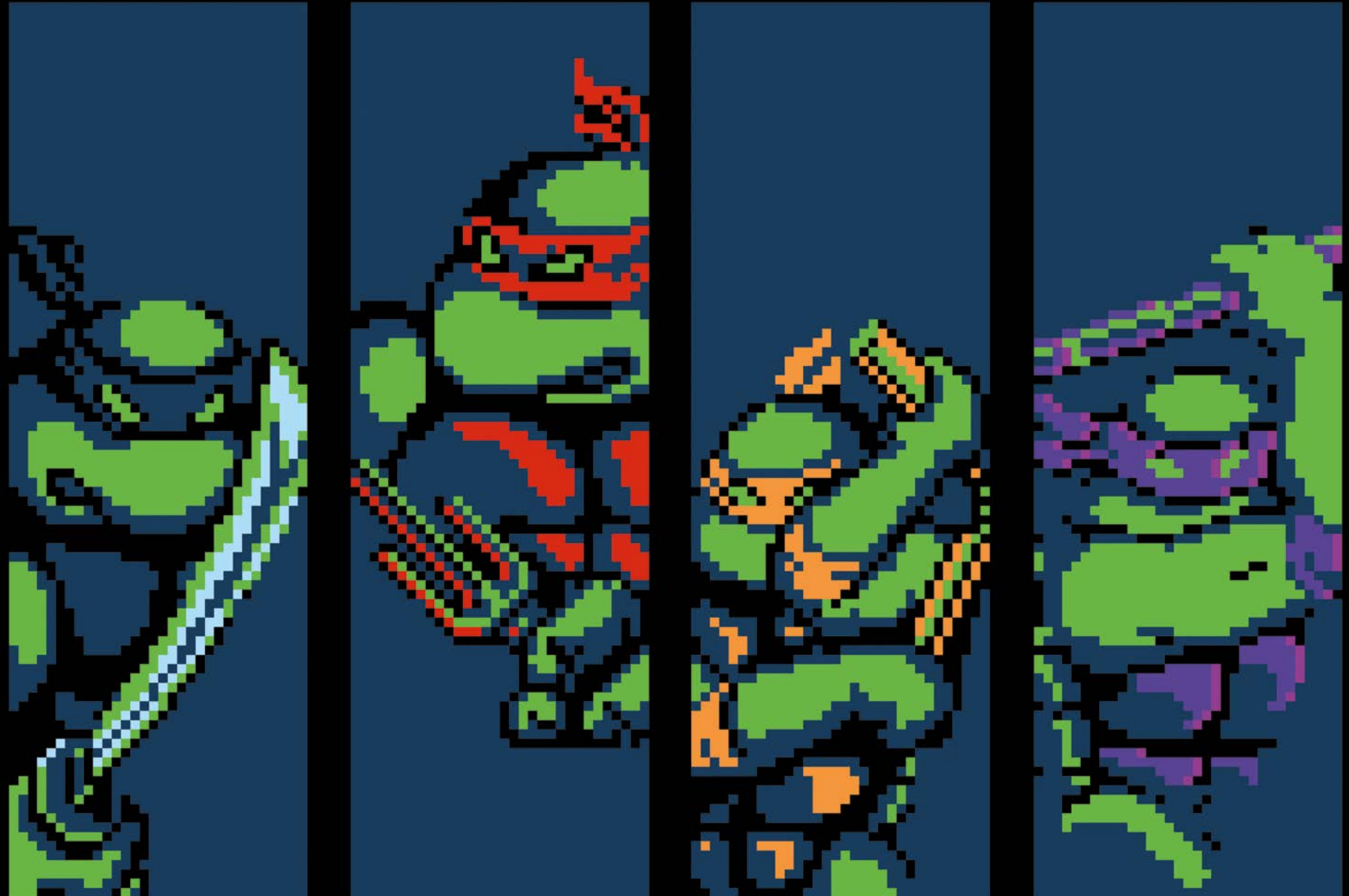
Platform
NES

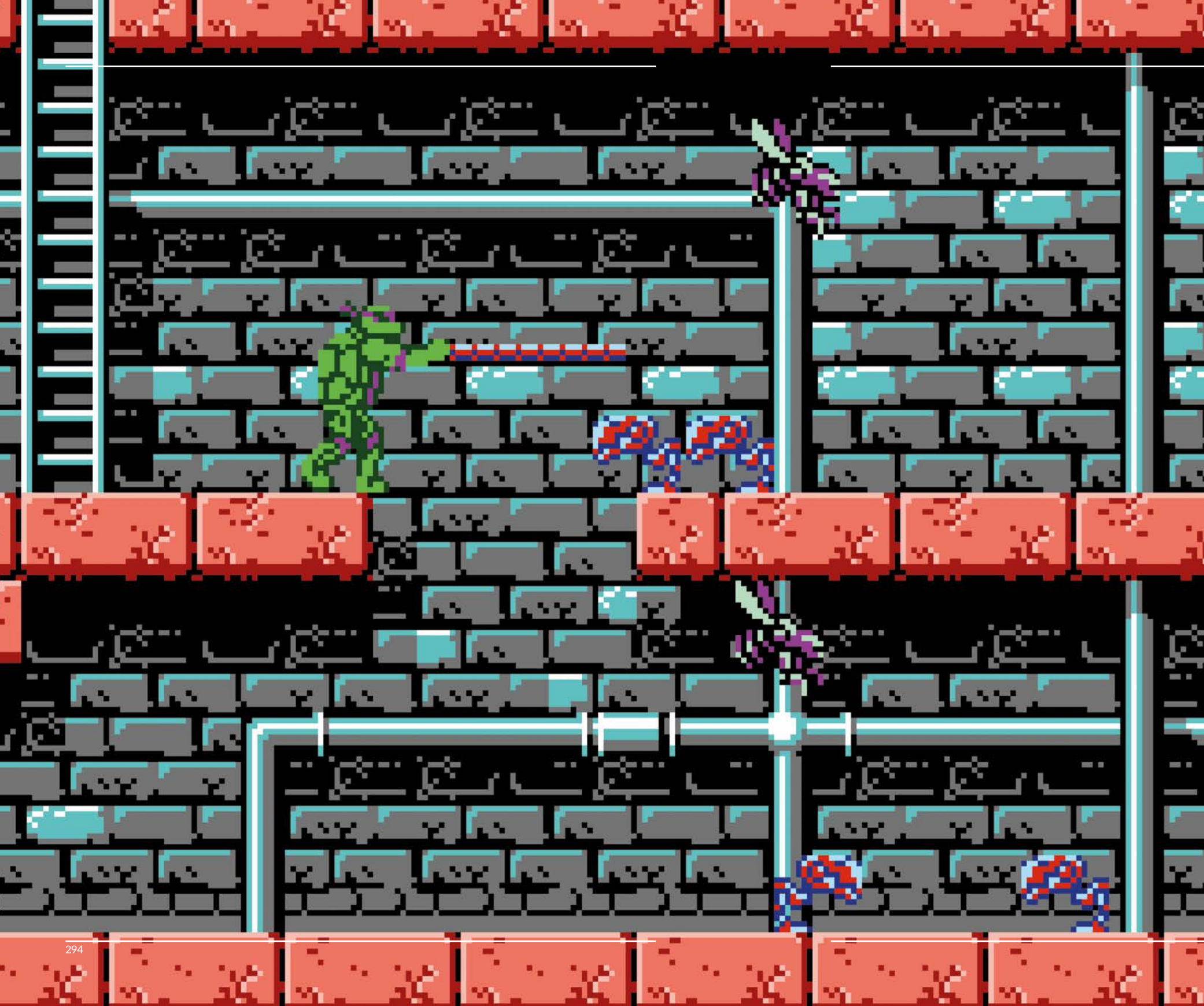
Released
1989

Genre
Action

Developer
Konami

Publisher
Ultra Games





Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

"Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is one of the most beloved NES beat 'em ups of all time. Based on the famous comic book by Eastman and Laird and developed by Konami, it features classic side-scrolling martial arts weapons combat showcasing the four fighting styles of the Ninja Turtle heroes - Leonardo (double katana swords), Donatello (bo, long staff), Raphael (double sai), and Michaelangelo (nunchuks).

You start the mission as Leonardo, but one of the slickest aspects of game was that you could switch to any of the other Ninja Turtles at any time. Every gamer had their favourite, but being able to play four characters added a cool element of strategy to the gameplay. If one of the Turtles was defeated you had to continue with whoever was left until you could recover your captured comrade.

There was also overhead-view gameplay as the boys chased the evil Shredder and his Foot Clan Soldiers around what is basically New York City in their Party Wagon, but the main event was always good ol' sideview multilevel beatdowns. The visuals were decent for the times, but the game specialised in continuous, intense action and featured mid-level bosses and end bosses all based on the comics' bad guys.

Turtlemania was at a peak in the late '80s and Konami Ultra released a second NES game, based on its T.M.N.T. arcade game called Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II. A generation of videogamers may not know the fine arts, but Leonardo, Donatello, Raphael, and Michaelangelo are four names they'll never forget."

Wes Nihei

Tecmo Bowl

“While other football titles went on to dominate the market in recent decades, there’s just something timeless about Tecmo Bowl that keeps it so culturally relevant even today (evidenced by the recent Bo Jackson Kia commercial in which he tears up the field in an 8-bit rendition of the car).

Like other arcade-first sports titles over the years, Tecmo Bowl retained its arcade-like controls and gameplay sensibilities to provide a fun, easy to pick up experience. Players could select from four offensive plays, and it was up to the defense to attempt to predict which play was coming and ultimately tackle the player with the ball. It was also somewhat cutting edge in its day, with nine players on each team and in-game player stats and team playbooks based on their real-life counterparts. Music played a big part too, with a persistent soundtrack to accompany the action.

Tecmo Bowl is also remembered as the first console game to feature real NFL players. And while Tecmo was unable to gain the rights for the team names due to licensing issues, this actually became part of the game’s charm, with players choosing from teams solely based on their home city or state.”

Sam Kennedy



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Platform
NES
Released
1989
Genre
Sports
Developer
and publisher
Tecmo

An interview with The Pickford Brothers.

The Pickford Brothers started creating software for the ZX Spectrum before founding Zippo Games and working with Rare on a series of critically acclaimed NES titles. The Pickfords would also create titles for the SNES – including Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball and Plok – and would go on to work on the N64, GameCube and Wii. They still design and develop games together.

How did you end up working with Rare on Nintendo games?

John Pickford (JP): Rare did an interview in a magazine and they mentioned they were looking for developers to work with and share what they were doing.

Ste Pickford (SP): They'd never done any interviews when they were known as Ultimate. They were super-secretive. Nobody really knew who they were; they were just these guys who put games out on the Ultimate label, and then they disappeared for a bit. When they reappeared they were Rare. It seems the whole point of this interview was that they needed developers; they did it to say, 'We're working on this NES console. You've never heard of it, but it's the future. If you make games, get in touch with us.' We got in touch with them and I think we were the only people they took on from that.

“ With the NES, you almost can't not make a game – it's just what it does. ”

JP: We did a pitch and we came out with a contract from the meeting. It was that fast. It wasn't all that great; I mean the amount of money they paid us was a pittance. They weren't angels really; they pretty much kept us on the breadline. We were practically doing them at a loss, these games. Aside from that, it was really exciting and a really good opportunity.

What was your reaction when you saw the NES for the first time?

SP: I thought it was awful. We'd been making 8-bit games for a few years and then we got all excited about the 16-bit machines, the Atari ST and the Amiga. We'd just left the studio that we used to work at to form Zippo Games – me, John and two other guys – and our intention was to make amazing new 16-bit games. The first reaction looking at the NES was, 'It's like a rubbish Commodore 64, one of those crap machines from the past.' The Stamper Brothers at Rare were like, 'No, play the games', and we did and we realised that these titles were just so much better than what we'd been doing. Over the course of a few weeks we suddenly flipped and we were converts, and we had this awful feeling that everything we'd been doing up to that point was wrong.

JP: With the NES, you almost can't not make a game – it's just what it does. It's got a scrolling screen and sprites, while the Amiga was more like a graphic workstation that you could persuade into moving things around, but by the time you've got eight-way scrolling and a bunch of sprites on the screen, to get that in 60 frames a second is pretty tricky. There's nothing on the Amiga that compares to Super Mario Bros. 3; there were a few attempts at doing platformers that had nice graphics but it all seemed pretty amateurish in terms of the gameplay and mechanics. What we learned from working with Rare was that games were products, they had to entertain, and I think that happened at the same time as we first worked on the NES

IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II was the first game you developed on the NES. What was this experience like?

SP: When we did IronSword, I don't think we were that good a developer. There was a big learning experience about how to make games proper products. I think we stepped up a bit with IronSword, but looking back I think it's a bit weak. We thought the graphics were terrible on the NES games, and even once we got into Zelda and Mario and realised how good they were, we still thought, 'Well, we can beat them on the graphics. We can do better graphics than these.' We had cleverer techniques of putting sprites together and bigger characters on the screen than the Nintendo games, and with IronSword we tried to do

these full screen bosses that were built out of the background. We were pleased with ourselves because we'd got more impressive graphics out of the machine, but I don't think it was a great game.

What was Nintendo's feedback like for the games you were creating?

JP: I don't think we had games tested before anywhere we'd worked. Obviously if someone found something, you'd try to fix it but it was almost like, 'Oh, maybe I'll fix that.' The publisher would have that power to say, 'Well this needs fixing', but Nintendo weren't the publisher, they were the authority. Sometimes it was a matter of opinion what was right, or we had things like the Thomas the Tank Engine game, which couldn't be released because it had the word 'church' in it. You couldn't have religion or smoking in a game, that sort of thing. There was still a very strong perception that games were for children, and you had to be very careful what you said and did in a game.

SP: I remember when Rare first told us that games have to be bug-free before they can be released, we just laughed. We thought that was impossible. They were dead straight-faced. We didn't have a culture of trying to make them bug-free, we were just trying to get them done, or whatever we considered 'done' for the release date, which usually meant loading and not crashing when it started! One of the games we did – Zub on the Spectrum – that did have an ending to it, which was a rare treat for us because we generally didn't do that in games.

JP: That was a new thing, the customer expected to finish the game. Nobody really thought they were going to finish a game on the Spectrum, you just played it until you finished playing with it. There wasn't really this expectation of finishing it and for me that was quite a new thing, that people would treat it just like a movie they'd bought – and of course they're going to watch the whole thing.



SP: I suppose the price sort of fed into that a bit. Some Spectrum games were £9.99, but a lot of the games we'd made were £1.99. We were horrified by the price of Nintendo games. It was £40 for a game, and that was back in 1988 - but for £40 you got your money's worth of entertainment out of it. I don't know if it was Rare or someone from Nintendo who had explained it to us that

'Johnny' could get a machine for Christmas and one game with it, and that might be the only game he gets until next Christmas or his birthday. They wanted months and months of entertainment to justify that price, and we just didn't think that way when we were making games.

JP: You'd put a few secrets in which might take a day or so of coding, and you actually add many hours of entertainment for the kid who's playing that thing to death.

SP: It's all gone a bit awful now, with all these modern games that are just 'collect 100 of this.' But at the time, adding little secrets and collectibles was a really fresh idea - something special for the game that the customer had spent a lot of money on.

Even today many people aren't aware of quite how many Rare games you guys worked on. Why is that?

SP: I'm not even sure that anybody knew outside of Rare that we were developing games at the time!

JP: We weren't allowed to put our names or anything on the games. Even on the game design documents they would take our names off and put their names on.

SP: For *Wizards & Warriors III* we did quite a long and complicated game design document because we wanted it to be more like an RPG. At the design stage it was trying to be a bit like *Zelda II*, or something like that. So we wrote a really long and detailed document, sent it to Rare, they sent it back to us - the same document that we submitted - and the only change was they'd got one of their artists to do a cover image and it said, 'Wizards & Warriors III, revised by Tim Stamper'. We used to roll our eyes a lot and laugh about it, but they were great really. We got on fine with them and everything; they were great to work with. Every time we went down to Twycross we were treated really, really well. We weren't gnashing our teeth about these things, but it just felt a bit odd at the same time.

What games stand out as being your favourites from this period?

SP: Looking back, *Solar Jetman* is probably the one I'm most proud of now. We pitched it as an original game called *Iota*. About half way through we had a big redesign of the project, and at that point Rare said, 'change the name to *Solar Jetman*,' and we thought, 'Oh, that's quite cool'. But at the same time it made it their game, not our game.

Sesame Street 1 2 3 / 1990



JP: Right at the end of *Solar Jetman*'s development, they doubled the cartridge size and ended up filling it with loads of big fluffy graphics and stuff. The silly thing is some of the work that we'd done was trying to fit the huge levels onto the tiny cartridge because they were massive and needed loads of compression. Then they went, 'Oh, we can double the size of the cartridge now!' As a result we were actually looking for stuff to fill it with! It was like the early days of CD-ROM where you'd make a game and you'd be embarrassed that you'd only used ten per cent of the disk, so people were trying to fill them with music tracks and CGI cut-scenes.

Tell us a little about the Sesame Street titles you worked on at Rare.

SP: I really enjoyed working on those. Rare gave us the project and we thought it was a real piece of crap, but it was really fun to work on and I think it was the first time we'd ever done a game for kids. It was very interesting from a game design point of view, thinking of how a young child would play the game and how you'd present things. They were actually Commodore 64 games that Children's Television Workshop had made and we added a hell of a lot to them.

You guys were still quite young during your NES days, and suddenly your games are being played in potentially millions of homes all over the world. How did this feel?

SP: I don't think we realised that. You have to remember that when we started on the NES it was nowhere in Europe. We were writing games for the Spectrum and a lot of them were big sellers in the UK, especially the Mastertronic stuff, so we'd gone from writing games that people knew to writing games on a machine that hardly anyone had heard of! So even though the market was bigger globally, I don't think we experienced it because we were making games for this foreign machine that no one had ever heard of.

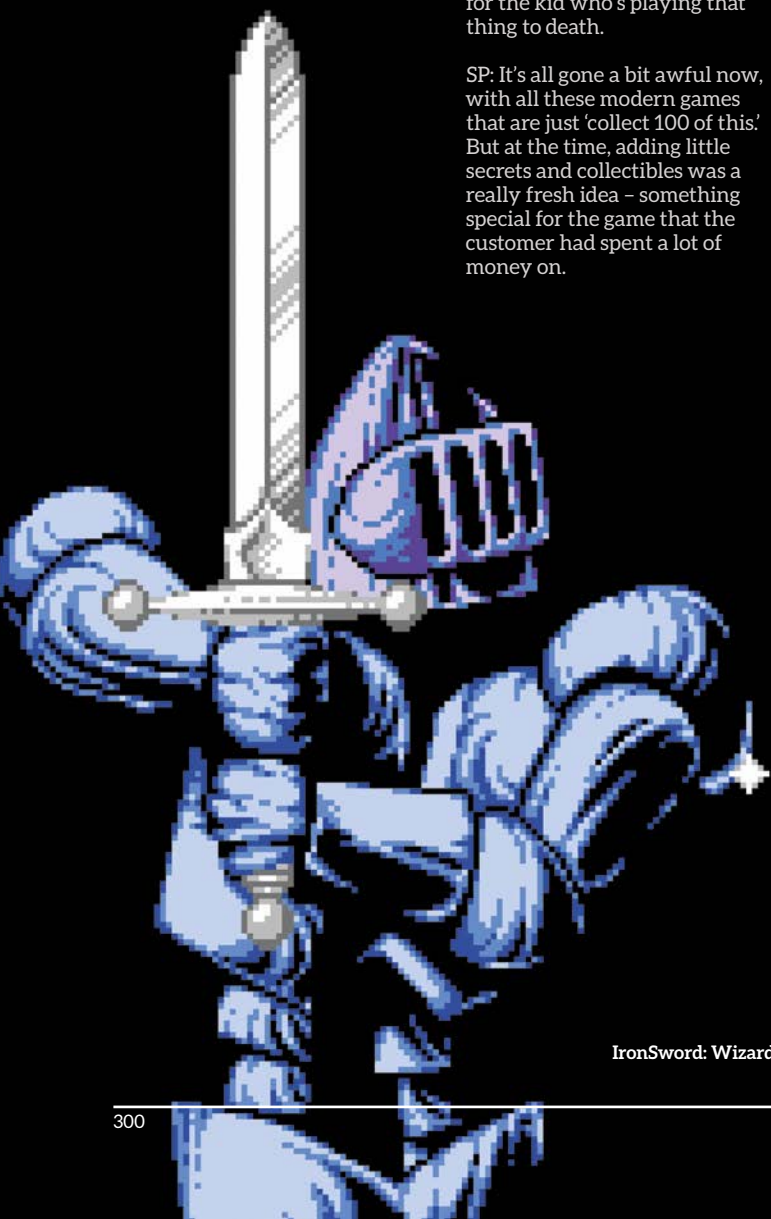
How important do you think the NES was to the games industry?

SP: The NES massively changed the industry. It introduced this idea of games having to be approved before they could be released and that's still with us now. Microsoft, Sony and Sega just copied that business model wholesale. It was never like that on home computers - Nintendo pretty much invented approval for games and it really worked. The bad side was that this model excluded developers

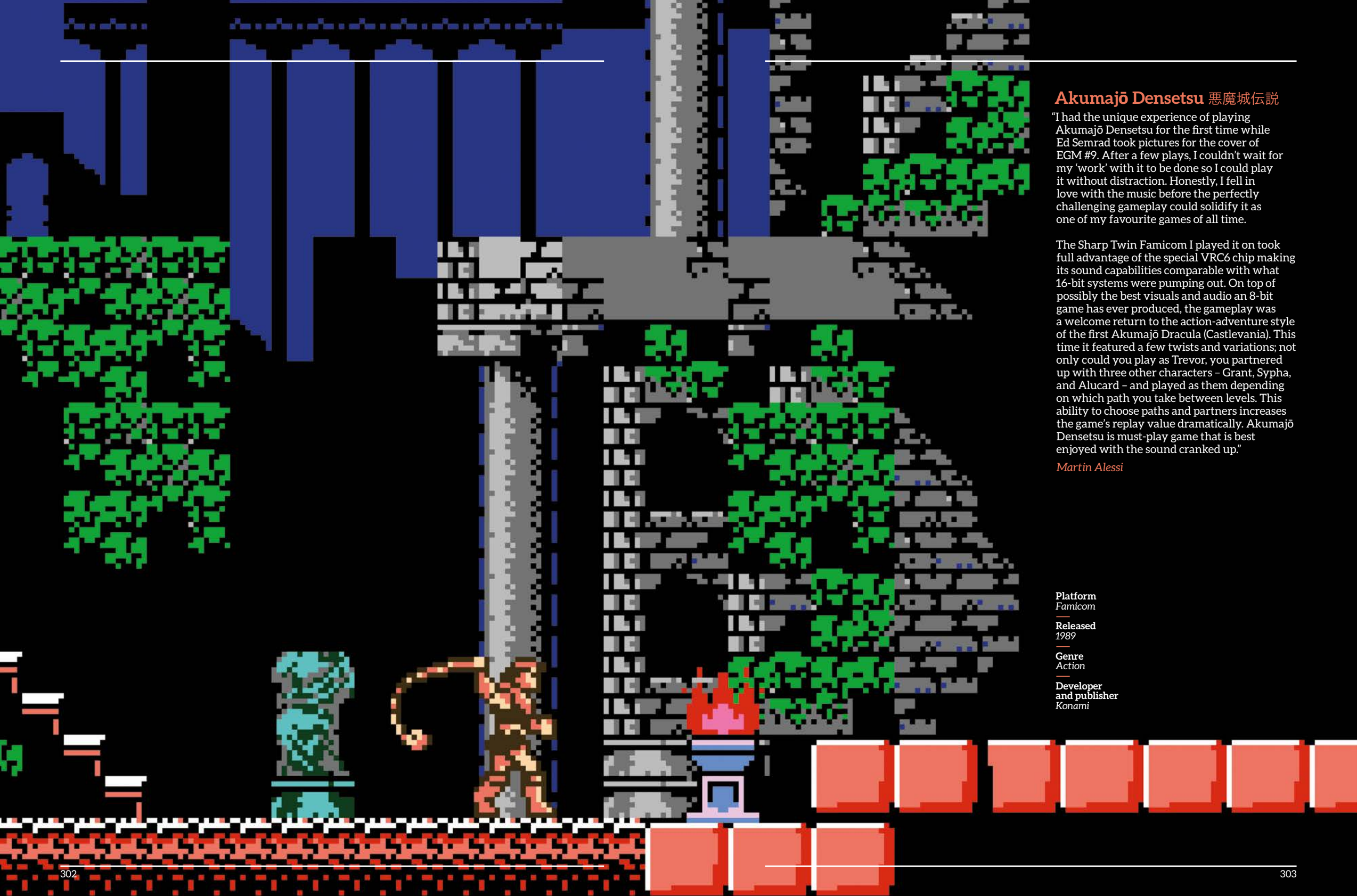
but it really, really improved the videogame industry; we got much better products. I'm not sure Nintendo gets enough credit for that.

JP: The concept approval side of it is pretty negative, but the quality side of it where you know it had to work, it had to be bug-free - that has been eroded hugely over the years with patches and stuff, but back then, it was like they literally didn't care; if there was a bug, the game's not coming out.

“ When we did *IronSword*, I don't think we were that good a developer. There was this big learning experience and how to make games proper products. ”



IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II / 1988



Akumajō Densetsu 悪魔城伝説

"I had the unique experience of playing Akumajō Densetsu for the first time while Ed Semrad took pictures for the cover of EGM #9. After a few plays, I couldn't wait for my 'work' with it to be done so I could play it without distraction. Honestly, I fell in love with the music before the perfectly challenging gameplay could solidify it as one of my favourite games of all time.

The Sharp Twin Famicom I played it on took full advantage of the special VRC6 chip making its sound capabilities comparable with what 16-bit systems were pumping out. On top of possibly the best visuals and audio an 8-bit game has ever produced, the gameplay was a welcome return to the action-adventure style of the first Akumajō Dracula (Castlevania). This time it featured a few twists and variations; not only could you play as Trevor, you partnered up with three other characters - Grant, Sypha, and Alucard - and played as them depending on which path you take between levels. This ability to choose paths and partners increases the game's replay value dramatically. Akumajō Densetsu is must-play game that is best enjoyed with the sound cranked up."

Martin Alessi

Platform
Famicom

Released
1989

Genre
Action

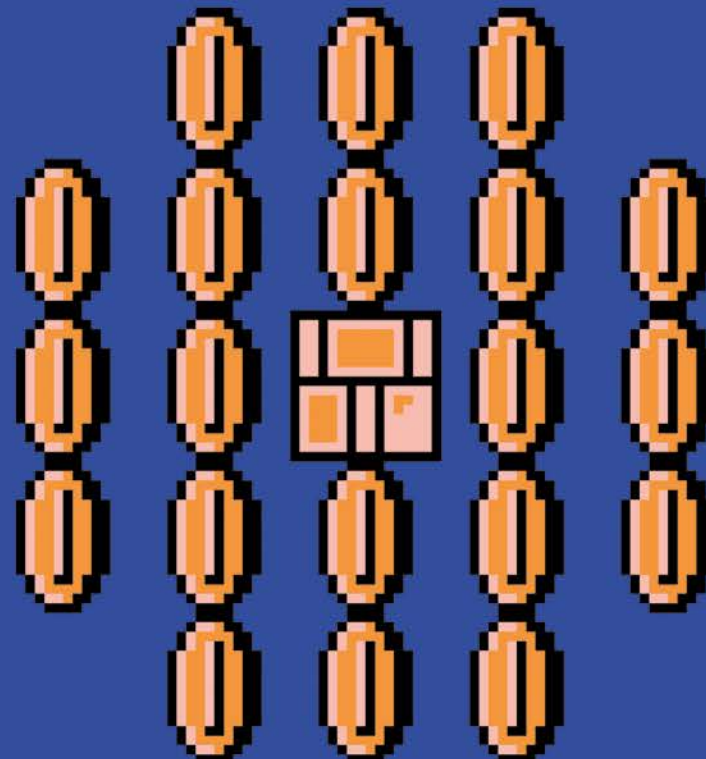
**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

Super Mario Bros. 3

“As I look back, the NES had some really interesting things about it. Within the limits that the system had, I think trying to create music with that technology, and trying to piece all of the different things together to come up with what I consider to be catchy or compelling music... It was sort of puzzle-like, and I really enjoyed that challenge.

The most challenging piece was the main theme for Super Mario Bros. 3. The original Super Mario theme itself was almost a little too empowering. That indelible impression it left in the user’s mind with how it matched up with what Mario was doing on the screen – that was a big mountain to climb when we started working on the music to Super Mario 3. I remember creating lots of different music in different styles, trying to come up with something that would match that game and be different enough from the original Super Mario theme. It was tough. It took me a long time to come up with something I thought would work, and it was really me and Mr. Miyamoto and Mr. Tezuka – the three of us – right up until the very last stages of development, listening to all of these different music pieces that I created, before we finally settled on what we ended up using.”

Koji Kondo



Platform
NES
Released
1990
Genre
Platformer
Developer
and publisher
Nintendo

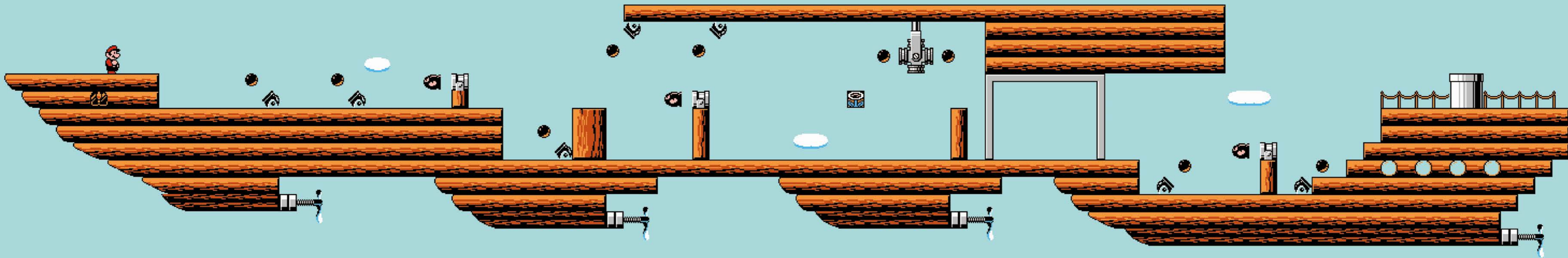
Super Mario Bros. 3

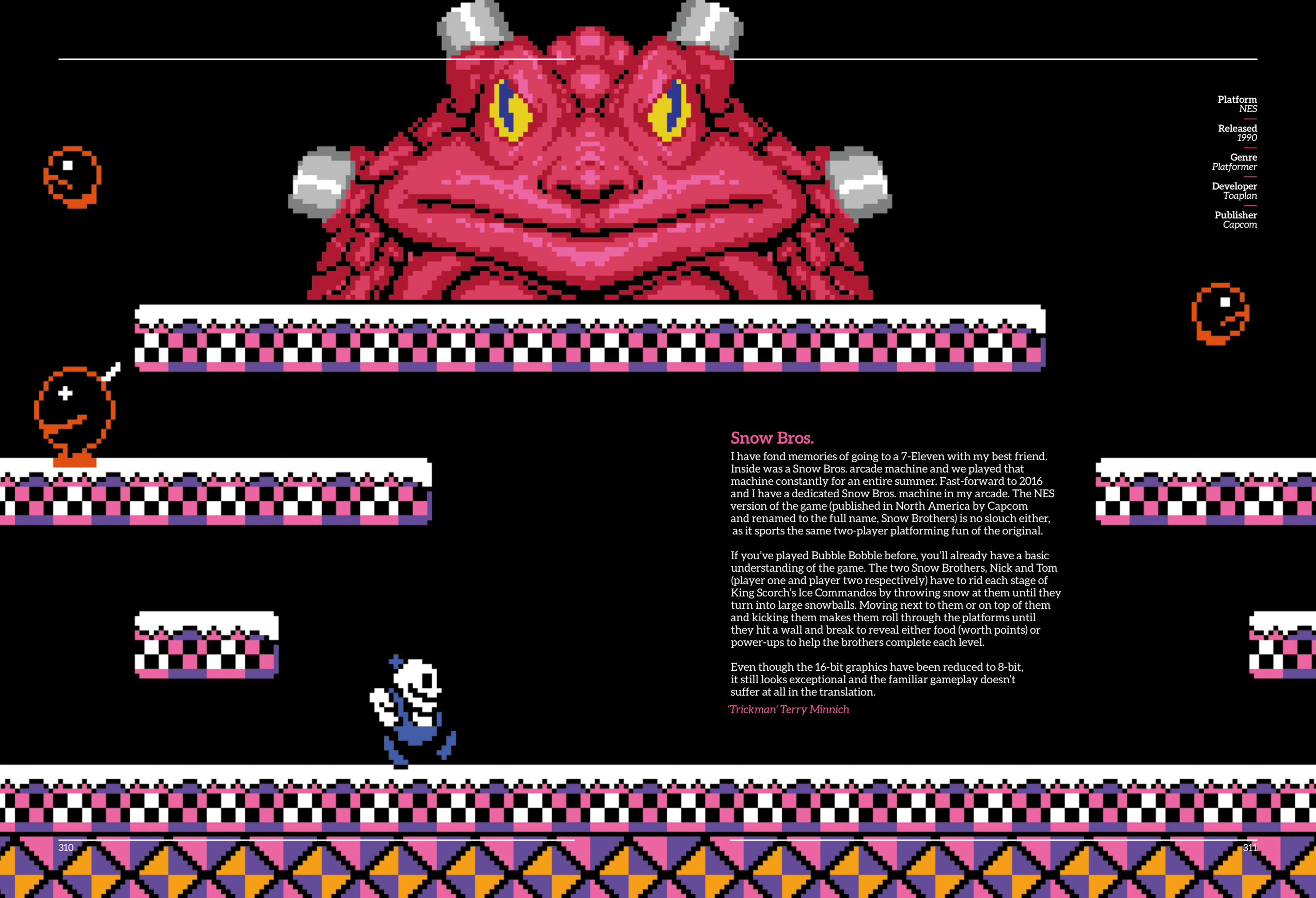
"Towards the end of 1991 I was fortunate enough to be working for a UK Nintendo magazine and encountered the European PAL version of a game that had debuted in Japan a full three years earlier. 25 years later, if asked the impossible question 'What's the best game you've ever played?' Super Mario Bros. 3 would be right up there and certainly, without question in my opinion, it's the best Mario game ever made.

With its responsive controls, pin-sharp visuals and clearly delineated worlds it was the near-perfect level design and powerful atmosphere that made it such a towering feat of brilliance. The way you were corralled around the world maps, unlocking routes and levels only when the designers

wanted you to, was a smart feature in itself. When playing through a level, every object had a purpose, every advancing enemy placed and timed to challenge you just a touch beyond your current level of skill. There were secret areas and hidden routes that a casual player might never know existed. And then the boss levels... they were something else. Huge wooden galleons descended from the sky accompanied by the ominous beating of drums and you faced several minutes of perfectly pitched tension and agility-testing hazards. Survive that and you'd feel a ridiculous sense of achievement and elation. So, yeah. That's Super Mario Bros. 3."

Andy Dyer





Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Toaplan

Publisher
Capcom

Snow Bros.

I have fond memories of going to a 7-Eleven with my best friend. Inside was a Snow Bros. arcade machine and we played that machine constantly for an entire summer. Fast-forward to 2016 and I have a dedicated Snow Bros. machine in my arcade. The NES version of the game (published in North America by Capcom and renamed to the full name, Snow Brothers) is no slouch either, as it sports the same two-player platforming fun of the original.

If you've played Bubble Bobble before, you'll already have a basic understanding of the game. The two Snow Brothers, Nick and Tom (player one and player two respectively) have to rid each stage of King Scorch's Ice Commandos by throwing snow at them until they turn into large snowballs. Moving next to them or on top of them and kicking them makes them roll through the platforms until they hit a wall and break to reveal either food (worth points) or power-ups to help the brothers complete each level.

Even though the 16-bit graphics have been reduced to 8-bit, it still looks exceptional and the familiar gameplay doesn't suffer at all in the translation.

'Trickman' Terry Minnich



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
Imagineering

Publisher
Absolute
Entertainment

A Boy and His Blob: Trouble on Blobolonia

"This was a pretty off-the-wall idea – your main character runs around the screen and has a sidekick in the form of a white blob. The sidekick idea came from a cartoon I'd watched 20 years before called *The Herculoids*, which had these two shape-changing blob characters. So having this shape-changing blob was kind of cool, but what was great about the game was that this blob became your toolset for navigating the world. He could change into various objects to help you along your way, so, for instance, you toss him a liquorice-flavoured jelly bean and he morphs into a ladder so you can climb up to an unreachable platform.

I don't remember thinking that the game was particularly difficult even though I've been told it is. The types of jelly beans that invoked a transformation were either a pun or alliteration of some kind so that you could remember them easily, such as 'tangerine' for 'trampoline'. I could have made it really nasty by limiting the amount of jelly beans you had, but decided to give a few extras to help the player out along the way."

David Crane

Crystalis

Released in Japan as *God Slayer: Sonata of the Far Away Sky*, this title from SNK is an RPG in the vein of *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy*, featuring a top-down map, dungeons and sword-based combat, but with aspects of magic and science fiction.

You begin the tale in a post-apocalyptic world, where society has devolved to pre-industrial levels, and mutated creatures roam the land. Your character is tasked with collecting four elemental swords in order to forge a fifth – called *Crystalis* – and vanquish the Emperor Draygon who seeks to use his military might to rule the world.

Although not as well known as some of its peers, *Crystalis* offers a polished RPG with a complex, gripping storyline and many features that were ahead of their time on its release. The title boasts great role-playing mechanics, with a large inventory of weapons, magic and items, and its visuals are easily on a par with the best on the NES. It's also quick and easy to play, unlike some of the more overwrought adventures of its era. Indeed, Nintendo was so impressed with the title that ten years after its release, it licensed it from SNK to create a Game Boy Color version.

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
RPG

Developer
and publisher
SNK





Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Scrolling
beat 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game

"The NES is largely remembered for its great two-player action games, and among the very best in that category is TMNT II: The Arcade Game. While the first game was a side-scrolling adventure single-player affair, the sequel brings the arcade beat 'em up home to consoles and allowed for simultaneous two-player Foot Clan-stomping. As expected by Konami's output at the time, the graphics are bright, colourful and wholly reminiscent of the popular cartoon, with huge, detailed sprites all taken from the show, with their trademarks and attitudes intact. And the soundtrack is among the best for the console.

The NES conversion even brought with it some exclusive content, including a new snow level and Shredder's pagoda stage, along with two original boss characters designed by Ninja Turtles co-creator Kevin Eastman.

As pizza is the food of choice for the brothers in shell, it was all but certain that a pizza restaurant would get a piece of the pie. Within the game you can find product placement for Pizza Hut, and for those who purchased the game, a coupon for a free personalised pan pizza was yours to enjoy. Though if you still have it, you might be a bit late to the pizza party by now."

Audun Sorlie



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Scrolling beat 'em up

Developer
Technōs Japan

Publisher
American Technos

CrossTown
H.S.

River City Ransom

Known as Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari in Japan and Street Gangs in Europe, River City Ransom is the third game released in Technōs Japan's Kunio-kun series, starring the 'hot-blooded tough guy' Kunio.

At first glance it looks like a stylised version of Double Dragon featuring chains and bats to wield, boxes and trashcans to throw, and even a co-op two-player mode. But the game layers on adventure and RPG elements to make it so much deeper and longer lasting than its inspirations.

The city is a fairly open world, in which you explore, engage in fights and collect money from

your downed opponents. You can then head back to the mall to buy drinks and food to replenish health and bolster your stats, or read books to gain new moves.

Although successful in Japan, despite some good reviews River City Ransom was largely ignored on release in the West, but has since gained a cult following - and it's easy to see why. While the action might not be as slick as the Double Dragon series, and earning enough money to power up is a bit of a grind, the game looks and sounds terrific, and offers a much more varied and rewarding take on the traditional side-scrolling street-brawler.

Mega Man 3

"From Mega Man 2 onwards we put in user boss designs that children had drawn. Project director Kitamura-san said, 'I want to get some ideas from players and put them in.' It was just something we naturally wanted to do.

Now, about whether the quality of the boss designs declined from Mega Man 3, I do not think that's true. People didn't contribute a fully designed boss; they didn't contribute a personally drawn sprite, or anything like that. They'd send in their basic design and we'd take the fundamentals of their idea and produce the boss from that, adding a

personal touch and creating a likeness with those characteristics, like a portrait sketch artist. That way, the fans would see the final result and think, 'That's my design!'

The concept of getting ideas from the public isn't that unusual in Japan. Even back then, in the 1980s, many Sentai anime or manga, like Kinnikuman, Kamen Rider, 'kaiju' entertainment and others, would use magazines to conduct fan submission campaigns and solicit new monster designs. It was something that Japanese kids were all familiar with and participated in."

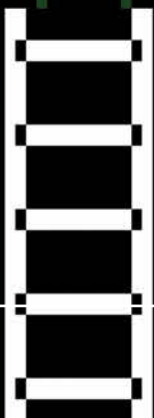
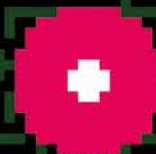
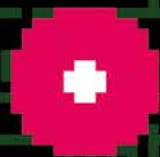
Keiji Inafune

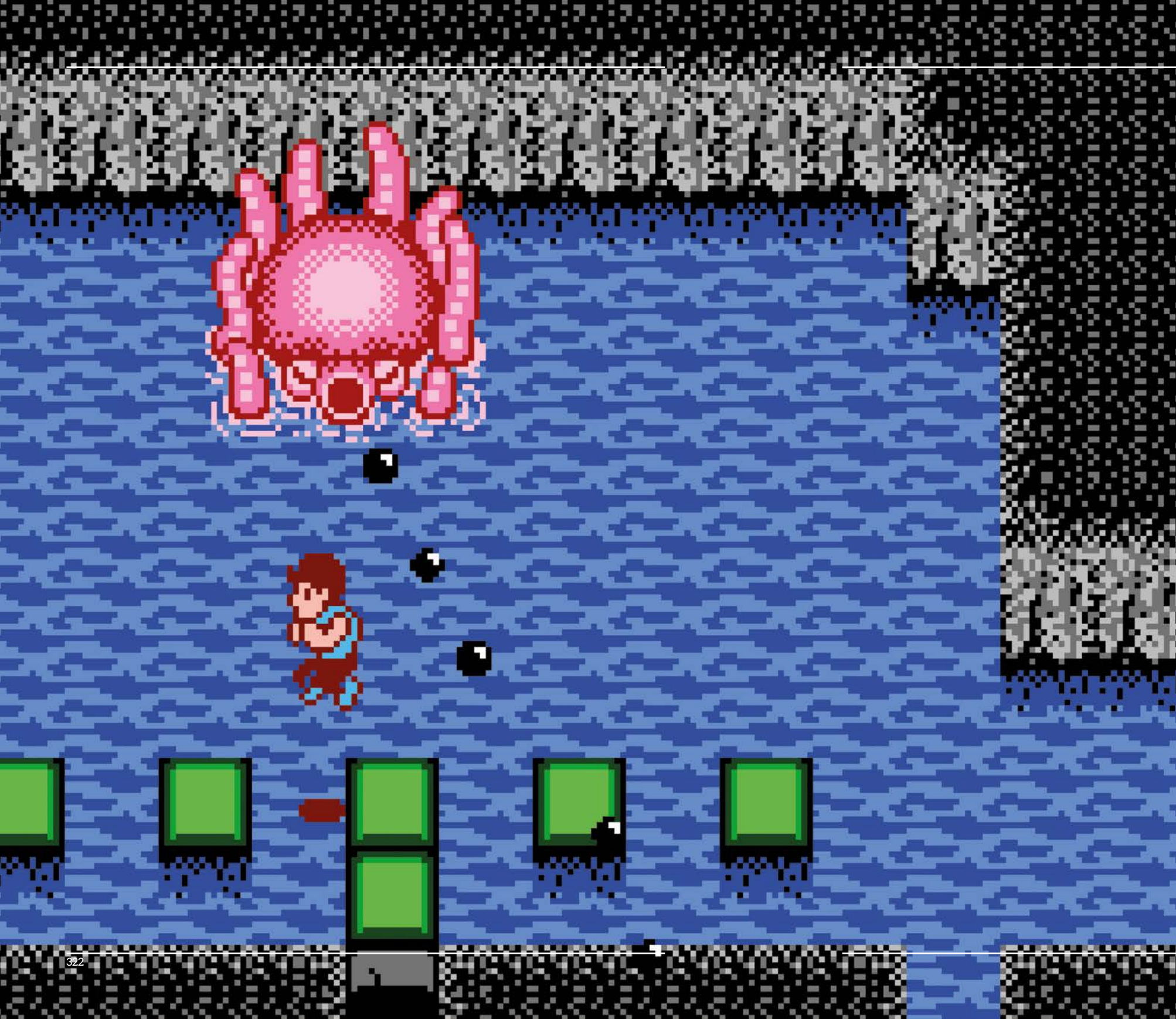
Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom





StarTropics

"StarTropics always had a pull on me. From its colourful, cartoony look to its Zelda-like vibe to its yo-yo-wielding teenage protagonist Mike, it all sounded pretty great to a ten-year-old. It's a shame then that my first go stalled due to its copy-protection scheme. Having rented the game, naturally with no manual included, I couldn't pass its creative yet unfortunate 'dip Uncle Steve's letter in water' security test. While I always intended to go back, only recently have I seen the second half of the game via Virtual Console.

Hoop-jumping aside, I liked the premise – student turns adventurer upon learning of his uncle's disappearance, all tied to an extraterrestrial invasion – and it has winsome box art. But it never quite captured the everykid charm that Super Nintendo's EarthBound enjoys to this day.

Similarly, the action-adventure gameplay may aim for Zelda, but it doesn't hit that high bar. It controls well in general, but the constant tile-hopping can drag. The clever portions, such as a fun piano puzzle or studying enemies' movement patterns to navigate otherwise darkened rooms, are matched by punitive elements. Think instant water deaths, blind jumps, and 1UPs that may actually take away lives.

Still, I enjoyed it enough to play through the first half in the early '90s, and then return years later when I was closer to Uncle Steve's age than Mike's. Not being a Nintendo classic doesn't mean StarTropics can't deliver a worthwhile excursion."

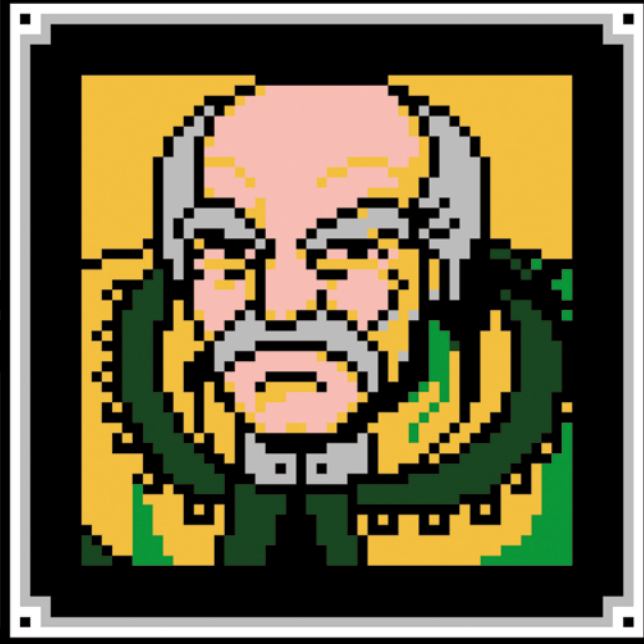
Greg Ford

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Adventure

**Developer
and publisher**
Nintendo



Platform
Famicom

Released
1990

Genre
Strategy

Developer
Intelligent
Systems

Publisher
Nintendo

Fire Emblem: Ankoku Ryū to Hikari no Ken

ファイアーエムブレム 暗黒竜と光の剣

Developed by Intelligent Systems, makers of the equally legendary Advance Wars, Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light is a turn-based tactical combat game with RPG overtones. Its key innovations are that, unlike Advance Wars, its units are unique individuals that can be levelled up over time and, when killed, stay dead. This generates an emotional attachment to characters, forcing you to be more circumspect when charging into battle - the loss of an important and much-loved unit is often cause for a mission restart.

Like Advance Wars, units have different strengths and weaknesses against specific opponent types, and gain an advantage when attacking or defending from certain terrain. For example, mounted units fare better on open plains, but can be attacked more effectively from wooded regions.

Often discussed in the hushed tones of the revered classic, Fire Emblem on the NES is more of importance as the seed of the franchise rather than in pure gameplay terms itself. The AI is pretty basic and the graphics best described as functional. So while Fire Emblem on the NES is certainly worth a play through to see how it all started, it's the later versions that would cement the name in gaming legend.



Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos

"Tecmo's original Ninja Gaiden was such a commercial and critical success that a sequel was inevitable, and as you might imagine, Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos improves on its illustrious predecessor in practically every way imaginable. The visuals are noticeably enhanced, with more detail and variety in the backdrops - one level even takes place on a speeding train, adding immeasurably to the tension.

And it wasn't just the presentation that Tecmo tightened up - the controls are even more accomplished this time around, with stealthy

protagonist Ryu Hayabusa now able to climb walls as well as use them as springboards for reaching higher platforms.

As someone who found the original game a tad on the tricky side, I always struggled with Ninja Gaiden II's later levels, which dial up the challenge considerably and leave the player little room for error. The slightly clichéd storyline - while superbly told via cinematic cutscenes - also grates when played today, but overall Tecmo's title has stood the test of time brilliantly, and is arguably the best entry in the NES Ninja Gaiden trilogy."

Damien McFerran

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

**Developer
and publisher**
Tecmo

The New Zealand Story

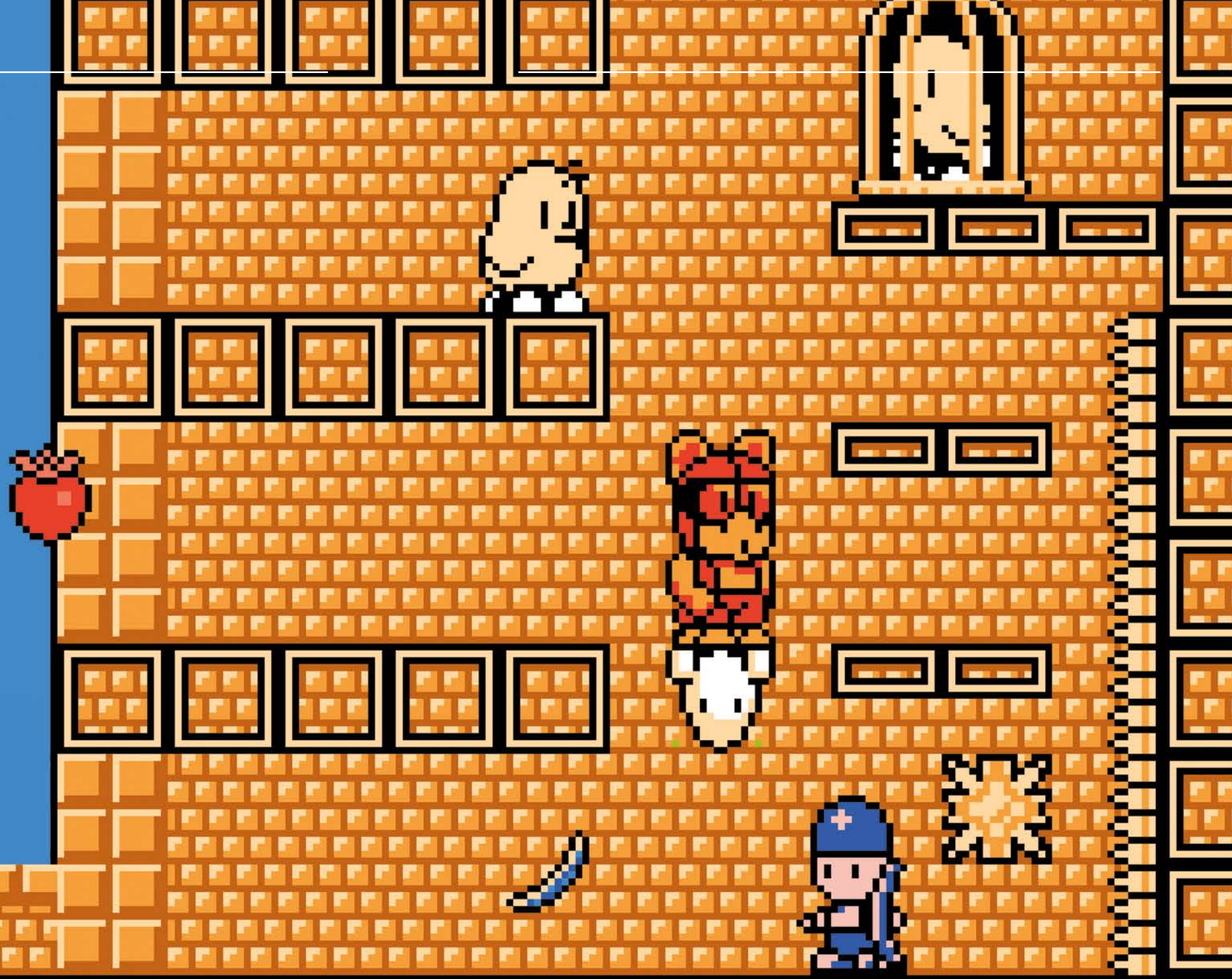
"Antipodean characters don't tend to figure heavily in videogames, so when they do make an appearance it's something to be celebrated. Tiki the Kiwi bird broke the Australasian glass ceiling in considerable style back in the late '80s and early '90s by taking the starring role in a platform game that captured the hearts and minds of gamers across the globe and, as a result, was ported to almost every available hardware platform. Why was The New Zealand Story so beloved? My answer would be, 'Because it's so very odd!'

On paper it's pretty formulaic. Environments made of modular blocks that the feathered protagonist leaps around. Ordinary enough. Enemies and traps that need to be jumped upon or leapt across... it's nothing we hadn't seen before. But there were weapons. You started off with arrows, and after that you got to chuck bombs at your enemies. Bombs that on exploding displayed a comic-book 'BAM'. That's satisfaction right there. Then there was the weird fact that you could find yourself jumping vertically up from solid ground into the seabed of a watery environment, at which point our beaky hero miraculously donned a mask and snorkel and found himself just as at home in an atmosphere of H₂O as he plainly wasn't in the air (being a flightless bird). And if that weren't odd enough, diving into the belly of a crystal whale in order to destroy it from the inside also played a part in the surreal nature of Tiki's journey.

My only gripe? Tiki looks nothing like a real Kiwi. The beak is ALL SORTS OF WRONG! Deep breath... pedantry aside, The New Zealand Story was properly ace."

Andy Dyer

Platform NES / Released 1990 / Genre Platformer
Developer Software Creations / Publisher Taito





Adventures in the Magic Kingdom

One of the earliest Disney/Capcom ventures (following Mickey Mousecapade and Duck Tales), this is a collection of mini-games notionally set in the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World. The player is tasked by Mickey to retrieve six silver keys in order to unlock the Cinderella castle and allow the Disney Parade to take place.

There are five separate games to play, plus a trivia angle where kids you meet in the park ask a question related to Disney's characters or history. The main games are all set in theme park rides: Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean are side-scrolling platformers; Thunder Mountain is a track-based train ride; Autopia is a racetrack game; and Space Mountain is a quick-time event set on board a spaceship.

While the idea of a mini-game collection sits nicely within the theme park setting, and most of the games are actually well presented, we have to take issue with the teeth-gritting difficulty level. Though presumably aimed at youngsters, the challenges on offer are enough to test the most hardened of gamers, requiring the deftest of joystick skills and lightning-fast reflexes. Even the trivia questions are well beyond the knowledge of your average pre-teen Disney fan (do you know Donald Duck's middle name?), so all who enter the Magic Kingdom do so at their own peril.

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Capcom

**“I love the Power Glove.
It’s so bad.”**

Lucas, The Wizard



Maniac Mansion

"At the start of the project we met with Ron (Gilbert) and Gary (Winnick), as well as a group of three new designer/developers known as 'The SCUMM-ettes', notably one of whom was Tim Schaffer who was assigned to the project to modify SCUMM scripts as needed for the NES version.

We originally converted the game very deliberately 'as is', with all of the original content (including the 'microwave hamster' bit). We would submit it in good faith to Nintendo, and their review process would reject it for content. It probably went through three or four times. One famous rejection I remember was a nude statue, where they complained pubic hair was visible, which was simply the line of pixels defining the shape of the legs. I think there are still versions around with the 'banned' elements in.

The C64 version doesn't have 'wall to wall' music, so we didn't originally have continuous music in the NES version either. We delivered an alpha version to Jaleco and got the feedback, 'Where's the music?'. We then got a contract amendment to provide all of the original music in the game - but at the last minute!

Even today when I meet strangers and say my company did Maniac Mansion, more often than not they are familiar with it."

David Warhol

Platform
NES
—
Released
1990
—
Genre
Point and click
adventure
—
Developer
Lucasfilm Games
—
Publisher
Jaleco



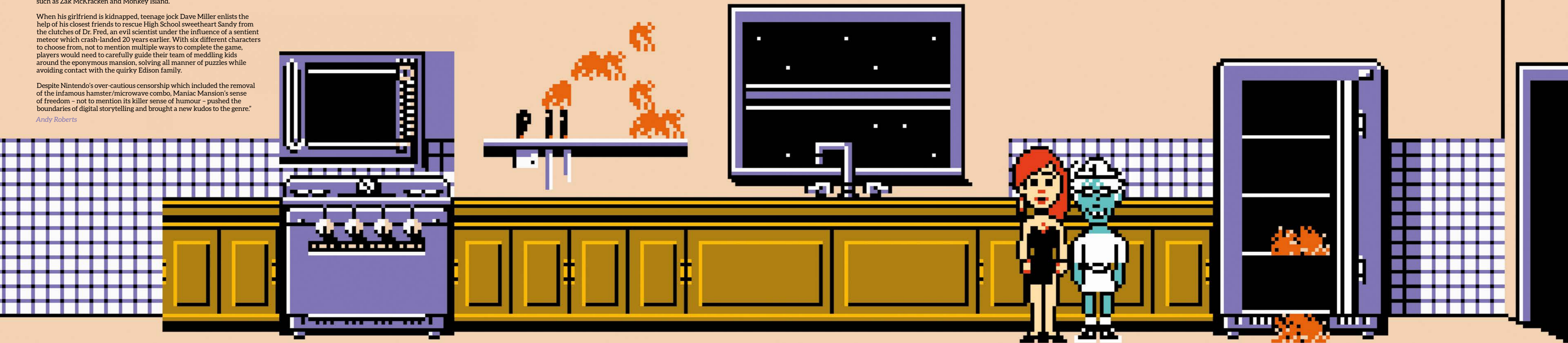
Maniac Mansion

"Widely acknowledged as the game which pioneered the point-and-click adventure genre, Maniac Mansion was the quintessential gaming experience for a generation raised on a healthy dose of Scooby Doo and teen horror movies. Created by Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick, Maniac Mansion was the first game to utilise LucasArt's pioneering SCUMM engine, which would eventually spawn a string of classic adventures such as Zak McKracken and Monkey Island.

When his girlfriend is kidnapped, teenage jock Dave Miller enlists the help of his closest friends to rescue High School sweetheart Sandy from the clutches of Dr. Fred, an evil scientist under the influence of a sentient meteor which crash-landed 20 years earlier. With six different characters to choose from, not to mention multiple ways to complete the game, players would need to carefully guide their team of meddling kids around the eponymous mansion, solving all manner of puzzles while avoiding contact with the quirky Edison family.

Despite Nintendo's over-cautious censorship which included the removal of the infamous hamster/microwave combo, Maniac Mansion's sense of freedom – not to mention its killer sense of humour – pushed the boundaries of digital storytelling and brought a new kudos to the genre."

Andy Roberts



Dr. Mario

Kickstarted by Tetris in 1984, the falling block puzzle genre inspired the likes of Columns, Klax, Puyo Puyo and a swathe of variants ending in '-tris'. Mario was six years late to the party, but while his inclusion is pretty much limited to providing a marketable character for the box art, the franchise sold over 5.3 million copies so it wasn't a bad strategy.

Developed by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi, Dr. Mario follows the usual falling-block structure - in this case with two-tone medicine capsules - where your task is to line them up with coloured viruses. When four or more blobs of the same colour are connected, they disappear; clear all the viruses and you move on to the next level. Later jars have a lot more viruses, but you can set the difficulty each time you play, giving yourself progressively tougher challenges.

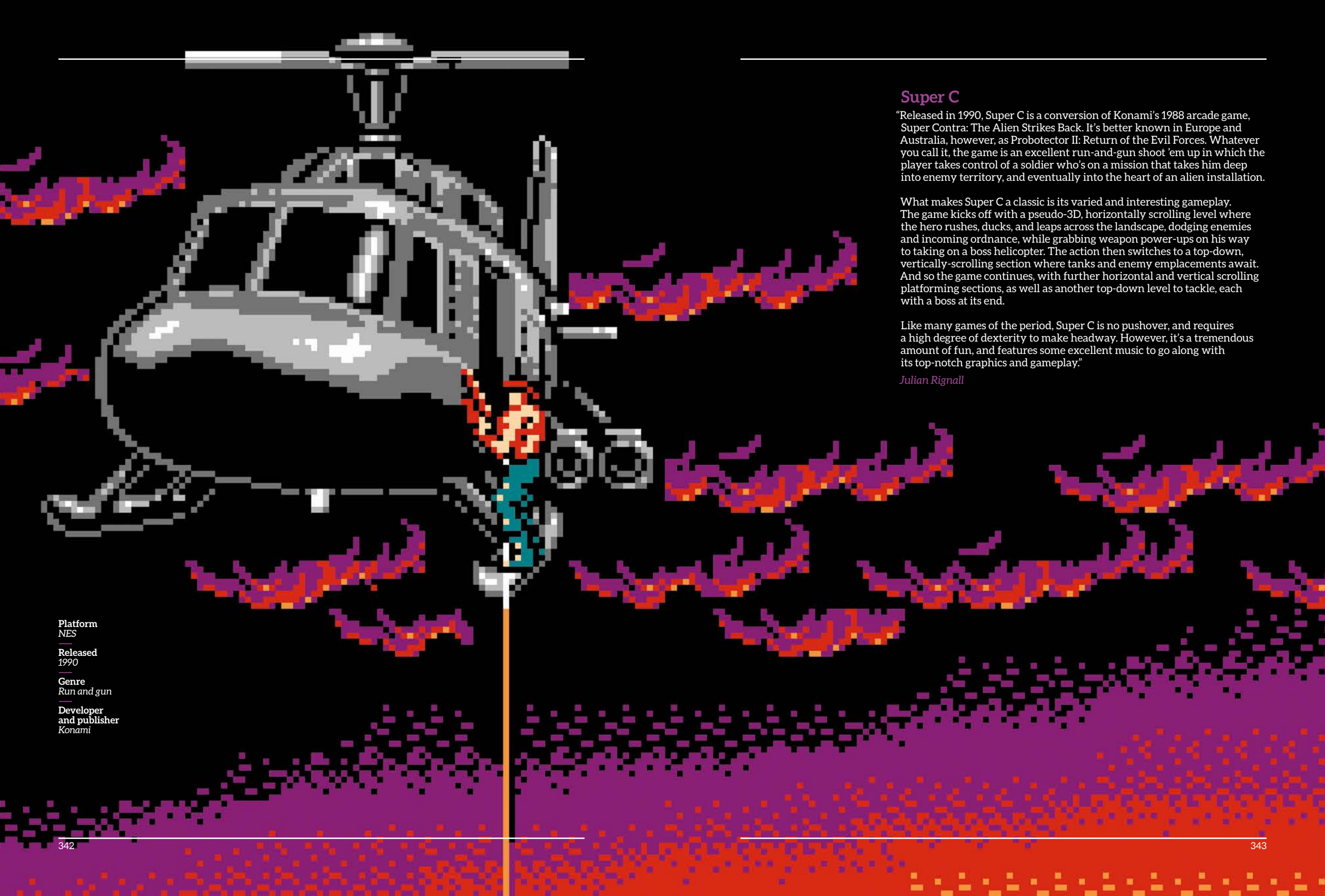
It all looks very sedate at first, but one over-rotation too many, one sideways move too far, and suddenly you find yourself in a jumble of random capsules, desperate just to clear enough room to manoeuvre, let alone worry about viruses. It's infuriatingly 'just-one-more-go' addictive, and a neat two-player head-to-head mode rounds off this slick puzzle package.

Platform NES / Released 1990 / Genre Puzzle / Developer and Publisher Nintendo

Dr. MARIO



LEVEL
00
SPEED
MED



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Super C

“Released in 1990, Super C is a conversion of Konami’s 1988 arcade game, Super Contra: The Alien Strikes Back. It’s better known in Europe and Australia, however, as Probotector II: Return of the Evil Forces. Whatever you call it, the game is an excellent run-and-gun shoot ‘em up in which the player takes control of a soldier who’s on a mission that takes him deep into enemy territory, and eventually into the heart of an alien installation.

What makes Super C a classic is its varied and interesting gameplay. The game kicks off with a pseudo-3D, horizontally scrolling level where the hero rushes, ducks, and leaps across the landscape, dodging enemies and incoming ordnance, while grabbing weapon power-ups on his way to taking on a boss helicopter. The action then switches to a top-down, vertically-scrolling section where tanks and enemy emplacements await. And so the game continues, with further horizontal and vertical scrolling platforming sections, as well as another top-down level to tackle, each with a boss at its end.

Like many games of the period, Super C is no pushover, and requires a high degree of dexterity to make headway. However, it’s a tremendous amount of fun, and features some excellent music to go along with its top-notch graphics and gameplay.”

Julian Rignall



Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun

悪魔城すぺしゃる ぼくだらキュラくん

This parody of the Castlevania series, entitled 'Demon Castle Special: I'm Kid Dracula' is a charming platform action game set across nine levels en route to a final showdown with the demon Galamoth.

Kid Dracula shoots fireballs that can be powered up by holding the fire button and which cause enemies to release coins when killed. These are collected for use in four end-of-level mini-games, where you can earn extra lives. Completing a level also grants you with new powers, such as homing missiles, the ability to turn into a bat, anti-gravity and so on. These add variety to the gameplay and are needed to defeat some of the later bosses.

Akumajō Special may not offer much that's truly innovative, but it's all presented so nicely. Control over the kid is crisp and responsive, and the graphics are splendidly bold and colourful, with lovely character design and sprite work. There's also a lot of neat visual tricks, such as rotating platforms and a speedy roller-coaster level that would make Sonic blush.

In terms of difficulty it's not quite up there with other Castlevania games, but it still throws up a decent challenge that you'll enjoy battling through.



Platform
Famicom

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Double Dragon II: The Revenge

"It all started off for me in the arcade, playing the original Double Dragon which was a two-player marvel at the time. Unlike some other gaming sequels, Technōs Japan wasted no time at all delivering a follow-up. This also began life in the arcade, in the heady game days of the late '80s and early '90s, when beat 'em ups were all the rage. Originally designed as an enhanced upgrade to the original, Double Dragon II: The Revenge – though perhaps not the arcade smash of its predecessor – became a classic game in its own right; a game with different controls to the original, but which plays out amazingly.

The plot, like many games of this time, was based on one thing: revenge! Billy and Jimmy Lee are out for more action and no one is going to stand in their way. This time Marian, Billy's girlfriend, has been murdered by the notorious, dark, mysterious and aptly named Black Warriors. With an amazingly funky J-pop soundtrack behind the game, the action takes place on the mean streets with knives, whips and iron bars among the array of weapons available to see off the bad guys."

GamesYouLoved

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Scrolling
beat 'em up

**Developer
and publisher**
Technōs Japan





Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers

"This is the second Capcom-developed Disney licence following the 1989 release of Duck Tales. And while Duck Tales might have been more popular, this was my favourite show from the Disney Afternoon roster.

Fat Cat, the perennial feline villain, has captured Gadget the inventor, and it's up to Chip and Dale to rescue her. Although, truth be told, she'd probably rescue herself if left to it. Standing in their way are a number of levels in which they must jump, smash and throw objects way larger than themselves at enemies in order to progress. The graphics perfectly capture the chipmunks' personalities, and the level design fully brings home that they are small and everything else is so large, with water taps, fans and furniture all proving surmountable obstacles.

Like a number of the other Disney/Capcom titles it was a touch on the easy side, but there's oodles of replayability and fun to be had going through it via multiple directions. What sets the game apart from most of the others is the two-player mode, where you can be helpful or a hindrance to your team mate, even going as far as picking them up to throw at enemies!"

Mat Allen

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



Batman: The Videogame

Notionally based on the 1989 Tim Burton movie, there's not really much here to connect the two, beyond the use of the Batman and Joker characters plus a few pixelated stills from the film. But that doesn't stop it from being probably the best movie tie-in of its generation.

It's a fairly standard action-platformer in concept, but Sunsoft has woven in a few elements to elevate it above its peers. Batman can punch his way past enemies, but is able to throw Batarangs, fire small missiles, and hurl three shuriken-like Batdiscs. They all have limited ammo but are re-armed using pick-ups dropped by defeated bad guys. The other key feature is Batman's ability to wall-jump, reminiscent of Ryu Hayabusa's manoeuvre in *Ninja Gaiden*.

The detailed, dithered-pixel graphic style makes it look unlike most other games on the NES, and captures the dark, Gothic mood of the film - in tone if not in actual locations. The action is also accompanied by a thumping soundtrack.

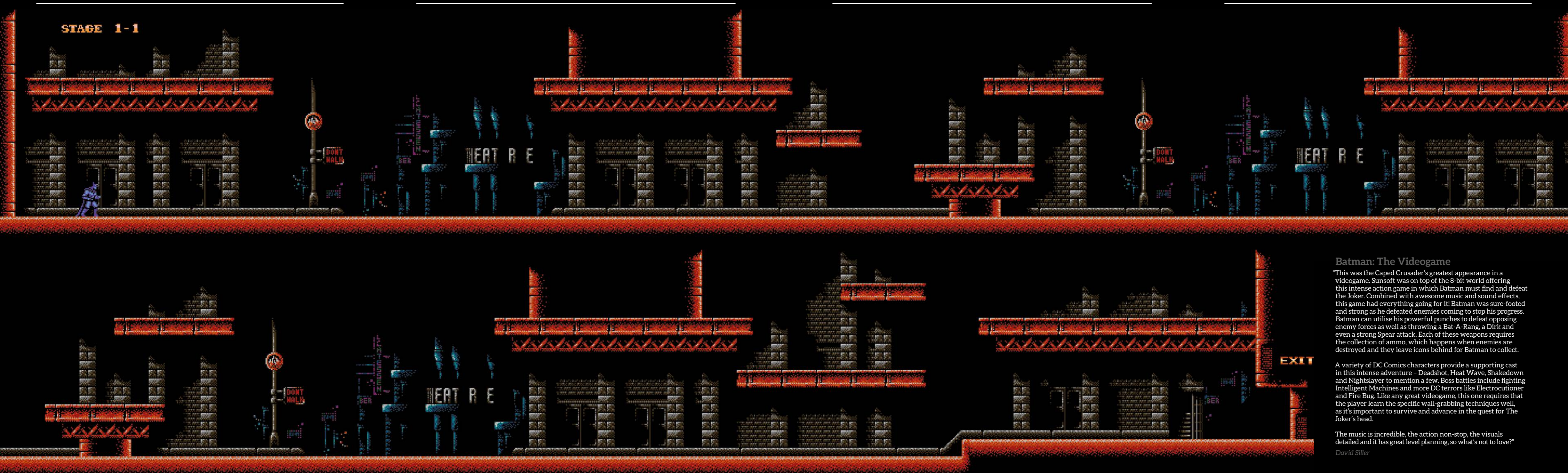
Batman: The Videogame lays down a challenge that's not for the faint-hearted, and you'll need repeated play-throughs to memorise enemy locations and hone your strategy. But far from the usual cynical licensed cash-ins, *Batman: The Videogame* stands on its own as unique and demanding action-platformer.

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Sunsoft



Batman: The Videogame

"This was the Caped Crusader's greatest appearance in a videogame. Sunsoft was on top of the 8-bit world offering this intense action game in which Batman must find and defeat the Joker. Combined with awesome music and sound effects, this game had everything going for it! Batman was sure-footed and strong as he defeated enemies coming to stop his progress. Batman can utilise his powerful punches to defeat opposing enemy forces as well as throwing a Bat-A-Rang, a Dirk and even a strong Spear attack. Each of these weapons requires the collection of ammo, which happens when enemies are destroyed and they leave icons behind for Batman to collect.

A variety of DC Comics characters provide a supporting cast in this intense adventure - Deadshot, Heat Wave, Shakedown and Nightslayer to mention a few. Boss battles include fighting Intelligent Machines and more DC terrors like Electrocuter and Fire Bug. Like any great videogame, this one requires that the player learn the specific wall-grabbing techniques well, as it's important to survive and advance in the quest for The Joker's head.

The music is incredible, the action non-stop, the visuals detailed and it has great level planning, so what's not to love?"

David Siller

Kickle Cubicle

This cutesy title from Irem is one of just a handful of NES action-puzzlers, and which uses a block-showing technique in a similar vein to *The Adventures of Lolo*.

To clear each level, Kickle the snowman needs to form a solid path to the red moneybags, scattered towards the edge of each island. To do this you use Kickle's icy breath to freeze the blobby blue creatures that hop about the screen, turning them into solid blocks of ice. You can then kick these into the water to make a new block to walk on, or towards other enemies to kill them. Kickle can also spit out pillars of ice to fence enemies in or control their movement.

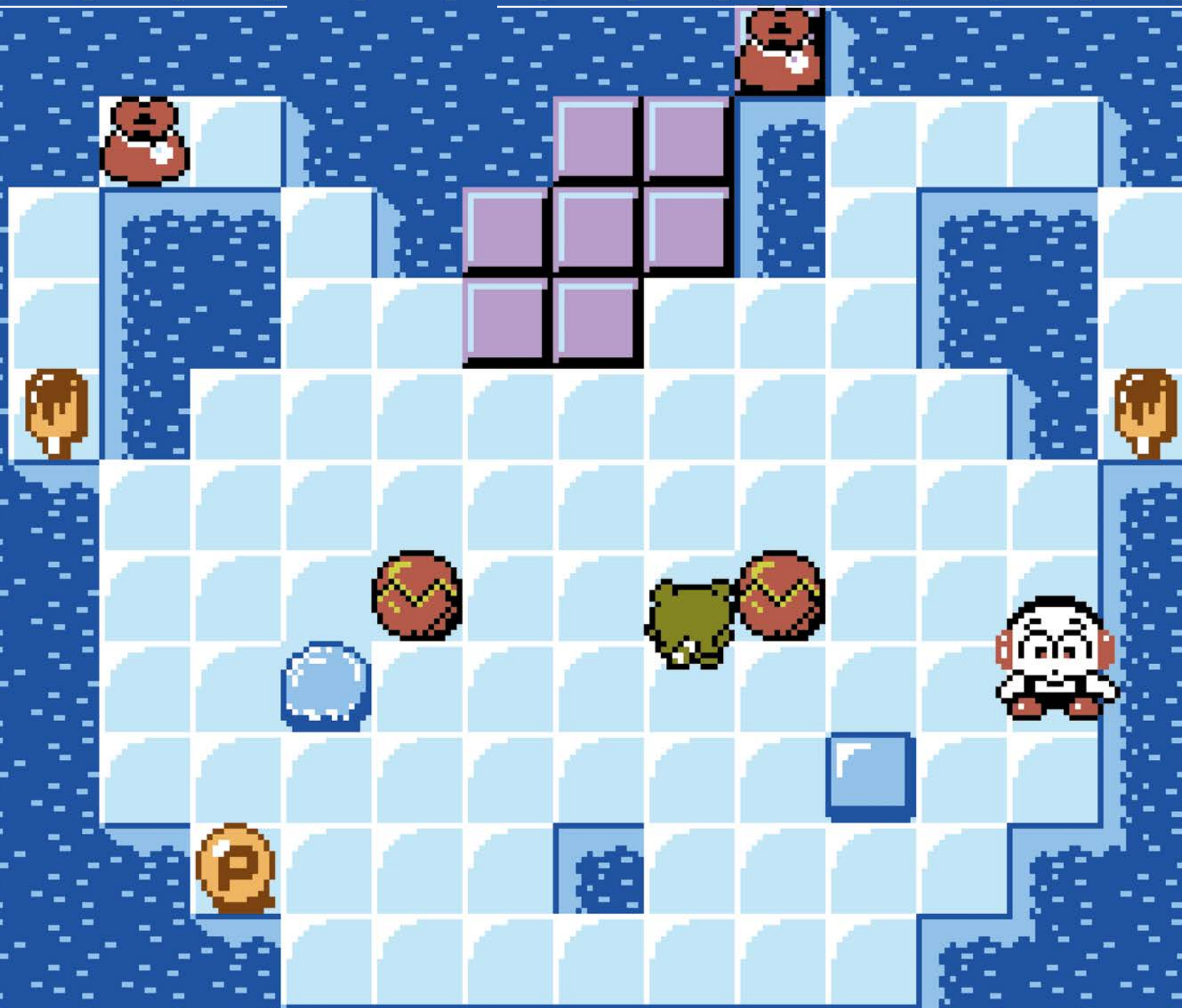
What at first appears as a cute and simple cartoon puzzler soon starts to offer up a healthy challenge as the screens become more complex and other creatures pop up to make life a bit more taxing. By mixing the cerebral aspect of puzzling with the quick reflexes of an action game, Irem has created a title that's uniquely compelling and a welcome addition to the endless platformers and beat 'em ups. The graphics are as colourful and as clear as they need to be, and with 97 levels to complete - plus infinite lives and a password system - this cool little puzzler should keep you busy for quite some time.

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
and publisher
Irem



An interview with David Darling

David Darling began writing games on the Commodore PET when he was 11 years old and, along with his brother Richard, founded Codemasters in 1986. Initially focused on making low-cost games for the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, Codemasters branched into consoles with the Game Genie cheat cartridge and a series of NES titles. Darling sold his stake in Codemasters in 2007 and now runs Kwalee in the town of Leamington Spa, UK. Currently, he is developing PlayPhoto for mobile devices.

How did you come up with the idea for the Game Genie?

It was me, my brother Richard and our friend Ted Carron who came up with the idea. When we were making games we were always trying to add innovative features. When we were doing Nintendo games, we used to have brainstorming sessions once a week where we'd go to my flat and try and come up with ideas. Because the NES used cartridges we thought we would have a switch on the cart so you could choose the number of lives, or choose which weapon you were using, something like that. Then we thought maybe we could make some kind of interface that will work with other games. We thought, 'That would be really cool', because all these kids in America that were getting stuck playing Super Mario Bros. or whatever would love it - maybe they were stuck on a level and they couldn't get past it, so they could use the device to see how to beat the stage.

How did you end up working with Galoob Toys on the device?

When we worked with Mastertronic in the UK, this guy called David Harding was their Canadian distributor and then he had a company called Camerica. So when we developed Game Genie we asked him if he wanted to distribute it in North America, but I think he thought it was too big for him so he took it to Lewis Galoob Toys in San Francisco and sold the idea to them. The guy David showed it to at Galoob had a son and he went crazy when he saw Mario jumping off the top of the screen.

Nintendo famously stepped in to prevent sales of the Game Genie. The resultant legal case actually influenced copyright law, didn't it?

Yes. I think really it solidified the interpretation of the law. It was quite a complex case and there were lots of different parts of it, but the main part was if you make a game like Super Mario, as soon as you make it - like drawing a picture - you own the copyright on that. And the idea of owning the copyright came from people writing books. They used to give you the right to reproduce the work, but then they thought, 'Well if you write a work like Harry Potter, then it's not really fair if somebody else does the sequel', so they called that the 'derivative' work. So you not only have the right to reproduce the original but you've got the right to create the derivative work. Nintendo even had Shigeru Miyamoto in the court case; he came to San Francisco because

Nintendo were saying that because the kid was plugging in the Game Genie and making Mario jump higher, that the kid was making a derivative of Miyamoto's game - and we were helping him to infringe copyright. But in the end the judge said because you unplugged it, the Game Genie wasn't permanently changing it; for a derivative work to exist it has to be permanent. That was how we ended up winning the case.

Was it all handled in the States and you stood by, or were you called up at any point?

We weren't called to the court case, but we were heavily involved in the legal process because there were different court cases. They had the original temporary restraining orders and they had an injunction,

and it went to about five different court cases all the way up just trying to stop Galoob selling it.

The lawyers wanted to know exactly how it worked so they asked us what felt like thousands of questions. One of the things we showed them that they found quite interesting was that Nintendo was marketing the NES Advantage joystick and it had a slow motion button on it. When you held down that button it let players slow the game down, which was cheating, essentially. So it undermined their argument that we were ruining these games, because they were authorising it themselves with their own products.

Micro Machines is a title that a lot of Nintendo fans will associate with Codemasters. How did that come about?

We were developing maybe five or six games for the NES. Back then we worked in Portakabins because the company was expanding so quickly. We had six Portakabins in the garden and in one of them was Andrew Graham, and he was working on this game called California Beach Buggies. It was a game where you were jumping over sand dunes and things; you could turn in mid-air and when you landed, you skidded. He's quite a perfectionist so he was fiddling around with this for a few months, and while he was doing that we were negotiating with Galoob on the Game Genie. They eventually licensed Game Genie from us and while we were in

“ Because the NES used cartridges we thought we would have a switch on the cart so you could choose the number of lives, or choose which weapon you were using, something like that. ”

San Francisco, they were saying, 'We make more cars than Detroit', in reference to their Micro Machines toy line. They were selling tens of millions a year. So we said, 'Do you want to sell Nintendo games? We're working on this California Beach Buggies game, maybe we can make it into a Micro Machines game.' In the end they never did any videogames, they just did Game Genie, but that was how we got the licence for Micro Machines.

We came back to England and we showed Andrew Graham the cars and said it would be quite cool if it was a miniature environment, like having a car on a school desk, perhaps. What came first was the car and the physics; it was the core game that came first and then we added the licence.





Trog!

"I first fell in love with Trog! at a local arcade called Galaxy World. The attractive graphics and addictive gameplay had me hooked for hours. Years later, I discovered the NES version and was hooked all over again. It was a wondrous multiplayer experience and it's still a game I enjoy playing to this day.

The object is to collect the same coloured eggs as your dino in a maze. If the Trog catch up with you, they'll knock you out and chomp on your carcass until you're nothing but bones. Luckily, you're not defenceless, as you can punch the Trog until they fly off the screen. The Trog get increasingly aggressive with each passing level and the mazes get more technical. But you have power-ups at your disposal, and the absolute best one is the pineapple, which turns you into a Trog-eating T. rex for a limited amount of time!

The original game sported 'Playmation' graphics (not unlike claymation), which gave the game a unique look with plenty of '90s references. Even without this visual enhancement, the NES version still looks graphically impressive and retains much of the personality of its arcade big brother."

"Trickman" Terry Minnich

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
Visual Concepts

Publisher
Acclaim



Snake Rattle 'n' Roll

"It's been a long, long time since I played Snake Rattle 'n' Roll but my abiding memory is that it was, simultaneously, brilliant and infuriatingly difficult. The isometric 3D, multi-storeyed environments had something of the Marble Madness about them.

The central premise of controlling a snake's head that eats up objects (in this case creatures known as Nibbley Pibbleys) and in doing so gets a longer and more unwieldy tail was already a tried and tested formula. You only had to look at the proliferation of 'snake' games on 8-bit home computers and the light cycle race in TRON to see the provenance of the chase-your-own-tail-at-your-peril play mechanic.

So, it was derivative and there was a significant pilfering of ideas from other games. In fact I've just remembered arcade coin-op Crystal Castles which I played to death back in the early '80s and which again has echoes in Snake, Rattle 'n' Roll. But remember Snake Rattle 'n' Roll came from UK developer Rare, a company that by the time it was working with Nintendo in the latter part of the

'80s and early '90s had already had an illustrious development history under its former trading guise of Ultimate Play The Game. At that time it was producing ground-breaking home computer games like Jetpac and Knight Lore; its understanding of the genesis of computer gaming and pedigree in innovating in the form was beyond doubt.

Long story short: although Rare would go on to produce big budget, hugely successful Nintendo titles Killer Instinct, Donkey Kong Country and the innovative FPS Goldeneye 007, it's fair to say that in Snake Rattle 'n' Roll we have a game that saw the team drawing on its expertise, pooling its gaming inspirations and producing something unique out of the familiar. Whether they see it this way I can't say, but for me, Snake Rattle 'n' Roll was a glorious collage of many of the games that I grew up with."

Andy Dyer

Platform
NES

Released
1990

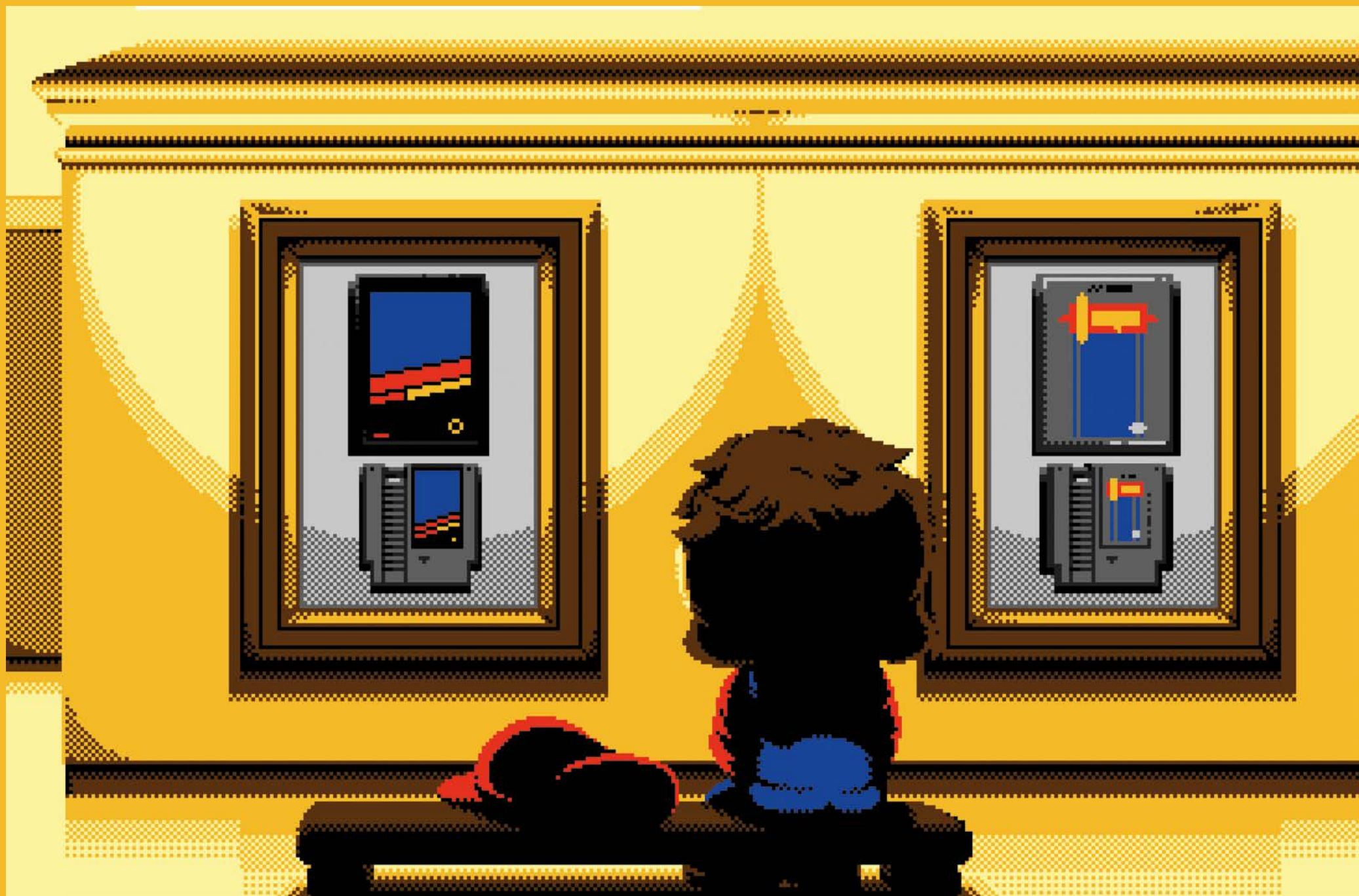
Genre
Action

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Nintendo

Box art

The early days of videogaming introduced a young audience to a range of art styles, some inspired by manga and anime, some inspired by western influences, and some entirely new, derived from the art of the games themselves. In this section we take a closer look at some classic examples of box art that graces Famicom, Famicom Disk System and NES titles.



'Display Purposes Only'
by Craig Stevenson / 2016

BLACK BOX GAMES

When you hit a new market, it's crucial to make a good first impression, and Nintendo opted for a sleek design for their US debut in 1985. The 18 launch games donned a pitch-black suit punctuated by a starfield (the NES was the future: after all it came bundled with a robot!), a far cry from the garish multicoloured Atari boxes.

Cutting the boxes in two halves, the slant titles added dynamism to the composition. On the bottom of the cover, a genre classification system was implemented with simple icons: besides the staples Action and Sport categories, there were Light-Gun titles, Robot-compatible ones, two programmable titles that included an edit mode, and a Donkey Kong themed edutainment.

At the bottom right of each box sat the Golden Seal of Approval, which would turn out to be one of Nintendo's more enduring logos.

The key element of this captivating design is its honesty about the actual game content. The use of zoomed-in game sprites, cut out on a black canvas

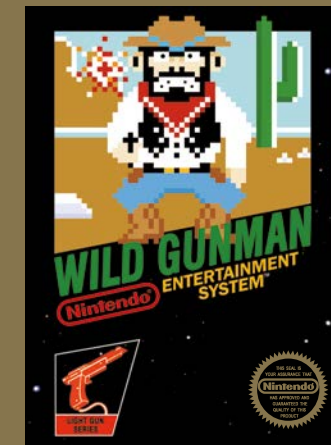
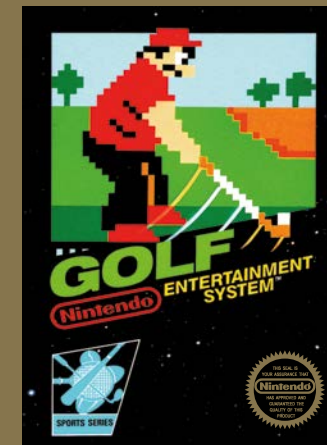
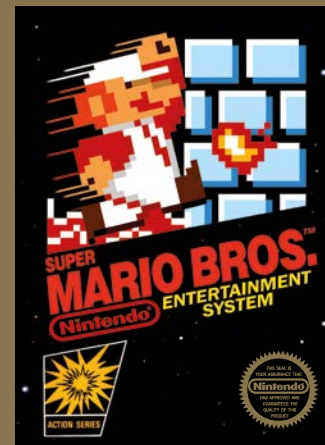
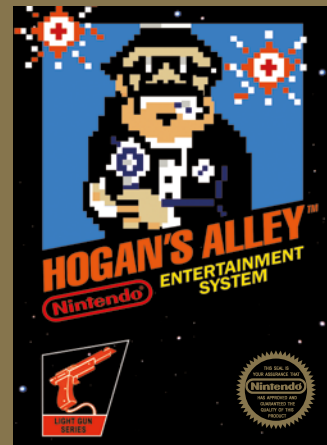
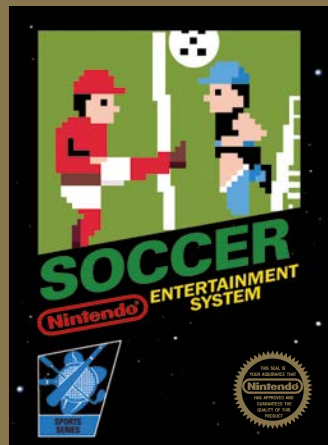
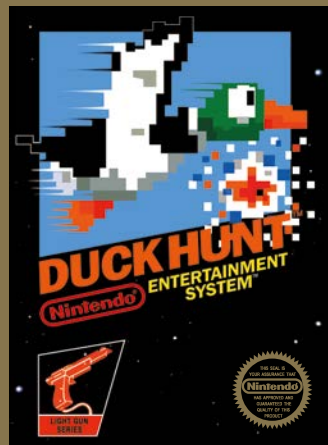
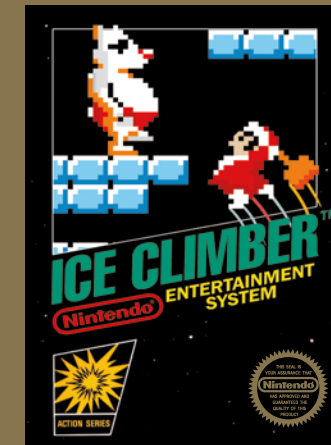
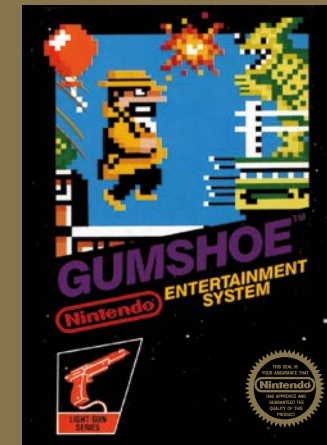
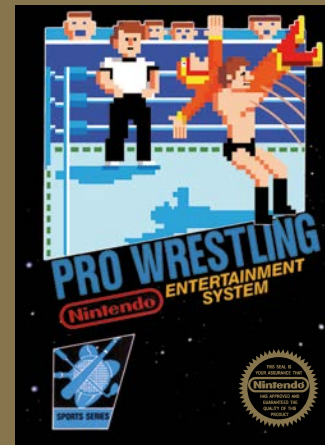
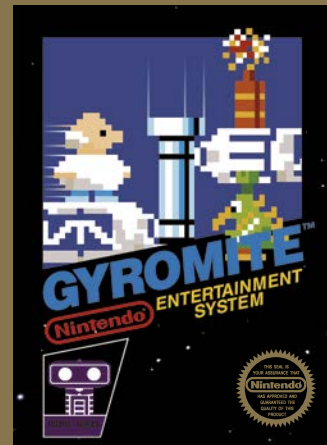
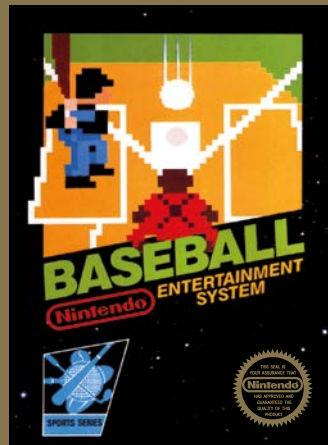
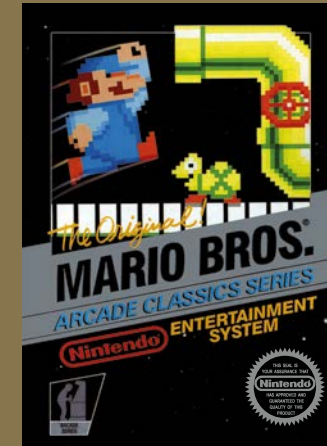
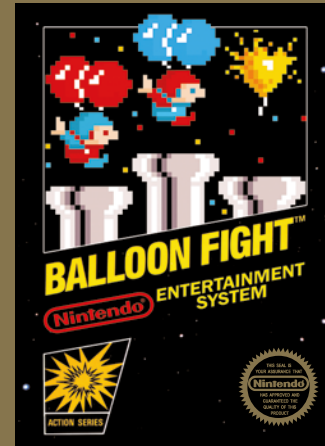
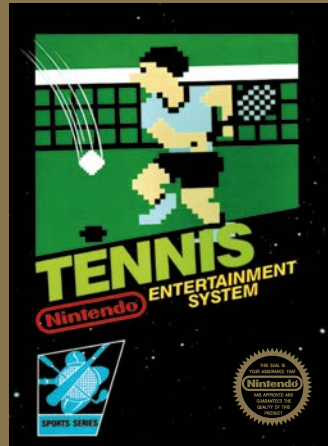
for maximum contrast, stayed true to the games: instead of sporting gorgeous oil or watercolour paintings, it focused on the blocky protagonists and featured them on the cover with pride - no more relegation to a couple of snapshots on the rear.

Of course, the strength of this approach relies on great pixel art to begin with: that's why Super Mario Bros., Duck Hunt and Excitebike have become true classic covers.

Things often start in a clean, coherent form, then you reach maturity and everything changes with third parties flocking onto the NES, games and genres increased manifold, and the black box design was abandoned.

Totalling 30 titles, the series would survive until early 1987, adding a prized subcategory of five arcade classics (although two original coin-op conversions - both from Irem - had been grouped into the Action category before), and ending on a high note with Slalom, Rare's debut and the first Western-developed NES title.

DUCK HUNT
VOLLEYBALL
BASEBALL
GOLF
SOCCER
GYROMITE
PRO WRESTLING
ICE CLIMBER
EXCITEBIKE
POPEYE
GUMSHOE



Metroid メトロイド

Nintendo's classic action game has some unusual design choices, not just in its excellent non-linear gameplay but also its presentation. For starters, the title isn't the name of the hero on the box: Metroid refers to the race of alien parasites the player is tasked with defeating. (According to game designers Hiroji Kiyotake and Yoshio Sakamoto the name is a portmanteau of 'metro subway' and 'android', alluding to the idea of the underground setting and the slightly robotic-looking main character.) The film Alien is also said to have been a big influence on the game's design, which may have led to this odd naming convention.

For a brand new IP, using the single character is a bold move, as it gives little away about the game's content – unlike The Legend of Zelda, for example, which is blatantly clear as to its adventuring nature. The artwork's not great in terms of composition, with a little too much empty space, but it's hard to argue with Samus Aran's in-your-face stance and the muzzle flash of her weapon against a blood-red background. Also, the raked back, movie-style logo conveys a sense of the game's epic nature. By comparison, the Western NES release, which features a montage of game's pixelated assets, is practically meaningless.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1986 / Genre Action / Developer and publisher Nintendo

Akumajō Dracula 悪魔城ドラキュラ

In an era when most games were jolly, bright affairs, Konami offered up something different in the shape of Devil's Castle Dracula – the tale of vampire-hunter Simon Belmont and his quest to destroy Count Dracula. The box artwork is a great encapsulation of the game's theme, but also acts as a visual prelude to the action within. The muscle-bound Belmont pauses, whip in hand, spying Castle Dracula for the first time, just as the sun begins to set. In his mind's eye, the spectre of the vampire hangs above the castle, a remote target – hiding, waiting.

The colourful comic-art style strikes a nice balance between the thrill of adventure and the horror that lies within; like the game itself, more spooky than scary. The composition cleverly uses the sloping rocks, banded clouds and other elements to continually draw your attention inwards towards the hero, whose bright skin tones make him stand out from the backdrop. We stand as Belmont, on the verge of the mission to come. And like our hero, we too must take a step forward towards the castle, into the box to retrieve the game and venture into the dark recesses of Dracula's lair...



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1986 / Genre Action / Developer and publisher Konami

Falsion ファルシオン

This shoot 'em up by Konami was released in 1987 with support for the Famicom 3D System: a pair of active shutter glasses that produced the illusion of 3D depth, hence the small logo in the bottom corner. Unlike a lot of sci-fi shooter box art – which so often writes cheques the gameplay can't cash – the artwork for Falsion actually provides an accurate representation of the game, with a faithful portrayal of the player's craft, approaching asteroids and the alien vessel encountered at the end of the first level. Even the glowing planet surface appears later on the game – though not quite with the same level of fidelity.

The image is traditional sci-fi fare, but unlike a lot of Japanese art of the time, has a loose, comic-book style, reminiscent of the packaging used for 8-bit computer titles in the UK and Europe. And what at first may seem like a fairly standard composition is cleverly done: the use of red for the tailfin and main thruster immediately leads the eye to the rear of the craft, where its sloping form sends your gaze forward, along the trail of gunfire to the alien ship and on up the neatly stylised logo.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1987 / Genre Shoot 'em up / Developer and publisher Konami

Super Lode Runner 悪魔城ドラキュラ

Irem's 1987 release is the third Famicom entry in the series, following the original Lode Runner and the ultra-challenging Championship edition, which were published by Hudson Soft. Representations of the puzzle-platforming gameplay vary wildly between editions and territories – US versions employ pulp fiction novel-style imagery, while the Japanese box art grows more cartoony with each release. For Super Lode Runner, Irem has basically ignored the dark, sombre and decidedly 2D look of the game, instead focusing on the fun aspect of its new two-player mode.

The overall structure and quality of this airbrushed piece is pretty good, providing a sense of scale and tension in its portrayal of the explosive action. The two main characters form a diagonal across the image, drawing the attention from top to bottom, while colourful enemies give the roving eye somewhere to pause. The only problem is that once the game's loaded, you'd be forgiven for thinking there had been some sort of mix up at the printers, because this vivid and dynamic artwork bears almost zero resemblance to the game within.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1987 / Genre Puzzle / Developer and publisher Irem

Vs. Excitebike エキサイトバイク

Released for the Famicom Disk System in 1988, VS. Excitebike is an updated version of the 1984 original, featuring head-to-head two-player action, a new soundtrack and a track creation system.

The box artwork takes a very different approach to the original Famicom Excitebike, with a much more cartoony interpretation of the game. The two bikers on the cover are typical of the Japanese style referred to as nitōshin – which roughly translates as ‘two heads tall’ – in which the ratio of the head and body are approximately 1:1. This is more widely referred to as ‘Super Deformed’ or SD, and is often used in parodies of the original source material, such as SD Gundam, though the trend is waning in Japan.

Here the technique is used more in its ‘chibi’ – or ‘short person’ form – producing characters that are cute and fun. Although the image is simply rendered, it manages to encapsulate the main theme of motocross stages in a stadium environment, with crowds, pennants and the red and blue colour-coded players. The clean illustration style ably conveys the excitement and competitive nature of the game, and still looks fresh and engaging nearly three decades later.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1988 / Genre Racing / Developer and publisher Nintendo

The Legend of Zelda: The Hyrule Fantasy ゼルダの伝説

Of the early Nintendo titles this is easily one of the more literal translations of the game content. The hero, Link, crouches with shield and sword in hand, in readiness for a battle that's about to begin, set against a background of the land of Hyrule. It's rare to see the blocky RPG overworld portrayed in this way, and perhaps speaks of Nintendo's honesty that it didn't wish to oversell its adventure with grandiose fantasy artwork that bore no resemblance to the angular Famicom graphics.

The artwork itself is rendered in a simple, almost naïve fashion, and leaves a lot to the viewer's imagination – there are no creatures to slay, no image of the dark prince Ganon. It's as if Nintendo was saying: here is the world we've created for you, and this is the hero you play. Come in and explore and discover what you will...

Naturally the bold logo sits against a triangular block, a persistent visual theme in the Zelda series referencing the Triforce relics, and while the Renaissance-style rapier that underlines it seems a little incongruous, it all adds to the sense of a heroic, otherworldly adventure.

This faithful, if somewhat prosaic, representation of the game was discarded for the Western release, in favour of gold packaging with an emblematic shield encasing a golden cartridge. It's a stylish approach that suited Western audiences and which has continued throughout the Zelda series.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1986 / Genre Adventure / Developer and publisher Nintendo

Super Mario Bros. スーパーマリオブラザーズ

Illustrated by Shigeru Miyamoto himself, this joyful artwork for the original Famicom release of Super Mario Bros. set the pattern for pretty much every Mario release for the next 30 years – although design duties would largely fall to animator and character designer Yōichi Kotabe and Nintendo's own in-house illustrator Yusuke Nakano.

As a representation of the game, you can't fault it: all of the main characters are present and correct, and the rolling hills, pipes, vines, flowers and end-of-level castle all feature, although the emphasis on the watery backdrop – presumably a nod to the underwater swimming sections – is perhaps overstated.

Mario attacks the challenge with his usual fervour, striking the kind of gleeful pose the character is now famous for. It's interesting that this early example of busy, character-packed imagery has become a staple of Japanese box art, especially the Rockman/Mega Man series, which takes the term 'cluttered' to new heights.

It's a tribute to the strength of Miyamoto's character design that, despite various palette changes and tweaks, the cast is still recognisable after all these years – although Mario now sports a red top and blue dungarees, and the latter-day Bowser is much more colourful pantomime villain.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1986 / Genre Platformer / Developer and publisher Nintendo

Hikari Shinwa: Palutena no Kagami 光神話 パルテナの鏡

Japanese title Light Myth: Mirror of Palutena – better known to Westerners as Kid Icarus – was another of Nintendo's tranche of Famicom Disk System titles released in 1986. The box art features the hero, an angel by the name of Pit, who's on a mission to rescue the kidnapped Goddess of Light, Palutena, from the clutches of Medusa.

For gamers unaware of the title, the packaging provides a sense of the overall theme, with Greek temples set among the clouds, but doesn't give much away about its play mechanics. Pit has wings, though they're barely used in the game, and the heart-tipped arrow brings cupid to mind, but there's no romantic matchmaking here: it's a battle to the death between Pit and the denizens of the underworld.

The image is solid enough, with a cute, nicely rendered character, while the plain skyscape suffices as a backdrop. The surrounding brickwork reflects the platform aesthetic and acts a useful border, enabling both the Pit character and logo to be cut out and brought into the foreground.

It's not exactly Nintendo's finest hour in terms of packaging, but a Nintendo 3DS version – released 26 years after the original – would do the franchise justice, with sumptuous artwork of Pit set against a luminous cloudscape.



Platform Famicom Disk System / Released 1986 / Genre Platformer / Developer and publisher Nintendo

Nekketsu Kōkō Dodgeball-bu 熱血高校ドッジボール部

Released in the West as Super Dodge Ball, this is the second entry in Technōs' Kunio-kun series, which features hot-headed young males out to cause trouble, either on the streets or when playing sports. They star the character Kunio (named after Technōs Japan's former president, Kunio Taki) and often feature super-deformed characters performing acts of cartoon violence.

Nekketsu Kōkō Dodgeball Bu followed Nekketsu Kōha Kunio-ku, which Westerners will know better as Renegade. However this was the first game on the Famicom to employ the box art template that other games would adhere to, with neat cartoon artwork set within a frame on a coloured or textured background.

As usual Kunio is at the front, sporting his distinctive haircut and characteristic sneer, while the rest of his crew are in the background, goofing about and setting the tone for the unruly action to follow. The 'Namennayo!' text across the background translates roughly as 'Don't look down on me!', reinforcing the rebellious, combative nature of the series.

This same graphical structure would be used for nine more games on the Famicom, including Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari (also known as River City Ransom), football sim Kōkō Dodgeball Bu: Soccer Hen, plus an ice hockey game, a one-on-one beat 'em up, a street basketball game and a bizarre sports compilation.



Platform Famicom / Released 1988 / Genre Sports / Developer and publisher Technōs Japan

Dragon Quest III: Soshite Densetsu e... ドラゴンクエストIII そして伝説へ...後!?

The third entry in the Chunsoft/Enix RPG series was released in 1988, following the success of Dragon Quest and Dragon Quest II: Gods of the Evil Spirits. Subtitled 'And thus into Legend...' it's actually a prequel in terms of the storyline, set many years before the events of Dragon Quest, where the Hero is on a mission to defeat the archfiend Baramos and his boss, Lord Zoma.

The box artwork follows the structure of the first two titles in which comic book-style artwork is enclosed within a frame, separating it from the familiar game logo and company branding. The piece is beautifully illustrated by manga artist Akira Toriyama, who also acted as the character designer for the series, and boasts Dragon Ball and Chrono Trigger in his lengthy and varied body of work.

For this release, the action scenes of its predecessors have been dispensed with in favour of a character piece, showcasing the cast of the game. A determined-looking Hero - son of the warrior Ortega - is front and centre, flanked by the various fighters, warriors, healers, mages and sages that join the party during your quest. This, combined with a landscape featuring castles and a distant mountain skyline, provide a sense of the scale of the adventure that awaits...



Platform Famicom / Released 1988 / Genre RPG / Developer and publisher Enix

Tetris テトリス

This release from Bullet Proof Software (BPS) needs little introduction. The puzzle game conceived by Alexey Pajitnov later appeared on the Game Boy, a perfect symbiotic relationship that captured the imagination of millions and made both the game and Nintendo's little handheld global successes. Naturally, there was a mad rush to license the title for every platform available, with an NES version appearing on Atari's Tengen label. However, Atari had only secured the rights to the arcade version, and so the Tengen game was pulled in favour of this Japan-only version from BPS.

The box art is nicely understated and set a template for the many BPS Tetris sequels and variants that would follow on NES and SNES. One can argue that the name Tetris alone sells the game and the addition of a recognisable puzzle piece is enough to ensure there's zero confusion over what the box actually contains. The only aspect we might quibble with is the speed with which the tetromino seems to be whizzing across the artwork, as this version is notorious for the pedestrian pace at which the blocks fall down the screen, without the player intervening via the D-pad. Otherwise this discreet entry is something of a rarity among 1980's videogame packaging and game branding in general.



Platform Famicom / Released 1988 / Genre Puzzle / Developer and publisher Bullet Proof Software

Rockman 4 Aratanaru Yabō!! ロックマン4 新たなる野望!!

Capcom's action-platform series has always had a case of split-personality: outside of Japan, the character and games are referred to as Mega Man and the presentation of the games has been radically different in the three major territories. This Japanese box art follows a similar theme as its predecessors, with an ensemble of manga-styled characters, energetically bursting out of their frames. However, the US and European releases have been a really mixed bag and didn't settle on a consistent approach until Mega Man 4 – where even then the art was of a dubious standard. (As a side note, the original NES Mega Man box has arguably the worst artwork in the history of videogaming!)

Rockman 4's imagery continues the 'organised chaos' approach, packing the available space with the allies and enemies featured in-game. However, this fourth installment really hits its stride in the quality of the character art, the composition, and in revealing a little of the setting and storyline. The neat use of a fiery outline around Rockman and Rush helps to separate them from the troupe and adds some dynamism to the image.

The series continued with this same arrangement until Rockman 6, the final chapter on the Famicom. Fortunately, the artwork for the Super Famicom releases would raise the bar even higher.



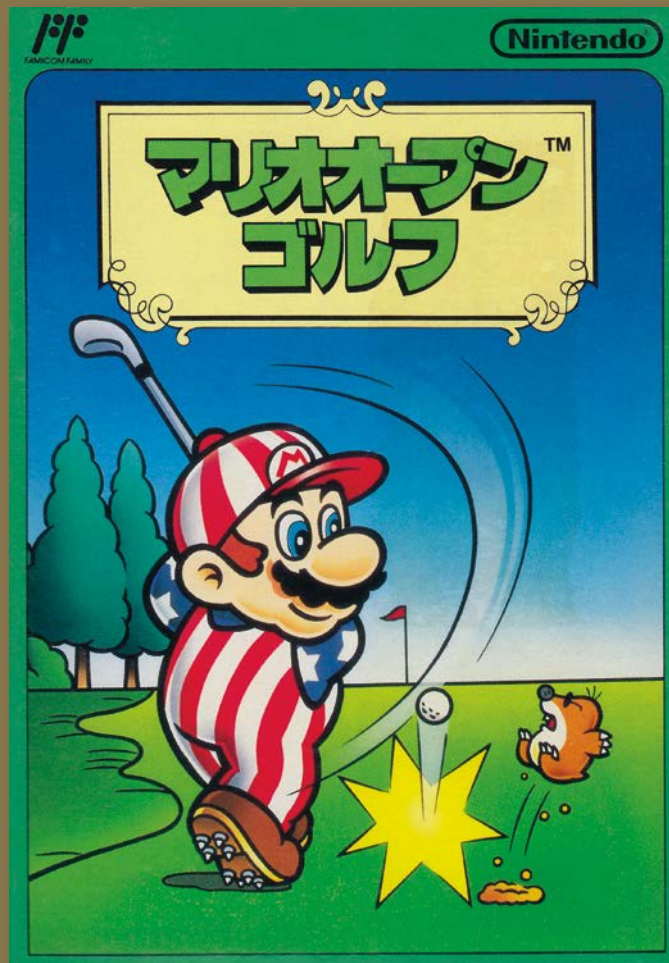
Platform Famicom / Released 1990 / Genre Platformer / Developer and publisher Capcom

Mario Open Golf マリオオープンゴルフ

This is the second golf game developed by Nintendo, following 1984's *Golf*, which was released as a US launch title for the NES. For this 1991 outing, the cover is graced by Mario, who by now had become a saleable asset, and marks the first time the classic character art was used on a non-platform game. (Though while it's understandable that Mario is dressed, rather garishly, in the stars and stripes for the NES release, it's a little odd that the same artwork was used in Japan – maybe golf was perceived as a mainly American sport back then.)

The illustration is typical cheery Nintendo, with Mario whacking his ball toward a distant pin, and causing a gopher to be ejected from his underground home. The image itself is typically high quality, although somewhat minimalist, with no opposition players or crowd. But in this regard the packaging is actually a fair portrayal of the excellent, if slightly solitary game within.

Other than the imagery, the game title and a couple of small logos, the package is pleasingly free of clutter. The NES version is similarly unencumbered, although the Nintendo logo and Seal of Quality do actually help balance the overall composition.



Platform Famicom / Released 1991 / Genre Sports / Developer and publisher Nintendo

Fire Emblem: Ankoku Ryū to Hikari no Tsurugi ファイアーエムブレ 暗黒竜と光の剣

Nintendo's take on the turn-based strategy/RPG game is the first entry in the *Fire Emblem* series, which would generate a further 11 original titles over 25 years. Developed by Intelligent Systems and produced by Gunpei Yokoi it was released on the Famicom in 1990.

The box features a handsome anime-style montage with the main protagonist, Marth, striking a lordly pose, the sweep of his cape dividing the image in two. Above, Princess Caeda confronts the evil wizard Gharnif, while their opposing forces charge into combat. Medeus, the Shadow Dragon and leader of the Dolhr Empire, is portrayed as an ever-present force, watching over the conflict with glee.

Below, and placed symbolically under Marth's protective wing, are the lead characters in the story, including the veteran knight Jagen, Duke Hardin, the armoured knight Draug, mage Merric, priest Wrys and several others, all clearly recognisable from their in-game avatars. The series would become well known for the consistent quality of its box art.



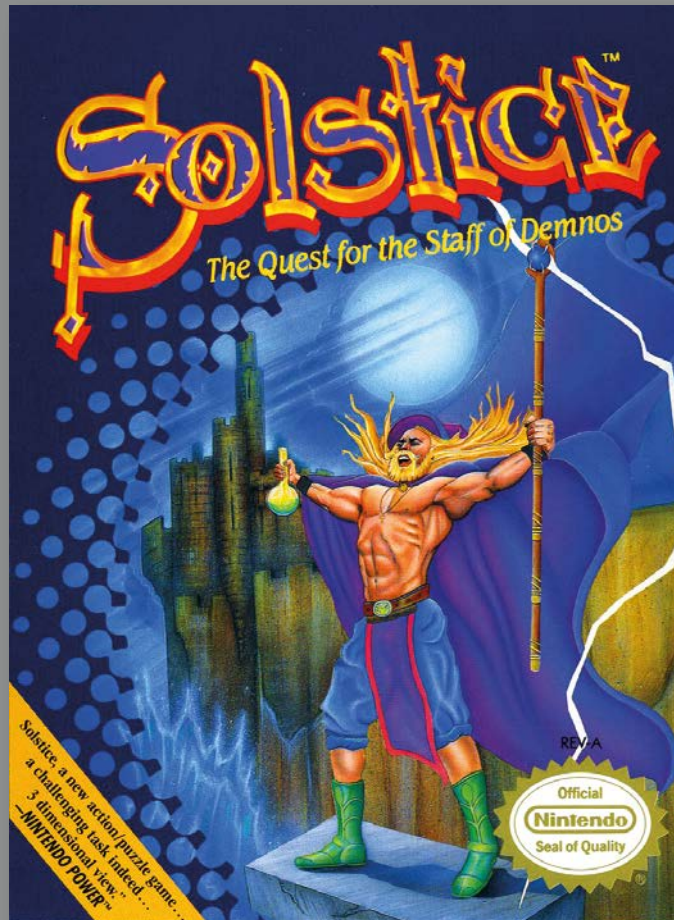
Platform Famicom / Released 1990 / Genre RPG / Developer Intelligent Systems / Publisher Nintendo

Solstice

"The Solstice job was a dream come true for me. It was a great game being published by a great company. I not only got to paint the cover but also the poster inside that went with the game. This job was seen worldwide in 1990 and helped secure a lot of other game work as it gave me credibility in the field. I was in heaven. I used to say to clients, 'Have you seen the Solstice art, I painted?'. It inevitably led to a lot more work. Unusually, I actually had a reasonable time to paint all the pieces, which were created using acrylic on illustration board.

I remember being in the local grocery store in 1989 in Pasadena and saw this bodybuilder for the first time. I thought he would be perfect for the game cover. He was unbelievable in stature, and looked like a superhuman action hero from television. He walked around the store like he owned it, and for the short time he was there he did - I was impressed. I thought to myself, maybe one day I could convince him to be in one of my paintings. The rest is history!"

Michael Winterbauer



Platform NES / Released 1990 / Genre Puzzle / Developer Software Creations / Publisher CSG Imagesoft

Metal Gear

Widely acknowledged as the originator of the stealth game, Hideo Kojima's groundbreaking title Metal Gear first appeared for MSX2 computers in 1987 (it was actually the system's inability to display lots of bullets on screen that forced Kojima to switch the gameplay from action to covert ops). A NES port appeared the following year.

The illustration famously features an image of Solid Snake based directly on a promotional photo of Michael Biehn as Kyle Reese in Terminator. In fairness to the illustrator, this was fairly standard procedure in the '80s and they've done a good job of the artwork, which is stylishly rendered; the character's pose and expression perfectly encapsulate the tension of a lone operative on a secret mission.

The montage also incorporates various elements such as laser fire, digital read-outs and blueprint-style graphics that lend an air of military high-tech to proceedings, and has all the hallmarks of a Drew Struzan movie poster. Finally, at the bottom of the image we catch our first glimpse of the 'metal gear' walking tank - although, rather disappointingly, the central focus of the game is entirely absent from the NES version, which instead features the destruction of a supercomputer as your ultimate objective.



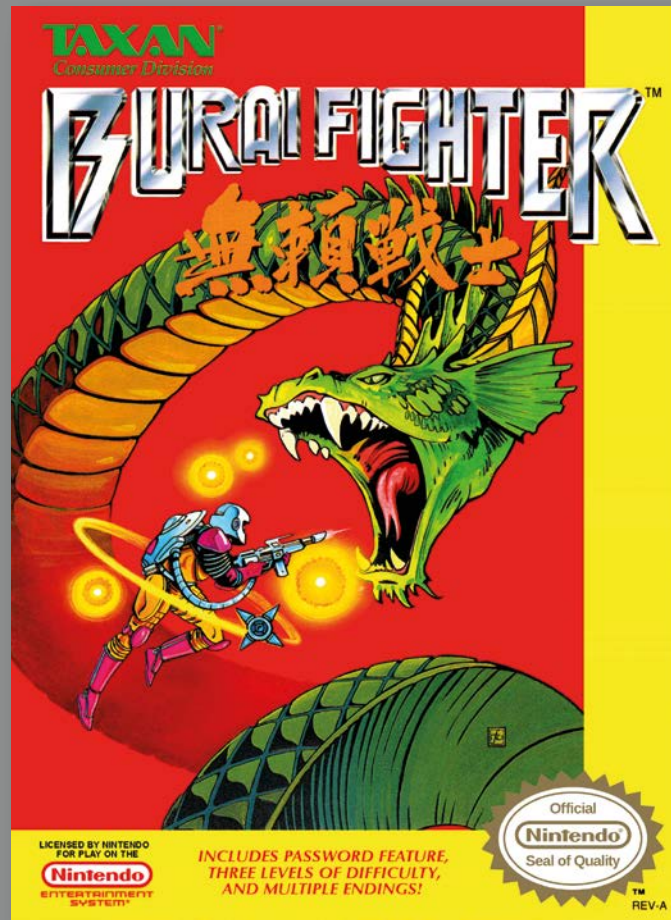
Platform NES / Released 1988 / Genre Action / Developer Konami / Publisher Ultra Games

Burai Fighter

“What started life as a pen-and-ink illustration was then painted with watercolour, airbrush and coloured pencils – all done on heavy-duty illustration board. As with most assignments at the time, I was given a brief description of the game premise, shown screen shots and some game footage. I remember sitting in a meeting with the art director and discussing important aspects of the gameplay and furiously jotting notes as we reviewed the reference. My biggest concerns back then were always if an art director wanted endless changes – although I think this one stayed pretty close to my original idea (most likely why I still like it!).”

It was done close to my time working on The Alien Legion for Marvel, so I’m sure I jumped at the opportunity to design a twisting serpent because Sarigar, leader of the Legion, has a snake-like body. I’m sure I wanted all the practice I could get! I tend to gravitate towards simple, strong designs whenever possible and I feel this one works on that level. It holds up well for one of my older pieces because of the centred focal point and twisting ‘action’ of the design.”

Frank Ciocco



Platform NES / Released 1990 / Genre Shoot 'em up / Developer and publisher Taxan

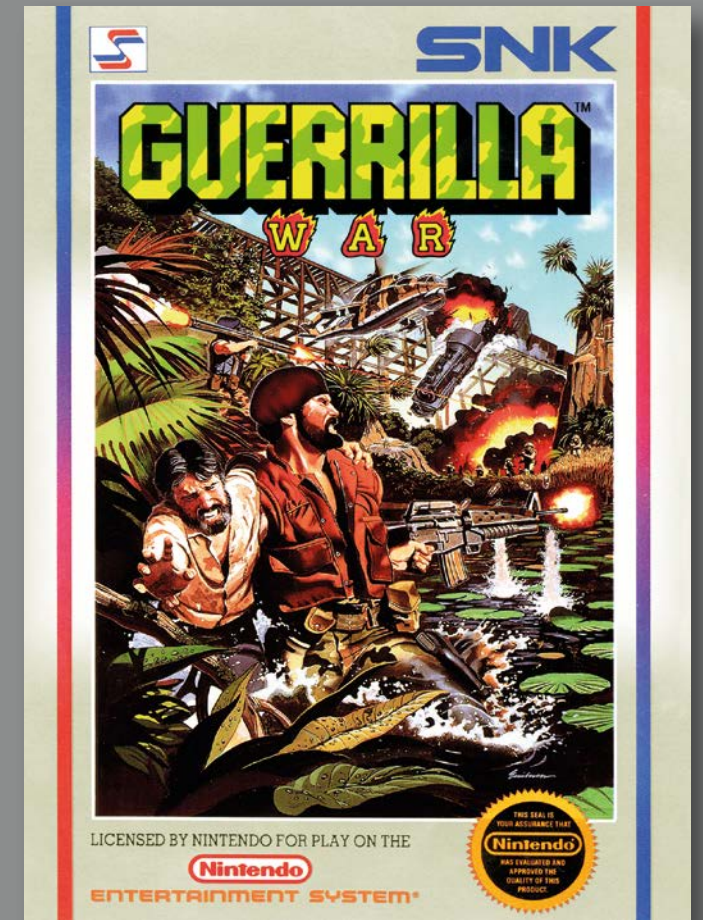
Guerrilla War

“It was September 7, 1988, when I drove from my Northbeach studio in San Francisco about 35 minutes south, to Westfield Avenue in Campbell California, to meet with the folks at SNK to discuss the cover illustration for their upcoming game Guerrilla War. I sketched and we discussed the possibilities as I watched the beta version game play on a large monitor. The script called for the daring rescue of a scientist by a couple of unnamed rebel commandos under heavy fire. This was during a two-month period, which found me doing the box art for Mega Man 2, Heavy Barrel, Bad Dudes and Strider, among others.”

In the Guerrilla art I was able to fit in a falling train, an exploding trestle, a hovering Russian Hind gunship and an enemy host! It featured many of the weapons I had close and personal experience with in combat in Vietnam, including an M-16, 40mm grenade launcher and 3.5-inch M20 Bazooka.

Two of my studio mates posed for me: Carl Buell, as the steely rescuer, spraying the enemy on full auto, and Robert Evans as my rescued scientist. Both were great friends and fantastic illustrators. I must admit that my favourite piece of the game art I did was Guerrilla War.”

Marc Ericksen



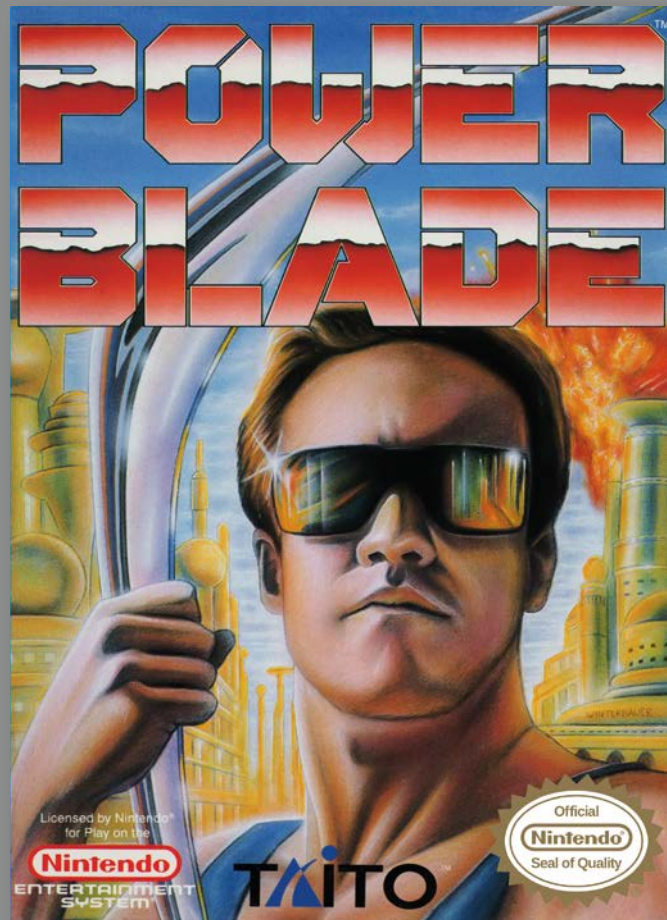
Platform NES / Released 1988 / Genre Run and gun / Developer and publisher SNK

PowerBlade

"I was very excited when I was asked to paint a cover for the game, which had a Terminator feel to it, and I'm a big fan of the movie. I realised that I'd need original reference to paint from, and I always took my own photos to use as reference. So I set up a photoshoot that had a Terminator feel to it, which really is all about attitude.

Initially I photographed two of my friends posing with a T-Square under the fluorescent lights in my studio. The pictures were good but not great. I asked one of them to take a photo of me trying the pose and it turned out really well so I decided to use it to paint the cover. The cover of PowerBlade is actually a self-portrait of myself. When the cover was published I received a letter from copyright lawyers asking what reference I used to paint from. I sent them the picture of myself holding a T-Square and that was the end of it."

Michael Winterbauer



Platform NES / Released 1991 / Genre Action / Developer Natsume / Publisher Taito

Ninja Gaiden

Tecmo's combat series began life as a coin-op and NES title, which were released almost simultaneously toward the end of 1988. But while the arcade version - known as Shadow Warriors outside Japan - has since disappeared almost without trace, the NES game has forged itself a place in gaming legend.

The console edition features three versions of box art: the Famicom has a somewhat static image of Ryu Hyabusa standing in front of a large stone idol, while the US and European versions place the ninja in a more dramatic pose against a New York skyline, though only the US release uses the original coin-op flyer artwork.

While the illustration technique isn't as good as some, the image is certainly arresting, thanks to its use of a fiery colour palette that frames the image and allows the blue-clad ninja to stand out. The figure of Ryu, poised and ready to attack, is neatly juxtaposed with New York, portrayed figuratively as a city on fire - a potent suggestion of the destruction the vengeful warrior is about to unleash. These elements work nicely together to provide a sense of the challenge ahead, while direct eye contact with Ryu's steely gaze provides an emotive connection with the viewer.



Platform NES / Released 1989 / Genre Action / Developer and publisher Tecmo

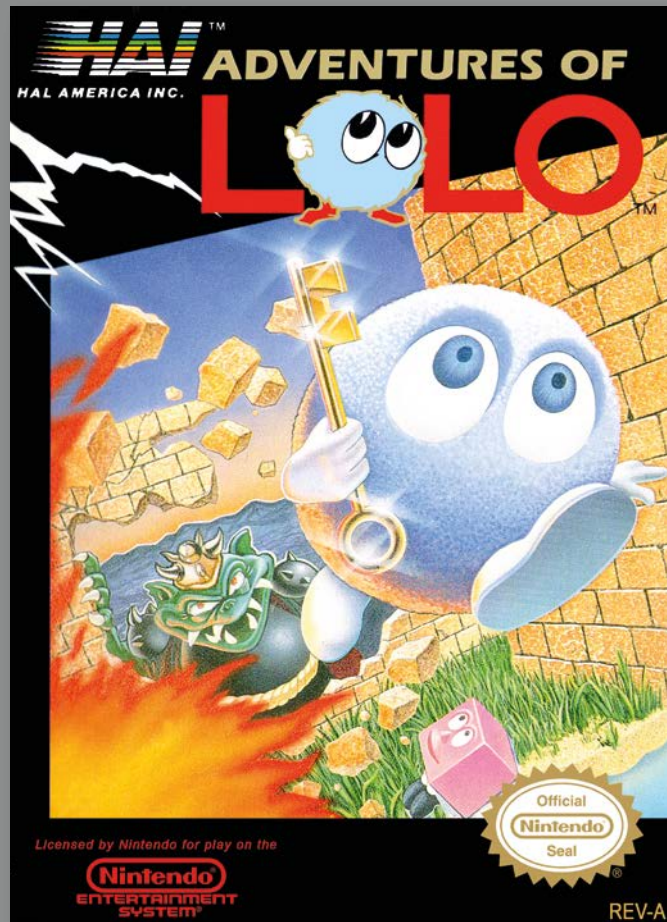
Adventures of Lolo

“With Adventures of Lolo I played around with several different pencil sketches for the ideal composition to showcase the characters and the game. I had to keep in mind where the graphics would be placed on the package itself, so communication with the art director was a must. Usually there were around three days of faxing sketches back and forth. Once approved, depending on the complexity, the final art can take three to five days. I was often juggling other projects at the same time, so sometimes things took longer. All in all, the total process was roughly around two weeks to create a piece of cover artwork.

The people at HAL Labs (the company I worked with creating the games or licensing from Nintendo USA) was great, they gave me a lot of creative freedom. If the artwork looks Japanese in style, it must just be that I was born in Tokyo and lived there until I was eight years old. I'm sure that has influenced my art even today, where I work for Disney as a background painter.

I'm pretty tickled that the pieces I did so early in my career still get the most recognition. I had fun making them!”

Kaz Aizawa

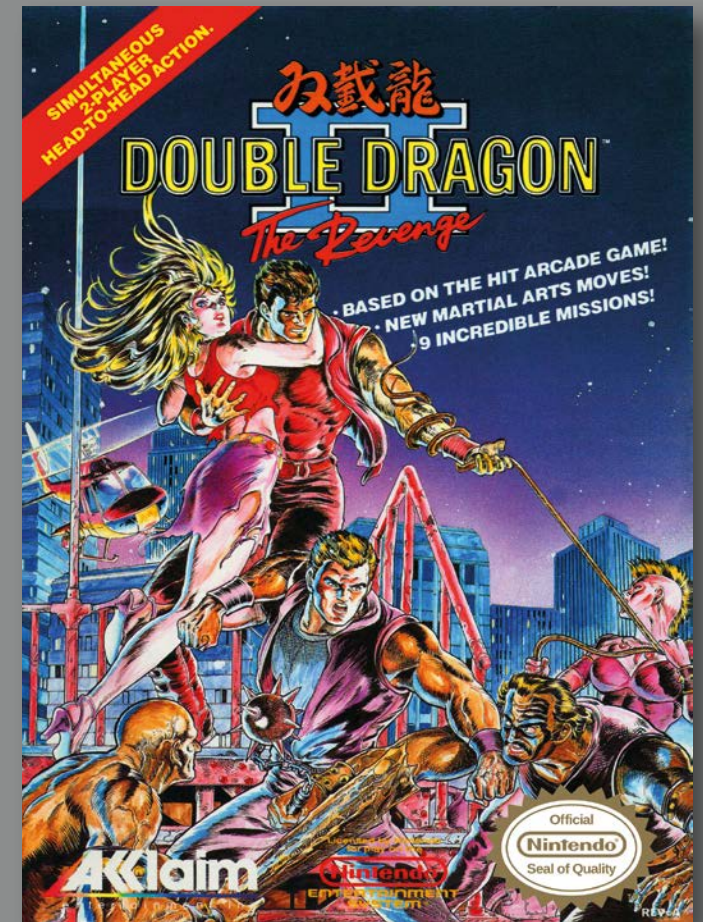


Platform NES / Released 1989 / Genre Puzzle / Developer HAL Laboratory / Publisher HAL America

Double Dragon II: The Revenge

Quick to capitalise on the success of the Double Dragon coin-op, Technōs Japan produced a sequel a year later, which, like its predecessor, was then ported to every system available. The series is notorious for the wide range (and varying quality) of art styles used across the different versions, formats and territories – there's little attempt at consistency and even the logo is something of a moving target. However, for this sequel, the NES and Famicom releases both utilise the coin-op flyer imagery, whose distinctive American comic art is in stark contrast to the rather naïve anime-style character work of the original Famicom release.

Certainly in terms of quality, the packaging for Double Dragon II is among the best in the series, and nicely depicts the street fighting action on offer, with a selection of brutal weaponry plus a nod to the chopper that features in the early levels. As usual, Billy and Jimmy Lee take centre stage in their colour-coded outfits, although the inclusion of a skimpily-clad Marion is at odds with a plotline that has her shot dead by the leader of the Black Warriors. The highly sexualised, tattered damsel-in-distress theme looks wildly outdated in today's post-feminism society, but does at least fit in with the dramatised, pulp fiction nature of the box art.



Platform NES / Released 1990 / Genre Scrolling beat 'em up / Developer Technōs Japan / Publisher Akkaim

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
Zippo Games

Publisher
Tradewest

Solar Jetman: Hunt for the Golden Warpship

"The tricky bit was the maths for the gravity on the ship and how it should be pulling, because it's a pretty puny processor in the NES. I can remember Steve Hughes having a lot of trouble just getting that working at a decent frame rate. The project got into a bit of a mess and was getting really bogged down. We had about five projects on the go in the studio and what would become Solar Jetman was definitely the 'disaster project'. We all had a big meeting and I can vaguely remember us deciding to do something to fix it. Me and John [Pickford] hadn't been that involved and we came on it and said 'Right, throw the design away, redesign it. What can we keep? What can we reuse that we've already built, but what else do we need to build?' I think only at that point we came up with the idea of the ship blowing up and the player turning into a little spaceman. We threw half of it away, streamlined the design and suddenly it became quite a nice little game. It sort of got rescued halfway through."

Ste Pickford



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

Developer
Interplay

Publisher
Activision



The Adventures of Rad Gravity

"The character design I did for Rad Gravity was inspired by Jay Ward Cartoons, who specialised in mock heroic characters such as Dudley Do-Right, Tom Slick and George of the Jungle, Lantern-jawed and instantly recognisable as the hero of the saga, but at the same time not to be taken too seriously (even if they did so themselves). I could also do Do-Right's voice, and would have silly conversations with fellow artist (and accomplished actor) George Almond, who had a spot-on Inspector Fenwick.

I can't say that I remember naming the character, or that he even had a name. Someone at Activision seized on the whole upside down, reverse gravity section, and came up with the moniker of Rad Gravity. I don't think anyone at Interplay was particular enamoured with the name at the time, but no one came up with anything better, so it gradually took hold and was accepted. I had shared art and animation duties with Todd Camasta on Battle Chess, and this was another chance to bounce ideas, changes and improvements in the art off each other. This kind of shared creation has its own special joy born out of respect the other person's talents and coming up with something better than the individual would achieve."

Bruce Schliekbernd

Destiny of an Emperor

Often deemed too complex or impenetrable for Western tastes, many early role-playing adventures never made it beyond the shores of Japan. But among the few that did, this entry from Capcom - its first attempt at an RPG - is a strange choice for translation.

Set in China it's loosely based on the true story of a small militia that set out to defeat the Yellow Scarves - a gang of rebels who took control of the region. You control the historical figure Liu Bei and his party of generals; other generals can be recruited (or dismissed) and each brings with him an army and a set of stats, plus tactical skills and, later on, magical powers.

Exploration takes place on a traditional top-down world map, with towns and strongholds to discover, plus random battles with bandits and rebels. Defeat your enemies and you earn food, gold, and experience points to bolster your armies.

Despite the usual RPG grind, some fiddly asset management and perfunctory graphics, *Destiny of an Emperor* is an interesting option for adventurers looking for something out of the ordinary. It's a bit slow to get going, but once you start amassing armies and defeating the Yellow Scarves, the growing sense of power becomes strangely addictive.

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
RPG

Developer
and publisher
Capcom





Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom

Little Nemo the Dream Master

"Capcom was something of a powerhouse during the NES days, especially in the sphere of 2D platformers. Mega Man, Bionic Commando, Duck Tales and Ghosts 'n Goblins cemented the firm's sterling reputation in this genre and ensured that its lesser-known releases also received a fair amount of attention by pure association. One of those was Little Nemo: The Dream Master, a cute romp through dreamland based on a Japanese animated movie, which in turn was based on the original Little Nemo comic strip, penned by American cartoonist Winsor McCay between 1905 and 1926.

Despite the adorable visuals and sickly-sweet premise, Little Nemo shares another similarity with its Capcom brethren - it's tougher than a pair of old boots left in concrete overnight. Each level tasks the player with collecting a set number of keys to unlock a door at the end, and while the slumbering hero can enlist the help of various animals along the way, doing so doesn't really make things easier - in fact, certain sections are near-impossible to overcome without relying on these helpers. Little Nemo's stern difficulty level may be at complete odds with its core premise, but it's exactly the kind of game that hardcore players will appreciate - and that's why it maintains such a lofty standing in the NES library, even today."

Damien McFerran



Pin-Bot

"I was never really a fan of pinball games when I was a kid because the digital age of videogames had just arrived. Whenever I visited amusement arcades on wet holidays in Wales the bright lights of Defender and Pac-Man always drew me in. I always associated pinball with TV shows and films such as Happy Days or Grease, and thought of them as old-fashioned technology. This, however, all changed after our visit to Williams (WMS Industries) during our trip to Chicago, where I was introduced to their development staff and some of their most popular machines. After much evaluating (let's face it - playing!) and discussing which would be the most suitable games to convert into videogames, we decided to go ahead with Pin-Bot and High Speed.

During development we were very lucky to have both High Speed and Pin-Bot sent over to Rare from the US so that we could study all of the features and elements that made them such amazing Pinball machines. I think it was Tim's brainwave to introduce the split-screen idea, which enabled the player to literally keep their 'eye on the ball' at all times. I think it was an excellent conversion and I have great memories of the sound coming from each machine as we 'evaluated it' night after night."

Kevin Bayliss

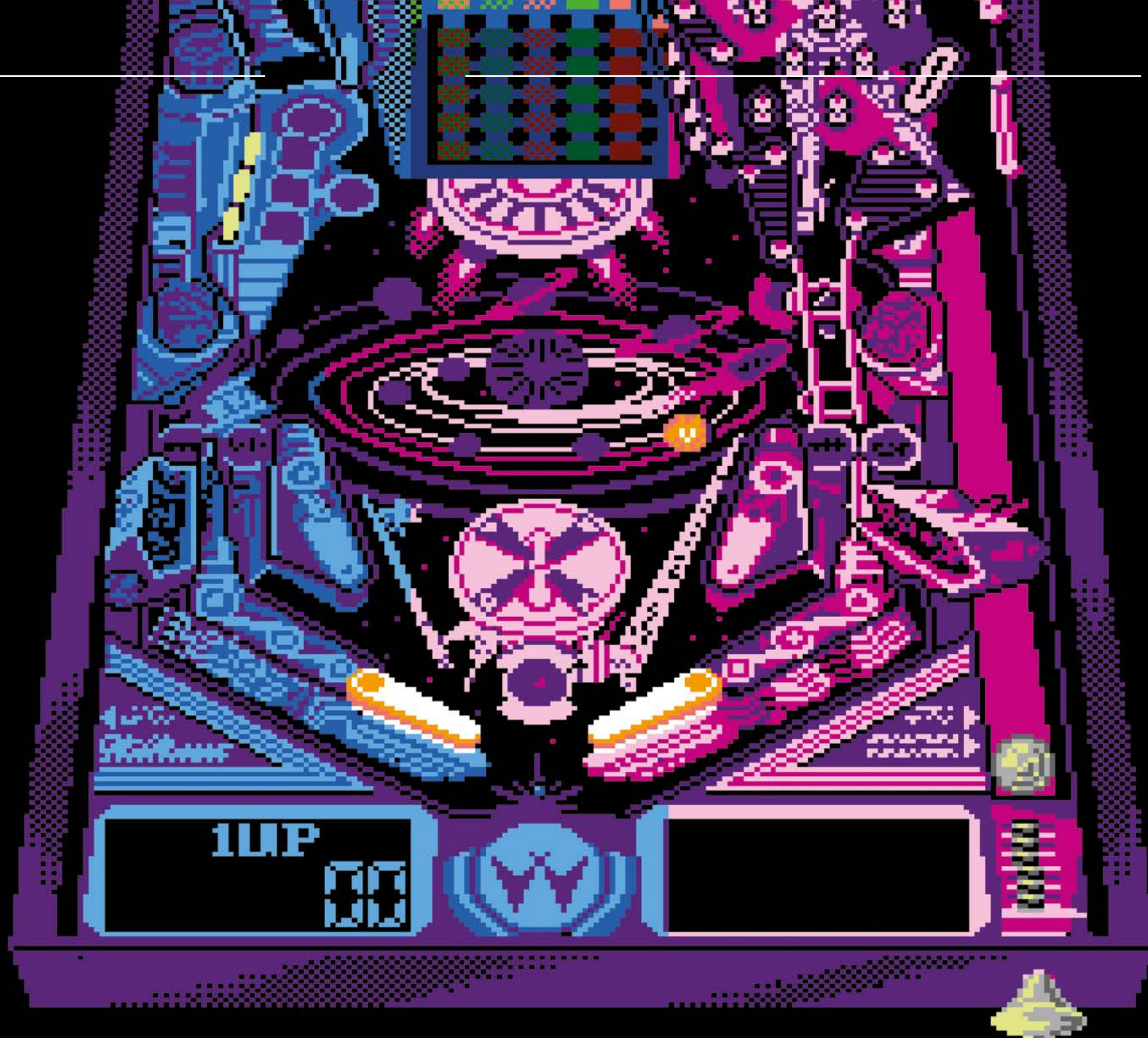
Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Simulation

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Nintendo



Solstice

“When I got to review Solstice on NES it was a real treat for me. I’d been a huge fan of Knight Lore and Alien 8 on the Sinclair Spectrum back in the ’80s. These two games, from developer Ultimate Play the Game, were technically quite remarkable for their time. Speccy games were not always the most graphically sumptuous, but then along came Knight Lore with its solid, detailed, 3D isometric environments and sophisticated platforming and puzzle-solving gameplay and us gamers couldn’t quite believe our eyes, or luck.

What the plot lacked in originality the game made up for in technical finesse. The visuals were a delight: where Knight Lore on the Speccy could deliver only monochrome graphics, Solstice boasted some wonderfully detailed scenes with colourful animated sprites. But more important was the game design. It was a big game, with the bad guy’s fortress spanning more than 250 separate rooms, and players were able to manipulate objects and enemies in order to solve puzzles with remarkable agility.

As simply a tribute to the games that inspired it, Solstice worked perfectly well, but it also featured some wonderful moments of thoughtful level design and flowing play mechanics that lifted it above being merely a variation on a theme.”

Andy Dyer

Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
Software Creations

Publisher
CSG Imagesoft



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Action

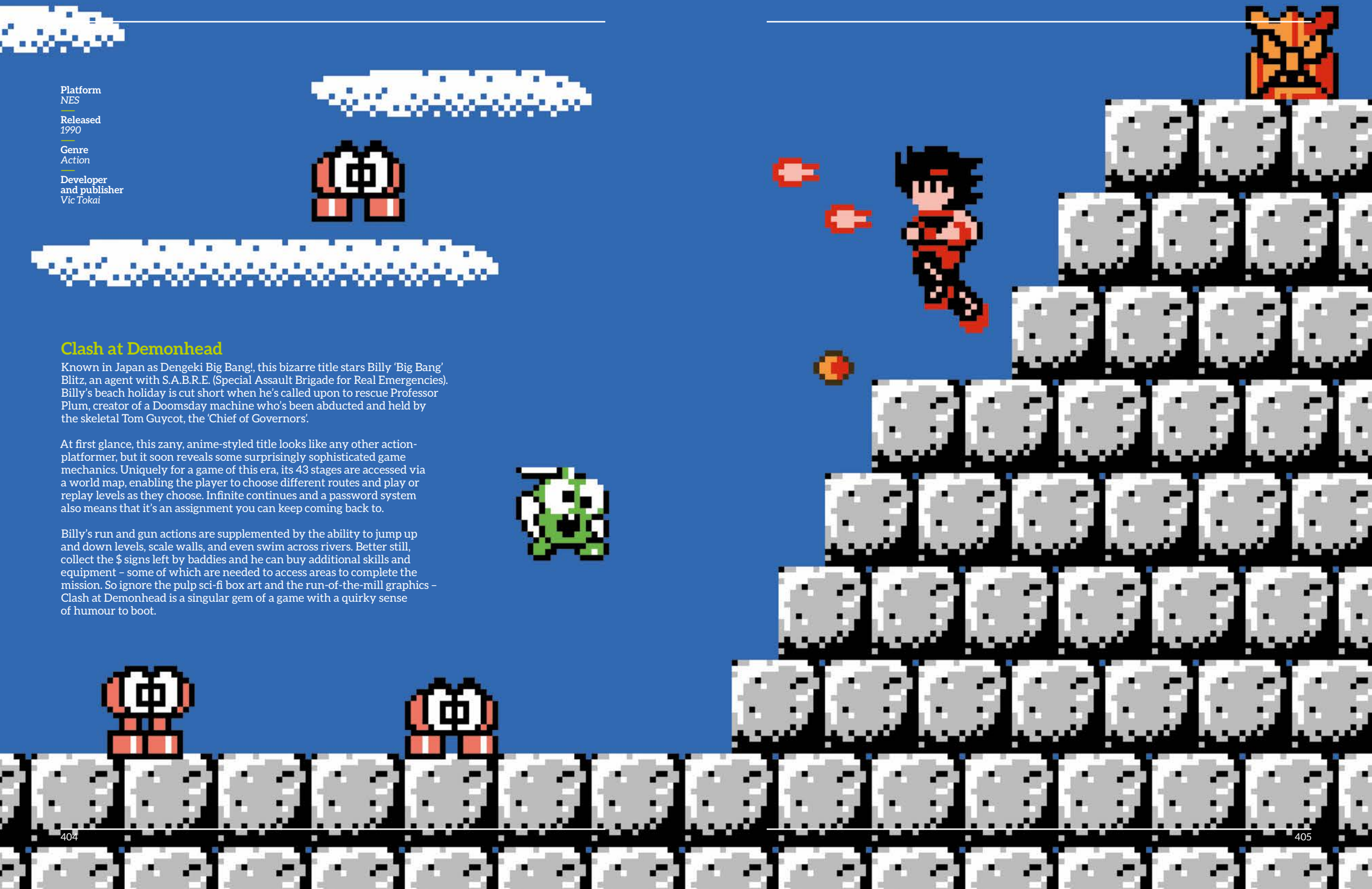
Developer
and publisher
Vic Tokai

Clash at Demonhead

Known in Japan as *Dengeki Big Bang!*, this bizarre title stars Billy 'Big Bang' Blitz, an agent with S.A.B.R.E. (Special Assault Brigade for Real Emergencies). Billy's beach holiday is cut short when he's called upon to rescue Professor Plum, creator of a Doomsday machine who's been abducted and held by the skeletal Tom Guycot, the 'Chief of Governors'.

At first glance, this zany, anime-styled title looks like any other action-platformer, but it soon reveals some surprisingly sophisticated game mechanics. Uniquely for a game of this era, its 43 stages are accessed via a world map, enabling the player to choose different routes and play or replay levels as they choose. Infinite continues and a password system also means that it's an assignment you can keep coming back to.

Billy's run and gun actions are supplemented by the ability to jump up and down levels, scale walls, and even swim across rivers. Better still, collect the \$ signs left by baddies and he can buy additional skills and equipment - some of which are needed to access areas to complete the mission. So ignore the pulp sci-fi box art and the run-of-the-mill graphics - Clash at Demonhead is a singular gem of a game with a quirky sense of humour to boot.



Platform
NES

Released
1990

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
Tokai Engineering

Publisher
Sunsoft

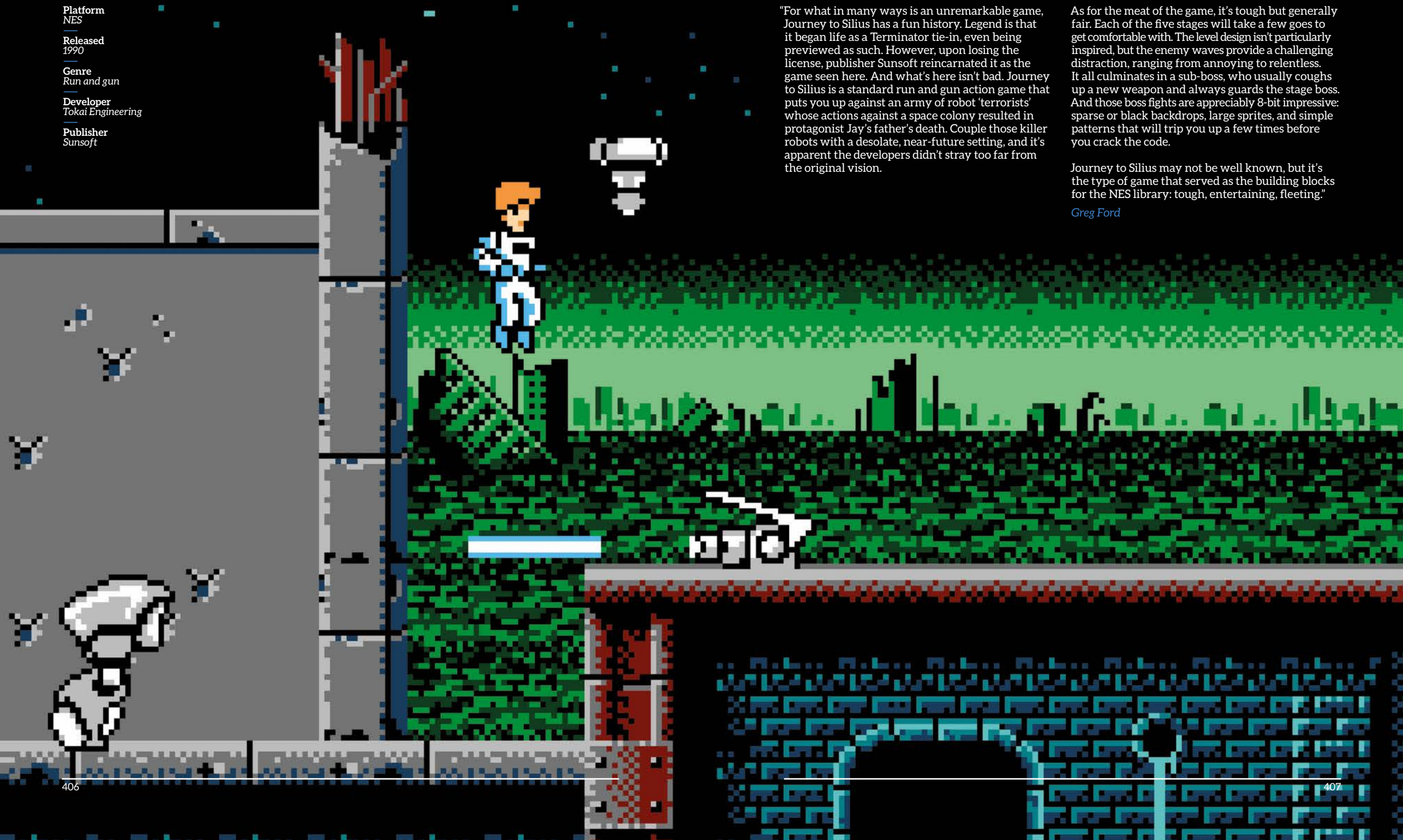
Journey to Silius

“For what in many ways is an unremarkable game, Journey to Silius has a fun history. Legend is that it began life as a Terminator tie-in, even being previewed as such. However, upon losing the license, publisher Sunsoft reincarnated it as the game seen here. And what’s here isn’t bad. Journey to Silius is a standard run and gun action game that puts you up against an army of robot ‘terrorists’ whose actions against a space colony resulted in protagonist Jay’s father’s death. Couple those killer robots with a desolate, near-future setting, and it’s apparent the developers didn’t stray too far from the original vision.

As for the meat of the game, it’s tough but generally fair. Each of the five stages will take a few goes to get comfortable with. The level design isn’t particularly inspired, but the enemy waves provide a challenging distraction, ranging from annoying to relentless. It all culminates in a sub-boss, who usually coughs up a new weapon and always guards the stage boss. And those boss fights are appreciably 8-bit impressive: sparse or black backdrops, large sprites, and simple patterns that will trip you up a few times before you crack the code.

Journey to Silius may not be well known, but it’s the type of game that served as the building blocks for the NES library: tough, entertaining, fleeting.”

Greg Ford





Platform
Famicom
—
Released
1990
—
Genre
Action
—
Developer
and publisher
HAL Laboratory

New Ghostbusters II ゴーストバスターズ2

“Not to be confused with the Activision version of Ghostbusters II (which was only published in North America), this particular outing from HAL Laboratory was released in Europe and Japan at the tail-end of 1990, well over a year after the release of the movie.

Infinitely more appealing than its North American cousin, however, New Ghostbusters II is a quaint top-down, multidirectional-scrolling affair which allows players to assume the role of Peter Venkman, Ray Stantz, Egon Spengler, Winston Zeddemore, or even quirky accountant Louis Tully, in a quest to rid the city of supernatural interlopers.

The game is set across six massive stages, including a courthouse, subway and art gallery, the aim being to trap all of the ghosts encountered along the way. Naturally, at the end of each stage lurks a butt-fugly boss, each requiring a subtly different strategy to vanquish back to the underworld.

While the single-player mode is nothing to write home about, it's the two-player mode that really shines; with an additional Ghostbuster in tow, the main player handles the proton pack while the secondary player takes care of trap deployment, and it's this subtle balance of skill and strategy that renders the whole experience immensely satisfying.”

Andy Roberts

Dezaemon デザエモン

Released by Athena in 1991, Dezaemon continued the long legacy of construction kits enabling payers to build their own videogames. The oversized (and originally expensive) cartridge provides all the tools you need to build a vertical shooter, complete with title screen, scrolling backdrop, alien attack patterns, power-ups and a basic soundtrack.

Sadly, Dezaemon's well-meaning aspirations are limited by the NES hardware and joypad controls, which make any creation activity rather laborious. Without the freedom of a computer mouse or tablet, every pixel, sprite and musical note takes time to add and edit. It's also hampered by a restrictive three-colour palette for each background tile and is limited to just three playable levels.

Even with these limitations, it's something of a miracle that Dezaemon exists at all on the NES. It may not let you create the next *Crisis Force*, but it does at least give players a taste of game and level design. And while Dezaemon is really one for the hardcore NES collector, the follow-up on the SNES saw the series reach its full potential, with massive improvements across the board. For any budding shoot 'em up designers out there, that's the version to go for.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1991

Genre
Utility

Developer
and publisher
Athena



Micro Machines

"I still remember being out shopping with my mom and seeing Micro Machines bundled together with Quattro Adventure as a two for one sale. I begged her to buy them for me the whole time we were shopping but she stood her ground and I went home empty handed that day. About two years passed when I had just made a new friend. I went to his house to play Nintendo and see what games he had, as all 11-year-old boys in the early '90s did when they made new friends, when I spotted it. He owned Micro Machines. We played for hours, days, weeks. I would sleepover and we would stay up all night trying to make it one level further. Stupid Helicopters.

It didn't take very long though before we realised that it was the two player competitive mode that was truly addictive. Weeks would turn into years, then decades as we continued to play throughout our teenage years and our twenties any time we'd get together. Now I'm in my thirties and I still love to play this game. It's one of my favourite on the system and I plan on playing with my son once he's old enough to understand that Emilio is a dirty driver and a cheat."

Dane Gill



Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Racing

Developer
Codemasters

Publisher
Camerica

RARE

Although it was established in 1985, Rare as a spiritual entity began life a few years before this momentous date. Siblings Tim and Chris Stamper founded Ashby Computers and Graphics Limited in 1982 above their father's shop in the sleepy Leicestershire town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, with the aim of creating original titles for platforms such as the Sinclair ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64.

Eventually rebranded as Ultimate Play the Game, the company became arguably the hottest UK studio of the era, pumping out classics such as Knight Lore, Sabre Wulf and Jetpac. Intensely secretive and adept at spotting new trends in gameplay years before their rivals, the Stammers became near-legendary figures in their homeland, with each Ultimate release being so eagerly anticipated that Tim began getting cash in the post accompanied by letters from fans asking for the company's next release - whatever it may be - to be posted out the very moment it was ready.

However, the Stammers were also keen followers of technological trends and watched the 1983 launch of the Nintendo Famicom in Japan with intense interest. Launching a separate company under the name of Rare, the siblings set about reverse-engineering Nintendo's console with the aim of developing software for it. At the time the Japanese company wasn't actively courting Western developers and official documentation and development units were simply not an option; Rare's tenacity proved that the firm not only had talent, but that it was also keen to be part of the new console revolution that was brewing in the Far East.

When the Stammers approached Nintendo with their work, the Japanese veteran - which had previously been certain that its 8-bit hardware could not be cracked without official documentation - sat up and took notice. So impressed was Nintendo of America boss Minoru Arakawa that he offered Rare the opportunity to become a third-party developer for the

console - which by now had been renamed the Nintendo Entertainment System in the US and Europe - making it one of the first Western studios to be given the honour. A new era was dawning for the firm; the old Ultimate brand was sold off to U.S. Gold and the Stammers focused their attentions on the console arena, and Rare.

This upturn in Rare's fortunes led to the company relocating to a converted farmhouse a few miles from Ashby in the tiny village of Twycross, surrounded by lush green countryside and the bare minimum of distractions. Here, the Stammers swiftly built up a solid team of talented designers, programmers and artists, many of whom were fans of the Ultimate era and eager to work with the geniuses behind characters such as Sabreman and Jetman.

Rare's first title for Nintendo was skiing title Slalom, produced for its NES-based VS. System coin-op hardware and later ported to the domestic system. It was an assured start for a firm with no prior console experience,

and was swiftly followed in 1987 by the Acclaim-published fantasy epic Wizards & Warriors, which would spawn Rare's first bona fide franchise. R.C. Pro-Am followed next, with its tight isometric racing action proving that Rare was capable of working in a wide range of genres.

Keen to explore technological challenges as well as software-based ones, it was around this time that Rare began work on its 'Razz' arcade board, an in-house standard which never made it to market. At one point the company even went as far as cramming the powerful hardware into a portable shell, dubbing the unit 'The Playboy'.

This prototype - which still resides in Rare's HQ - was then taken to trade shows, but the project was silently shelved when Nintendo let the UK company in on its forthcoming Game Boy. While Nintendo's offering was far less powerful, the Stammers saw the value in collaborating with the Japanese company rather than entering

into an expensive and potentially risky hardware battle. As a result, the firm was given early access to the Game Boy and would produce a string of hit titles for the monochrome portable.

Rare's growing knowledge of the NES hardware reaped massive benefits as many publishers approached the studio to work on various properties. A North American office was established in Miami, Florida and headed by Joel Hochberg, an industry veteran who used his enviable collection of contacts to develop valuable relationships with companies such as Acclaim, LJN and Tradewest, ensuring a steady stream of commissions.

Rare would produce over 60 titles for the NES and the Game Boy; licenced properties such as quiz show adaptations Jeopardy!, Wheel of Fortune, Anticipation and Hollywood Squares rubbed shoulders with Sesame Street 123, WWF WrestleMania, Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Beetlejuice. In many of these games, Rare's name was hidden away and unless you were prepared to dig deep into the credits, you may not even have realised that the UK studio was the one doing the legwork.

Even so, the company still found time to create unique, original titles, which allowed its staff to spread their wings a little. Time Lord was an inventive 1990 action-platformer set in different

stages of history, while Captain Skyhawk adopted an isometric view to create an intense shooter, predating the likes of EA's Desert Strike. Whether it was within the confines of a licenced property or creating an entirely new game, the Stammers encouraged their employees to be inventive with their efforts, pushing technical and gameplay boundaries whenever possible.

“ Rare's growing knowledge of the NES hardware reaped massive benefits as many publishers approached the studio to work on various properties. ”

The process of porting pre-existing titles to the NES may have curtailed such creativity, but it was nonetheless another lucrative source of income for Rare at the time. As the company's standing in the industry grew it was tasked more regularly with converting established hits to Nintendo's console, allowing publishers to leverage the platform's huge installed base without having to do the hard work themselves.

“ The dawn of the '90s saw Rare's status in the industry reach hitherto unprecedented heights. ”

Titles such as Marble Madness, Silent Service, California Games, Cabal, Narc and Arch Rivals were all transferred to the 8-bit console with impeccable skill by Rare, ensuring that even more cash entered the company coffers. The studio's incredible work rate was made all the more remarkable by the fact that the titles it produced were of such a high standard; in 1989 it developed 16 different games for the NES, and the following year it was involved in another 16.

This rapid release schedule enabled the Stammers to amass a sizeable war chest that would stand the company in good stead when the 16-bit generation began in earnest.

During its NES days Rare not only used its own internal talent but also worked with other UK-based developers, including Zippo Games, founded by the Pickford Brothers. Established with the aim of developing content for the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST home computers, Zippo was signed up to exclusively produce titles

for the NES under the Rare banner. The Pickfords would oversee the production of IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II, Wizards & Warriors III: Kuros: Visions of Power and Solar Jetman: Hunt for the Golden Warship – three critically-acclaimed Rare releases – but the pressures of running the studio became too much and the siblings sold Zippo to Rare, where it was absorbed under the Rare Manchester banner.

The dawn of the '90s saw Rare's status in the industry reach hitherto unprecedented heights. The company's string of licensed and original titles ensured a steady flow of cash, but it was 1991's Battletoads that should perhaps be considered Rare's defining NES outing. Created in response to the amazing popularity of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and a fairly blatant attempt by the Stammers to create a multimedia brand which could straddle the world of games, toys, comics and TV, Battletoads skillfully combined fighting, platforming and vehicle sections to become one of the console's most beloved titles. It was followed by sequels such as Battletoads in Battlemaniacs, Battletoads vs. Double Dragon and even a coin-op iteration in 1994. The series even branched out onto rival hardware, with a Sega Mega Drive version appearing in 1993 – a vital reminder that despite Rare's close relationship with Nintendo, it was still an independent entity at the time.

Given the sheer volume of product Rare produced for the NES and Game Boy, it's perhaps surprising that the firm can only count seven SNES games in its library. Having been so heavily invested in producing games for the massively popular NES, the arrival of 16-bit systems caught the company napping to a certain degree, but the Stammers were also keen to find the 'next big thing' and steal a march on their rivals. Around this time Rare retreated a little and began investing heavily in Silicon Graphics hardware to create rendered 3D visuals – a process that soaked up a lot of cash and resulted in a notable downturn in the production of software.

Any other studio would have struggled to match this period of reinvention with the inevitable reduction in output, but Rare's astonishing work rate during the NES and Game Boy years gave the company a significant financial buffer. The gamble paid off handsomely, as Nintendo – which was looking for a way of giving its SNES console a boost against the rival Mega Drive – decided the time was right to create a more solid relationship with the UK firm. Having already seen the benefit of collaborating with Western developers after teaming up with fellow UK firm Argonaut on 1993's Star Fox, Nintendo stepped in and purchased 49 per cent of Rare, making the company a second-party studio.

Such was Nintendo's level of trust in the talent at Twycross that it allowed the Stammers to use its beloved Donkey Kong franchise as the basis of its next game, which – despite being on the 16-bit SNES – would use cutting-edge rendered sprites to deliver hitherto unseen levels of visual quality. Rare's use of CG characters would trigger a wave of copycats and the firm would continue using the technology in the arcade game Killer Instinct, which was duly ported to the SNES, Game Boy and eventually Nintendo 64.

While Rare unquestionably made its reputation on the NES, it would be the N64 that would supply the company with what many deem to be its 'golden era'. Closer to Nintendo than ever before, the studio was granted complete access to the console and even had input in its early development and production, with Rare staffer Martin Hollis flying out to Silicon Graphics headquarters to test the N64 chips as they rolled off the production line. The result was a string of critically-lauded smash-hits including GoldenEye 007, Banjo-Kazooie, Jet Force Gemini, Donkey Kong 64, Perfect Dark and Diddy Kong Racing, titles which not only gave the N64 some of its most notable highlights, but also inspired and influenced many other releases.

Despite the level of success Rare enjoyed during its time with Nintendo, the Japanese company made it clear to the Stammers that it wasn't interested in buying it outright, and as the millennium dawned other potential suitors made themselves known. Activision was said to be close to making an offer but it would be Microsoft that signed on the dotted line, purchasing

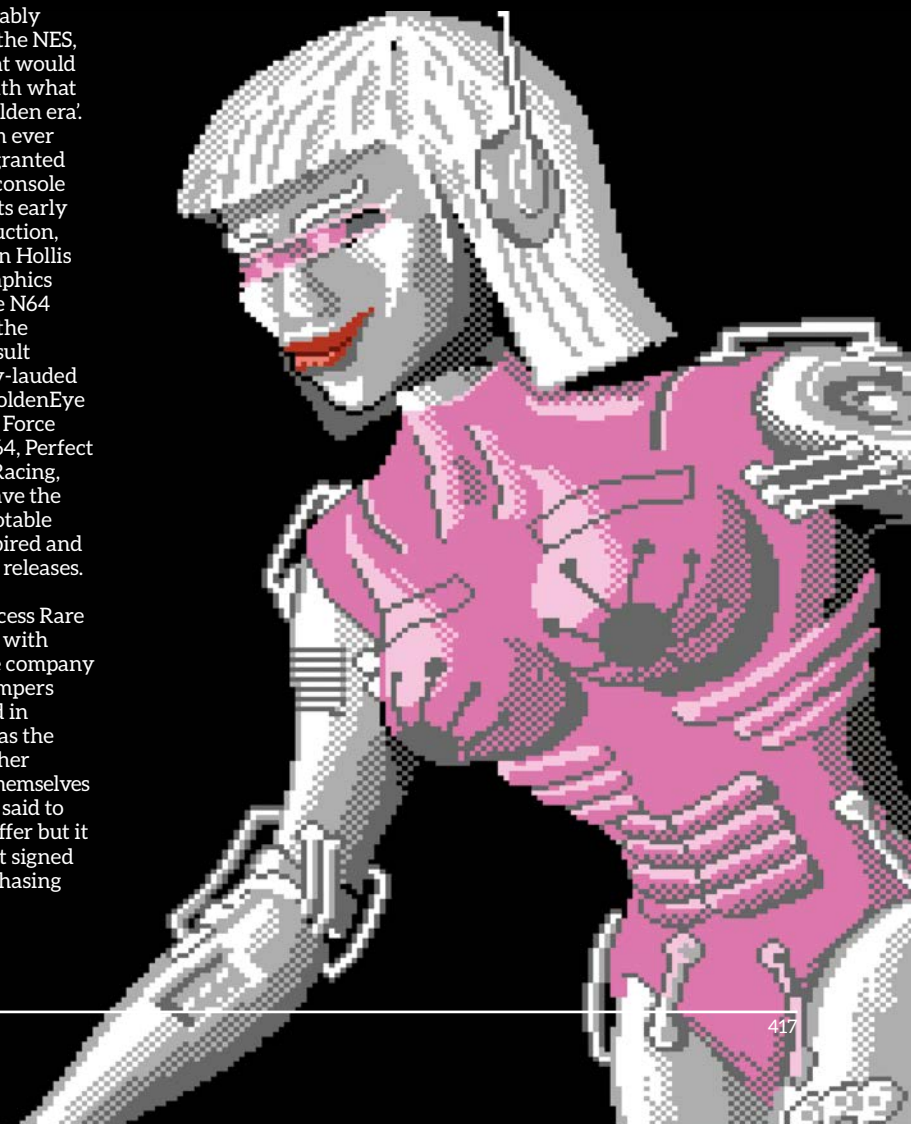
Rare for a cool \$375 million and making the company a first-party studio for its Xbox console.

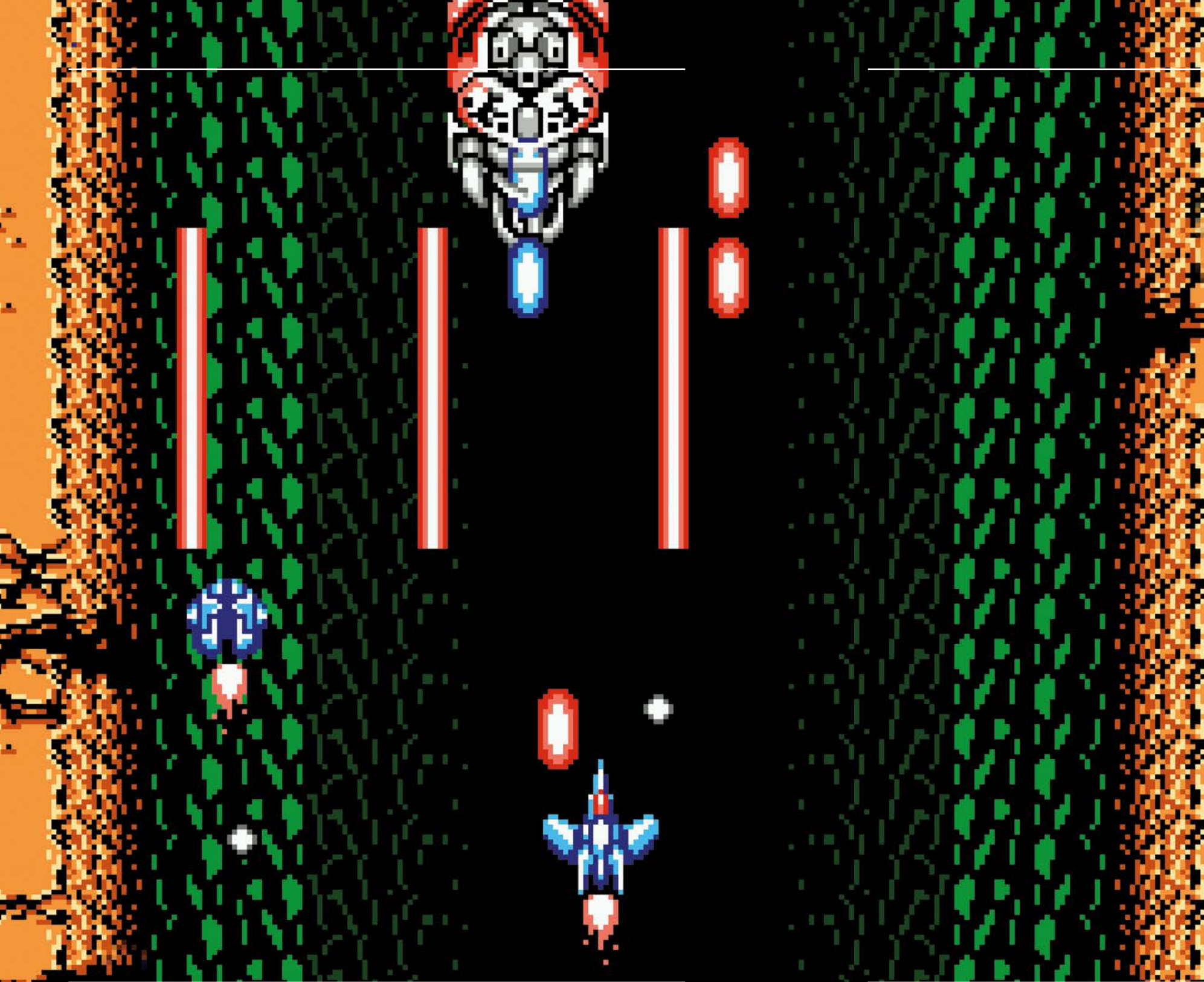
Since then the firm has revisited existing franchises with the likes of Perfect Dark Zero and Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts while creating new IP in the form of Viva Piñata and the Kinect Sports series. It has also worked on Microsoft's avatar system and proved instrumental in developing tools for the motion-sensing Kinect camera.

More recently, the firm celebrated 30 years in the business by launching Rare Replay on Xbox One, a compendium of classic titles, which includes several NES classics. Rare has now been under Microsoft's wing for over 15 years and is currently hard at work on Xbox One online adventure title Sea of Thieves, a promising release which aims to leverage Rare's love of tech with its quintessentially British sense of humour.

“ Rare would produce over 60 titles for the NES and the Game Boy. ”

Pin-Bot / 1990





Crisis Force

クライシスフォース

Chief contender for the title of best NES shoot 'em up is this sadly overlooked beauty from Konami. Released late in the NES's life, Crisis Force was a Japan-only title and never quite found the audience it deserved.

On paper it's a standard vertical scrolling blaster: your ship collects tokens to upgrade its weaponry, there are end-of-level bosses plus the occasional mid-level boss, and each stage is graphically themed with waves of attacking craft. But Crisis Force also features a system whereby your ship can morph into three different forms, providing fire in different directions - a strategic requirement for certain sections. And if you collect five gold tokens you take on the form of a giant, glowing craft, blasting huge energy beams in all directions.

Powered by Konami's VRC4 chip, it's a graphical tour de force, with destructible backgrounds, multi-layer parallax scrolling, giant bosses and some gorgeous sprite work and character design - at times it's could almost pass as a 16-bit title. There's also a simultaneous two-player mode, though it's really best played solo.

These old-school shoot 'em ups are an acquired taste, but Crisis Force is one of the finer examples and worth playing if only to see just what the humble NES can actually do.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1991

Genre
Scrolling shooter

**Developer
and publisher**
Konami

Metal Storm

"Irem's Mobile Suit combat action game is one of the most unique in the entire 8-bit library. A giant robot controlling a powerful laser on the planet Pluto has run amok and is destroying the entire solar system!

This game stars a space-fairing combat robot, M-308 Gunner, featuring the ability to shoot its weapon in four directions and also reverse gravity, enabling it to walk on ceilings. This gravity control technique needs to be learned well, as it becomes pivotal to successfully engage the enemies and complete the mission. M-308 can acquire various enhancements such as a shield, and more powerful weapons such as a fireball and upgrades to the standard gun.

A password system is included so that forward progress and conditions are saved and the player can continue the quest unabated later if necessary. This game requires split-second decision making in order to be successful as the visuals will dazzle you and maybe confuse your position. Nevertheless, M-308 Gunner is a formidable warrior and faces many extreme bosses as well as many small ships in the playfield.

No action player worth their mettle should be without this fantastic platform shooting game!"

David Siller

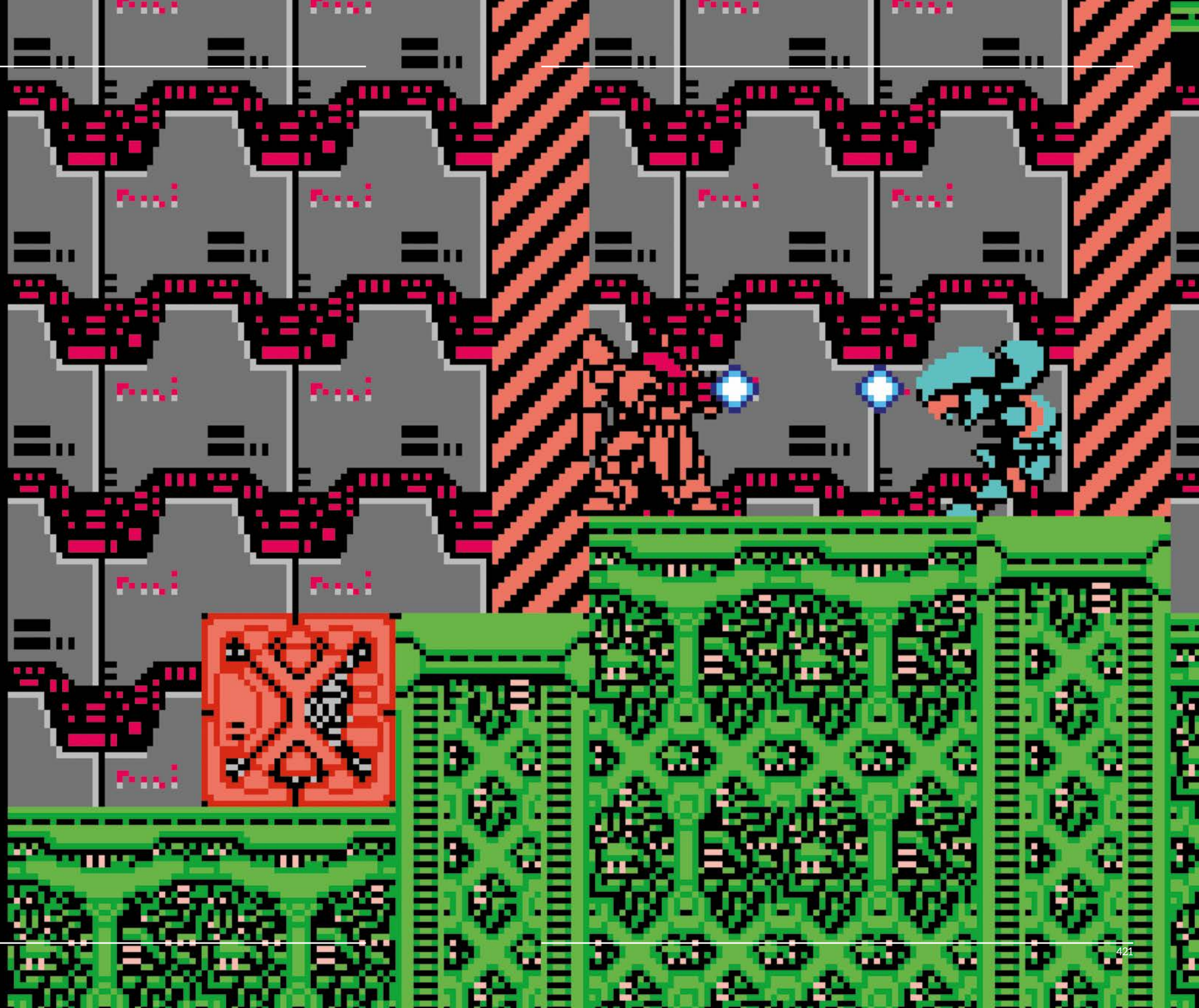
Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
Tamtex

Publisher
Irem



Ghoul School

"The Zelda NES games were really big at the time, so I took the gameplay model from Zelda II and adapted it to a Ghostbusters storyline. I really wanted it to become a 'property' that could be picked up by Hollywood and made into a Saturday morning cartoon show or line of merchandise. I ended up writing and pitching the initial idea, developing it into a complete game, programming most of it and creating all the sound and music.

When creating the main character, I started with the heroes of Zelda, Metroid and Rygar as my prototype. At the time spiked hair was all the rage, so that suggested his look and name, 'Spike'. He needed to be a nice kid, but cool and rebellious as well.

I tried to make the weapons funny, cool and appropriate to the storyline. Among the early ideas that didn't make the final game were: a Teleporter to warp you through the school intercom, a Boom Box to play music and distract enemies, a Ghoul Disguise to make enemies ignore you for a while, Erasers to clap together and escape a tight situation in a cloud of chalk dust, and the Fire Hose."

Scott Marshall

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
Imagineering

Publisher
Electro Brain



Tecmo Super Bowl

“With the original Tecmo Bowl, we wanted 60 frames per second and to make the speed a priority. To achieve this, each team only has nine players. But to show the excitement of NFL, we decided 11 players should be on each team for Tecmo Super Bowl. The CPU of the NES prevented 22 players from moving at the same time, so we struggled with that for quite a bit until we conquered the problem by utilising a subtle blinking effect that tricked the NES into thinking there were fewer than 22 players moving at once.

Because I wanted to use the unique formations and strategies, I often watched NFL videos in slow motion while rewinding them and jotting down the players’ movements on paper. Before the game’s production, I didn’t even know the rules of American Football, but afterwards I was always looking forward to the games on television!

As a programmer, there was still so much that I wanted to do. I wanted to check for more bugs, but our schedule and ROM were pushed to the limit. Compared to other Tecmo games, it’s about four to eight times larger.”

Shinichiro Tomie

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Tecmo



Platform
Famicom

Released
1991

Genre
Action

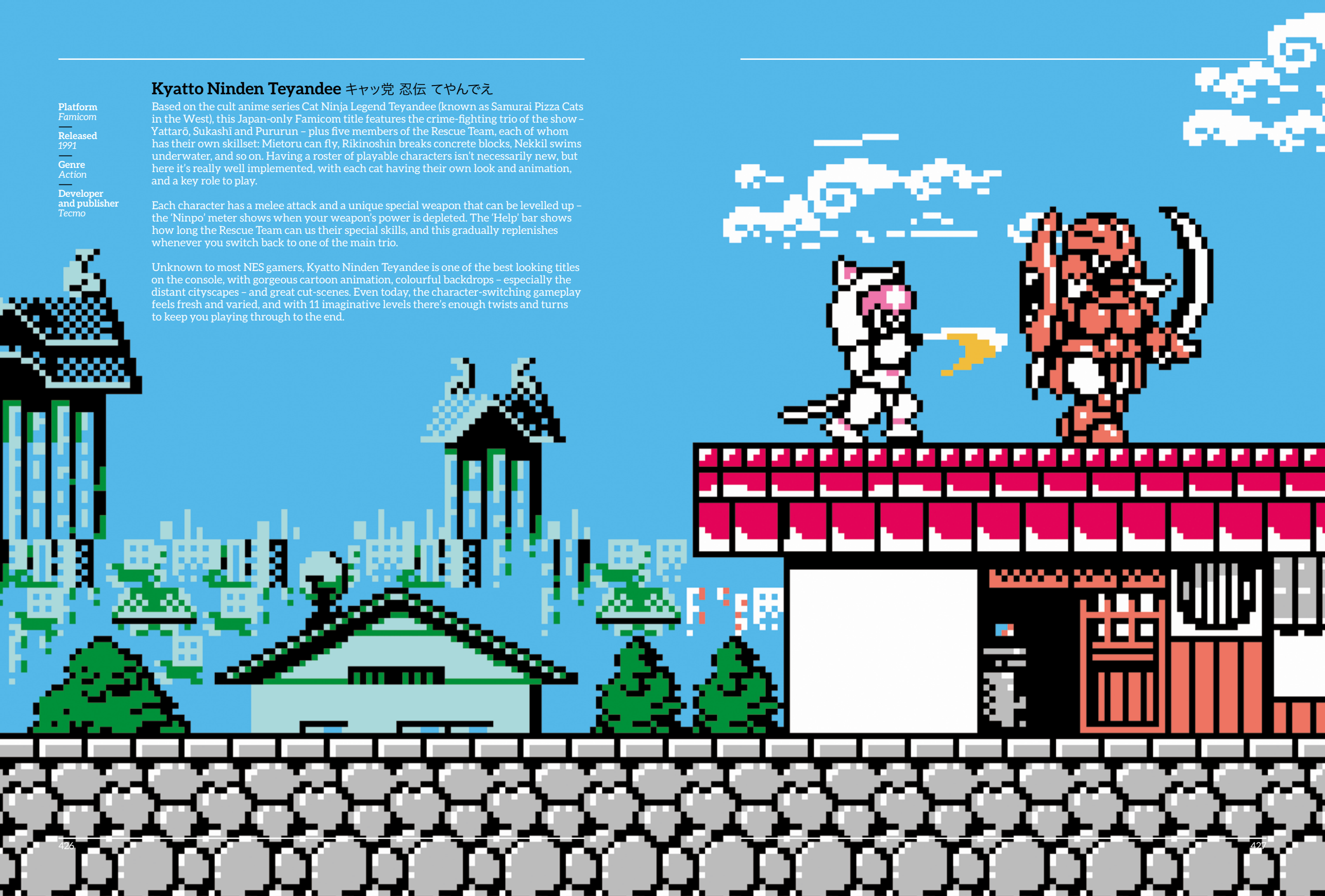
Developer
and publisher
Tecmo

Kyatto Ninden Teyandee キャット党 忍伝 てやんでえ

Based on the cult anime series Cat Ninja Legend Teyandee (known as Samurai Pizza Cats in the West), this Japan-only Famicom title features the crime-fighting trio of the show – Yattarō, Sukashī and Pururun – plus five members of the Rescue Team, each of whom has their own skillset: Mietoru can fly, Rikinoshin breaks concrete blocks, Nekkil swims underwater, and so on. Having a roster of playable characters isn't necessarily new, but here it's really well implemented, with each cat having their own look and animation, and a key role to play.

Each character has a melee attack and a unique special weapon that can be levelled up – the 'Ninpo' meter shows when your weapon's power is depleted. The 'Help' bar shows how long the Rescue Team can use their special skills, and this gradually replenishes whenever you switch back to one of the main trio.

Unknown to most NES gamers, Kyatto Ninden Teyandee is one of the best looking titles on the console, with gorgeous cartoon animation, colourful backdrops – especially the distant cityscapes – and great cut-scenes. Even today, the character-switching gameplay feels fresh and varied, and with 11 imaginative levels there's enough twists and turns to keep you playing through to the end.





“Kids loved Mario and parents loved the NES because their kids loved it.”

Masayuki Uemura,
software engineer and designer



Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Nintendo

Battletoads

"We got sent this sort of slideshow of all of the merchandise for the 1989 Batman movie and Tim Stamper [Rare co-founder] says, 'We need something that we can push like this, which is under our control. We want the bedspreads, we want everything, cans of food with our character on it.' He wanted to do something zany with a character that was sort of elastic and stretchy.

I was a real geek when I was a kid and I was really into looking at the frogs in my pond, so what I drew was three toads or frogs on a lily pad, in biro, really badly and I called them the 'Amphibi-uns'. Then someone came in and said, 'It's like the Ninja Turtles', and I didn't know what that was. We put together a style guide then Mark Betteridge and Tim started writing a game which started off with a beat 'em up level, then speeder bikes, then a tunnel, and it just took all these elements to make a variety of sections that just went well together. We were in complete control of it. We didn't have to answer to anyone, so it was nice."

Kevin Bayliss



Battletoads

"This was certainly a title that we wanted to push further and a load of effort went into making all aspects of Battletoads as good as they possibly could be.

When I was initially briefed to create the soundtrack, it was in its early design stages and Tim and Kev were busy sketching characters in pads with markers. What really helped is that they had some initial thoughts on where they wanted me to go with the music. Tim at the time had been listening to some '80s German rock band (that I can't remember the name of) and he gave me a track to listen to which was a major inspiration for the title track. Throughout the development I was in and out of the office and would occasionally play the development version - although it was so hard I couldn't get very far!

There was even a spin-off cartoon of Battletoads that aired in the states. They were clearly trying to capitalise on the huge popularity of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, which were huge at time. By complete coincidence, the guy who was writing the cartoon was also called David Wise! Sadly, it never made it past pilot stage."

David Wise

Shatterhand

"Shatterhand is a game that seems at first like just another forgettable NES action-platformer, but is saved by its crisp visuals, brilliant level design, and inspired core mechanic. The game owes a lot to Mega Man, but instead of gaining special weapons from defeating bosses, Shatterhand's hero matches sets of Greek letters to activate one of eight companion robots, each with a different mode of attack. This system has a ton of depth, really allows the player to customise his strategy for different encounters and different play styles, and, above all, is just really, really cool.

Shatterhand is also an example of a game that was extensively localised; the Japanese version is a licensed game based on the TV series Super Rescue Solbrain – unknown in the West even now, to say nothing of its status in 1991. The localised version opts to remake its hero as a New Yorker with robotic arms, and pits him against a would-be world-conqueror by the name of General Gus, whose cyborg army seems unstoppable. It's a brilliant fusion of Mega Man-style robot army with '80s cop movies, and the smug look on our hero's face after General Gus' ambitions are left in flames makes the whole affair a thing of beauty."

Darien Sumner

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

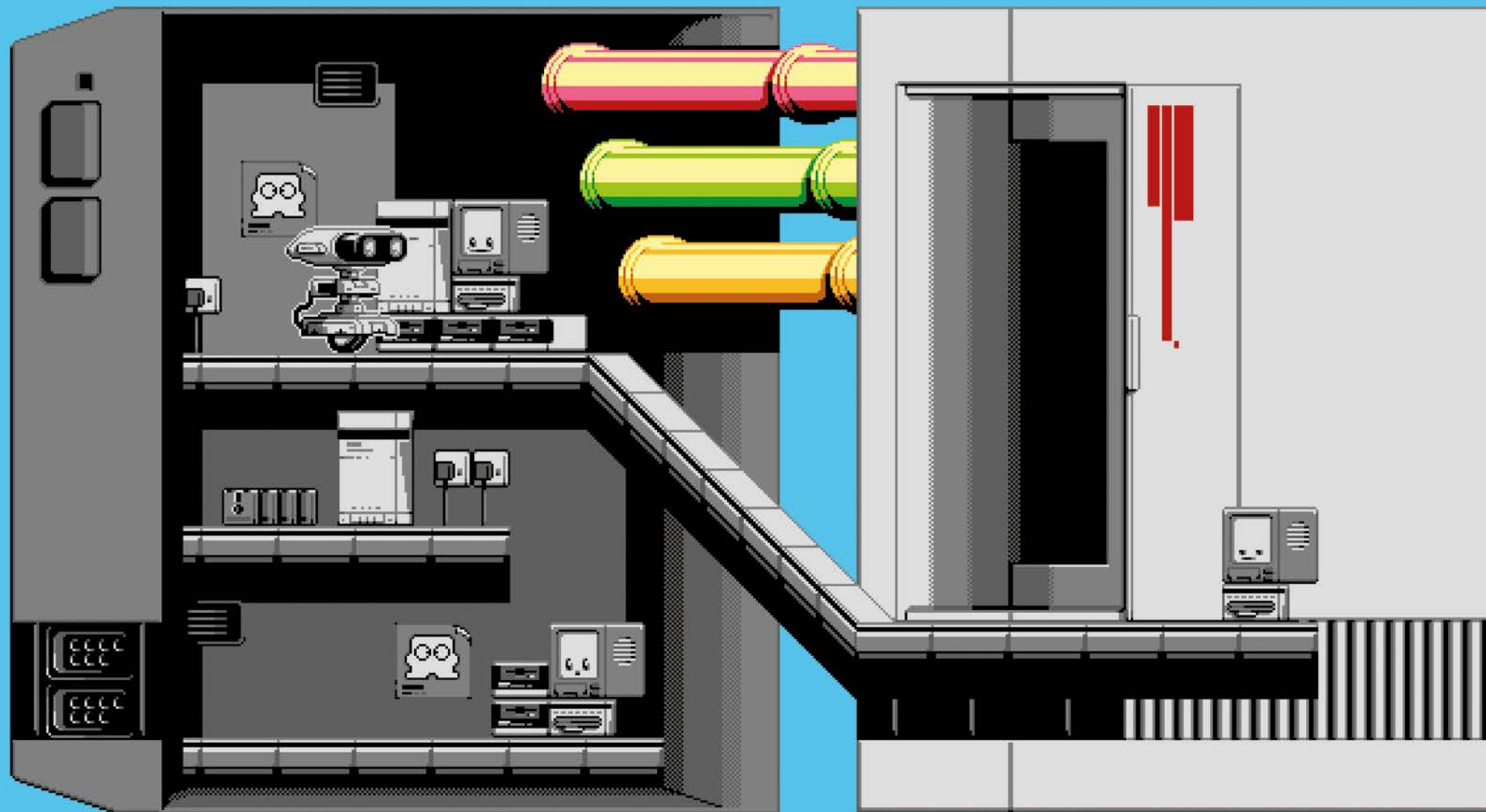
Developer
Natsume

Publisher
Jaleco



Homebrew games

Nintendo formally retired the NES in 1995 and the Famicom in 2003 – yet more than decade later, new games are still being produced, thanks to a thriving community of homebrew coders around the world. From a version of Angry Birds to Final Fantasy VII to a game featuring both Sonic and Mario, the homebrew scene keeps on delivering new software for dedicated lovers of Nintendo's classic consoles.



Super Bat Puncher



This entirely new title from Morphcat Games – aka Julius Riecke and Nicolas Bétoux – features a small blue cat armed with a comedy extendible boxing glove. As well as punching bats, it can be upgraded catapult him around the levels. This polished platformer has a great soundtrack and even boasts a two-player mode.

Platform
NES

Released
2011

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Morphcat
Games

ROM City Rampage



Indie developer Brian Provinciano set out to make an '80s-style NES game, packed with knowing references to retro gaming culture, and Retro City Rampage was released for the PC in 2012. However he then went back and recoded the game, making it "100% hardware-accurate" to the NES, and released it as ROM City Rampage a year later.

Platform
NES

Released
2012

Genre
Action

**Developer
and publisher**
Vblank
Entertainment

Battle Kid: Fortress of Peril



Released in 2010, Sivak Games' Battle Kid is a merciless flick-screen platformer, in which pretty much everything can kill you. Progress is a matter of trial and error as you tiptoe from screen to screen, aware of the ever-present spectre of insta-death always a few pixels away. But it's also pretty addictive too.

Platform
NES

Released
2010

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Sivak Games

Publisher
Retrozone

Somari



Released in 1994 Somari is an uncensored mash-up which places the character of Mario in the world of Sonic the Hedgehog, complete with all of Sonic's speedy moves. Although technically impressive, the game is notoriously difficult. However, it's as close as Famicom gamers will ever get to playing 16-bit Sonic on their 8-bit consoles.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1994

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Somari Team

Hello Kitty Land



Created by Rachel Simone Weil – curator of the Femicom online museum – Hello Kitty Land is a 2003 ROM hack of Super Mario Bros. in which the colour palette, graphics and physics have been altered to place the Mushroom Kingdom within the universe created by Sanrio. It's just one of long line of gender-swap hacks, including Mega Girl and Super Peach.

Platform
Famicom

Released
2002

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Party Time!
Hexcellent!

Star Versus



This competitive one-on-one shoot 'em up – resembling a tactical two-player version of Asteroids – was released in March 2015 by Studio Dustmop, an independent developer based in New York. For \$48 you can buy a boxed cartridge version of the shooter, complete with manual that works on an NTSC NES.

Platform
NES

Released
2015

Genre
Shoot 'em up

Developer and publisher
Studio Dustmop

Final Fantasy VII



Square's ambitious RPG debuted on the 32-bit PlayStation, but that didn't stop the industrious Chinese coders at ShenZhen Nanjing Technology from creating a 2D, 8-bit version for the Subor system, a clone of the Famicom. Released in 2005, this unauthorised version of FFVII has itself been hacked by enthusiasts to improve the graphics and solve some gameplay issues.

Platform
Famicom

Released
2005

Genre
RPG

Developer
ShenZhen Nanjing
Technology

Angry Birds



The mobile gaming phenomenon made it to Nintendo's 8-bit console in 2009, 26 years after the Famicom first appeared. Created by someone in Asia (the prime suspects are Chinese outfit Nice Code), it features the same soundtrack and gameplay mechanics, although the physics aren't as accurate and so its porcine targets are much harder to kill.

Platform
NES

Released
2009

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
Nice Code

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Shoot 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



Disney's TaleSpin

The fourth game produced by Capcom in its licensing deal with Disney is based on the 1990 half-hour TV show, in which - somewhat incongruously - Baloo the bear works for an air delivery service. The game follows his exploits at the controls of his plane, the Sea Duck, as he attempts to collect and deliver cargo while under constant attack from Don Karnage and his pirates.

With a kids' TV show as its inspiration, colourful Disney box art and an introduction by Baloo's cute brown bear boss Rebecca, you'd think we'd be all set for a jolly cartoon adventure in the skies... Not so. TaleSpin is like the demon offspring of Jungle Book and Defender, crafted by someone with an intense dislike of children.

The game is technically proficient, mixing vertical and horizontal scrolling sections, plus the ability to flip the Sea Duck on its head and fly in the opposite direction. But the craft is slow to manoeuvre and only fires a single bullet at a time (until you save enough money for an upgrade), so combat is a stilted, frustrating affair. Throw in some brutal bosses and beginning-of-level restarts, and you have a test stern enough for any arcade-hardened gamer, let alone a pre-teen Disney fan.

Chōjin Sentai Jetman 鳥人戦隊ジェットマン

The Super Sentai TV franchise has been running since 1975 with 40 series to its name – though you'll know it better as the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers, which is how it was adapted for US TV in the early '90s.

The show has the members of Sky Force jetting around in their fabulous bird-themed aircraft, jumping on motorbikes and buggies, transforming into their superhero alter-egos and flying into battle using wingsuits. But Natsume decided that would be too tricky, so we got this simple run and gun side-scroller instead.

The action is split across five stages and all you have to do is battle your way to the end of the level, at which point you turn into the mecha form of your hero and engage in a one-on-one bout with the end-of-level boss.

You can select any of the five areas to play in, and there's also a Battle Mode where you can practice the beat 'em up sections. With an Easy mode and a password select, you'll easily see everything the game has to offer in one sitting. The simple gameplay might be great for kiddie fans of the show wanting to play as their heroes, but sadly there's not much on offer for everyone else.

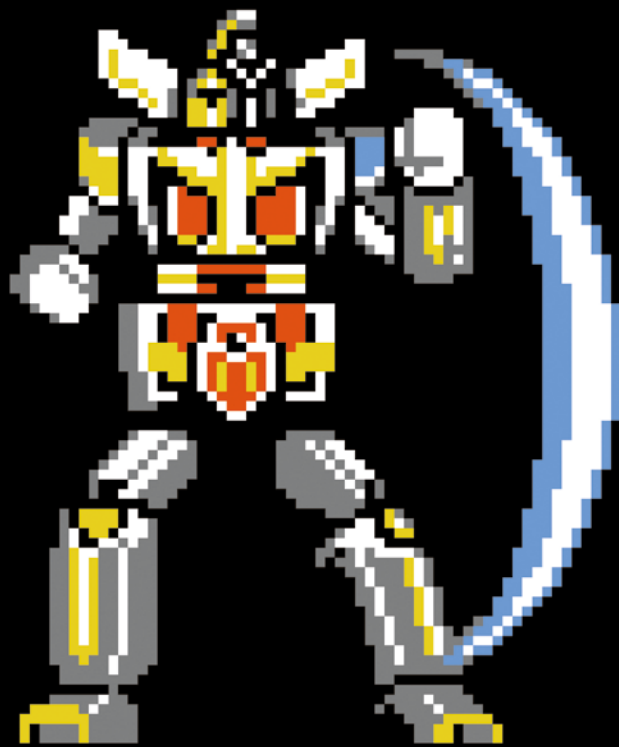
Platform
Famicom

Released
1991

Genre
Run and gun

Developer
Natsume

Publisher
Angel



NES Open Tournament Golf

Golf has been a perennial subject for videogames, with more than a hundred commercial golf games released – ten of them published by Nintendo. This entry from 1991 uses the classic first-person view of the course alternating with an overhead view of the ball's flight.

The control system is simple – select your club, choose the angle of direction, and apply top or spin. Hitting the ball is achieved using a strength meter, operated by timed presses of the A button. Stop the marker on the line and your shot goes straight, but tap too early or too late and you'll slice or hook the ball. Ingeniously, you can slow the speed of the meter, but at the sacrifice of power. It's an unforgiving system requiring the reflexes of a cat on caffeine, but master it and you'll feel like a golfing ninja.

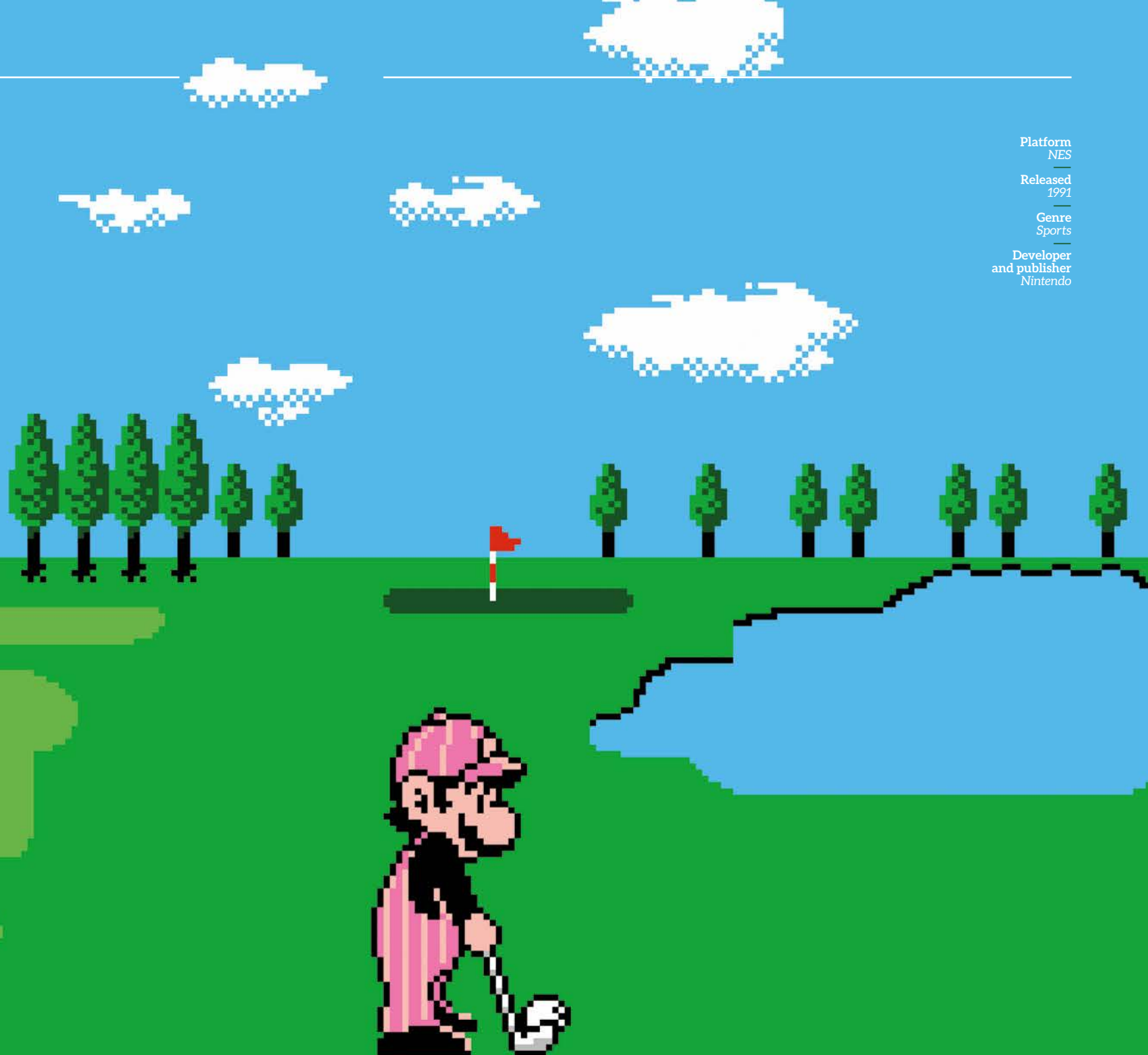
NES Open Tournament Golf plays a really solid game and is especially entertaining in two-player mode. It's also beautifully presented with three full courses (five in the Japanese version), plus Stroke, Match and Tournament play modes. In truth, you could release this game today and apart from some visual niceties it would still play just as well. Another Nintendo classic.

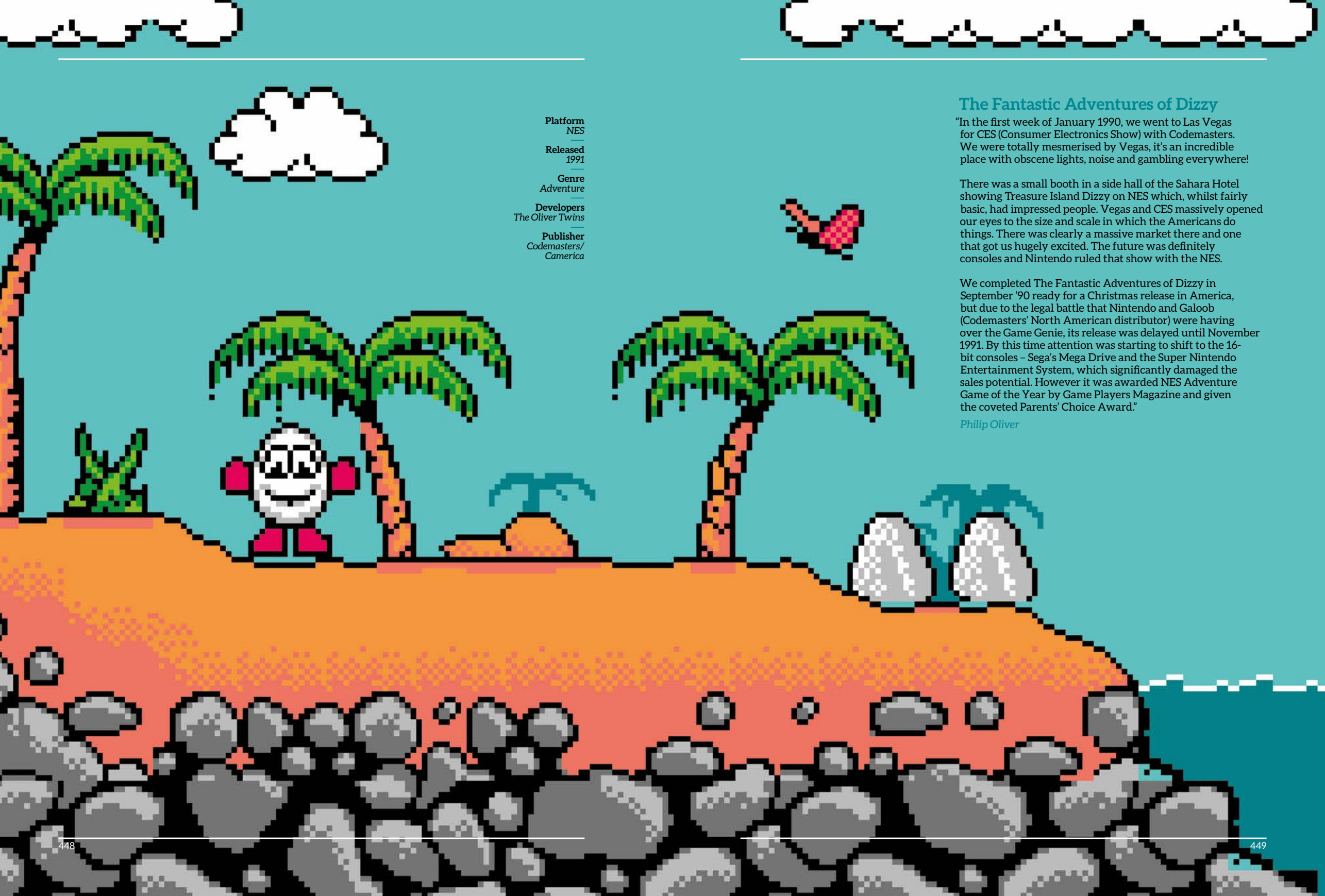
Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo





Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Adventure

Developers
The Oliver Twins

Publisher
Codemasters/
Camerica

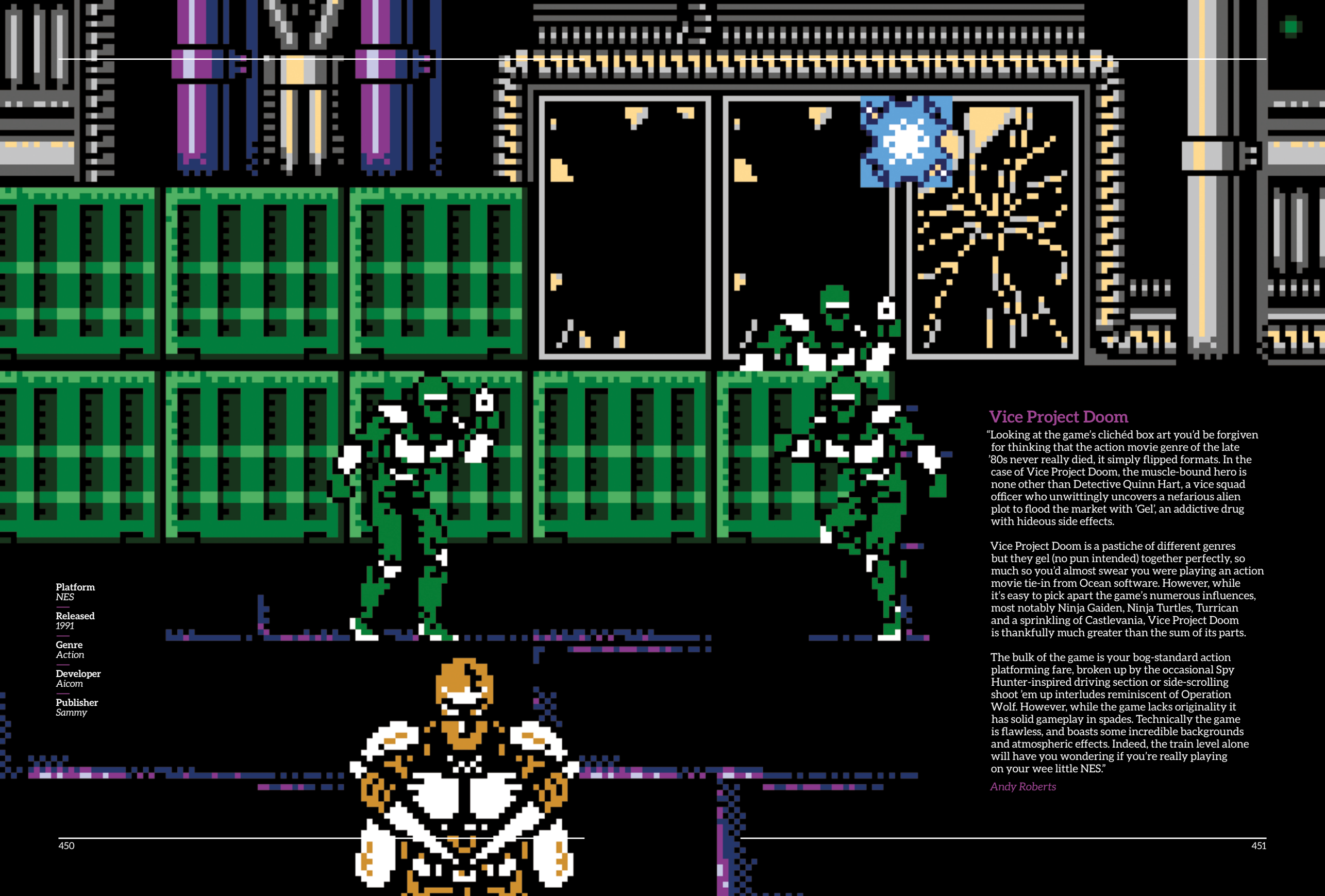
The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy

"In the first week of January 1990, we went to Las Vegas for CES (Consumer Electronics Show) with Codemasters. We were totally mesmerised by Vegas, it's an incredible place with obscene lights, noise and gambling everywhere!

There was a small booth in a side hall of the Sahara Hotel showing Treasure Island Dizzy on NES which, whilst fairly basic, had impressed people. Vegas and CES massively opened our eyes to the size and scale in which the Americans do things. There was clearly a massive market there and one that got us hugely excited. The future was definitely consoles and Nintendo ruled that show with the NES.

We completed The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy in September '90 ready for a Christmas release in America, but due to the legal battle that Nintendo and Galoob (Codemasters' North American distributor) were having over the Game Genie, its release was delayed until November 1991. By this time attention was starting to shift to the 16-bit consoles - Sega's Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, which significantly damaged the sales potential. However it was awarded NES Adventure Game of the Year by Game Players Magazine and given the coveted Parents' Choice Award."

Philip Oliver



Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
Aicom

Publisher
Sammy

Vice Project Doom

"Looking at the game's clichéd box art you'd be forgiven for thinking that the action movie genre of the late '80s never really died, it simply flipped formats. In the case of Vice Project Doom, the muscle-bound hero is none other than Detective Quinn Hart, a vice squad officer who unwittingly uncovers a nefarious alien plot to flood the market with 'Gel', an addictive drug with hideous side effects.

Vice Project Doom is a pastiche of different genres but they gel (no pun intended) together perfectly, so much so you'd almost swear you were playing an action movie tie-in from Ocean software. However, while it's easy to pick apart the game's numerous influences, most notably Ninja Gaiden, Ninja Turtles, Turrican and a sprinkling of Castlevania, Vice Project Doom is thankfully much greater than the sum of its parts.

The bulk of the game is your bog-standard action platforming fare, broken up by the occasional Spy Hunter-inspired driving section or side-scrolling shoot 'em up interludes reminiscent of Operation Wolf. However, while the game lacks originality it has solid gameplay in spades. Technically the game is flawless, and boasts some incredible backgrounds and atmospheric effects. Indeed, the train level alone will have you wondering if you're really playing on your wee little NES."

Andy Roberts

Power Blade

This US release is a reworked version of the Japanese Famicom title *Power Blazer*, featuring a remodelled hero, improved manoeuvrability and totally redesigned levels. And while *Power Blazer* was a mediocre *Mega Man* rip-off, *Power Blade* is another forgotten gem in the NES archive.

Your hero, Nova, is on a mission to enter six sectors of the Master Computer and retrieve its datatapes – which basically means blast your way to the end of the level and kill the boss. Nova is armed with a boomerang, which can be fired in eight directions (floors and walls permitting) and whose number, power and range can be upgraded with pickups.

You can play each of the six stages in any order and they're all nicely varied. And, unlike its predecessor, they feature branching pathways to areas that conceal a secret contact – who you need to find in order to open up the boss door in each stage – and a power suit which is armed with powerful energy waves.

Power Blade is good looking, smooth, fast, and the unusual level design elevates it above other games in its genre. It's not as teeth-grindingly difficult as some action-platformers, but still delivers a solid gaming experience.

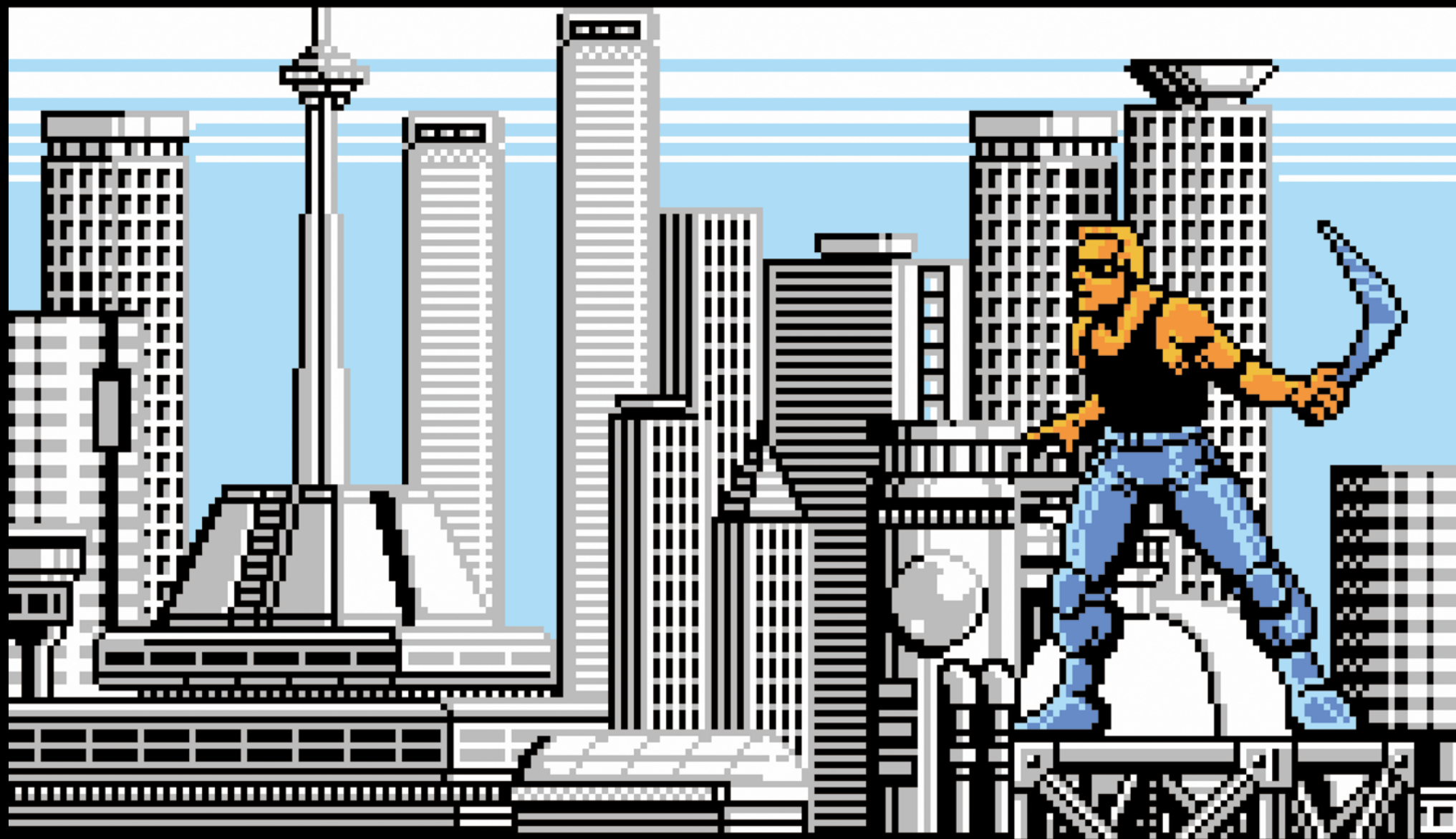
Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
Natsume

Publisher
Taito



Batman: Return of the Joker

Unsurprisingly, with the original NES *Batman* a smash hit, Sunsoft was quick to release this sequel, which appeared exactly two years after its predecessor. And while the developer could have simply churned out some new levels, it opted instead to build a completely new game.

Based on the comic books rather than the movies, *Return of the Joker* features a zoomed-in view of the action, with a larger Batman character in levels that are much more claustrophobic. This also removes the need for the *Ninja Gaiden*-style wall-jumping, so Batman is much less athletic this time around. The dithered, grimy look of the original has also been restyled, with backdrops that are clean and sharp with some incredible parallax scrolling sections and clever graphical effects. It's a very, very good-looking game.

However, the gameplay hasn't really evolved much beyond your standard action-platformer. Levels are relatively short and basically force the player to memorise the locations of hazards and enemies until they can reach the end (thankfully a password system stores your progress). Weaponry is in ready supply, thanks to destructible boxes, and so it's very much a case of trial and error, in the same vein as *Rush'n Attack*. That's not to say the action in *Return of the Joker* isn't fun and engaging - it's just not quite on a par with the glorious visuals.

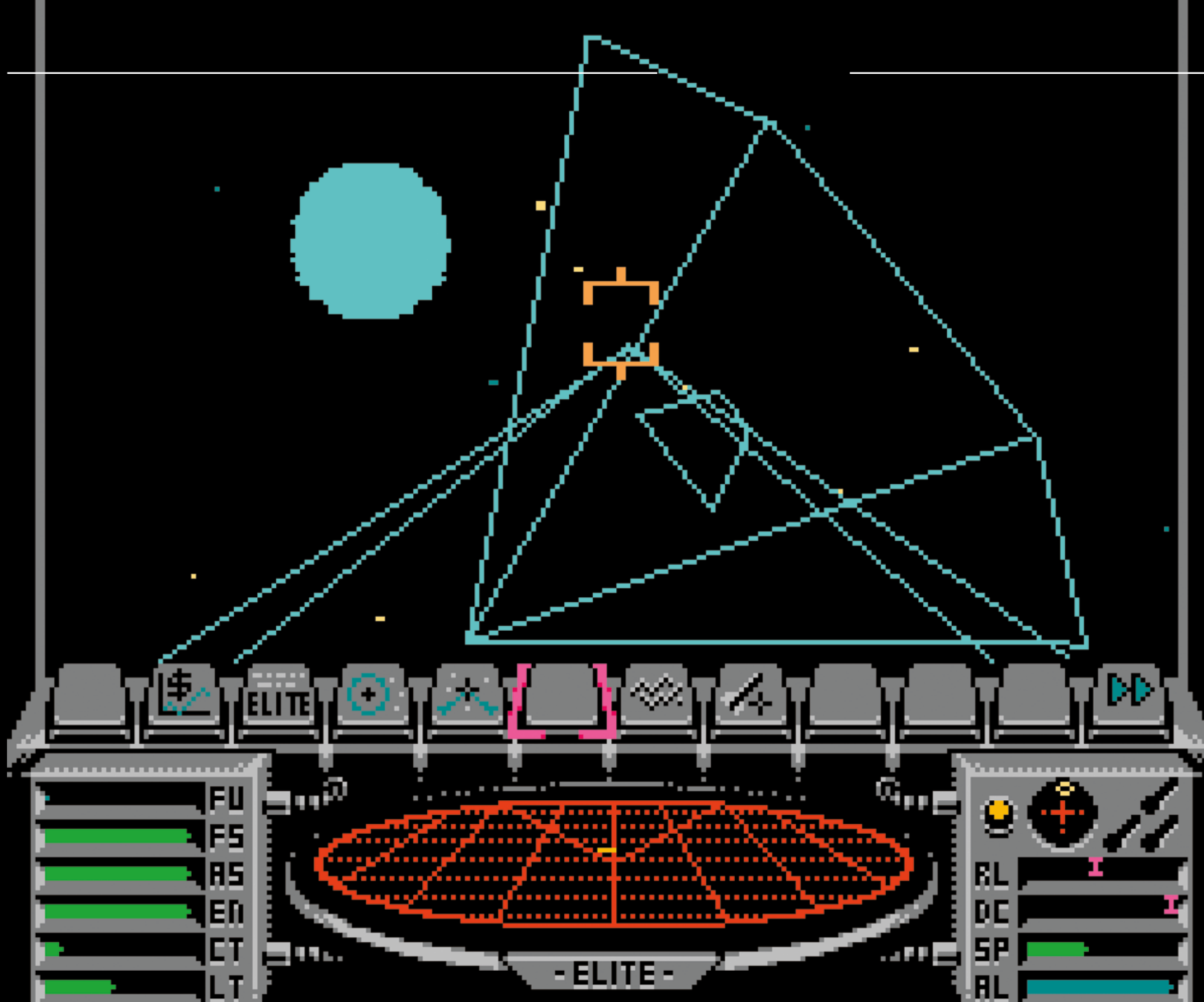
Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Sunsoft





Elite

"This was the last of the 6502 Elites and the most technically challenging because the NES was designed for sprite games, with no full-screen bitmaps amenable for wireframe. We had to use a character-mapped display to fudge a bitmap display and use self-timing code to switch between the graphics and scanner area. This is why NES Elite looks so different from other NES games. The advantage of the NES was much more code space which we filled up with eye candy graphics and music. The absence of a keyboard forced us to rethink the control system but I think the 'icon strip' we used worked well.

I spent a lot of time developing a self-play mode entered if the title screen was left up for a while, and I was pleased with how NES Elite turned out. We had to make a few political changes, renaming the illegal trade goods from 'Slaves' and 'Narcotics' to 'Roto Slaves' and 'Rare Species' to meet NES Political Correctness criteria, although strangely 'Firearms' was deemed acceptable!

Sadly, NES Elite was only published in Europe. The NTSC version was never released."

Ian Bell

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Simulation

Developers
David Braben
and Ian Bell

Publisher
Imagineer

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer
Eurocom

Publisher
Mindscape



Dropzone

"I'd always loved Archer MacLean's Dropzone on the Commodore 64, so wondered if I could get it working on the NES. I set to on a demo, and got a pretty decent one up and running. So, there I was with a playable demo of Dropzone on the NES and I sat there quite chuffed with myself, but what to do now? We decided to contact Archer and after a brief chat he decided to come up and visit. I'd never met him before, but had always admired his work, so it was a real pleasure to meet him. He thought the demo looked great and we discussed how to take things forward. It was at this point I hung up my coding gloves on the project and brought in a proper coder in the shape of Jon Williams. We discussed getting the original source code from Archer who only had print outs so poor old Jon was tasked with typing it all in line by line... no small task!

What we ended up with I think we can be quite rightly proud of. On one of the cheapest and technically-deficient Nintendo cartridges, we managed to recreate what was considered one of the best 8-bit shooters developed."

Mat Sneap

Gun-Nac

While not exactly over-represented on the Famicom/NES, what the shoot 'em up lacks in numbers it more than makes up for in quality. And to a list that includes classics like Gradius, Crisis Force, Dragon Spirit, Super Star Force and 1943, you can add Gun-Nac.

Developed by shooter specialist Compile, Gun-Nac is a parody of its 1986 title Zanac, and has you facing off against carrot-lobbing rabbits, ammo boxes, cash, logs and other obscure adversaries. In truth it's not as madcap as something like Parodius, for example, and beneath the slightly unconventional exterior beats the heart of a true shoot 'em up.

The main gameplay mechanic is power-ups – and lots of them. There are five different weapons to collect, each of which can be upgraded to become super-powerful, plus upgradeable smart bombs and a 'wing', which adds additional weapon points and durability to your ship. You can even collect moneybags to buy weaponry and power-ups at a fast-food store between levels.

It's less frantic than some shooters, but still manages to fill the screen with enemies, missiles and icons, and does it with minimal flicker. You'll probably get quite far in your first sitting, and the mid-and end-of-level bosses are a bit underwhelming, but with eight long-ish levels plus four difficulty settings, Gun-Nac is a solid, accessible blaster, with plenty of replay value.

Platform
NES

Released
1991

Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer
Compile

Publisher
Tonkin House





Rampart ランパート

If you've had enough of scrolling beat 'em ups, platform shooters and JRPGs, here's something truly unique. A mixture of Missile Command with elements of Tetris (no, really), Rampart is a conversion of the 1990 Atari coin-op, with the aim of defending your castle from enemy bombardment.

Having placed your cannons, you launch a salvo of fire against the enemy forces, while they in turn try to destroy your fortifications. After each barrage, you're given a series of tetrominoes with which to rebuild the ramparts, and as long as the castle borders are complete with no gaps, you get additional cannons with which to attack the next wave.

The NES version from Jaleco sticks to the fortresses and fleets of the coin-op, but this Famicom release by Konami adds multiple themes, such as Little Red Riding Hood, dragons and samurai – which act as difficulty levels – and also introduces whirlwinds, which rampage across the screen, destroying your precious defences.

The inventive mixture of action and puzzling is surprisingly tense, especially as you feverishly try to rebuild your walls with tetrominoes that don't quite fit, while the countdown timer ebbs away. Both versions play a mean game, and are definitely recommended for puzzle fans or for a quick break from covert missions behind enemy lines.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1991

Genre
Strategy

Developer
and Publisher
Konami

An interview with Kevin Bayliss

Recruited by UK studio Rare at the tender age of 16, Kevin Bayliss would work as an artist and designer on some of the company's most famous titles, eventually rising to the position of graphics director before leaving in 2005 to pursue a career in music. He's now back in the industry working at Playtonic Games on Yooka-Laylee, along with many other famous Rare alumni.

Tell us about when you began working at Rare.

I was 16 and just wanted to do computer graphics, specifically the title pages for ZX Spectrum or Commodore 64 games. I didn't think about the rest. I thought I wasn't clever enough to put graphics into a game, I assumed somebody else would do all that. I visited Rare for an interview as I lived locally and Tim Stamper showed me Wheel of Fortune running on the NES and what they'd reverse-engineered with Pro-Am. He asked, 'So, do you think you could do this then?' In my head I thought, 'No', because I was looking at all of his best stuff. But I was 16, so of course I said yes! The next morning I got up, went to college with my mate Doug and told him all about it. No one at college believed me, but Doug did; I told him about Tim showing me his Lamborghini and everything.

Rare wanted me to start right away, so I had to convince my college teacher that it was the right thing to do. He said, 'No, you should stay here and learn

Pascal and COBOL, and all these companies they come and go every week', which he was right about, to be fair. But then my mate was saying to him, 'No, this one doesn't. They've been going for years.' Which was true, because Rare had previously been known as Ultimate Play the Game and had made all these great Spectrum and C64 games. So I went for it!

What was it like in the beginning?

The first day I came in through the door, they were just finishing Wheel of Fortune so I had to do the prizes - a fitted kitchen, a Porsche, stuff like that - and it was really, really basic. Tim taught me how to get the pixelation process done, put things into 8x8 characters and what colours you could use on the NES. Then there was Hollywood Squares, but they wanted some animation in that one - a game quiz show host. I'd always drawn cartoons of my mates at school, so I just drew these cartoons because no one had seen them before. I basically drew a quiff on my friend, put him in a suit behind a counter, did a few frames of animation - the glint on the teeth and everything - and that was my first bit of animation.

In the summer of that year, not long after starting, they said they wanted to take me and Mark Betteridge to CES in Chicago to see all the games that Rare was working on, because we'd got quite a few on different stands. That was amazing because

I didn't even know what a Nintendo was when I went there for that first interview - just Spectrum, Commodore 64, everything that we'd got in the UK. When I saw the NES first I thought, 'It looks ugly. It doesn't sound as good as the Commodore 64'. But then I played Castlevania and a couple of the other games on there, and they were clearly better than anything I'd experienced up to that point.

Rare worked with a wide range of publishers on the NES. How did that come to pass?

Nintendo wanted as many good quality games as possible on their system that they could put their 'Seal of Quality' on. Slalom was the first game Rare did for Nintendo on the NES, but we also worked with publishers like LJN, Acclaim and Tradewest. Licensed products were a safe bet for us to some degree because they usually already had some kind of known brand name or personality behind them. They were also sometimes quite nice to work on because you kind of knew what the game was going to involve right from the start. When a licensed game came in - be it Roger Rabbit, Nightmare on Elm Street, Beetlejuice or whatever - we'd get a video sent to us that would show the film or some sneak trailers of it, or the script and style guide. Everybody loved Nightmare on Elm Street, but I made a complete pig's ear of the game. We had no real design; we just went along and came up with a basic idea. But it was nice because I'd come home and my friends would ask me what I was doing and I'd say, 'I've been doing Nightmare on Elm Street,

I've been doing Roger Rabbit.' Some of the other things - like the conversions we did for games like Cabal, Super Off Road, John Elway's Quarterback - they were nice to do because there was a bit of glamour with them.

The WrestleMania games were massively successful for you back then.

WWF WrestleMania was enjoyable but scary for me to develop graphics for because it was the first game I was really let loose on and I had very little game design experience back then. It's not my best work, but it turned out ok I guess. It was the software engineer and a graphic guy's job to come up with everything. We didn't have a design department! It'd get a little bit of a dressing over from Tim and Chris Stamper and they'd say, 'I've come up with a bit like this', and Mark would come in and give his opinion. I did all of the artwork for the mugshots for the WWF wrestlers and although I knew who they were from a video that had come over, after watching British wrestling here on a Saturday evening - with guys like Giant Haystacks and Big Daddy - it was just so different. In the WWF they were in a massive stadium, the guys were huge; I just didn't get it. I think when I first drew everything, I did this grimy little wrestling ring, no crowd or anything! I had to draw the characters but I didn't realise they were household names - guys like Hulk Hogan and Randy 'Macho Man' Savage - so you had to make sure you drew them right.

I kept creating these mugshots and I can remember the faxes would come over from Acclaim, 'The character faces are coming along nicely', and I was like, 'Er, they're done!' They were just worried that the wrestlers were going to be particular about how they looked. When we went to CES that year, I got to meet André the Giant and I was shaking because I thought, 'He's going to know that I drew this picture of him and I really did exaggerate his belly, he's going to kill me.' He was enormous. I was like a tiny little eight-stone spiky-haired mouse in this ill-fitting suit from Burton's; he was seven-foot-five, 680 pounds or something like that.

He sat on this chair and could barely move. He was just sweating, signing autographs. There's a picture of me with him somewhere and it was like Danger Mouse and Penfold; I looked like I could fit in his pocket. WrestleMania wasn't my best game but hey, with Hulk Hogan on the cover it's gotta help! During my time at Rare I also met John Elway and again I looked like a titch when I stood next to him! All these icons of American culture that I've met and I didn't even know who they were at the time, it's terrible. It would be like meeting David Beckham for your average American Football fan!



“WrestleMania wasn't my best game but hey, with Hulk Hogan on the cover it's gotta help!”

WWF WrestleMania / 1989

What about the games you did for Milton Bradley?

How did they come to pass?

MB Games wanted to move into the whole Nintendo scene. When I went to CES we were at this meeting with them and they said, 'We just want to get a game like this.' These guys in business suits came out with these cards with a painted illustration of a concept of the front cover, and those became Time Lord and Captain Skyhawk. To be honest they just left us to it. We'd send them a few briefs on what we were going to do, then a demo of it and just got something looking good. Tim had the whole futuristic isometric thing going with Skyhawk. For Time Lord, I quite liked Contra, and it was decided that we were going to have a guy who travels through time and he has a different kind of weapon for each period. While these were licensed to MB Games they were original products, there wasn't any existing property tagged onto them.

Why do you think so many American companies commissioned Rare to work on their properties?

We had a really good ambassador for Rare stateside in the shape of Joel Hochberg. He'd already

got plenty of connections and knew people because he owned arcades, so he had quite a good relationship with them all and was able to get them on board for us.

Did being a British company cause any issues?

Joel was always trying to get us to move, have an office over in Miami, or at least a division. We talked about it and Tim and Chris were dead against it, while Mark and I thought it would be great - but then we were young! Had we been in America, we'd have been out every night, the work rate would have gone. When these companies came over to wet and miserable England they'd visit this sleepy place in the middle of the countryside where we were based with no distractions and could see how hard we were working. They knew we'd get the work done!

What limitations did you encounter working on the NES?

Colours were always a problem, but certain companies had a very good way of making games look great - I think Konami did such a great job with Castlevania. It had a style and you could see what you're doing. I think when I worked on Cobra Triangle I did

the title page for it, and you'd got a map of how many colours you could have in each 8x8 character. If you had the dragon's head moving into the corner of another character, you'd have to then draw some sprites and place the sprites over the bits that would be black. So there was an art to it and it was an enjoyable challenge - especially as also you'd then got the character count as well, and when you got to that point in a game where it's gone over 256, you'd say, 'That means it's going to go out at a different price and it's not going to sell as many copies.' It was always a great achievement to get something that looked good on a cheap cartridge.

Rare's turnover was prolific during the NES era. Was it difficult to get so many quality games created?

Tim just wanted to get as much of us out there as possible. So you'd have two or three Game Boy products going on and however many NES games, licensed and original, because we'd got other things like all of the educational stuff, Sesame Street and so on. But not everything sold. Snake Rattle 'n' Roll was squeezed into a tiny cartridge and I loved the way it looked, but it didn't sell. It had an awful front cover and it basically wasn't pushed. It was a great game - it just wasn't marketed.

Do you think would it be fair to say the NES is a pretty pivotal machine in Rare's history?

I'd say so. Back when I started Tim said to me he'd taken the whole home computer thing as far as it could go in the UK. I don't think software piracy was a part of it or anything - I think it made a dent on it - but it was still quite strong. I think they said, 'Well, we can't do any better.' The Amiga and the ST

Battletoads / 1991

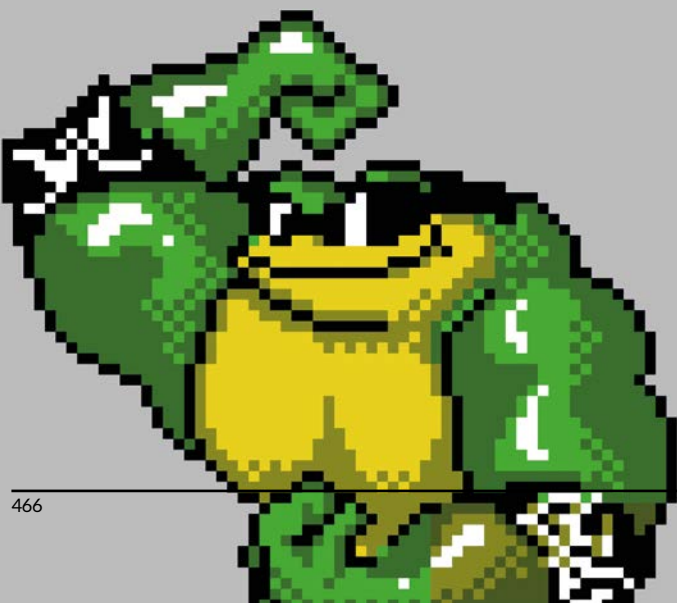


Cobra Triangle / 1989

simply didn't interest them. I think they just wanted to take things to the next level, to go even bigger than they'd been on the Spectrum and C64. Then they met Joel; he showed them the NES, which had just been released. The Stammers knew it was going to be big, there were plenty of orders of it in the shops. So they reversed-engineered the hardware and they looked at how much potential it had for games. The rest is history, and without the NES, maybe Rare wouldn't have become the big name it is now.

What kind of place does the NES hold in your heart?
For me, the console was my first experience of a proper professional job. Rather than coming from education and going and working in the factories as my dad wanted me to do, I just got to do graphics for a living.

“ Without the NES, maybe Rare wouldn't have become the big name they are now. ”



Ufouria: The Saga

"Ufouria is one of the great unknown action-adventure games on the NES. Released late in the system's life - in 1992 in Europe and Japan but not in North America until a 2010 Wii Virtual Console release - it isn't well known enough to have developed a huge following. And that's too bad, because with an optimal launch date across all regions and a big Nintendo Power push, Ufouria [known as Hebereke in Japan] perhaps would be considered a classic. Instead, it will have to settle for hidden-gem status.

The game follows the Metroid mould. Bop-Louie, an unlikely hero with a strange name, starts with limited abilities and little support to tackle an alien menace. But by knocking sense into three friends (to cure their amnesia, of course), Bop gets them to join his cause, each bringing a unique skillset.

Platform
NES

Released
1992

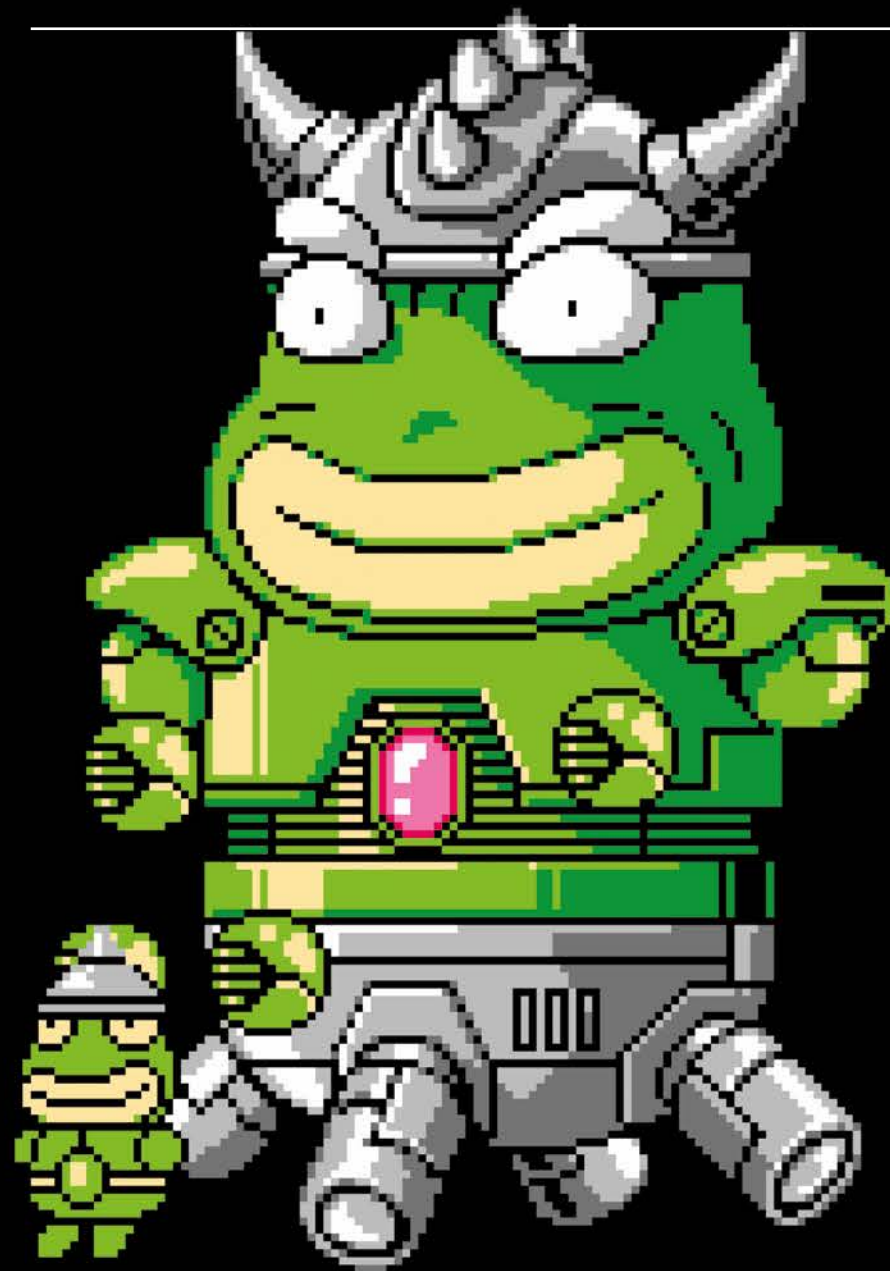
Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Sunsoft

Swapping between characters proves easy and fun, and Ufouria hits its stride as the quartet chips away at the map's previously gated areas by using newly unlocked abilities.

They traverse caves, waterways, giant trees, a temple... nothing groundbreaking in terms of game locales, but the settings are appreciably diverse and connect logically as the challenge escalates. Graphically, Ufouria's characters are detailed and bright, creating a whimsical tone. The controls work well, even allowing for mid-jump character swaps. And so it goes: satisfying details beget an underappreciated whole."

Greg Ford



Gargoyle's Quest II: The Demon Darkness

This fifth entry in the Ghosts 'n Goblins franchise is a sequel to the 1990 Game Boy release, which introduced RPG elements to the platform-combat format.

The game begins as Firebrand the Red Arremer demon is setting off to complete his Warrior Training. This introduces a short side-scrolling level in which the player can familiarise themselves with Firebrand's moves: jumping, clinging on to the sides of pillars and walls, and flying for short periods of time. With training complete Firebrand emerges to find the Demon Realm has been attacked by the Black Light - and so his quest begins.

The player explores the world using a top-down view for the main adventure, interspersed with handsome side-scrolling action stages. Fortunately, the random battles that plagued the Game Boy release have been excised from this version.

The combination of RPG and action makes a nice change of pace, and while the story is actually quite linear, its dozen-or-so challenging levels will keep you occupied for some time. Released late in the NES's life, and a year after the SNES had arrived, Gargoyle's Quest II was overlooked by many and its existence should be a welcome surprise for old-school Ghosts 'n Goblins fans.

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Action

Developer
and publisher
Capcom





Konami Hyper Soccer

Before Pro Evolution Soccer – also known as World Soccer: Winning Eleven – there was International Superstar Soccer, and before that there was Hyper Soccer, part of Konami's Hyper Sports series and the company's first football game on a Nintendo console.

Prior to kick-off, you have a bunch of options, with tournament play, player vs computer and head-to-head modes, plus a penalty shoot-out. You choose to play as one of 24 national teams, then select a playing formation and allocate points to various parameters such as speed, offence, defence and so on.

One good aspect in play is that – unlike other games – your players all move in concert with the D-pad, so whoever you're looking to pass to, you'll always have control. Of course the basic problem with NES football games is the lack of play options: with only two buttons you can only pass or shoot while in possession, and perform headers or sliding tackles while defending. The system is fine for what it is, but there's no real finesse and the ball spends most of the time being hoofed up and down the field. Having said that, Konami Hyper Soccer is reasonably fast and fluid, and can still provide a few late night, post-beverage laughs with a friend.

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Sports

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Konami

Bucky O'Hare

Based on the 1984 comic book by Larry Hama and Michael Golden, this action-platformer is set in a parallel universe in which the United Animals Federation is in constant conflict with the Toad Empire. The game kicks off with an attack on the ship transporting Bucky's crew, who are captured and sent to four different planets - prompting Bucky to embark on a series of rescue missions.

What at first appears as a standard side-scroller soon reveals a range of clever game elements. It mixes vertical and horizontal sections - often with parallax scrolling - giant characters and spaceships, streams of lava, fast-paced roller-coaster sections...

And once one crewmember has been rescued they can then be used in other stages, bringing their dedicated weapons and skills to bear - such as a block-smashing gun or the ability to walk on walls.

Bucky O'Hare is a great looking title - one of the best on NES - but some of the platforming sections are a bit too intense, resulting in instant and undeserving death. It's too clever for its own good at times, and with more than 60 tough acts to complete, it may well be an undertaking too great for many gamers. Still, Bucky O'Hare is well worth playing, if not completing.



Little Samson

"You'd be forgiven for thinking that Little Samson was a quasi-religious game featuring a main character who derives his strength from a magical hairdo. Conversely, the game owes more to the likes of Mega Man and Metroid than a biblical bodybuilder with a fancy coiffure.

Created by a team of ex-Capcom developers, Little Samson was released late in the NES's lifecycle when many gamers had already moved onto the SNES. Thus, despite its exceptional aesthetics and technical prowess, Little Samson never garnered the acclaim it so richly deserved.

The quest begins when a Dark Prince is freed by a freak thunderstorm and the King summons four unlikely heroes - Little Samson, Kikira the Dragon, Gamm the Golem, and K.O. the Mouse - to rid the kingdom of evil's curse.

With no text or dialogue throughout the game, it's action all the way as you run, jump, punch, climb and shoot your way through a multitude of levels and bosses. Luckily, you're able to switch between the four characters at any time in order to take advantage of each one's special skills and abilities.

Slick, exceptionally polished and extremely rare, Little Samson is simply one of the finest platformers on the NES. If you're after the original cartridge, however, be prepared to shell out a month's salary for the privilege."

Andy Roberts

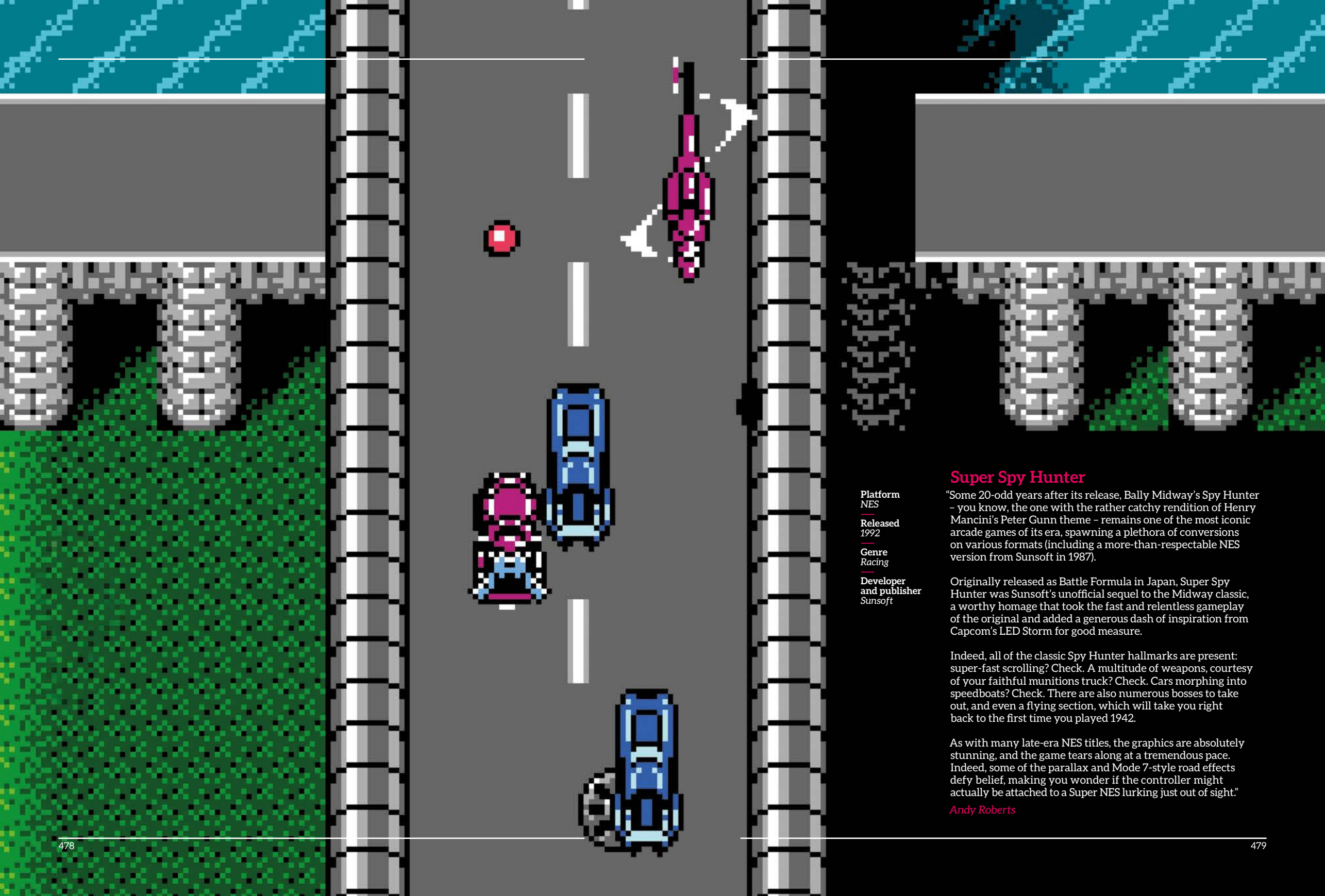
Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Takeru

Publisher
Taito



Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Racing

Developer
and publisher
Sunsoft

Super Spy Hunter

“Some 20-odd years after its release, Bally Midway’s *Spy Hunter* – you know, the one with the rather catchy rendition of Henry Mancini’s *Peter Gunn* theme – remains one of the most iconic arcade games of its era, spawning a plethora of conversions on various formats (including a more-than-respectable NES version from Sunsoft in 1987).

Originally released as *Battle Formula* in Japan, *Super Spy Hunter* was Sunsoft’s unofficial sequel to the Midway classic, a worthy homage that took the fast and relentless gameplay of the original and added a generous dash of inspiration from Capcom’s *LED Storm* for good measure.

Indeed, all of the classic *Spy Hunter* hallmarks are present: super-fast scrolling? Check. A multitude of weapons, courtesy of your faithful munitions truck? Check. Cars morphing into speedboats? Check. There are also numerous bosses to take out, and even a flying section, which will take you right back to the first time you played 1942.

As with many late-era NES titles, the graphics are absolutely stunning, and the game tears along at a tremendous pace. Indeed, some of the parallax and Mode 7-style road effects defy belief, making you wonder if the controller might actually be attached to a *Super NES* lurking just out of sight!”

Andy Roberts



Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom

Mega Man 4

“Back then, you were working with such a difficult set of parameters, such as limited colours and memory. In fact, the reason Mega Man is blue is due to the limits of the Famicom. From the very first pixel sprite design by Kitamura-san it was done using that palette. There were reds, but they were very garish reds. Also at that time there was Mario, and he’s red! And if you look at things like Power Rangers and superhero groups, red is always the leader while blue is usually the support character’s colour.

I think the Japanese were better at looking at the limitations and figuring out how to get past them, or how to use them to the best of their ability. For example, we only had six people working on Mega Man, so what was our solution, because we had such a small team? We just worked all the time. We worked 24 hours a day and slept at the office. In the West you wouldn’t have been able to do that, and now in Japan you can’t do that any more either. But in those days you could!”

Keiji Inafune



Super Turrigan

“Released in 1992, toward the end of the NES’s life and uniquely in Europe, Super Turrigan seemed on the surface just another of the many quick-job, outsourced ports of the 1990 original Commodore 64 hit. Instead, Manfred Trenz, a one-man-army like his ironclad hero, single-handedly developed it from scratch.

It’s one weird beast: composed roughly of 75% Turrigan and 25% Turrigan II, interestingly it reuses graphic assets from the 16-bit incarnations, rather than C64 graphics. The sprawling, multi-directional scrolling layout of the stages is uncompromised, and a couple of new bosses have been added to spruce things up, although jetpack segments were removed.

However gameplay changes are more radical: you surely won’t complete this with 100 extra lives in your bag, as 1UP tokens are now sparse, making every diamond vital for survival. In-stage checkpoints have also removed, so you’re in for a challenge.

Turrigan can run by holding the fire button, like Mario, and can stay in buzzsaw mode for as long as he wants, like Samus. The action is remarkably full-screen, without the bottom bar. While Trenz didn’t push the NES to its limits as he did with the C64, the game retains its fundamental qualities, making this ‘remix’ episode a lost chapter that fans of the series shouldn’t miss.”

Carlo Savorelli

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Action

Developer
Rainbow Arts

Publisher
Imagineer



Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Ocean

The Addams Family

"We were working from the film script and a bunch of production stills so the designers had to build something that fitted aesthetically and creatively. Okay, the overall mechanic was pretty long-in-the-tooth, as platformers were available in abundance. However, the big differentiator was the really smart level design, which ultimately made the overall gameplay challenging and completely compelling. I'd been involved in the development of more than 120 games at Ocean and I'd say that this was the best design (gameplay-wise) our in-house studios produced over the ten years I was there. All credit to Warren Lancashire, James Higgins, Simon Butler and Jon Dunn who initially created the game on home computer and then ported across to the NES and SNES.

The game was a critical success and, despite the market seemingly becoming tired of derivative licensed games, The Addams Family sold extremely well; not just on the NES but also across the many computer formats it was made for. The combination of platform action and fun puzzles seemed to capture the imagination of players who clamoured for more and were rewarded with a sequel a couple of years later."

Gary Bracey

M.C. Kids

"M.C. Kids was born out of Gregg Tavares' [lead programmer] and Darren Bartlett's [lead designer and artist] love of Super Mario Bros. 3. You can feel the influences throughout the game and yet it has plenty of original play mechanics and ideas of its own packed into it. A lot of time and attention was put into every part of the game and it shows. The game originally had a scrolling map quite similar to the one in Super Mario Bros. 3, which Nintendo wasn't happy about and asked us to change it.

I drew and animated all of the enemy sprites by hand, pixel by pixel, using a mouse and software called Deluxe Animator by Electronic Arts. That software and EA's Deluxe Paint were industry standards at the time for creating videogame graphics. We had limited colour palettes to work with: NES sprites have something like three colours, and some of those colours have to be shared. Black was used for outlines, so that left just two more colours. It was quite a challenge to make characters look good but I think it turned out great!"

René Boutin

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Virgin Games





Gimmick!

"I had already done the music for Out Live, Benkei Gaiden and others, so naturally I felt that pressure where you feel like you have to outdo yourself. Substantively, the Gimmick! developers asked for several songs with a 'pop' sound. For me personally, game music is something where you're going to have to listen to the same songs over and over, so I try to make sure that A: The looping music won't become grating to the players, and B: The opening and endings are dramatic. Above all, I was careful to make sure I was writing music that just felt good.

At the time, our programmer, Tomomi Sakai, was on a mission in pursuit of the perfect controls for Gimmick - for example how floaty it should feel when the character jumps. He wanted the controls to feel just right. Somehow I had picked up on that, and decided I would try to make the music match that feeling somehow. For Gimmick, I wanted the music to sound more like a live performance than a composition. Sound programmer Naohisa Morota played a big part in helping achieve that."

Masashi Kageyama

Platform NES / Released 1992 / Genre Platformer / Developer and publisher Sunsoft



Gimmick!

"Can a small Green character save the girl from the Dark Empire? Sunsoft produced many great NES games and this was the flagship of that effort. Master the 'beam-up' Star weapon and ride it with skill to reach hidden, secret places along the way.

With some of the best music and sound effects of the 8-bit generation (thanks to a dedicated sound chip), Gimmick! will entertain and challenge your abilities, and you'll be captivated, sinking deep into this odd adventure. Stages are littered with mechanical devices such as conveyors, moving and dropping platforms, claws and clamps.

An army of strange small black-and-white enemies that can walk and fly will manifest along the way, shooting arrows and generally making advancement difficult, but never fear as Gimmick brilliantly combats all-comers! Power up the overhead star and release it to defeat as many enemies as possible on its run. Ride those same enemies, if you're skilled, and find new paths to recover stuff that enhances gameplay. Push objects to gain an advantage in these dangerous levels of play and discovery.

This fun cartoon action game is no fluke and there is no gimmick to the wonderful and skillful techniques to learn and explore!"

David Siller

Disney's Darkwing Duck

"Crime has overrun the City! A secret organisation called F.O.W.L. has fiendish plans to rule over everyone, so who ya gonna call? Darkwing Duck of course!

Select a destination from the city map and off goes DD into action. Capcom seems intent on duplicating Mega Man's success and popularity here (once again) and with great measure and unique features. Smart move! DD moves like a typical vigilante action hero including grabbing overhead ledges, various objects and many clever mechanical devices, and pulling himself upward and onward. It's important to master the grab technique in order to effectively advance through this adventure.

Our hero can of course 'duck' down (Ha!), employ his Cape as a shield and use a Pop Gun to neutralise enemies trying to stop his particular brand of justice. DD must also recover stolen diamonds and gold bars dropped on the playfield when any of the zany cast of enemies is defeated. Dramatic music and whimsical sound effects entertain your play and beautiful graphics will please your eyes and keep you enthralled the entire time. Each and every night there's a fowl job to do but someone has to quack up this evil organisation and DD is the man... er... duck for the job!"

David Siller

Platform
NES

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



Moon Crystal ムーンクリスタル

If you want to see arguably the best sprite animation on the Famicom, you need to seek out this side-scrolling platformer by little-known developer, Hector. Green-haired hero Ricky is on a mission to rescue his father and the local villagers from the evil Count Crimson, who intends to use the Moon Crystal to bring the dead back to life.

In truth, it's fairly standard in its approach - Ricky slices enemies with his knife, navigates each level and faces a boss before moving on to the next. The scenery is generally attractive, but it's the animation that stands out, with Ricky able to run, duck, jump and somersault, and cling on to platform edges before hauling himself up. It's all very smooth and reminiscent of Prince of Persia, released three years earlier.

Moon Crystal is a more thoughtful, slow-paced platformer, but that doesn't stop it from being frustrating. There are lots of pixel-perfect jumps and you're sometimes hampered by the unresponsive control system - Ricky can't turn while stabbing or ducking for example, which is especially annoying during boss battles, when dying sends you back to the start of the level. It's a shame that a few poor design choices mar what is otherwise a thoroughly charming game.

Platform
Famicom

Released
1992

Genre
Platformer

Developer
and publisher
Hector





“Above all, video games are meant to just be one thing: fun for everyone.”

Satoru Iwata, game designer and ex-president of Nintendo

Summer Carnival '92: Recca

サマーカーニバル'92 烈火

While Recca - or Blazing Fire - might not quite deserve the accolade of best shoot 'em up on the NES, it's certainly the most intense. And though it may not technically be a danmaku or 'Bullet Hell' game, it certainly comes pretty close.

Released for Naxat Soft's 1992 shoot 'em up tournament, the rules are simple: fire, dodge enemy missiles, last as long as you can - which, in most instances, is a couple of minutes. Your ship's weaponry can be incrementally upgraded with a variety of pickups, providing lasers, spread shot, side turrets, etc. and it also has a perpetual smart bomb, but this can only be charged up when you're not shooting - and it's a brave player who doesn't have their thumb locked down on the fire button.

The game has four longish levels featuring some hardware-pushing psychedelic effects, swarms of enemy craft and a variety of bosses, most of which are massive, screen-filling creations spewing missiles and lasers. To all intents and purposes Recca is impossibly hard - you need superhuman skills to get past level two, let alone complete the game. But while it lasts it's frenzied, frantic and loads of eye-searing, brain-fizzing fun.

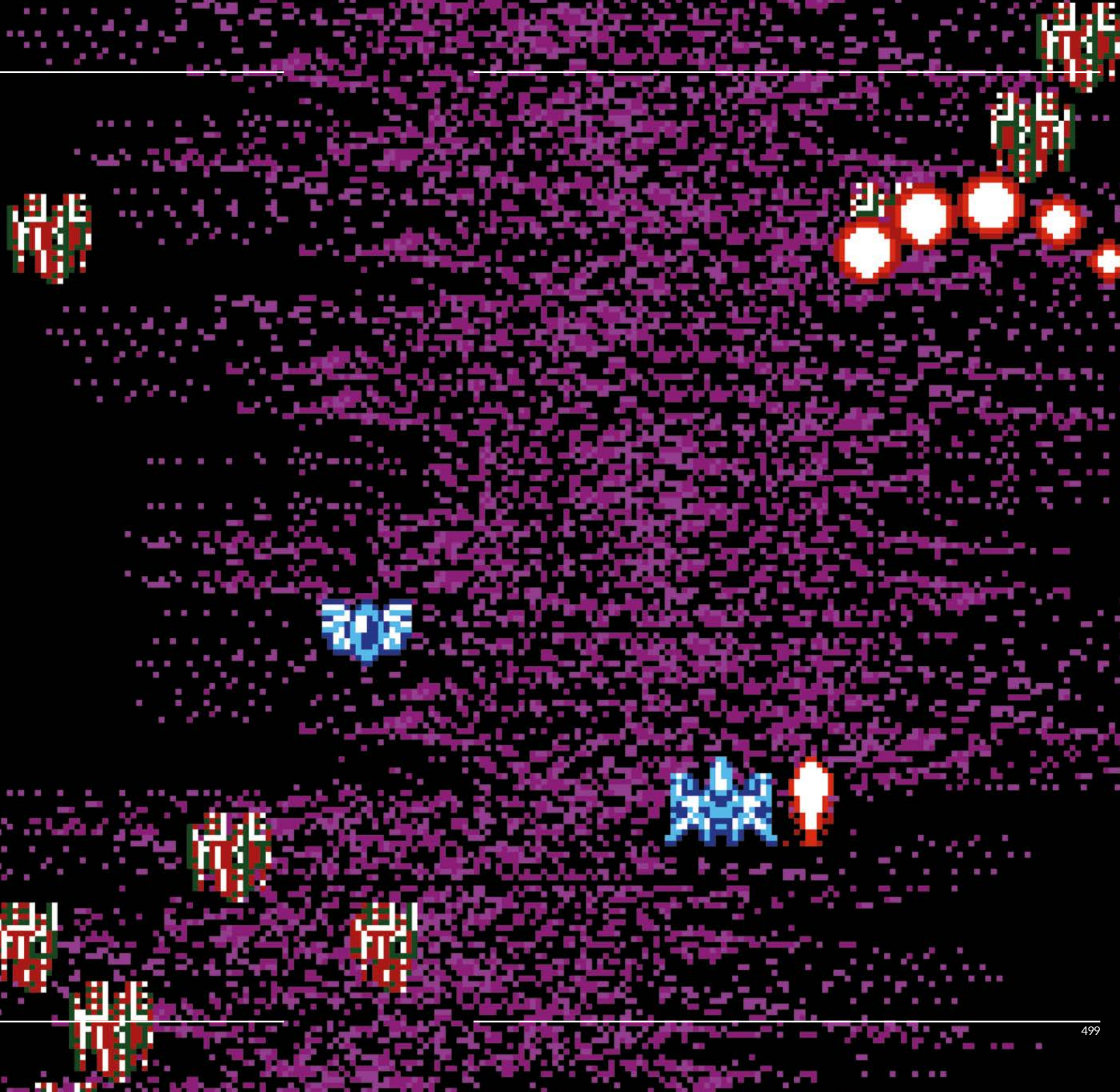
Platform
Famicom

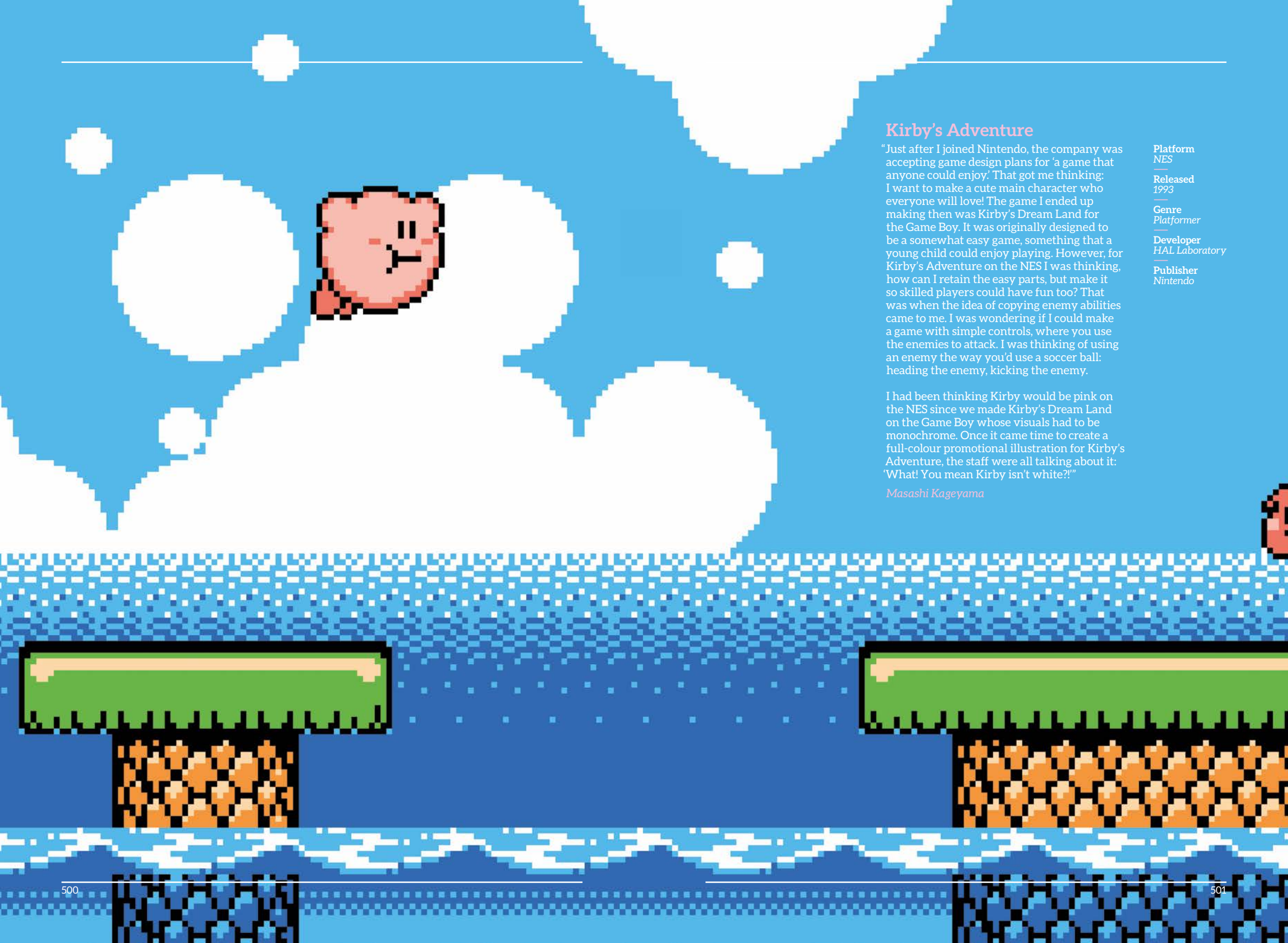
Released
1992

Genre
Scrolling shooter

Developer
KID

Publisher
Naxat Soft





Kirby's Adventure

"Just after I joined Nintendo, the company was accepting game design plans for 'a game that anyone could enjoy.' That got me thinking: I want to make a cute main character who everyone will love! The game I ended up making then was Kirby's Dream Land for the Game Boy. It was originally designed to be a somewhat easy game, something that a young child could enjoy playing. However, for Kirby's Adventure on the NES I was thinking, how can I retain the easy parts, but make it so skilled players could have fun too? That was when the idea of copying enemy abilities came to me. I was wondering if I could make a game with simple controls, where you use the enemies to attack. I was thinking of using an enemy the way you'd use a soccer ball: heading the enemy, kicking the enemy.

I had been thinking Kirby would be pink on the NES since we made Kirby's Dream Land on the Game Boy whose visuals had to be monochrome. Once it came time to create a full-colour promotional illustration for Kirby's Adventure, the staff were all talking about it: 'What! You mean Kirby isn't white?!'"

Masashi Kageyama

Platform
NES

Released
1993

Genre
Platformer

Developer
HAL Laboratory

Publisher
Nintendo



Kirby's Adventure

"After a successful debut on the Game Boy, it was time for Nintendo's pink puffball to make his one and only splash on the NES with Kirby's Adventure. The extra firepower on a home console brought Western gamers Kirby in all his pink glory (as opposed to the ghostly white from before), and he was all the better for it. Not only was this the first game in the franchise in colour, but it also marked the debut of his signature move of copying an enemy's ability after swallowing them.

While Kirby's Adventure isn't particularly challenging, it does present some fun platforming gameplay with Kirby's innate ability to float in the air. Being able to use different powers depending on which enemies are in sucking range also adds a simple, but effective reward system for not getting hit. You definitely want to hang on to that spinning sword move no matter what!

A really cool surprise near the end of the game has you go through an extended version of Green Greens from Kirby's Dream Land. It even retains the iconic music and Game Boy-like colour scheme (although Kirby remains his pink self).

If you're looking for a Nintendo classic that's not too taxing, few scratch that itch more than Kirby's Adventure. Suck some air and float on."

David Giltinan



Asterix

"We started working on the NES version of Asterix just after finishing the Game Boy version. First we tried using the same graphics but in the end they all had to be redone completely due to the difference in screen size and proportions. For the main character I used the SNES version as a reference, but the rest of the sprites were the same as the Game Boy version, only upscaled and with colours. Dealing with the palette system of the console felt a bit like in the ZX Spectrum days, only with four colours instead of two, but it was much more rewarding than having only four shades of gray like it was on the Game Boy.

There is a bonus stage in the game that involves jumping over barrels and hitting Baba, the pirate lookout, who throws them. Nintendo asked us if we could change that character because he was black, and having to hit him could be considered racism. In that pre-Internet era, some people at Infogrames had to go to the Nintendo offices in Japan to show them the real comic, and how usual it was for Baba to get hit, just like the rest of the pirates!"

Alberto J. González

Platform
NES

Released
1993

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Bit Managers

Publisher
Infogrames

Battletoads and Double Dragon

"What's better than Battletoads or Double Dragon? How about Battletoads AND Double Dragon! There weren't too many epic crossovers back in the '90s that quite made an impact such as this one, especially for gamers. Seeing these characters from two legendary beat 'em up franchises join forces was a real treat to not only see, but also play.

Licking her wounds after her last defeat, The Dark Queen allies herself with the Shadow Boss, which prompts Battletoads Rash, Zitz and Pimple to form the 'ultimate team' with martial artists Billy and Jimmy Lee. Since the game was developed by Rare, Battletoads and Double Dragon plays a lot more like a Battletoads game, enabling a more fun and frenetic experience. Billy and Jimmy lend themselves well with hard-hitting punches and kicks, and there's a diverse cast of enemies and bosses from both franchises to take out. There's even an Asteroids-like level (one of my favourite parts) that breaks up the hand-to-hand combat.

While the way you beat up the women with whips in the third level will certainly raise an eyebrow in today's world, that's not enough cause to miss out on this rock 'em, sock 'em classic. Battletoads and Double Dragon is the prime example of a crossover done right."

David Giltinan

Platform
NES

Released
1993

Genre
Scrolling
beat 'em up

Developer
Rare

Publisher
Tradewest



Fire 'n Ice

"I designed the original Solomon's Key which was an action game for arcades with a little bit of a puzzle element added into it. I remember making Catrap on the Game Boy years later, which I found interesting as it was almost solely based on logic or thinking rationally - it was a pure puzzle game.

I acquired a taste for that style of game and so proposed to Tecmo a puzzle game with a character who extinguishes fire using ice. I thought, maybe I could create a game that is somewhat similar to Solomon's Key, but would have these logic or puzzle elements behind it, and also my desire to incorporate story elements. At the beginning it was to be called Ice Kid, but was finally renamed Solomon's Key 2 (Fire 'n Ice in the USA).

If you look at the game it's completely different to Solomon's Key but we had the feeling that it probably wouldn't sell well, so the sales people had the idea that if we use the name Solomon's Key it will sell better. I had to redesign the characters and adjust the storyline a bit, so that it wouldn't look too strange!"

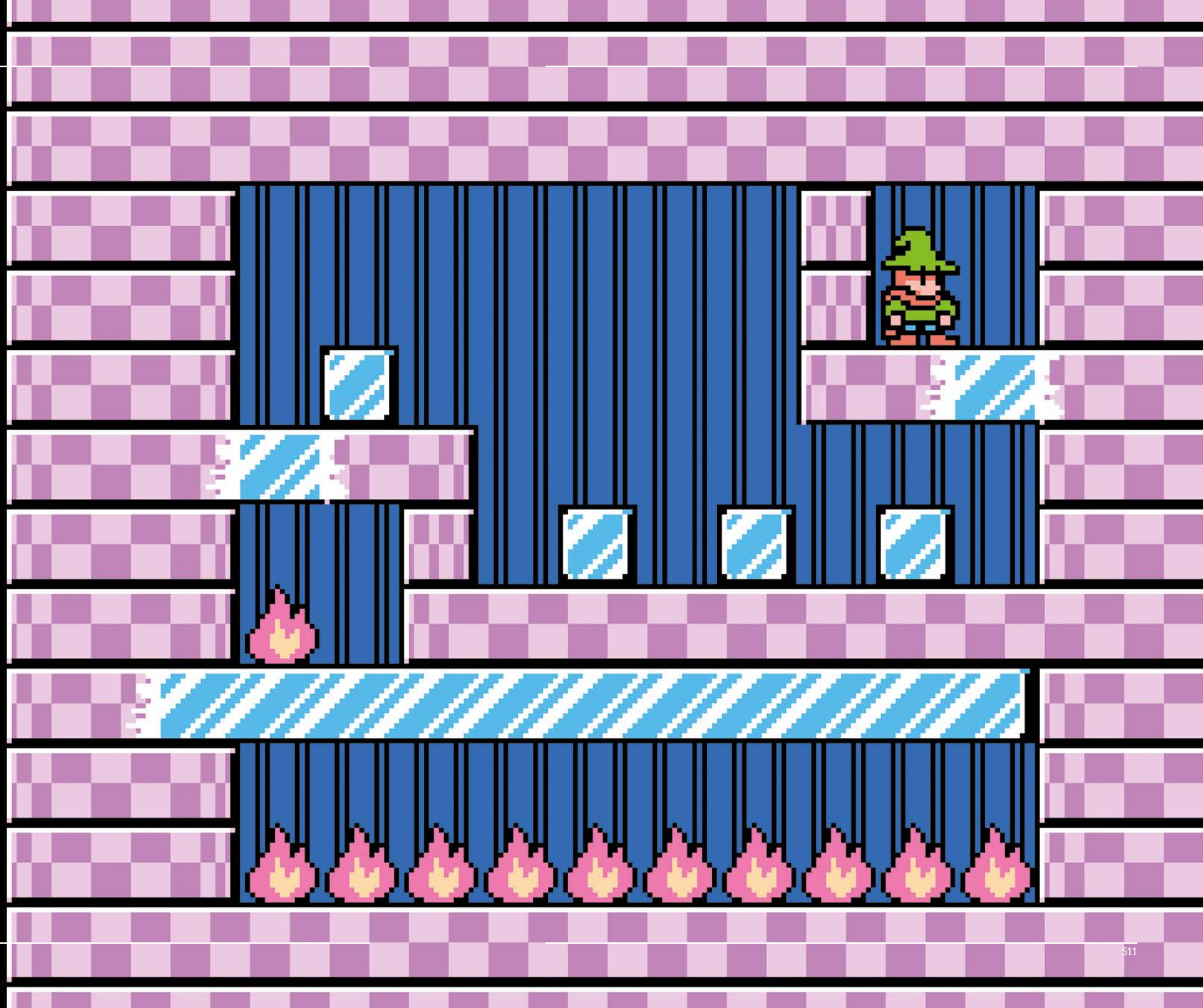
Michitaka Tsuruta

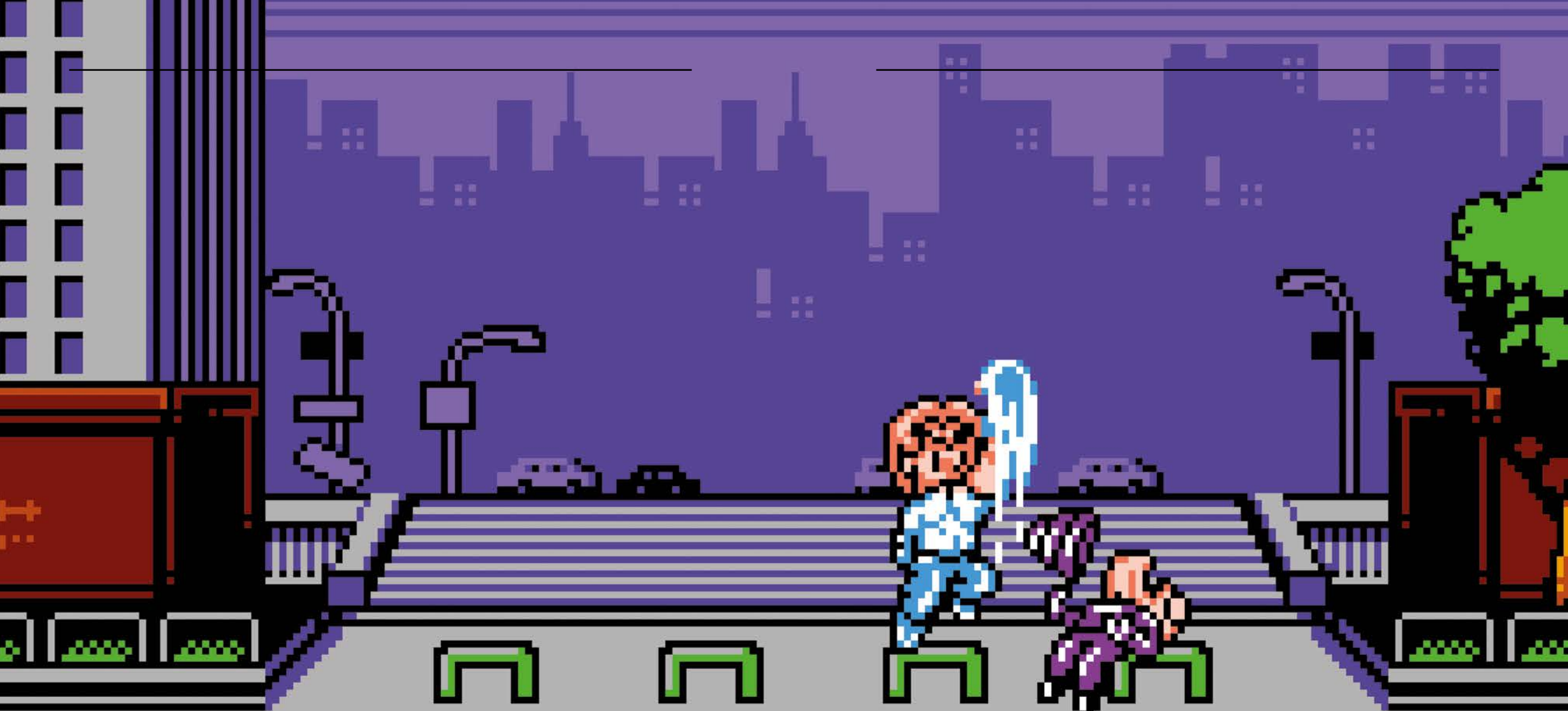
Platform
NES

Released
1993

Genre
Puzzle

Developer
and publisher
Tecmo





Mighty Final Fight

"For arcade-going kids in the early '90s, Capcom's Final Fight was a seminal, almost life-changing release. Like so many gamers of the period, my every waking moment was consumed by the desire to have the perfect home conversion of this amazing coin-op brawler, but the wait was a long one. The 1990 port for the Super Nintendo ended up being a somewhat botched effort, lacking the simultaneous two-player mode, the character Guy and an entire level, and while it was faithful in every other regard, it left me wanting. I had no idea that a few years later I'd be perfectly content to play an 8-bit take on the concept complete with super-deformed

characters, but as a fan of the original, Mighty Final Fight certainly caught my attention. The two-player mode was still regrettably absent, but the introduction of an RPG-style experience point system lent the game surprising depth. While the superb Sega CD conversion of Final Fight would eventually pacify my need for an authentic domestic facsimile of the coin-op, I'll always have a place in my heart for this pint-sized spin-off. It took one of the most brutal games of the era and gave it a cute lick of paint, and I'll forever love it for that."

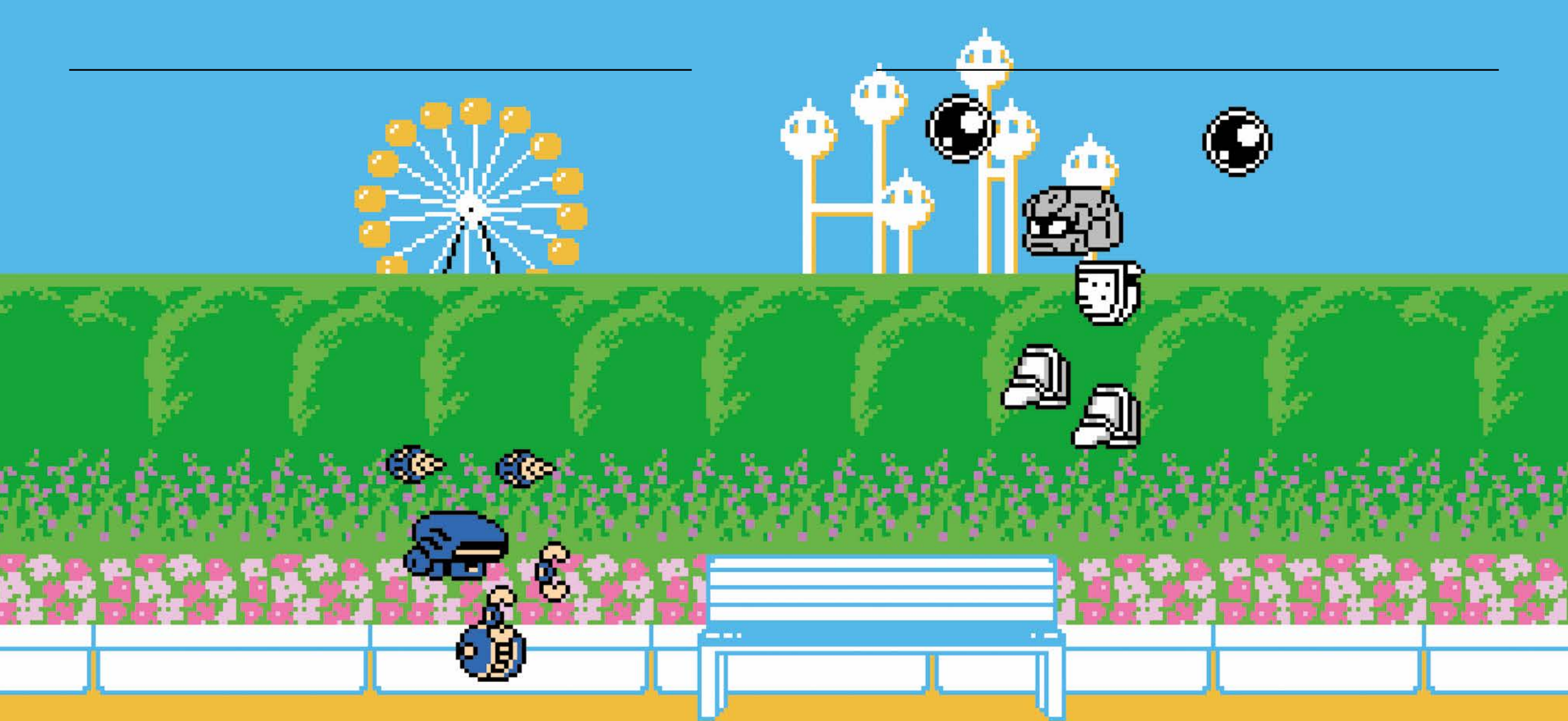
Damien McFerran

Platform
NES

Released
1993

Genre
Scrolling
beat 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Capcom



Platform
Famicom

Released
1993

Genre
Beat 'em up

Developer
and publisher
Nintendo



Joy Mecha Fight ジョイメカファイト

Released towards the end of the Famicom's lifespan, this beat 'em up from Nintendo takes a very different approach to the genre. With the system's graphical limitations, the decision was taken to use robots as the combatants and split their body parts into individual sections, allowing for much smoother movement, with squash and stretch-style animation creating the impression of a character far larger than the sum of its parts. It's a technique that would be reused for Mii characters on the Nintendo Wii, and the effect here is totally convincing.

The aim of the game is simple: defeat all the contestants in a round and then battle the boss robot to move on to the next set of opponents. Every robot you beat can then be used in subsequent bouts, employing their special moves to offset those of your opponent, and there are 36 robots in all.

One disappointing aspect is that when you first load the game, it looks like you'll have the opportunity to mix and match body parts to create the ultimate fighting robot – though sadly that's not the case. However it's still a terrific-looking title, and Joy Mecha Fight's simplicity makes it ideal for beat 'em up novices.



Disney's The Jungle Book

"This was one of the first really important titles for Eurocom. Virgin approached us as they had Dave Perry doing the Genesis version and were looking for a team that could handle the NES and Game Boy versions.

Platform
NES

Released
1994

Genre
Platformer

Developer
Eurocom

Publisher
Virgin
Interactive

We were tasked with building a version that loosely followed its 16-bit cousin. To that end I started on the graphics while Jon Williams began work on the code. I was always inspired by a lot of Capcom artwork such as Ghosts 'n Goblins, Mega Man, Little Nemo and Duck Tales, so I sort of took elements from some of these but had to work around various NES restrictions with colour palettes and character restrictions. We took what animations we could from the film and squeezed them into the cartridge frame by frame. I remember Jon used to draw them all out and number them so he could refer to them, proper old-school!

Virgin were very happy with the result, to the point that when Dave Perry got moved off the project to work on Aladdin they asked us to convert the NES version onto the Genesis... which was the start of a long relationship for us with Disney."

Mat Sneap

Unreleased games

The history of videogaming is littered with might-haves and what-ifs... titles whose intentions were just too grand; that suffered endless set-backs; or that were being developed at just the wrong time. There are dozens of Famicom and NES games that never got to enjoy their moment of glory in the stores of Akihabara or the shelves of Best Buy – here is a selection of games that will, sadly, never see the light of day – plus one that did eventually get released in 2016.



Aliens: Alien 2

"My very first game at Square was Aliens: Alien 2. First I went to watch the film, because I hadn't seen it and then I got some highly detailed model kits to use as reference materials. I kept them on my desk and referred to them from time to time as I created the graphics.

As for the project team, the planner was Hiromichi Tanaka, designer on Final Fantasy II and III, and also producer for Secret of Mana and Final Fantasy XI. I was creating the graphics for all the versions and I also did the graphic novel. The music and sound effects were done internally by Nobuo Uematsu.

Due to the different specifications, the graphics needed to be redrawn for each version so I did the MSX version first, and then had to start over from scratch on the Famicom and PC versions. I think the Famicom version reached a stage between alpha and beta, however the quality was quite poor. The programmer just, well, didn't really have the skill to pull it off. He was holed up in the office, working at it night and day, but unfortunately it didn't turn out the way we had hoped so it was never released.

It was a very famous film and we had a lot of freedom to develop the title, plus I was only 20 years old, so that was quite exciting for me!"

Takashi Tokita



Platform
NES

Released
Unreleased

Genre
Action

Developer
Square



Sunman / Superman

"Hoping to follow the success of their licensed Batman game, Sunsoft got the Superman licence from DC Comics. The programmer that they commissioned to do this development, Kenji Eno, was insensitive to the authenticity the license required and wanted creative freedom to do his own thing. Japan brought me in on it as they thought that I could convince Eno to change it back into a Superman game. We had a long meeting together at his small Tokyo Studio, but he refused point blank to change it to my suggestions.

We couldn't reach an amicable agreement, so Sunsoft dropped the licence and changed it to an original title called Sunman. Sadly, it was canned and never released, as Japan considered it a development failure and didn't want it to affect their stellar 8-bit reputation.

I had a special Famicom cartridge made of this for my own collection. I guess it was to be the only one in existence."

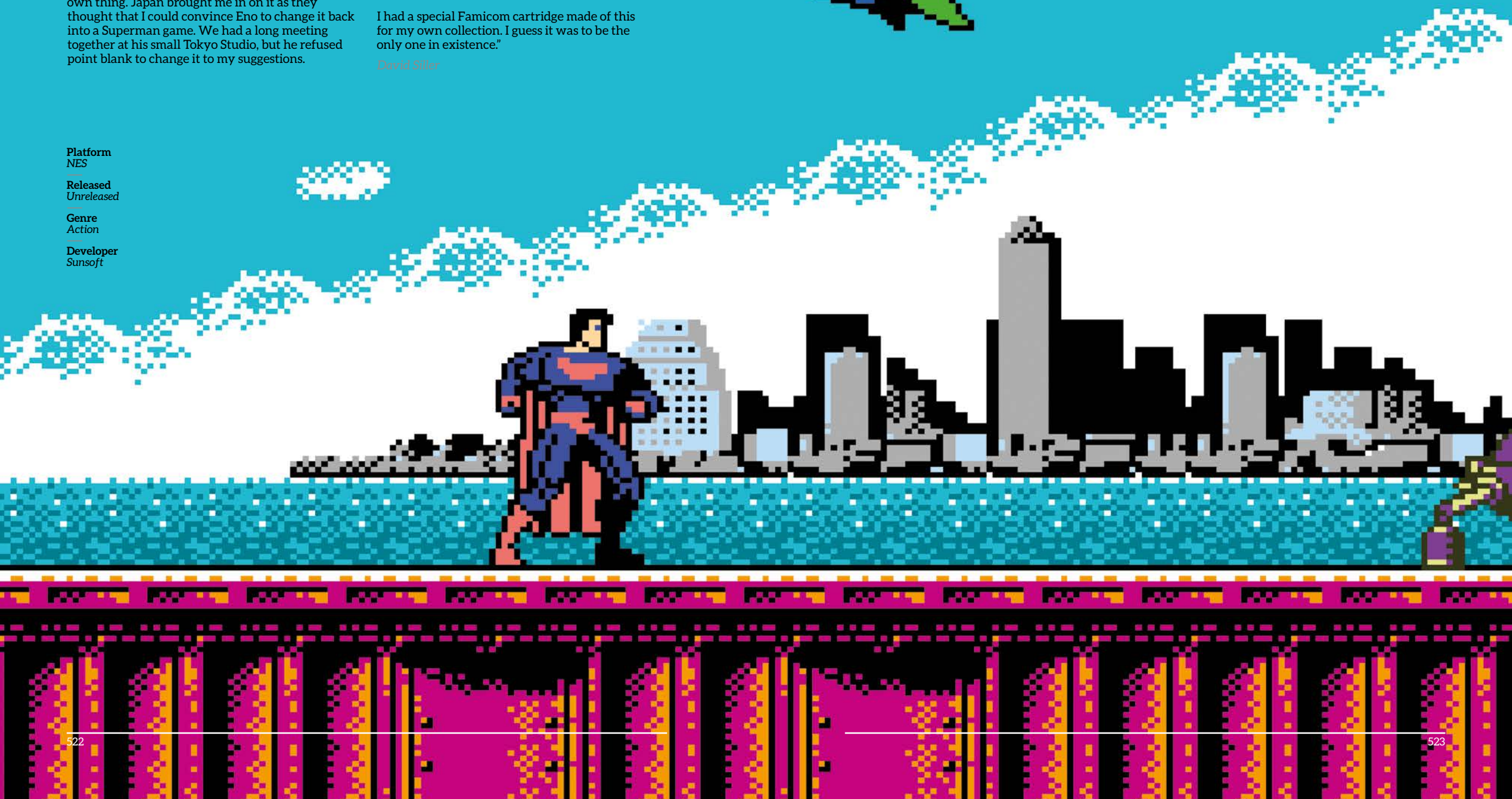
David Siller

Platform
NES

Released
Unreleased

Genre
Action

Developer
Sunsoft



Hard Drivin'

"Jurgen Friedrich, who wrote the [Atari] ST version, and I were able to use the larger CPU to do the mathematical approach. So what we did was take the corner scenes and the loop scenes and made basically animated loops out of those. So when you went through the loop, it was a play-back. And then I used the technology that was in Roadblasters and a few other driving games; I applied what was at the time the traditional Nintendo driving game approach, which was to do it by scanline. The general part of the track was done using the scanline technique, and then when you encountered the features of the track, they were actually mini movies that were playing back.

The higher-ups at Tengen didn't think it was of publishable quality. And the things that we needed to do involved putting more expensive hardware on the cartridge, which just wasn't sustainable."

Mark Morris

Platform
NES
Released
Unreleased
Genre
Simulation
Developer
Tengen



Wonderland Dizzy

"I'd been in the loft looking for some fun props to take to a talk we had planned and found a hand-drawn map to Wonderland Dizzy, our second Dizzy game for the NES. After the talk Andrew and I were trying to remember how finished the game was. If it was, could we release it? So I went up in the loft to see if I could find it..."

I found a disk, sadly the finished compiled game file wasn't there, but ALL the source code and graphics were. I wrote to Andrew Joseph of Yolkfolk.com - the biggest Dizzy Fan site. Andrew was very excited and said one of the Dizzy fans he knew would be able to compile it. A few days later, Lukasz Kur from Poland delivered a ROM image to Andrew Joseph who forwarded it on to us. Wow! He'd got it working. That's when we thought... cool! Let's release this free to the world."

Philip Oliver

Platform
NES

Released
2015

Genre
Adventure

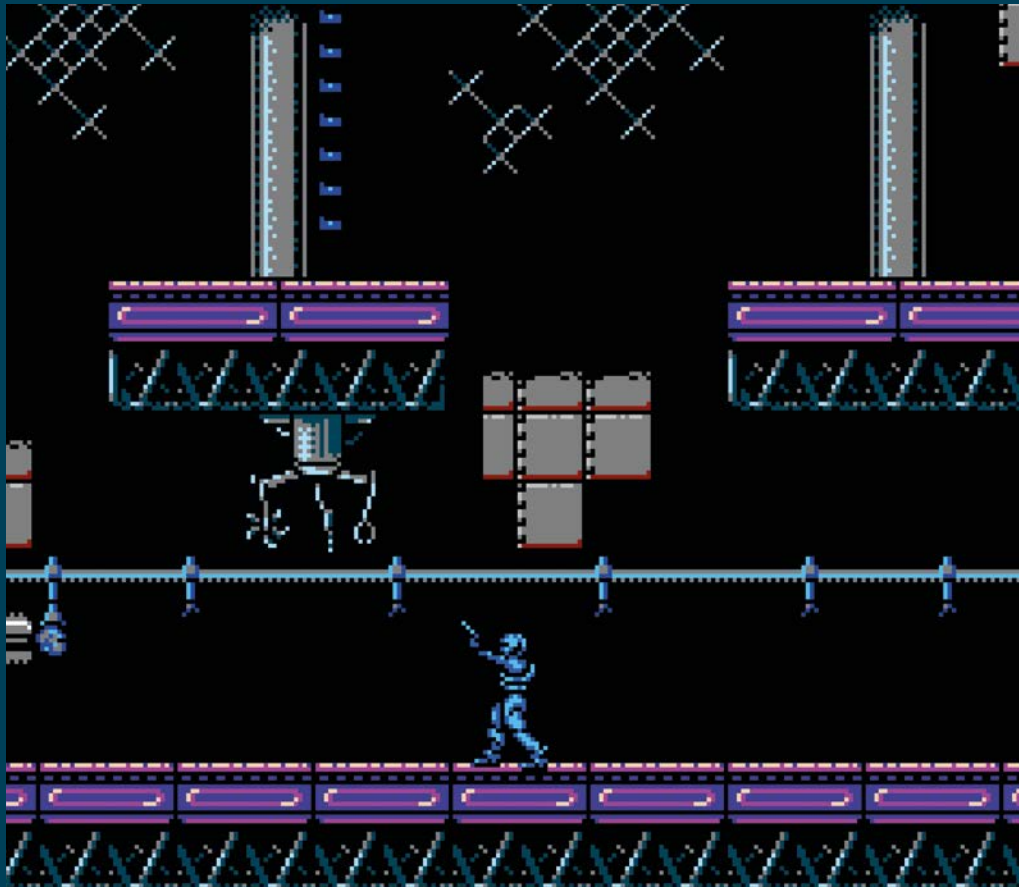
Developers
The Oliver Twins

Robocop vs. Terminator

“Graeme [Devine] gave me a job to do, which was Caesars Palace for the GameBoy. Two weeks later he moved me to a new project: Robocop vs. Terminator for the NES. I made Robocop Vs. Terminator for Interplay. It was a very, very bad game. The artists on the project couldn't deal well with the limits of the NES so it looks very bad, and the designer was a recently-promoted playtester who didn't really know what he was doing. My attitude was that I would pretty much do what I was told (since I was doing it as a contract) and so I didn't push any design issues.

At the time they told me it probably wouldn't ship in the United States but it might ship in Europe. I didn't keep a working version of the source, otherwise I would think about leaking it out on the net.”

Gregg Tavares

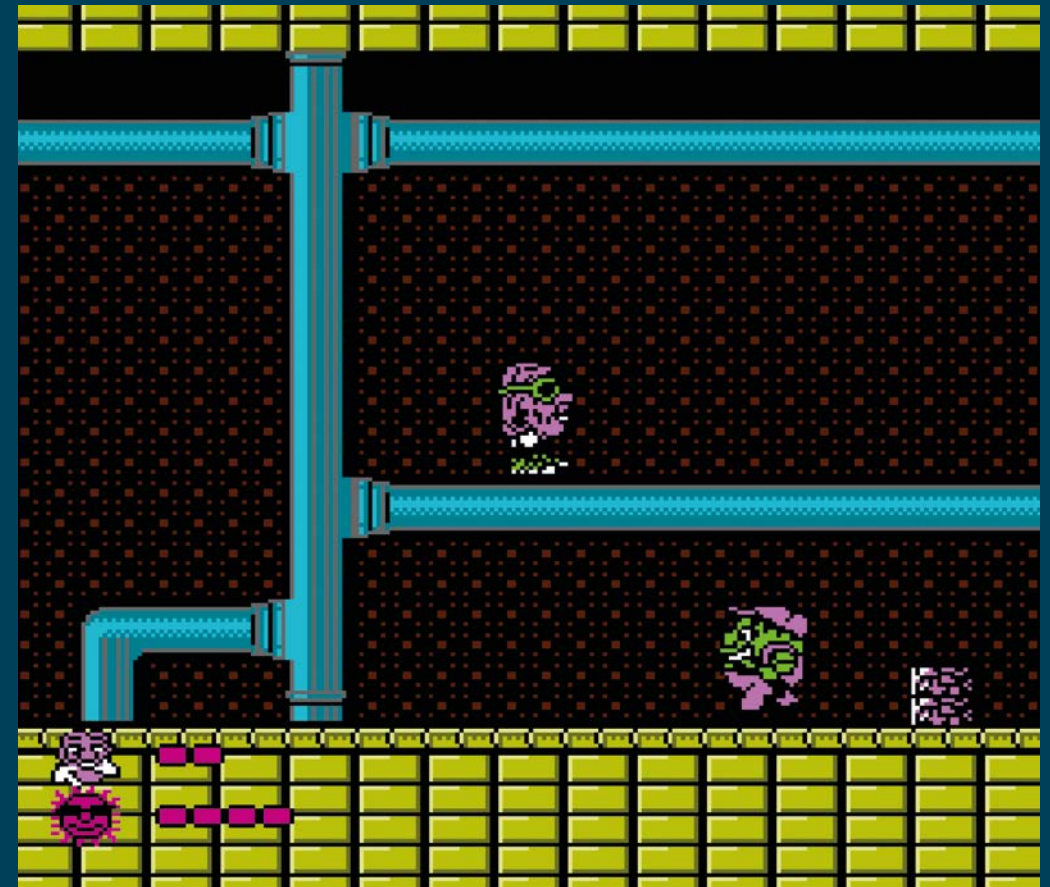


Platform
NES

Released
Unreleased

Genre
Action

Developer
Interplay



The California Raisins: The Grape Escape

“I remember development for California Raisins being slow since the tools felt particularly arcane – even for 1990. I also only had about four pages of documentation on the whole machine, so there was quite a guessing game. Being so far down the chain of relationships made it difficult to get questions answered.

Why was the game never released? I honestly don't know. As far as I understand, it was complete and ready to go. Some people have had conspiracy theories that someone may not have wanted the game released – it's fun to think that, but it's probably more likely that it was a marketing or company politics thing. I understand that the game did have some healthy pre-orders from the retailers.”

Robert Morgan

Platform
NES

Released
Unreleased

Genre
Platformer

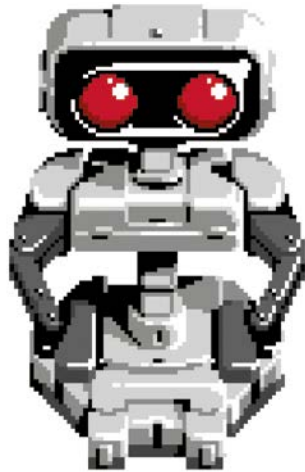
Developer
Radiance

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David Lee Hawkins	Dirk Müller	Eric Riedmann	Frank Provo	Glenn Larsson	Howard Knibbs	James Honey	Javier Ortiz	Jessica Telwach	John Vainio
David Lord	Dmitri Ponomarjov	Eric Riedmann	Frank Provo	Glenn Larsson	Howard Knibbs	James Honey	Javier Ortiz	Jessica Telwach	John White
David Lyons	Dmitriy Yermolov	Eric Riedmann	Frank Provo	Glenn Larsson	Howard Knibbs	James Honey	Javier Ortiz	Jessica Telwach	John Wood
David Mangus	Dominic Adams	Eric Riedmann	Frank Provo	Glenn Larsson	Howard Knibbs	James Honey	Javier Ortiz	Jessica Telwach	John Yencken
David Manning	Dominic Del Vecchio	Eric Riedmann	Frank Provo	Glenn Larsson	Howard Knibbs	James Honey	Javier Ortiz	Jessica Telwach	Jim Zidlicky
David Marriot	Don	Eric Wei	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg B.	Ian Davies	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Chen	Johnny Tomic
David Martin	Don Siliin	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Deane	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Martinez Bertólez	Don Booth	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Firlotte	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David McKie	Don Henricus	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Davin Meisch	Don Kirkland	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Mowbray	Donato F. Sinicco, III	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Northington	Doni Savvides	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Norton	Donnie D. Washington II	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Page	Dora Buckle	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Petrt	Doran Chamberlain	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Powell	Doug Brennenman	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David R. Harley	Doug Mann	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Reith	Doug Wilder	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Richier	Douglas Candano	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Roguin	Douglas Q Hawkins	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Rosen	Dr. Steve Jones	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Rubin	Dr. Jason Thar	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David S Roberts	Dr. Kevin Pepper Jr.	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David S. Baum	Dr. Milos Jovanovic	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David S. Nelms	Dr. Stephen Kolomyjec	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Sampson	Drew Aronica	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Sanger	Drew Gulas	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Sasser	Drew Kaz	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Schneider	Drew Nickels	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Sharp	Drew Ressler	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Sheppard	Duane Leininger II	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Stadley	Duane Marquez	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Tafulo Jorge	Duarte Figueiredo	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Teo Dtd	Dustin Dick	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David W Hill	Dustin Grayson	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Wagner	Dustin Long	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Widjaja	Dustin Rees	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Wieland	Dustin Tierney	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Willgoose	Dusan Medera	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Winter	Dwhitney Shaw	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Wooldard	Dwight Battle	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David Wurzel	Dylan Cook	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David W. Anderson	Dylan Howard Cromwell	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
David and Ora P	Dylan Kurlansky	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Davide Canavesi	Dylan Pack	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Davide Piva	Dylan Reynolds	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dayna Abel	Dylan Snyder	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Davin Meisch	Dylan Wolf	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean Bayley	E.B.D. Holland	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean DeKrell	Edwin B. Caldwell	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean Flukes	Ed Roberts	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean Noakes	Ed Schindler	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean Paddock	Eddie Rylan Riley	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dean Witte	Edgar Sánchez Grajeda	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dedy Sofyan Lu Ming Wei	Eduardo Uribe Blanco	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dee Whittington	Edward Beswetherick	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Devide Barroso	Edward H. Caldwell	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Dimitry Orat	Edwards Barrow	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Denise Loh	Edward Wainwright	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Denise Nepraung	Edwin Fisher	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman
Deniz F. Balnak	Ero Rantanen	Eric White	Frederik Lauridsen	Greg Beckman	Ian Hill	James Pettit	Jean-Charles Mathy	Jim Peterman	Jon Bockman

Joni Hautala	Justin Chines	Kevin Purcell	Lee Huggett	Marc Beavan	Martin Dreisbach	Matthew Greening	Michael Isbitski	Mikko Saviniemi	Nigel J Allen
Jonny Linley	Justin Clark Dray	Kevin Saunders	Lee Morgan	Marc Bennett	Martin Dubé	Michael J. Griffin	Michael J. Hixon	Miles Boyd	Nils Milnes
Jonnie Williams	Justin Coble	Kevin Stark	Lee Revill	Marc Bret	Martin Ferenczi-Houlden	Michael J. Hughes	Michael J. Peck	Milla Ikonen	Nikola Popin
Jonny Edge	Justin Cooney	Kevin Starr	Leif Matthiessen	Marc David Morgan	Martin Fink	Matthew Harris	Michael J. Adams	Milton J Sabido	Nils Bonenberger
Martin Lewis	Justin Gapek	Kevin Andrewsworth	Leish Andrew Woollett	Marc Gapek	Martin Gornow	Matthew Hapstead	Michael James Adams	Ming Lau	Nish L Cortez
Jonny Levig	Justin Dale Ball	Kevin Zurawel	Leigh Bower	Marc Judnick	Martin Guy Williams	Matthew Javanshir	Michael Jewell	Miquel Tomas Homs	Noah Kohles
Jools Watsham	Justin Emlay	Kevin Ticer	Leigh Hills	Marc Maessen	Martin Knippen	Matthew Knippen	Michael Joseph Dichiera	Miroslav Vizvary	Noah Ward
Jools Wills	Justin Erwin	Kiat Tanachotthitigul	Len Brassard	Marc Oberhäuser	Martin Kovarik	Matthew Korytowski	Michael K Palmisano	Misael Acedo III	Nola Winnicki
Jordan Anthony Bennett	Justin Fenico	Kiki Baheramajah	Lena Cardell	Marc Osward	Martin Krause	Matthew Macomber	Michael Katchabaw	Mitchell Holt	Nora Weber
Jordan Bueto	Justin Forbes	Kim Andre Østergaard	Leo Picado	Marc Rennhard	Martin Kuustik	Matthew Martin	Michael Keil	Mitchaela Suzuki	Norman Kühnl
Jordan Caccarelli	Justin Haywald	Kim Lindberg	Leonard Martinez	Marc Vioti	Martin Lykke Sjøstrand	Matthew Newham	Michael Keith	Mohammad Yakoub	Nurhan Gomaa
Jordan Giesbrecht	Justin Havel	Kim Marins	Leslie Jaw	Marc Woodward	Martin Niemczyk	Matthew Nosal	Michael Kalso	Mohamad Jabaza	Octavi Navarzo
Jordan Jacobs	Justin James	Kingsley Ella Boles	Leslie Lok	Marcel Aldrup	Martin McNair	Matthew Nosal	Michael Klinkhamer	Mohd Rukhairy	Oliver Grimm
Jordan McCommons	Justin Massongill	Kira Parker	Lester	Marcel Jackwerth	Martin Mengui	Matthew Pelouin	Michael Klösgen	Molly Newsam	Oliver Hale
Jordan Miller-slaven	Justin Parmer	Kirk Sklenar	Leszek Krupiński	Marcel Rebenstorf	Martin Nagel	Matthew Pierce	Michael Kunert	Morgan Clissett	Oliver Knagge
Jordan Murphy	Justin R. Jones	Kirk Wilbur	Levy Blanchard	Marcel Schalhorst	Martin Osborne	Matthew R. Hale	Michael Kuppinger	Mostafa Alattar	Oliver Kondic
Jordan Rogers	Justin Saba	Kirston Otis	Lewis Childs	Marcel Schön	Martin Ottowitz	Matthew R. Luft	Michael Kühnel	Mr Joel DJ Baass	Oliver Koslowski
Jordan Rudek	Justin Scioli	Klas Hammarström	Lex Mesman	Marcel Wiene	Martin Poirier	Matthew Rader	Michael Ladanyi	Mr Kronus	Oliver Mackey
Jordan Smith	Kathryn Snattuck	Klaus Stark	Liam Gardner	Marcelle Micciarelli	Martin Riedl	Matthew Reid	Michael Lagiglio	Mun Keat Looi	Oliver Matzke
Jordan Stich	Justin Tilford	Klaus Timmermann	Liam Piesley	Marco Aguilár	Martin Wodok	Matthew Riddle	Michael Larson	Mun Wei Looi	Oliver Maynard
Jordi Escobar Bonet	Justin Weeks	Klaus Wittmann	Liam Roe	Marco Bonadonna	Martin Woodard	Matthew Roger	Michael Lavigne	Nabeel M. Al-Haider	Oliver Rennie
Jordy Szablewski	Justin a Bridges	Knut Kraushaar	Lichtmayer Peter	Marco Fumo	Martin Wright	Matthew Roger	Michael Lee Ponton	Nabil Bisharat	Oliver Rummeyer
Jorge Blanco	Jérôme Vallée	Kodiak Saks	Marco Grintjes	Marco Jirasek	Marty Alchin	Matthew Rossi	Michael Lirko	Nac Datta	Oliver Bolender
Jorge Guia	Jörg Burbach	Koen De Brabander	Lincoln Ho	Marco Koeder	Marty Chinn	Matthew Schura	Michael Lopez	Nadim Jabre	Oliver Bordereau
Jorge Ruiz Benedicto	Jörg Winterstein	Komei Ohashi	Lincoln McClellan	Marco Lago	Martyn Hoyle	Matthew Sease	Michael Lynch	Naoya Sato	Oliver Martin
José A. Olivares	Jörn Grote	Konstantin Gorelyy	Ling Lau	Marco Lago	Martyn Large	Matthew Seavey	Michael Lünzer	Nasser AlMulaifi	Oliver Vigneresse
José Luis Martínez Jr.	John Gierstin	Konstantinos Marinopoulos	Luigi Pierres	Marcelo Storz	Marveth McCarthy	Matthew Simacek	Michael Larson	Omar Gardiola Arroyo	Oliver Romero
Jose Guerra	Jürgen Florido	Kostis Mastorakis	Lionel P Belanger II	Marcel Ravetto	Marçal Mora Cantallops	Matthew Stordeur	Michael Martinec	Natalie Harreld	Omar Romero
Jose Ivan Lopez Romo	Jürgen Schmid	Koval Dmitry	Lionel Vidal	Marco Verhoeven	Masih Naisan	Matthew Tamura	Michael Matuzak	Nate Carmody	Ørjan Edvardsen Nilsen
Jose Javier Manzanares	K. Ku	Kris Vanderweit	Lisa Dahlkoetter	Marco a Cortez	Mat Allen	Matthew Tuffin	Michael Mayerhofer	Nate Dudek	Ørjan Laxaa
Jose Lopez	Kai Engelbrecht	Krishna Corinaldesi	Lisa Whittlatch	Marcos Bolanos	Mat Fleck	Matthew Turvey	Michael McDermott	Nate Voss	Orlando Capetillo
Jose Luis Equiza	Kaidlor	Kristen Hanna	Liz Sikes	Marcus Bearden	Matej Jan	Matthew Vose	Michael McParland	Nathalie Tull	Orlando Orozco
Jose Luis Garza	Kaleb N. Ratcliff	Kristen Larson	Liz and Peet Cooper	Marcus Bornhöft	Mateusz Morek	Matthew Wallace	Michael Murphy	Nathan	Oscar Calderon
Jose Luis Martínez Leon	Keith Matthews	Kristian Cooper	Lloyd Cooper	Marcus Schuring	Mathew Cooper	Matthew Wallace	Michael Papp	Nathan Black	Oliver Matzke
Jose Luis Sanchez De Gabriel	Kamran Keenan	Kristian Bredal	Logan B. Decoursey	Marcel Lung	Mathew Wilson	Matthew Wilson	Michael Pestana	Nathan Cannell	Oliver Matzke
José Luis Valcárcel Moragrega	Kari Vinther Nielsen	Kristian James-Gillum	Logan Bush	Marcus Stjárnäs	Mathew Shepherd	Matthew Wrenn	Michael Pfoser	Nathan Collins	Ozan Can Kirkyildiz
José Miguel Fonseca Moraes	Karl Andrews	Kristian Milos	Logan James	Marcus Strautman	Mathias Böhmer	Mathias Vallerström	Michael Pinney	Nathan Kellen	P Underwood
José Olivença	Karl C	Kristin Bedemann	Logan Perez	Marek Kstelovic	Mathias Lange	Matthias J. Lange	Michael Quiroz	Matthias Lynch	PJ Matthews
Jose P. Zagal	Karl Milligan	Kristofer Simicic	Logan Walters	Marek Werno	Matthias Lamm	Matthias Lamm	Michael R. Trice	Nathan Morrow	PR Taylor
José Tremblay Champagne	Karl Todd	Kristoffer Stenfelt	Logan Wilberts	Marko Tyrväinen	Matthieu Hebert	Matthias Mormino	Michael Rivo	Nathan Morrow	Pablo Hidalgo Juanes
Joseph Brumfield	Karl W. Auer	Kristian Gustafsson	Logan Wilberts	Marko Tyrväinen	Matthieu Rubin	Matthias Mormino	Michael Rivero	Nathan Sluowitz	Pablo Pérez Gómez
Joseph Fox Sampson	Karol Szymczuk	Kupō Smith	Lorenzo Dutto	Mario Florez	Matthieu Smeets	Matthias Van Schendelen	Michael Roberts	Nathan Smeets	Pablo Pérez Gómez
Joseph Goodman	Karsten Fouquaet	Kurt Klingler-Wilensky	Lorenzo Perugini	Mario Florez	Mats Kangas	Matthijs Van Schendelen	Michael Roberts	Nathan Smeets	Paolo Paps
Joseph Hawkins	Karsten Müller-Bier	Kurtis Stamp	Lorenz Liebig	Mario Ilinger	Mats Lindh	Matthias Kuntz	Michael Scuderi	Nathaniel Shamma	Parker James Delponce
Joseph Ho D.h.	Katcha Dzeja	Kyle Austin Karras	Loric Madramootoo	Mario Liebig	Mats Trovik	Mattia Ranta	Michael Sepcot	Nathaniel Vella	Parker Wayne Wenzler
Joseph Klemm	Katherine Wallace	Kyle Beasley	Lothar Lattermann	Mario Liebisch	Matt	Mattia Carletti	Michael Shea	Neal Andrews	Pascal Berger
Joseph Kulikowski	Kathleen Hanel	Louis Montambeault	Louis Stumpf	Marios Filos	Matt and Olivia Glass	Mattia Centemero	Michael Smith	Neal Manning	Pascal Panneels
Joseph Seeger	Katsuyuki Fujita	Louis Montambeault	Louis Stumpf	Marisa L Smith	Matt Artz	Mattias Dahlberg	Michael Stevens	Nealon Ledbetter	Pascal Seeger
Joseph Stanton Sr	Kazu Matsaura	Luc De Brouwer	Luc De Brouwer	Luc De Brouwer	Matt Benson	Mattias Dahlberg	Michael Stevens	Nealon Ledbetter	Pasi Rinne-Halkola
Joseph Steinert	Keiji Nishihara	Luc De Brouwer	Luc De Brouwer	Luc De Brouwer	Matt Bruen	Mattias Dahlberg	Michael Stevens	Nealon Ledbetter	Paolo Paps
Josh and Amie	Keith Borgholthaus	Luca Calamiti	Luca Calamiti	Mark A Jackson	Matt Casey	Mattias Dahlberg	Mauricio Vives	Michael Veroni	Patrick James Delponce
Josh Donow	Keith Dufresne	Luca Fabbri	Lucas Oyarzun Cortés	Mark Alan Edwards	Matt Clemson	Matthias Böhmer	Maurizio Pistelli	Michael W Hillard	Parker Wayne Wenzler
Josh Dusel	Keith Dufresne	Kyle Davidson	Lucelena Rodriguez Marichi	Mark Alcocer	Matt Cruca	Matthias Lynch	Max Frishberg	Michael W. Stieber	Pascal Seeger
Josh Goodfellow	Keith Dufresne	Kyle Davies	Lucien Hoare	Mark Argent	Matt Ellard	Matthias Lynch	Max Higdon	Michael Wagner	Patrick Berlinger
Josh K	Keith Higgaugan	Kyle Dinsdale	Lucien Hoare	Mark Argent	Matt Ferguson	Matthias Lynch	Max Jay	Michael Walker	Patrick Karlsson
Josh Kennedy	Keith J. Frank	Kyle Dinsdale	Lucien Hoare	Mark Argent	Matt Foster	Matthias Lynch	Max Nardi	Michael Webster	Patrick Bönzil
Josh King	Keith Morris	Kyle Messineo	Lucy Brown	Mark Buffone	Matt G	Matthias Lynch	Max Silverman	Michael Winn	Patrick James Moylan
Josh Lee	Keith Slater	Kyle Mumma	Luigi Vicari	Mark Buffone	Matt Highley	Matthias Lynch	Max Smith	Michael Woodard	Patrick Khachf
Josh McConnell	Keith Strickland	Kyle Nunery	Luis Alberto Martinez Luna	Mark Crocker	Matt Hodges	Matthias Lynch	Max Svensson	Michael A. Jacobs	Patrick King
Josh Miller	Keith Tollfree	Kyle O'Leary	Luis Maria Prada Vazquez	Mark Frewin	Matt Holgate	Matthias Lynch	Max Symmes	Michael A. Jacobs	Patrick Koonings
Josh Washburne	Keith Tollfree	Kyle Overby	Luis Martins	Mark Goddard	Matt K.C. Wong	Matthias Lynch	Max Ullman	Michael Tomczak	Patrick McEarevy
Joshua Lack	Keithbuswell	Kyle Posing	Luis Martins	Mark Hiltner	Matt Knoch	Matthias Lynch	Mazhar Khan	Michael Tomczak	Patrick Miller
Joshua M Diaz	Kelli Myers	Kyle Posing	Luis Martins	Mark Hiltner	Matt Knoch	Matthias Lynch	Mazhar Khan	Michael Tomczak	Patrick Miller
Joshua Michael Turner	Kelli Abernathy	Kyle Schleich	Luis Mosquera Muñoz	Mark Howlett	Matt Krupa	Matthias Lynch	Meaghan Phillips	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joshua Minol	Kevin Chang	Kyle Starr	Luis Sana	Mark Howlett	Matt Lambourne	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joshua P Leingang Batölein	Kelvin Lee	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark J Mangano	Matt Lawrence	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joshua Parish	Ken Brown	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark J Lang	Matt Lewis	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joshua Pate	Ken Carlson	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark James Taylor	Matt Mann	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joshua Rogers	Ken Händel	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark J Lang	Matt Manning	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Jossie Tirado	Ken Kotch	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Matson	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Jouni Vepsäläinen	Ken Vanderveer	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt McCoy	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Journey Russell	Kenan Bennett	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Miller	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
João Filipe Marques Silva	Kenji Nagano	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Miller	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Joël Fuchs	Kenneth Chik	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Morris	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
J Sebastian Guzman A.	Kenneth D. Morris	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Nance	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Jschembri	Kenneth Lee	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Nance	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan A. Paz Muñoz	Kenneth Mileay	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Pittman	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Andres	Kenneth R Valentine	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Ronge	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Antonio López Almagro	Lars Becker	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shaw	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Carlos Gomez	Lars Erik Bakken	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Fernandez	Lars Peterke	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Francisco Rojas M.	Lars Steinbach	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Jose De Haro	Lars-Magnus Hellrönn	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Manuel Diaz	Maciej Bizunowicz	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan R. Ramirez A.	Maciej Korzeniowski	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Rufes	Mads Darø Kristensen	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Vargas	Maggie Donec	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juan Vera Sequeiros	Laura Richardson	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Juha Ahariemi	Kent Knutsen	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
Julian Detris	Kerry Loggins	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
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Julien Confetti	Kevin J Taylor	Kyle Thiboutot	Lukas Boettger	Mark Sato	Matt Shores	Matthias Lynch	Michele Sarzana	Michael Harolopakis	Patrick Mahan
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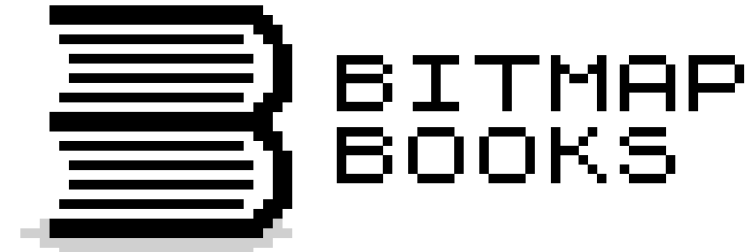
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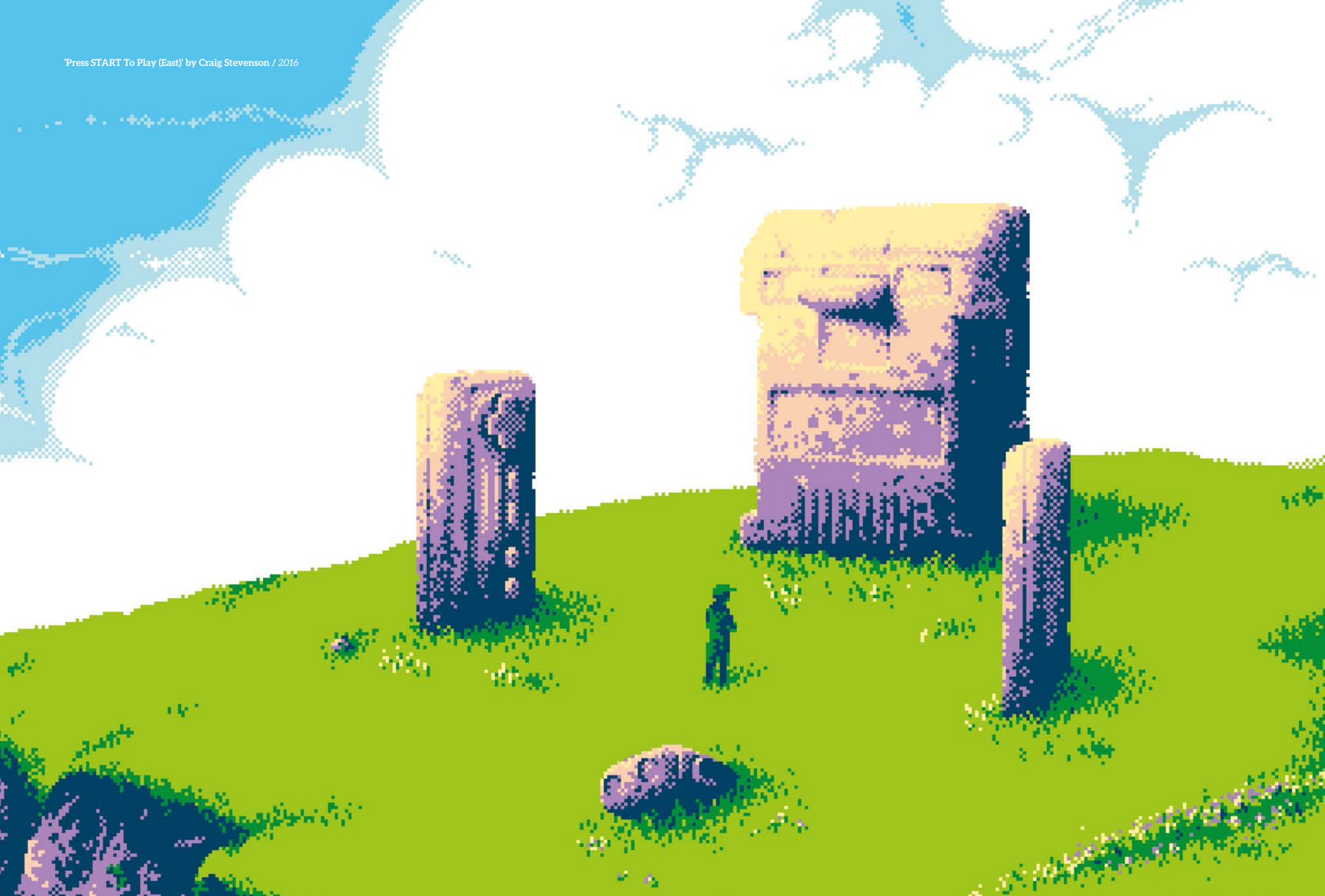
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With its cutting edge graphics and extensive catalogue of iconic games, the NES/Famicom played a huge part in the history of videogaming. Nintendo's console stormed onto the market and immediately raised the bar with classic titles such as Donkey Kong, Super Mario Bros., Mega Man, The Legend of Zelda, Final Fantasy, Fire Emblem and many more.

Over the course of its 20-year lifespan the console sold in excess of 60 million units, making Nintendo a household name, and introducing youngsters everywhere to a whole new world of characters and stories. For many, this would be a turning point in their lives, leading them to become artists, game designers and programmers. It helped to popularise manga and anime among Western gamers, and brought icons of Western culture into Japanese homes. Nintendo's little 8-bit console changed the world of entertainment forever, and its influence cannot be overstated.

NES/Famicom: a visual compendium aims to showcase the very best pixel art, box art and product design on each system. Spread over 536 pages, it features more than 170 classic games, with articles on the leading developers, interviews with key figures in the industry and mini-features on subjects such as packaging, fan art and unreleased games.

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