

# GAMING INSURRECTION

FOR GAMERS, BY GAMERS







Lyndsey Beatty, editor-in-chief

# from the editor

**W**elcome back, gentle and dear readers!

We hope everyone is staying safe and being smart about the continuing pandemic. While we're continuing to stay safe, we're still gaming. We'd hope to have acquired a Nintendo Switch during the holidays, but after several attempts, we came up short in our quest. We will continue to search, perhaps receiving one as a Valentine's Day gift or first wedding anniversary surprise come April. Metroid Dread and Animal Crossing: New Horizons are looking more fabulous by the day.

While we continue to hunt for a Switch, the origins of some of its most popular releases are reflected in this issue. This issue is one that is a long time in coming. We've been planning our list of the greatest games of all

time for a long time. We're talking a decade at least. And so much has come and gone since then! Fortunately, for us, we're thinking about games of the retro persuasion, those great games of yesteryear that no matter when we talk about them, they always occupy a lofty pantheon. There are some heavy hitters on this list, the games you most expect, like Super Mario Bros. 3. But there's also a few quirky and unexpected titles that you might never have heard of, too.

So, get to reading our list of the best of the best and let us know what you think of our choices for the GOAT game. Enjoy the issue!

*Lyndsey*



**LYNDSLEY BEATTY**  
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**LYNDSLEY BEATTY** is co-founder and editor-in-chief of GI. She enjoys binge watching TV with her husband, editing as part of the Uppercut Editions team and playing various retro video games. Lyndsey resides in Columbia, S.C., and is an accounting auditor for the state of South Carolina.

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## GAMING INSURRECTION

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## GI REVIEW POLICY

Scale is from 1 to 5 as follows:

- 1 — **Broken.** Absolutely do not play this game. A broken mess from start to finish. Game is unplayable and irredeemable in all areas.
- 2 — **Substandard.** The game isn't for everyone. Some mechanics work; others need work. Overall design is questionable in some areas.
- 3 — **Average and meets expectations.** Mechanics work and it's a decent package overall. It's playable, and you'll come back to the game.
- 4 — **Above average.** Exceeds expectations. Overall, a great game worth keeping in a gamer's library. Presentation and mechanics all work as expected and add to or enhance the gaming experience.
- 5 — **Masterpiece.** Everyone should play this title at least once to experience what it has to offer.

STAFF



**BRANDON BEATTY**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

**BRANDON BEATTY** is editor-at-large for GI. Brandon writes reviews when the mood strikes him, produces the quarterly Otaku Corner column for The Strip and spends a significant amount of time watching new and old anime alike with his wife. Brandon resides in Columbia, S.C., and is a security specialist for the state of South Carolina.

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# Mario Kart 8 soundtrack goes for the gold with stellar racing tunes and tracks

**T**he music of Mario Kart has always been important. There's nothing like racing with your favorite Mario character and taking in the scenery of a new track with a bop playing in the background.

The genesis of Mario Kart's sound may have begun in the Super Nintendo era, but the rich tradition continues with the latest game in the series: Mario Kart 8. These are some of our favorite tracks, new and old, to race around with.

**Music Park (Mario Kart 7 – 3DS):** The bouncing track makes up for the weird and slightly lackluster racing locale. The beat is fun and lively, and there's plenty of horns to help keep the music-themed racing enjoyable.

**Dragon Driftway (Mario Kart 8 – Wii U):** The Chinese dragon-themed racing track is fun and twisty, just like we like it. The music here is beautiful and legitimately makes us smile with the use of an erhu, a Chinese stringed instrument. Dragon Driftway sounds just as beautiful as it looks.

**Excitebike Arena (Mario Kart 8 – Wii U):** We aren't shy about our overall dislike of Excitebike for the NES, as has been noted previously in GI. However, the themed track in Mario Kart 8 has captured our hearts, and dare we say, made us reconsider our feelings about the original game. It's fun and rowdy, upbeat and pristine in its remake.

**Grumble Volcano (Mario Kart Wii – Wii):**



Mario Kart Wii had some decent tracks, despite feeling like a disappointment when it was first released. Grumble Volcano is one of the few things to emerge from the rubble, and it's a good thing, too, because it's a banger.

The tone and beauty of it arrives in the atmosphere where racing through an exploding super volcano is a beautiful experience.

**Main Menu (Mario Kart 8 – Wii U):** The main menu always sets the tone of the experience, and the latest menu music is no different for Mario Kart 8. This gets us in the mood to get ready to drive. It's groovy

and fun but there's some seriousness going on, too.

**Animal Crossing (All Seasons) (Mario Kart 8 – Wii U):** We are massive Animal Crossing fans here at GI, so it shouldn't be a surprise that we love the track devoted to the series. It's fun, airy and light in any version, and we love that it incorporates elements of intro themes for all the series' main games up to Animal Crossing: New Leaf. This is one of our favorite tracks for obvious reasons.

**Neo Bowser City (Mario Kart 7 – 3DS):** One of our favorite Bowser-themed tracks is a fun ride in Mario Kart 8. It's futuristic and



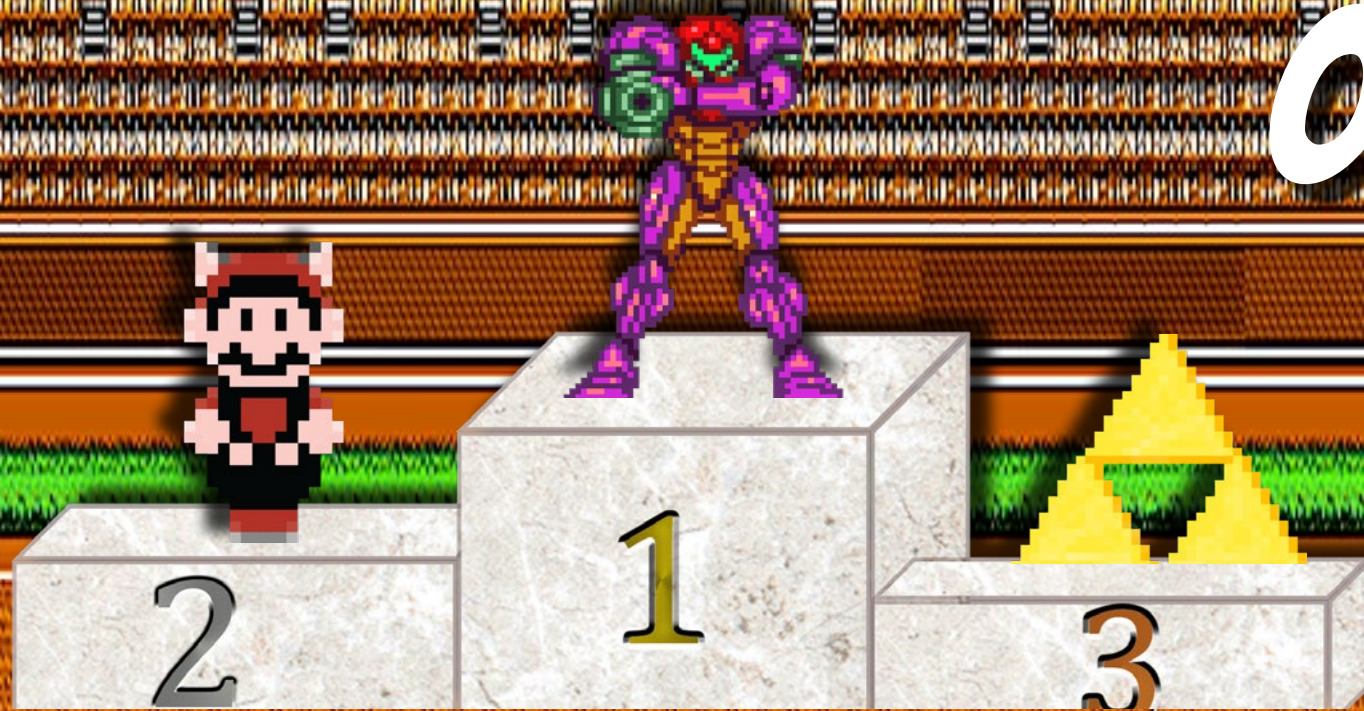
hopeful, even though it's themed after the bad boss turtle himself. This is a banger that will make you bop.

**Ribbon Road (Mario Kart: Super Circuit – GBA):** An oldie but goodie from the Game Boy Advance days, Ribbon Road sounds a lot like a beach classic. Straight from the surf sound, Ribbon Road is a fun favorite invoking boogie boards, waves and pinup beach girls.

*Lyndsey Beatty is editor-in-chief of Gaming Insurrection. She can be reached by email at [lyndseyb@gaminginsurrection.com](mailto:lyndseyb@gaminginsurrection.com)*



# GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME



GI RANKS ITS  
FAVORITE RETRO TITLES  
... EVER



**W**e here at Gaming Insurrection are an old-school duo. We've been around the block for a long time, and we've played a lot of games.

That said, we have some favorites.

What does it mean to be the GOAT?

It's what the game reminds us of, the good times we encountered when sitting down to play. It's the music, the graphics, the immersion. It's how we talk about the game years later, remembering where we were when we played it for the first time. It's the memories and feelings evoked just by saying its name.

We want to share our favorites with you because it's a rite of passage to name your favorites if you're a gamer, and to start the conversation of what it means to be a GOAT from old heads who love games.

There are some obscure titles here and there, and the names you've come to expect as retro juggernauts are also here.

Be forewarned, though: This is the best of the best.



Lyndsey Beatty

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# NO. 1: SUPER METROID



**M**y travails on Zebes began not with the first game in the series, but with the second in 1994. I was but a young, inexperienced lad in search of a good time. I stumbled into the arms of one Samus Aran and joined her quest to eradicate the Metroid species. I knew the game so well at one point that I could achieve my best clear time and 100 percent item collection rate in the same playthrough. I was so dedicated to the thrall of Super Metroid that I wanted to name my future daughter after Samus. The love has been there from the moment I booted up an existing save file in my Christmas gift and is still there despite more advanced and different style games in the series.

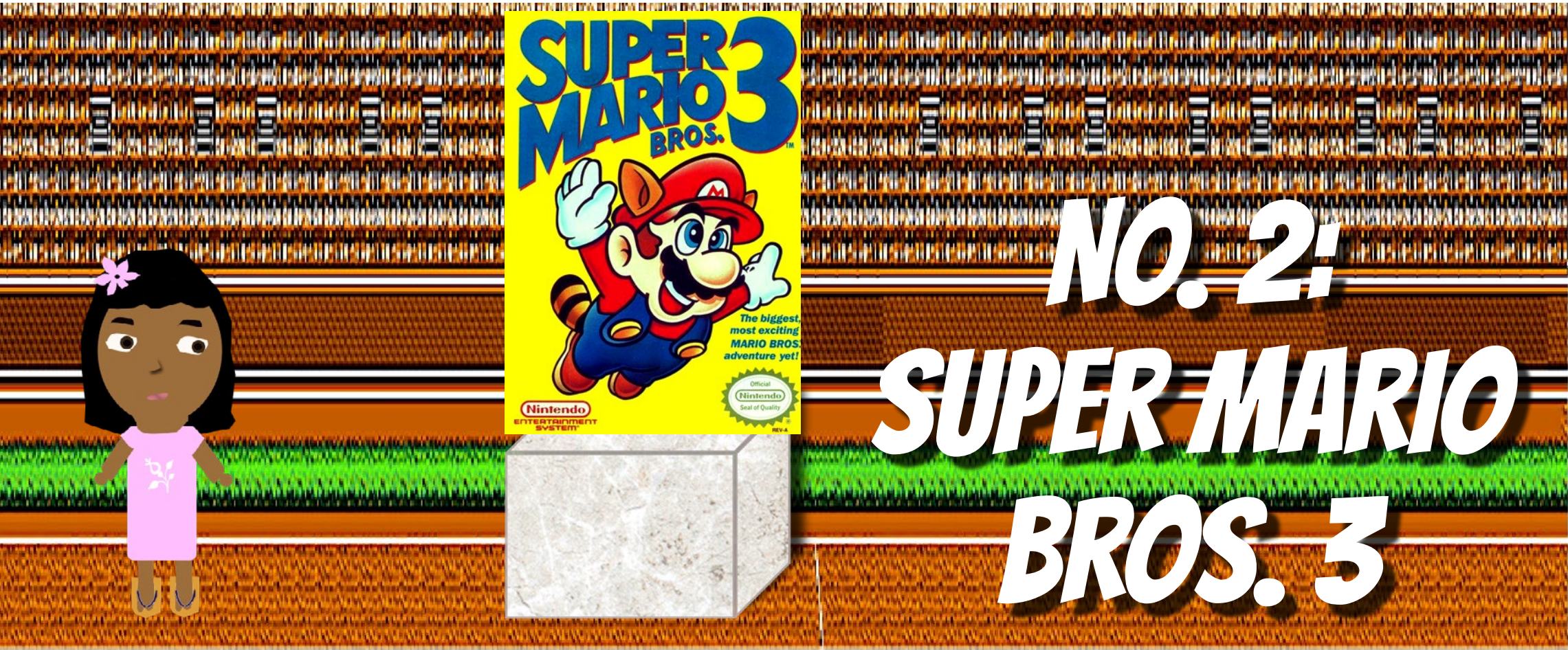
You can't tell me that Super Metroid is not the best game of all time. Intricately crafted in mechanics, sound, graphics and story, Super Metroid is the quintessential adventure for modern gaming — a fabled complete package. Even after nearly 30 years, the game still plays just as good as the day it was released. I still get goosebumps finding items and approaching

boss battles, and I've played through the game in its entirety hundreds of times at this point.

There is nothing more satisfying than remembering how to defeat each of the bosses or walking through the game and sharing its secrets with a newer and less-educated gamer. Even the experience of watching playthroughs and finding new ways to experience the game through specific boss order is still thrilling. There's just something irresistible about the charm of Samus toppling the Space Pirate empire once and for all.







**W**arp whistles. Suits. Koopa Kids. Everything that is Mario is found in the greatest Mario game of all time: Super Mario Bros. 3.

There was nothing quite like Super Mario Bros. 3 when it hit the market in 1990 in the U.S. The first glimpse of the true sequel to Super Mario Bros. in The Wizard set the tone for everything else to come: Bigger, better and more Mario. The impact of seeing Mario take flight for the first time was undeniable: Mario was king, and he knew it.

The play is polished and refined down to the core with Super Mario Bros. 3. There isn't too much that Mario can't do, and no other Mario game until Super Mario 64 would revolutionize Mario the way SMB3 did in terms of mechanics. The look and feel of Super Mario Bros. 3 also play into its strengths and lasting appeal. It feels just as fun to play as it looks. The sound is iconic as well. There is a reason that Nintendo returns to this aesthetic for current Mario games when they want to invoke nostalgia. It is not a secret that modern 2D Mario plays closely to the SMB3 era.

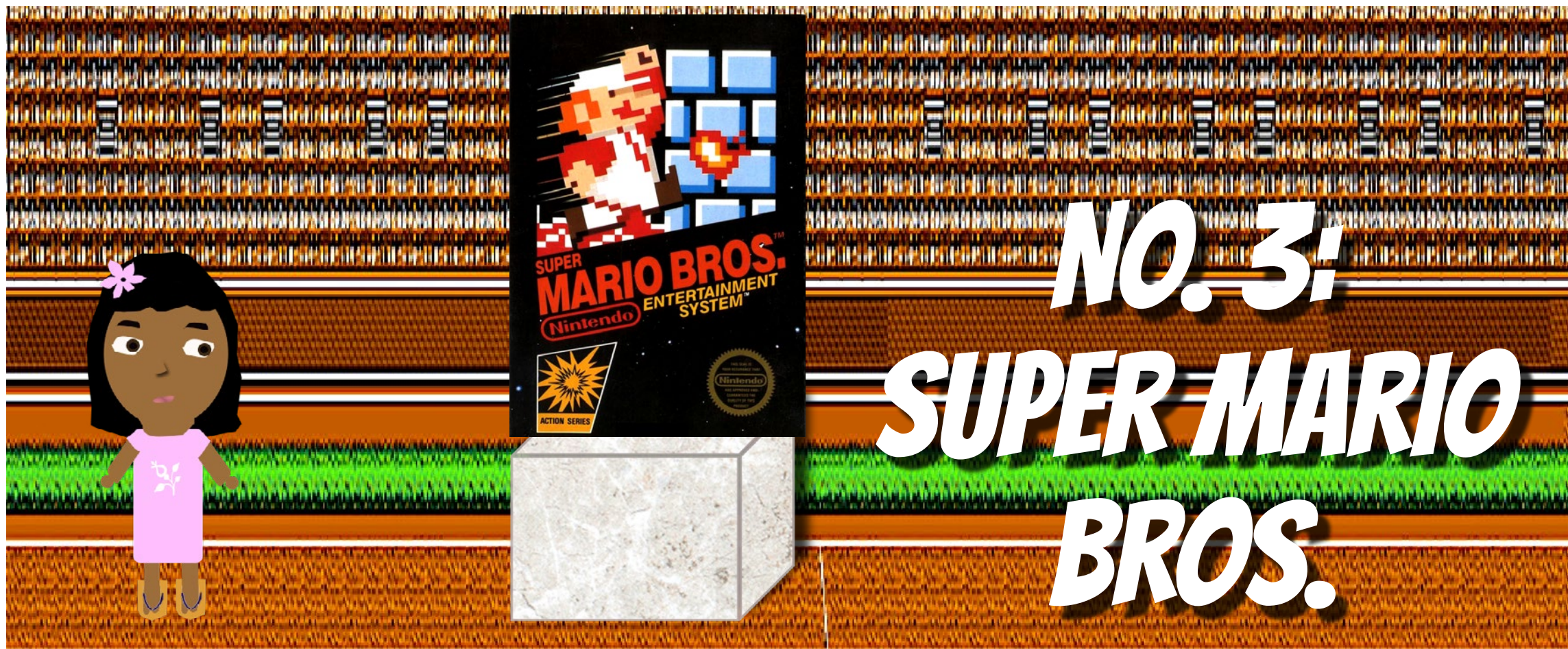
If you want the best 2D Mario game ever made, and you want it in its purest form, look no further than suited and booted Super Mario Bros. 3.



Lyndsey Beatty







In the beginning of modern gaming, there was one king that ruled over everything else available at the time. The revival of entire industry rested on its shoulders and meant the difference between life and death for video games entirely. Who rode in to save the day with excellent mechanics, music, and playability? Super Mario Bros. threw on its cape, put the industry on its back and sold 58 million copies in the process.

Super Mario Bros. is simply perfection. The replay value is infinite, the graphics are gorgeous, and the mechanics are unparalleled. The original NES version is still playable more than 35 years after its initial release and that's even with the various remakes on the market.

Look and feel aside, Super Mario Bros. is known as the gold standard for hop and bop platforming. Every platforming game released after SMB is beholden to it for its existence. It serves as the template for everything to come after. Even its designers are known as the template: Shigeru Miyamoto, Takashi Tezuka and Koji Kondo are legendary for their creation and have directly influenced some of the most influential designers in the gaming industry today.

I know exactly where I was and how old I was when I played the game for the first



Lyndsey Beatty

time (7 years old and at a long-since-moved friend's home) and heard the iconic overworld theme of SMB. That first memory of dying on the first Goomba in World 1-1 will forever stay with me. The game introduced me to the juggernaut that is Mario and video games in a wider perspective. Thirty-three years later, I'm still humming along with the overworld theme and answering texts with the level complete fanfare. I still play with the same rhythm and worry if I'm going to make the big jump of World 8-2. I developed gaming lingo that I still use today, thanks to SMB.

Instantly memorable and often duplicated. That is the impact of Super Mario Bros.







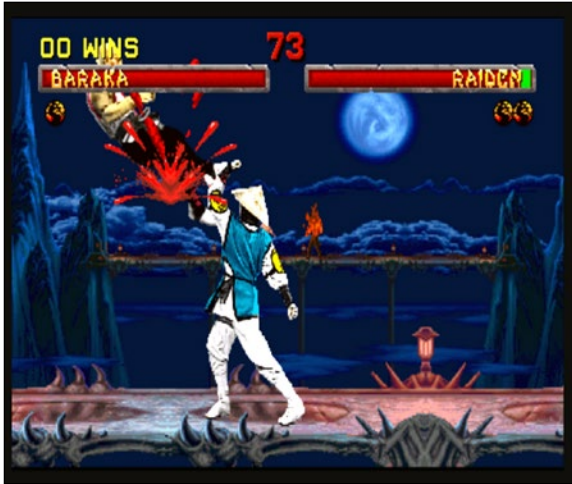
**T**he goriest fighting game series I have ever played took me by surprise one random night in 1993. I wasn't looking to play anything new and was walking out of the long-defunct Aladdin's Castle in Columbia when I saw it. There it was, in all its decapitating and ice-throwing glory: Mortal Kombat II just sitting there, waiting no begging, to be played. The curious 12-year-old in me was hooked ever more.

Bombastic and rudimentary by today's standards, MK2 is everything a fighting game shouldn't be. A strong story, memorable fighters, seemingly endless secrets, and impressive and realistic graphics? Those weren't allowed to be in anything other than Street Fighter II. And yet, somehow, a group in Chicago stole the attention away from the legendary Capcom with a fighting game set in a mystical world where you could, and were highly encouraged to, execute people at the end of a match. And, get this, this wasn't even the first game in the series. It's the sequel, and it's bloodier and more outlandish than the first game. Heads rolled. Just the way it should be.

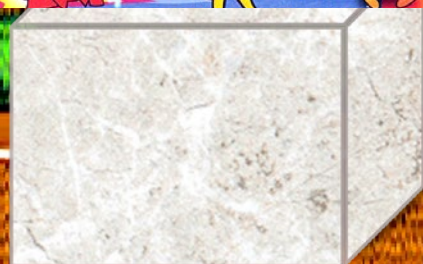
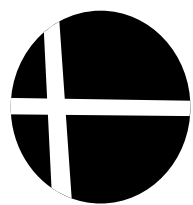
A killer soundtrack coupled with smooth gameplay and graphics means it's not your average fighting game. And there were imitators galore. But that's the beauty and charm of MK2. Nothing could prepare you for one of the best sequel games of all time.



Lyndsey Beatty







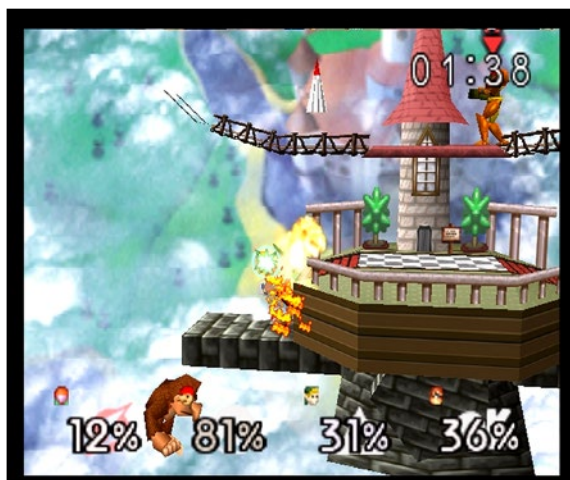
## NO. 5: SUPER SMASH BROS.

**W**hat's better than romping through the Mushroom Kingdom or Hyrule? Try fighting as Mario and Link against an agitated Pikachu ready to fry you with Thunder Jolt. Or popping Yoshi because it ran off again when you least needed him to. Super Smash Bros. took a novel concept and smashed itself into the upper echelon of video games where nearly all of its cast already resides.

The original 1999 game is Smash in its most basic form and that's just fine. This is where current Smash started, and its naïve and pure roots make it arguably the most fun to play. This is where making it back to a stage is wholly dependent on knowing the right timing and your character. Weapons are still a mystery that you had to go into training mode just to familiarize yourself with them. And when it was just about Nintendo marquee names duking it out. This is the magic that the Smash series began with. This is where stages were born with cute gimmicks that evoked a series you were probably familiar with and wouldn't kill your character because of something outside of your control. Smash Bros. came out of the gate with a strong showing and sense of identity about what it was and what it wasn't, and we loved it. It was a smashing good time.



Lyndsey Beatty







# GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME

## LYNDSEY'S PICK

NOS. 6-25



NO. 6: SUPER MARIO WORLD



NO. 7: SUPER MARIO KART



NO. 8: DUCKTALES



NO. 9: MORTAL KOMBAT 3



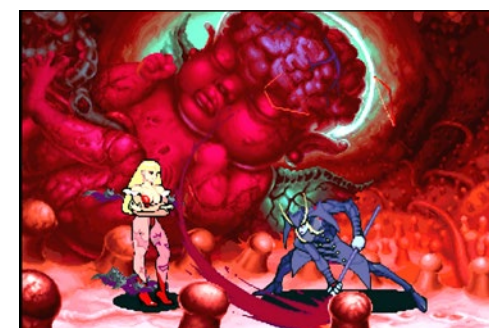
NO. 10: ANIMAL CROSSING



NO. 11: BORDERLANDS



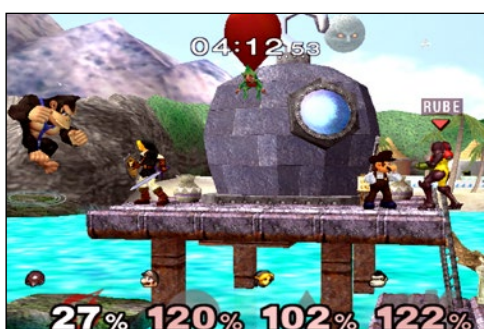
NO. 12: STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3



NO. 13: VAMPIRE SAVIOR



NO. 14: DDR EXTREME (JP)



NO. 15: SMASH BROS MELEE



NO. 16: POKÉMON RED & BLUE



NO. 17: FINAL FANTASY V



NO. 18: GALAGA



NO. 19: CRAZY TAXI



NO. 20: MYSTICAL NINJA 64



NO. 21: NINJA GAIDEN



NO. 22: SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



NO. 23: PROJECT JUSTICE



NO. 24: SOULCALIBUR



NO. 25: TETRIS





## NO. 1: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



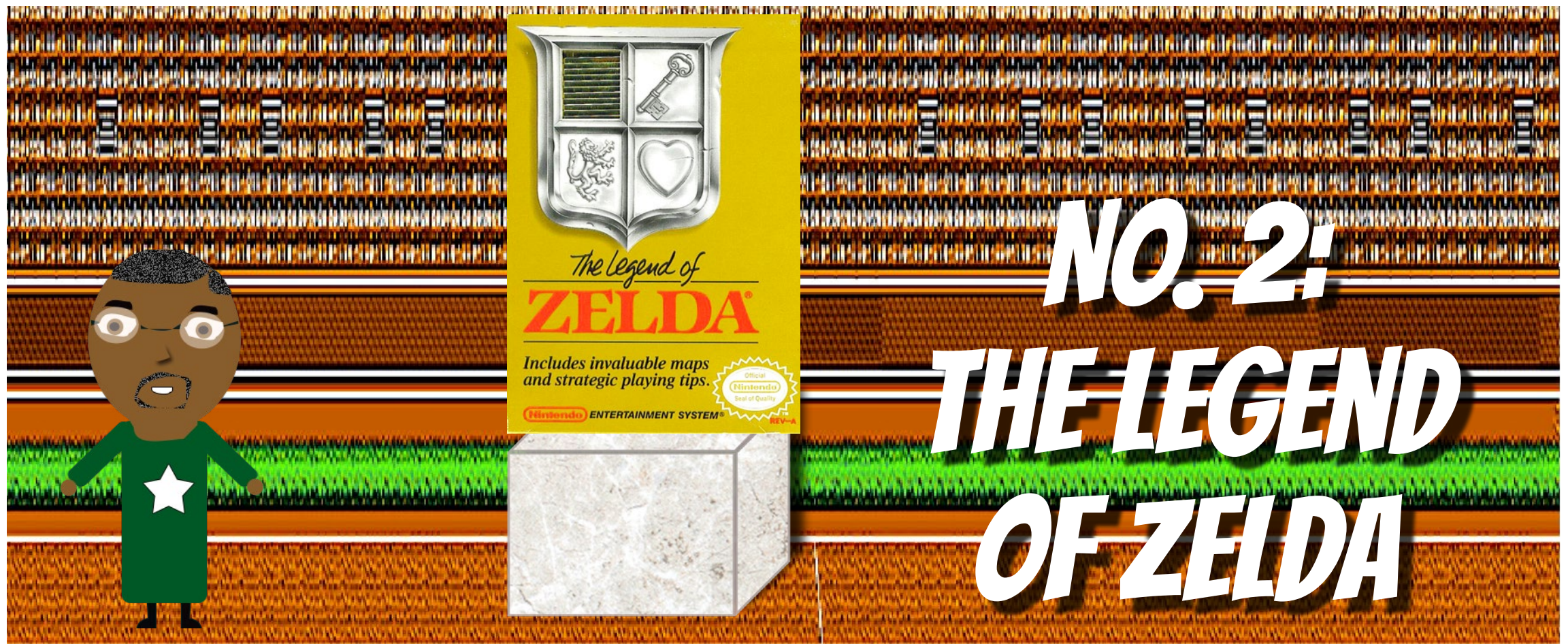
Brandon Beatty

**T**he crown jewel at last! Super Mario Bros. 3 got me excited once more about Mario and company taking on Bowser and his new Koopa Kids, wreaking immeasurable havoc across the Mushroom Kingdom. With new powers such as flight and old power-up favorites allowing me to do new tricks, I was so sold on SMB3 that I went and got the official strategy guide and cheated my butt off.

I also like how Nintendo introduced new suits with various powers. It was a time for exploration, and a time for more secrets and cool things we'd never seen before in a Mario game. Super Mario Bros. 3 is the definitive killer app for the NES, in a library full of killer apps.



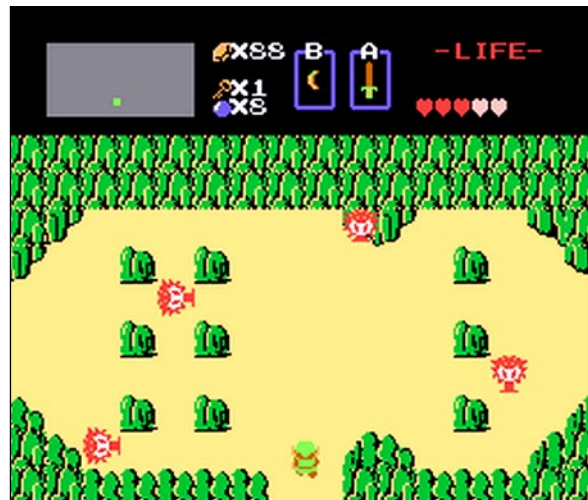




In 1988, I was gifted an NES and received the original Legend of Zelda as one of my first games for it. When I was introduced to Link, Zelda and the Hyrule Kingdom, I journeyed around the land using various swords and other weapons and items to stop the demon Ganon and reunite the mystic Triforce.

The Legend of Zelda showed that Nintendo could contribute more to video game history besides Mario. I remember many a Friday night staying up to beat the game, learning the dungeons and tricks to beat the bosses in each.

Zelda is worth its weight in rupees and more.







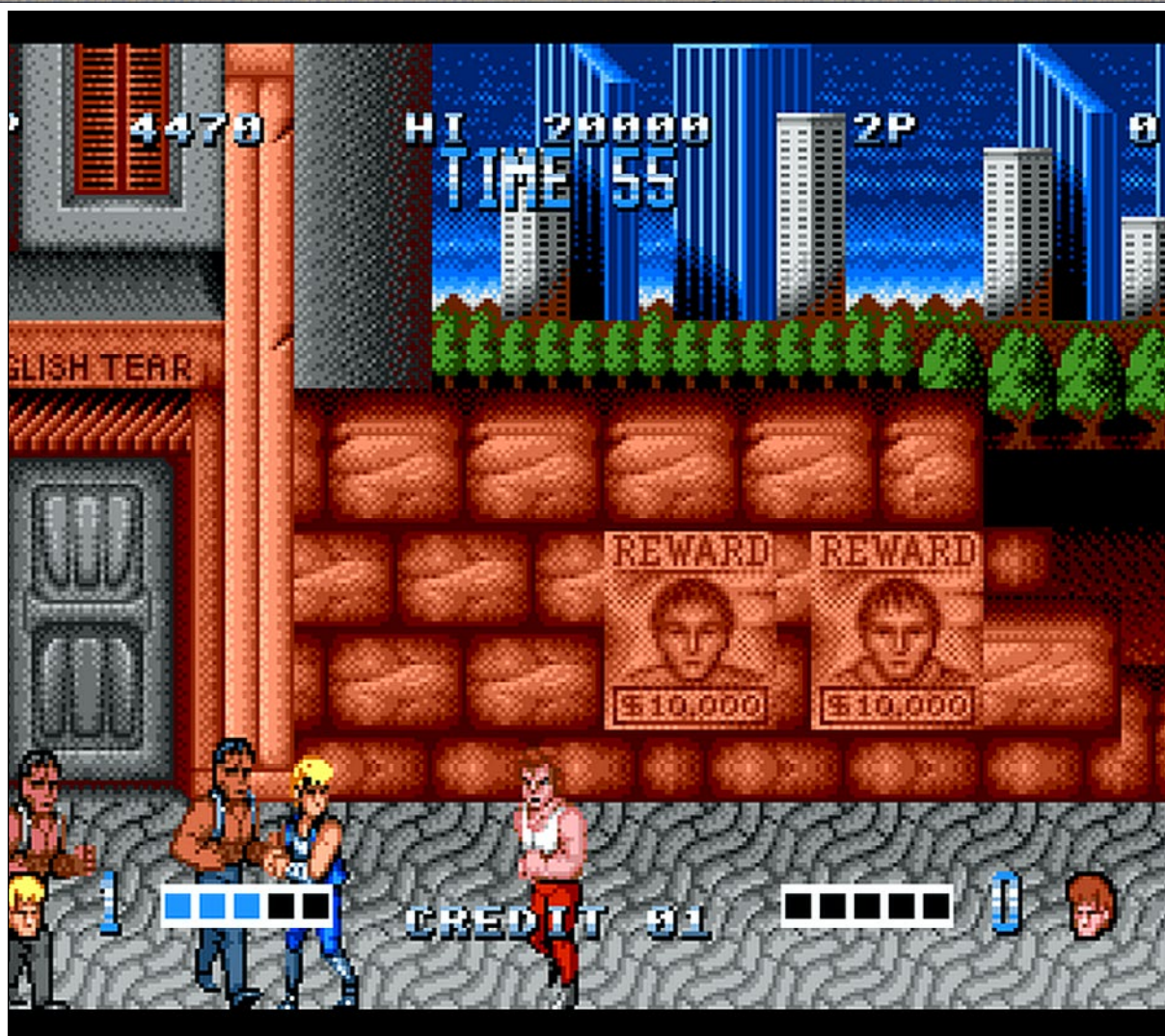
## NO. 3: DOUBLE DRAGON



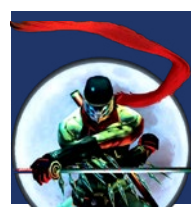
Brandon Beatty

**A**h, the brothers Lee. Billy and Jimmy Lee have made their martial arts skills known to gamers ever since they arrived in arcades worldwide in 1987. When I first played in the arcades, it made me put in token after token trying to beat the first stage alone. It was also the second game I received for the Sega Master System where I did finally beat the game numerous times thanks to a difficult cheat code that I was able to pull off.

Double Dragon was also a breakout hit spanning multiple chapters on various gaming consoles and was later adapted into a Saturday morning cartoon. Despite the terrible 1994 live-action movie, there was nothing like teaming up to kick and punch my way through trouble ... and make it double.







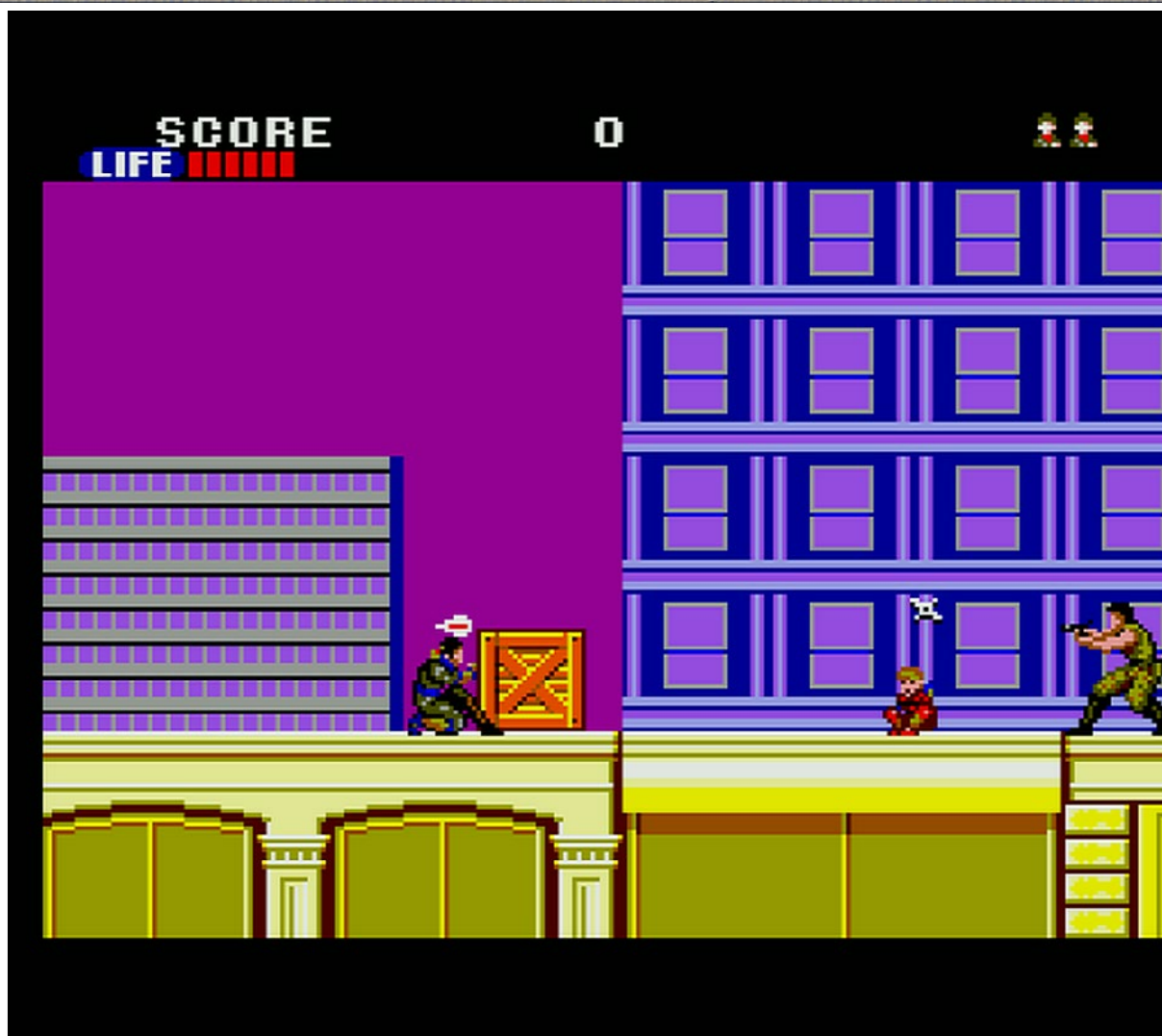
## NO. 4: SHINOBI



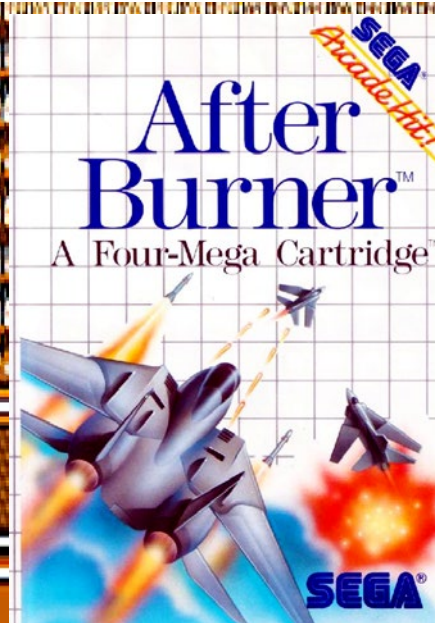
**Brandon Beatty**

**A**nother Sega hit that makes my list is Shinobi. Developed during the heyday of ninja films and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Shinobi caught my eye in the arcades, and I got it as a gift on the Sega Master System. Taking the role of expert ninja Joe Musashi, I embarked on a battle using various weapons such as shuriken, katanas, bombs and guns to rescue my students from the nefarious criminal organization known as Zeed.

Shinobi went on to have multiple sequels for Sega's own consoles but made a revival on PlayStation 2 and other next-gen gaming consoles. There was, arguably, nothing more fun than taking out crime syndicates as a ninja. A lot of my quarters vanished like Joe Musashi running through Shinobi.







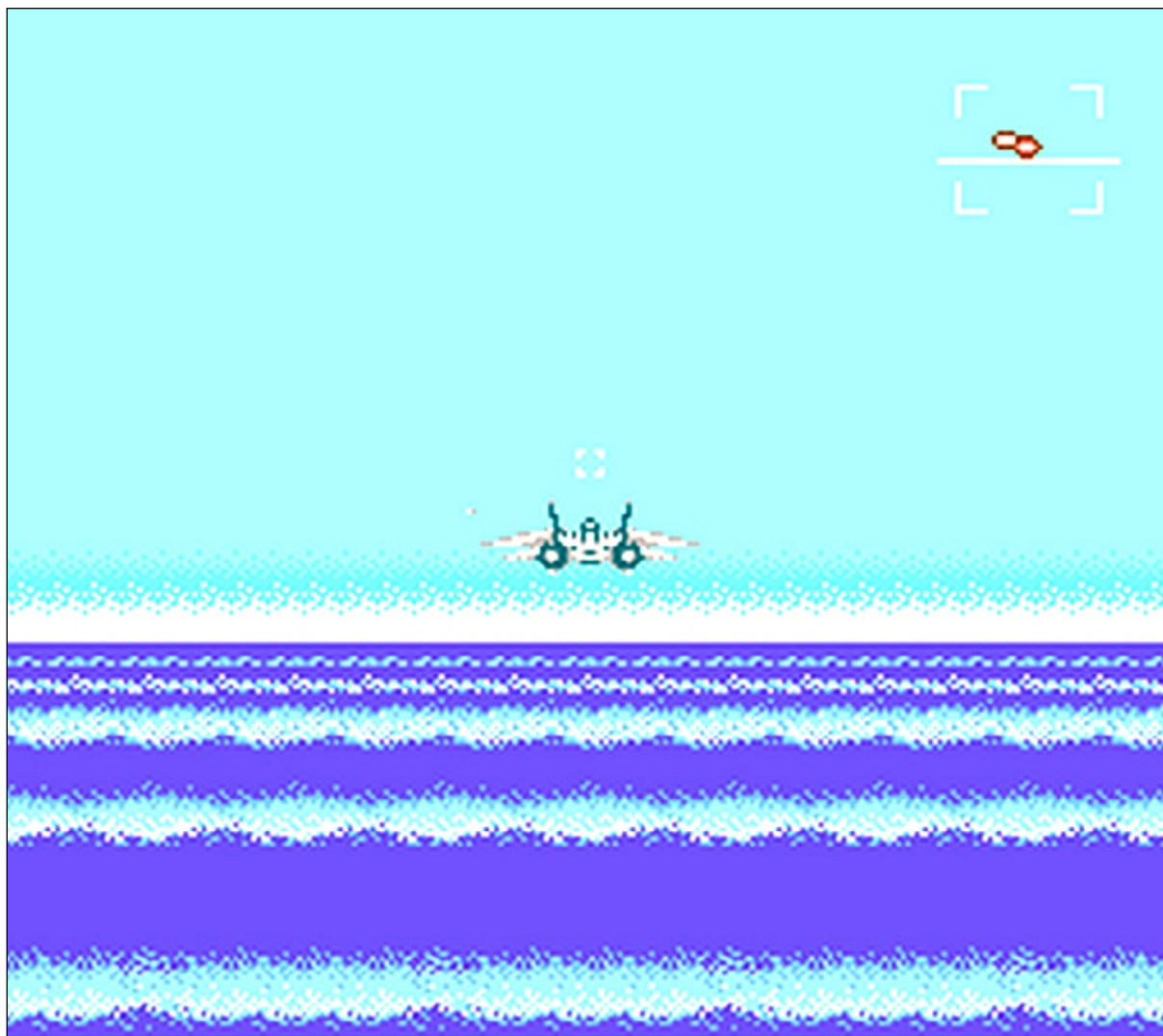
# NO. 5: AFTER BURNER



**Brandon Beatty**

**W**hen the 1980s movies Iron Eagle and Top Gun came out, every action-hero wannabe — me included — wanted to fly a F-14 jet fighter. Sega fulfilled that request by releasing the soon-to-be arcade classic After Burner in arcades in 1987. The game consists of 18 stages of flying an F-14 to shoot down various enemy aircraft, so who didn't want to be a fighter pilot playing through that?

After Burner cemented its legacy by its sequel After Burner II and appearing in films such as “Suburban Commando” and “Terminator 2: Judgment Day.” I was right there along for the thrill ride. Because, after all, who doesn't have a need for speed?







# GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME

## BRANDON'S PICK

NOS. 6 -25



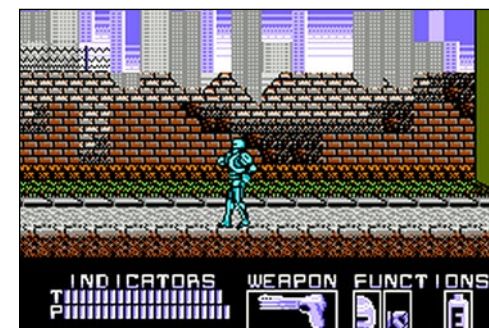
NO. 6: U.N. SQUADRON



NO. 7: FINAL FIGHT



NO. 8: HANG ON



NO. 9: ROBOCOP



NO. 10: REAL GHOSTBUSTERS



NO. 11: ALTERED BEAST



NO. 12: STREETS OF RAGE



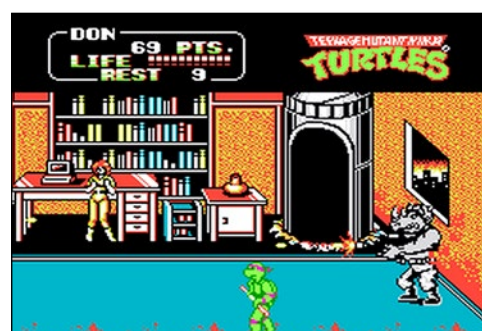
NO. 13: BAD DUDES



NO. 14: NINJA GAIDEN



NO. 15: SUPER STREET FIGHTER II



NO. 16: TMNT II: ARCADE GAME



NO. 17: SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2



NO. 18: PHANTASY STAR IV



NO. 19: MEGA MAN 3



NO. 20: MEGA MAN 8



NO. 21: MS. PAC-MAN



NO. 22: BUSHIDO BLADE



NO. 23: DEVIL MAY CRY 3



NO. 24: BLOODY ROAR



NO. 25: RESIDENT EVIL 2



# TECH GEEKS

## WESTERN DIGITAL 4TB PORTABLE HARD DRIVE

If you need more space in the portable sphere, Western Digital's hard drives are an excellent solution. The ample space is more than enough to hold just about everything you ever had digitally, and they run smoothly and quietly. We upgraded our original personal drive as well as the drive that holds our emulators, both with the 4TB model. The copy speed was decent, the price was great for this much space these days and the variety of shell casing color options was nice.

**Price:** \$130 to \$150

**Where to buy:** Staples, Amazon, Best Buy



## AMAZON BASICS: USB 3.0 CHARGER CABLE - A-MALE TO MICRO-B

Before we replaced several portable drives, we researched and bought replacement data cables for the drives. Once we figured out which cables were needed, it was quick and easy to buy off Amazon. They weren't expensive and were just what we needed as a temporary solution. The cables are sturdy and high-quality, and they provide excellent data speed.

**Price:** \$7.94

**Where to buy:** Amazon







GAME OF THE ISSUE

## MARIO KART 8

Nintendo's latest go-kart madness has the racing game down to a science, **PAGE 19**

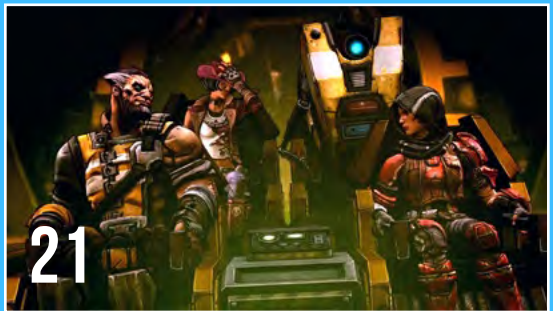


GAME OF THE ISSUE

## INSIDE



**Watch Dogs**  
The debate of public versus private and individual freedoms weighed against the government's right to know are the focus of hacking thriller Watch Dogs.



**Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel**  
It's a new day but more of the same looter-shooter action on Pandora's moon Elpis. If shooting and more shooting are your thing, you've come to the right place in Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel.



**Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run**  
The Kid goes long and deep in a time when baseball was still good. Harken back to the good old days in one of the best 16-bit baseball games with Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run.



**The Punisher**  
Messing around with Frank Castle while he's on a mission to avenge his people and clean up crime is a bad idea. Playing as him in The Punisher is a good idea.





Developer: Nintendo, Release: 2014

# Mario Kart races back to form in Wii U edition

There comes a time in every Mario Kart fan's life when you have to make a choice of whether you still love the series or if you don't. I assume this, of course, because I have no idea if anyone still plays Mario Kart or not. I assume they do, and I just don't know it. The series hit that fabled peak of questionability for me when Mario Kart Wii was released. GI wasn't using a rating scale when we reviewed it (editor's note: This was reviewed in 3Q2008), but suffice to say it would not have received a good score. Mario Kart had a lot of work to redeem itself for me, a longtime lover of the series who started in 1992. The latest original entry, Mario Kart 8, has made significant effort to polish the series again.

Mario Kart, at its core, has always been about arcade racing. There's nothing realistic about playing as various Mario and other general Nintendo characters while romping through various Mushroom Kingdom locales. It's always been about the Mario charm expanded to fit within a palatable driving scheme that makes anyone a champion go-kart enthusiast. Mario Kart 8 does not shirk on this charm. If it's a memorable Mario character, they're probably in this game.

And, in a nod to the appeal of Nintendo crossover and nostalgia, there are new additions from outside the portly mustachioed plumber's usual suspects: You can now play as Animal Crossing's Isabelle and The Legend of Zelda's Link. While they don't necessarily contribute anything new to the series, their presence is enough to elicit excitement because it means Nintendo is finally opening Mario Kart up to the general roster. There is much to mine from, and if you're questioning any of this, look at the lead Smash Bros. has taken in this field.

Mario Kart has always been the sort of series that takes its history seriously. Entries after Mario Kart: Double Dash have begun referencing the previous tracks of yore, sometimes with varied results. Mario Kart 8 manages to



By  
**Lyndsey Beatty**

gather a lot of stellar new tracks and some old that aren't favorites but will suffice as entries. A lot of the older tracks are from more recent entries but make no mistake — they are there for the purpose of drawing you in to remind you of the good times and then send you on your merry way to try the new tracks. Tugging at my heart strings with a modern SNES Rainbow Road remake will get you everywhere, though there are caveats to these remakes.

While the tracks are great graphically, the music is hit or miss. When I say I want a Rainbow Road throwback, I also want the original music to go with it. It doesn't need a musical overhaul because the original music was brilliant. I'm not sure why Nintendo thought it needed to have the sound remade, but it wasn't a particularly great decision. Other remastered stage choices, including Grumble Volcano and Music Park, are fine. And a lot of the new tracks are great; Dragon Driftway and Excitebike Arena are definite standouts.

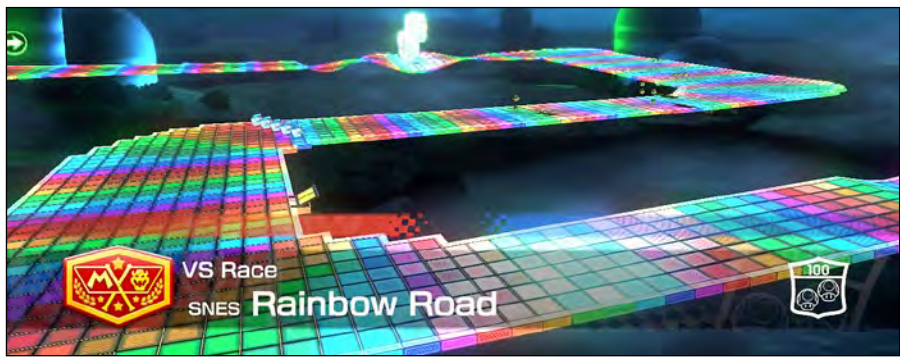
Graphically, the game looks amazing. It's the best-looking Mario Kart produced yet. All the characters look life-like, and the stages are incredibly detailed. Even the water particle effects look amazing. There are times when there's a brief lull in action that I can soak up the surroundings, and I'm impressed by the Wii U's understated capability. Mario Kart 8 shows what the system could potentially do. It's a testament also to just how good Mario Kart looks in the modern era.

**SCORE:  
4.5 OUT  
OF 5**

Now, here's where we may have some issues. I'm not fond of the AI rubberbanding, and I haven't been a fan of it since the Mario Kart 64 days. We are a quarter of a century grown up and past that, and we're still having issues with last-minute victories by the AI. This is a known issue at this point, yet it rears its ugly head still. Also, while a lot of the new tracks are cool — Excitebike Arena among the best of the bunch — there are some that do absolutely nothing for me. Track selection is important, and this entry has dullards. Big Blue, for whatever reason, keeps showing up in modern catchall Nintendo games, and it's here, too. I'm not impressed with the track at all, and they could have come up with something else.


Also, while I love the Animal Crossing track, it needs something else than the series' cute motif and catchy music. It's your basic, run of the mill drive around in a loop track, but it needs something else to give it some pop. Same thing goes for the Hyrule track. It's basic, too. What makes this worse is that the tracks are part of the DLC bundle for the game. If you're asking me to spend hard-earned money on extras, the extras need to be super special. I'm not getting that with those two tracks, specifically. Thankfully, there are other extras to be had that kind of make up for those.

Overall, this is a solid entry in the Mario Kart sphere of influence. This is the best entry in years, and it deserves some high praise for a lot of the things that it gets right. There's always room for improvement, but the racing king continues to show why it's the arcade racing champ and why it continues to rule the road of go-karting.





# WATCH DOGS™

Press 

**Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal, **Release:** 2014

## Watch who watches society in surveillance thriller

I am sort of a tech geek. While I do not have the latest gadgets in gaming or modern living, I love to have knowledge about the latest in digital security. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I spent time off binge-watching the USA network show “Mr. Robot.” The protagonist, Elliot Anderson, was not a social butterfly, but if he wanted to know something about someone, all he needs is their digital details and he would either help or hinder them. Before Mr. Robot took form, Ubisoft in 2014 developed a game that applied action-adventure elements and mixed them with cybersecurity and personal privacy issues involving big technology companies. Watch Dogs was born of that curiosity.

In Watch Dogs, you take on the role of hacker Aiden Pierce, who in 2012 was collaborating with his mentor/partner Damien Brenks on an electronic financial heist in a fictional Chicago hotel. Unknown to the hacking duo, they tripped off an alarm set by another hacker, which forces Aiden to take his family out of the city.

While on the run, they are pursued by hitman Maurice Vega in a car chase that kills Aiden’s niece. Enraged, Aiden, along with partner/fixer Jordi Chin, sets off to find Vega and his employer while uncovering a hideous conspiracy behind the popular CtOS (Central Operating System) that has Chicago



By  
**Brandon Beatty**

**SCORE:  
4 OUT  
OF 5**

heavily dependent on it.

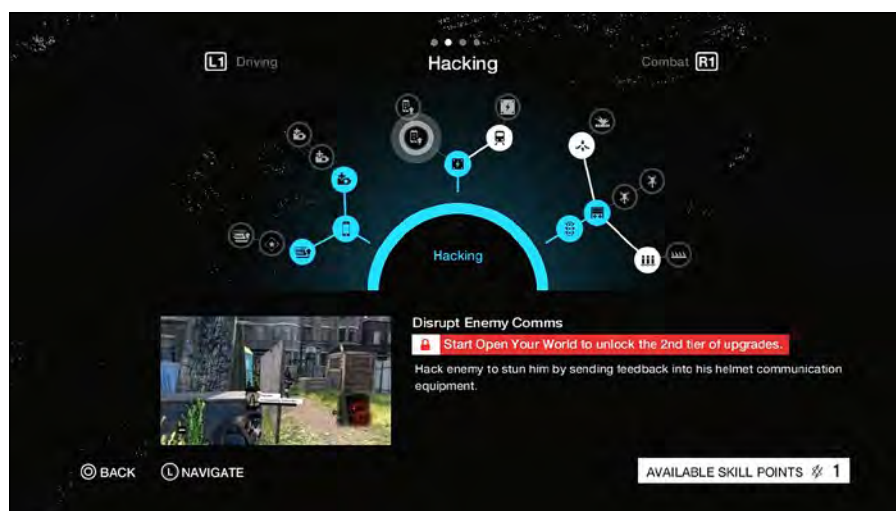
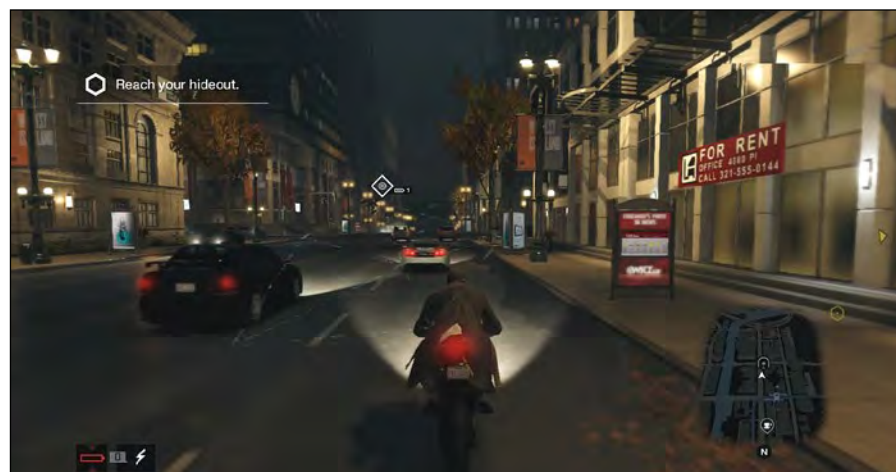
Watch Dogs is simple to play yet requires some practice to be familiar with. Using the analog sticks to control Aiden’s movements and the in-game camera was difficult at first; however, with enough practice, you will have him almost invincible. The menu for Aiden’s collected items as well as driving scenarios are like Grand Theft Auto, which I found frustrating but not unplayable. Aiden’s main weapons are a collapsible baton and a portable device known as the Profiler. The Profiler picks up NPC info that could be used to loot or embarrass them, depending on the situation. Also, you can scale vertical walls and crouch behind walls to hide from enemies. I especially like the ability to hide because it’s well done in its application. During the first mission of the game, I found Vega and roughed him up, hacked the baseball stadium’s power

grid to cause a blackout and snuck away from the police. With the well-practiced controls, it was easy to make this sequence work and get on with the rest of the game. That’s how smooth it should be.

The graphics in Watch Dogs are sharp and do well in taking advantage of Ubisoft’s Disrupt engine, which presented the city of Chicago and its landmarks with great care and detail. Another detail I liked was the ability to set the time for Aiden to rest. The representation of the day and night cycle was perfect. Watch Dogs’ music is a nice mix of adrenaline and house music and contributed well to the overall atmosphere.

Watch Dogs is great to play if you want to act out your vigilante hero fantasies, legally, of course. Watch Dogs will not disappoint, although I would recommend using a strategy guide to help make your first playthrough more enjoyable.

For those who are interested in cybersecurity like I am or want to experience control of a city by technology, get to hacking.







Developer: 2K Australia, Release: 2014

# Pre-Sequel retreads Borderlands

Stop me if you heard this one. A group of four bounty hunters run amok on Pandora and open a treasure chest filled to the brim with loot after killing a bunch of things.

In fact, you should have stopped me, because you've heard that song and dance before. Twice to be precise. It's because I've waxed poetically about two other Borderlands titles in previous issues over the past decade. It was all fine and well, that running amok on Pandora. Until it wasn't. You see, Borderlands has charm and grace, knowing when it's hitting its limit at the bar. Borderlands 2, well, you have to tell it when to stop because it thinks it can handle its liquor but really can't. Pre-Sequel? Brown liquor gives it courage to talk to folks a certain way, and it winds up getting thrown out of the bar and Ubered home. It's because Pre-Sequel thinks it's something we've never seen before, when we all have and we're not buying.

Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel is set between the events of Borderlands 1 and 2 storyline-wise but was released chronologically after Borderlands 2. Pre-Sequel tells the parts of the Borderlands saga that we didn't see happening simultaneously in the first game and mentioned in the second game: How Handsome Jack discovered the Vault; took over the Hyperion Corporation and, by extension, Pandora; and, corralled an earlier



By  
Lyndsey Beatty

SCORE:  
2.5 OUT  
OF 5

group to assist in his nefarious plans of domination and galactic dominion. Along for the ride this time are characters we already know from Borderlands 2: Nisha Kadam, the future sheriff of Lynchwood and Jack's future girlfriend; Wilhelm, pre-cybernetic obsession and transformation; Athena, wandering Pandora after the events of the Secret Armory of General Knoxx DLC in Borderlands; and, Claptrap, who's assisted the Pandora Vault Hunters but doesn't yet know he's the sacrificial lamb of the story. These Vault Hunters are summoned through an Echo-Net call from Jack to find the Vault on Pandora's moon, Elpis.

Knowing what we know now about Jack and his motives, it's safe to assume that there will be greed, money and shenanigans involving guns. Those are there, yes, but it's just Borderlands 2 with a slightly different mask and a lacking story. Because make no

mistake: The story is not moving forward here. It's solely meant to fill in some gaps, but it's obvious it's not meant to be some sort of pitch-shifter that Borderlands 2 or Borderlands 3 were and are.

Knowing this about the story, what you find when you get to Elpis is definitely a whole lot of typical Borderlands skullduggery. From the beginning of the journey once you touch down on the planet, the new mechanics of oxygen management and low gravity are a pain to deal with and obnoxious. Yes, you do need something new to spice things up a bit, but it's not implemented with any type of precision or enjoyment. Constantly having to manage how much oxygen is left while trying to avoid taking damage means distraction, and it ruins any sort of sandbox vibe the game might have been going for. Oxygen management is also taking precedence while working through Borderlands Beginning Syndrome, or when you start a character in a Borderlands playthrough with little to no help. The first few hours of any Border-

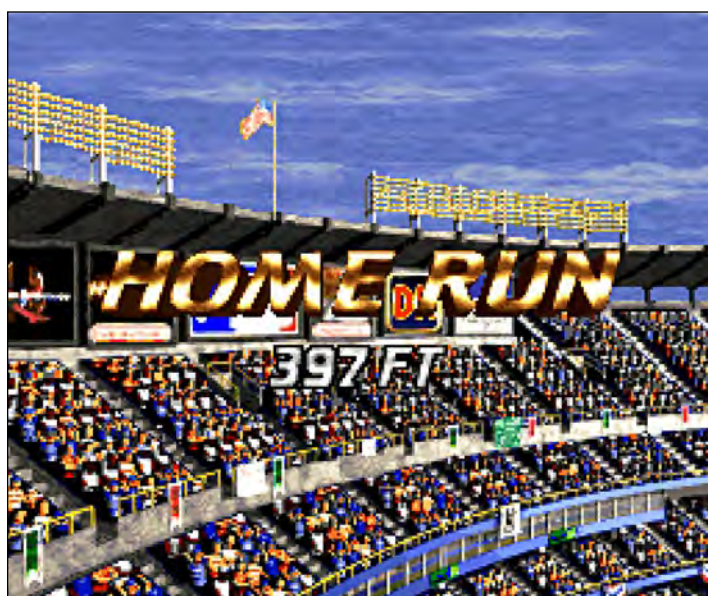
lands playthrough are slow and a slog with no help, and Pre-Sequel is no exception. All other mechanics are Borderlands 2 based, so there's nothing else new here of note.

Much like the non-new mechanics, the graphics are Borderlands 2 based as well. So, you're not going to see new textures, though there are a few new enemies and NPCs to change things up a bit. The new enemies are slightly interesting, as are some of the bosses. This has always been Borderlands' strength as franchise: Colorful characters that leave an impression. Pre-Sequel manages to create some goodwill with some new characters, but they're all in the style of Borderlands 2. Borderlands 2 was serviceable in its graphics as a marginally better upgrade to Borderlands, so you're getting that marginal up-

grade here as well. The soundtrack also is Borderlands 2 based, so if you enjoyed that, you're probably going to enjoy this, too. There are a few tracks that stand out, but nothing special ... much like everything else offered here.

Take Pre-Sequel for what it is: a standalone package that really should have been preparatory DLC for Borderlands 2 or even follow-up DLC for that game. It really shouldn't have been held back after Borderlands 2 because it works well as a stopgap measure between Borderlands and Borderlands 2. As a front-end sequel game, it's just more of Borderlands 2 — down to the reused assets and soundtrack — and that doesn't necessarily increase its endearing qualities, no matter how much I love Borderlands as a whole. At this point, it's suffering from sequel-itis.





Developer: Rare, Release: 1996



# The Kid's SNES follow-up a guaranteed home run

There are a few things Rare, the bastion of all that is unholy in retro gaming, has done correctly. One was GoldenEye 007 for the Nintendo 64. And another is the Ken Griffey Jr. MLB series.

Ken Griffey Jr., for the uninitiated, is one of the best major league players to have ever picked up a bat and glove. There was once a time that folks believed that Griffey would beat Hank Aaron's home run record in the '90s. Alas, once Griffey left the Seattle Mariners after the 1995 season, he was never the same thanks to numerous injuries. He's still "that guy," though, and it remains that his game series is one of the best in arcade baseball. The first game was good, but the sequel — Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run — is absolute fire.

Let's start with the premise, because there actually is something of a story here. The opening cinematics show Griffey Jr. at the plate doing what he does best: Smack the ball. Already beloved by fans and teammates, his heroics in the bottom of the 11th inning of the 1995 American League Division Series' final game that year cemented the city's



By  
Lyndsey Beatty

SCORE:  
5 OUT  
OF 5

love for "The Kid" and led to the birth of this sequel title. He was so beloved that when Griffey Jr. started thinking about retirement, Seattle actively campaigned for the Hall of Famer to simply "come home" and reclaim his title of King of the Kingdom. This setup is lovingly crafted in just the intro, and the rest of the game is favorable because of it.

So, what's inside the package with a slick outside? A lot, for a SNES game. There are several ways to play, depending on if you want a quick game or if you want to make a full 162-game season of things. The MLB League mode is a greatly appreciated feature. In it, you can choose to play three types of seasons: A short 26-game season,

a medium 52-game season and a full 162-game season. There's also an option to play an exhibition game in the MLB Challenge mode. I like the ability to choose between those options, because maybe I don't want to sit through an entire season. I can't do that in real life, so I know I don't want to do that in a video game version. There's even a mode to resume a previously started game.

If you're not so inclined to be a player, there's a decent manager mode included. Ever the non-traditionalist, if you're like me and you want to skip to the end, you can run through a World Series mode where you play out the Series to crown your champion. There's also an All-Star mode where you can play through the titular game and participate in the Home Run Derby.

With the wealth of options in how to play, it's easy to actually play. Winning Run doesn't reinvent the wheel of baseball video game mechanics, which is a good thing. That means that even if you're not a sports nut, you could probably pick up the game and learn how to play baseball. Base running, fielding, pitching and batting are easy to understand here, and the mechanics all come naturally.

While Winning Run doesn't have the MLB player's license — neither

did the original game, either — it does have a flavor that competing games at the time didn't have: Charm and charisma in every detail. The graphics are clean, crisp and outright beautiful. They are so well done that even 26 years later, as a SNES game, they hold up. Even the menu graphics look great. Rare was killing it in the late portion of the SNES' lifespan, and Winning Run is a stunning example.

And, for a moment, let's talk about the soundtrack. This is one of the few sports soundtracks that I own. Rare's sound team continuously makes up for the surrounding mess with quality sound, and this is one of the best from their catalogue. The main theme was fantastic, and the menu theme is outstanding as well. Both themes

add to the overall package and get things started off right. The in-game ambience is nice as is the play announcer. Everything ultimately creates a good arcade baseball feel, which you're going to need if you're going to slog through an entire pennant.

Technically, aside from the lack of the MLB player's license, there's nothing wrong with Winning Run. The lack of player names and likenesses is a bummer, but it doesn't really take away from the core strengths of Winning Run.

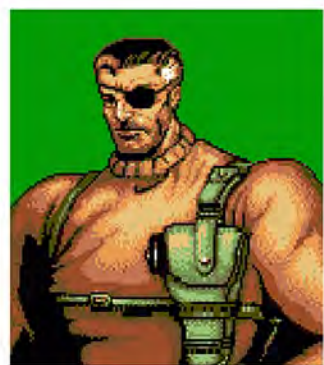
Excellent options, easy-to-understand mechanics and a fantastic soundtrack make running the bases fun in Winning Run. The Kid's sequel effort paid off and bats high in the order of great sports games.



## 2 PLAYER PROFILE

### NICK FURY

NAME: NICK FURY  
AN AGENT FOR  
S.H.I.E.L.D.



Developer: Capcom, Release: 1994

# The Punisher makes good in digital crime cleanup

Before Marvel vs. Capcom became a relevant name to gamers, the companies collaborated on other games. Those games became essential classics to develop gamers who specialized in single-combat titles. In 1994, Capcom and Marvel brought a Final Fight-style game to the Genesis that starred comics' most infamous anti-hero: Frank Castle aka The Punisher.

The game follows the storyline of the classic Marvel comics series. Frank Castle, a decorated veteran Marine, was enjoying a day in the park with his family when they unwittingly became witnesses to a mob shooting. As a result, Castle and his family were massacred, him being the only survivor. Castle became determined to get payback by any means necessary. With fellow warrior Nick Fury (of S.H.I.E.L.D.), Castle begins his war on crime against mob boss Wilson Fisk aka Kingpin, who caused the death of his family and



By  
**Brandon Beatty**

**SCORE:  
3 OUT  
OF 5**

many other innocents.

The game plays similarly to "Final Fight" and "Captain Commando." You can choose to play as either Castle or Fury and can team up in multiplayer.

You start off with the basics, progressing to combos and various weapons such as handguns, automatic rifles and katanas.

There was liberal food and other power-ups such as cash, gold bars and diamonds that increased my score and restored health since the amount of enemies coming at me

was nonstop.

The graphics were pleasant enough, although they attempted to copy arcade cabinet-quality with little success. I will give Capcom credit for making the graphics comicbook-like. It was like reading an actual issue of the comics including captions "BLAM!" "KRAK" and "BOOM!" instead of playing a rushed paint job of a popular comic series video game. The music of each stage was also decent as Capcom's sound team delivered, keeping things close to what the Punisher feels like.


With the work Capcom put in, the attention to detail made me want to pick it up to play as a returning comic book fan who knew about Castle and Fury but wanted to learn more about the Kingpin and other Marvel villains such as Bushwhacker and Bonebreaker.

The Punisher is the first successful paring of Capcom's know-how with Marvel's legendary vigilante who wastes no time dispensing his brand of justice on criminals. Playing through this isn't exactly punishment.





# Welcome to RETRO GAME CORNER



Getting to Know

## Animal Crossing

### Pocket Camp

BY LYNSEY BEATTY  
GAMING INSURRECTION

**Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp** arrived for mobile play in 2017, and it's remained fresh with new features added consistently over its four years. Here's a breakdown of the current in-game map: locations, animal friends to see and things to do.

#### Campsite

This is your home base, where you can return to decorate and invite animal friends once you have their required furniture crafted. The base of operations also serves as the host location for flower garden events (unlocked at Level 3). The area can be decorated with at least 100 items, and the foreground, sky and background can be changed as well.

#### Fortune Cookie store

You can purchase various fortune cookies, past and present, with in-game currency — Leaf Tickets or Bells. All cookies are available on a rotating time-limited basis. This store is also physically available when visiting the Market Place.

#### Market Place

This is the central shopping section of Pocket Camp. Here, you can buy items to decorate your camper and campsite. You can also buy clothes and accessories for yourself and your animal friends. If you need to sell clothes and items, you can talk to Timmy to start the process. Reese and Cyrus' shop is a physical location outside of the menu to allow for crafting. Isabelle can also be found here to provide information on in-game activities and mechanics.

#### Blather's Treasure Trek

Blathers is a longtime NPC who now provides maps that must be traversed to unlock certain animal contacts and items for use. You can either roll dice or use a specified currency (i.e. Friendship Powder, Bells, Essence) to clear a map instantly. Leaf Tickets can also be used to instantly clear and collect all items from maps.

#### Pete's Parcel Service (unlocks at Level 3)

At the heart of Pocket Camp is animal requests. Once you reach Level 3, you can have Pete fill their requests with items from your inventory. These requests can only be filled for animals you have met at least once. Further requests for the animal can be filled three times using a request card. Pete's service resets once the animals rotate within their three-hour time limit at vacation spots.

#### Happy Homeroom (unlocks at Level 6)

The Happy Homeroom Academy has returned with ever-increasing interior design classes based on animal requested items and game events. Every passed class includes ranking medals and rewards. You can play for free once a day and HH Vouch-



ers are awarded three times a day. A single voucher can be purchased for 30 Leaf Tickets.

#### Cabin (unlocks at Level 15; second floor expansion unlocks at Level 50)

The Cabin serves as another area for customization and hosting animal friends. Initially, the Cabin has a single floor, but can be upgraded to a second floor. Anything can go on the floors, and animals can be called to either floor at any time.

#### OK Motors

OK Motors is where you go to find custom paint jobs for your camper as well as interior expansion. The three ravens here offer multiple styles for the outside of the camper as well as different paint schemes. When you're ready to add more space or another floor to your camper, come here.

#### Gulliver's Cargo Ship

Gulliver's Cargo Ship will visit three islands of your choice with differing rewards. The islands are themed and require Export Points to set sail. Once

loaded up, Gulliver will visit the island for a determined time and return bearing gifts to choose from. For a Leaf Ticket fee, all gifts can be collected at one time. Item rewards can include special gifts for animal contacts, animal maps for use in Blather's Treasure Trek, Essence, clothing, or Sparkle Stones.

#### Shovelstrike Quarry

When you want a break, you can come into the quarry to break rocks for items. The quarry is available at any time, but there are two ways to enter: Get friends to help or use Leaf Tickets. With friends helping, you can request as many as you like to help you enter. Only five friends need answer the call, and they will be rewarded with Friendship Powder. Using Leaf Tickets, you can use 20 tickets three times a day to enter. Once inside, you'll break rocks to collect ore. The better the quality of the ore, the better the reward.

#### The four vacation spots

All vacation locations feature a spot for an animal contact to rotate into for requests. Other players,

friends or strangers, will also appear.

#### Breezy Hollow

Here, you'll find your native fruit for picking in groups of three. Permanent fruits found here are apples, cherries, peaches, pears and oranges. Lychees, lemons or grapes will be found, depending on the player.

#### Saltwater Shores

Coral and seashells can be found dotting the shore, as well as a place to fish normally and during Fishing Tournaments. Coconuts are also found here.

#### Lost Lure Creek

Freshwater fish appear in the creek and near the waterfall normally and during Fishing Tournaments. You can also find three types of native fruit trees.

#### Sunburst Island

The only place to find bugs is here along with access to Gulliver's Cargo Ship. Coconuts are plentiful across the small island.



# MORTAL KOMBAT MOBILE

Credit: Murdoink @ Mortal Kombat Warehouse for all background and logo art and renders/www.mortalkombatwarehouse.com

LYNDSEY BEATTY  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



## Welcome to a small tournament called Mortal Kombat ...

Hello all, I'm a longtime Mortal Kombat enthusiast who dived headlong into the world of MK Mobile in 2018. This new section delves into the intricacies of character card collection, fusions and team creation for towers.

Look for information on the basics to get you started and how to conquer the 100-level Shao Kahn's Tower to help you when you're ready to take on the challenging themed towers.



## MK MOBILE STATISTICS

- **Number of cards owned:** 148
- **Total number of cards (as of press time):** 153
- **Percentage owned:** 96.7%

### Cards missing (as of press time)

- Nightmare Freddy Krueger
- MK11 Nightwolf
- Klassic Rain
- MK11 Sindel
- Pyromancer Tanya

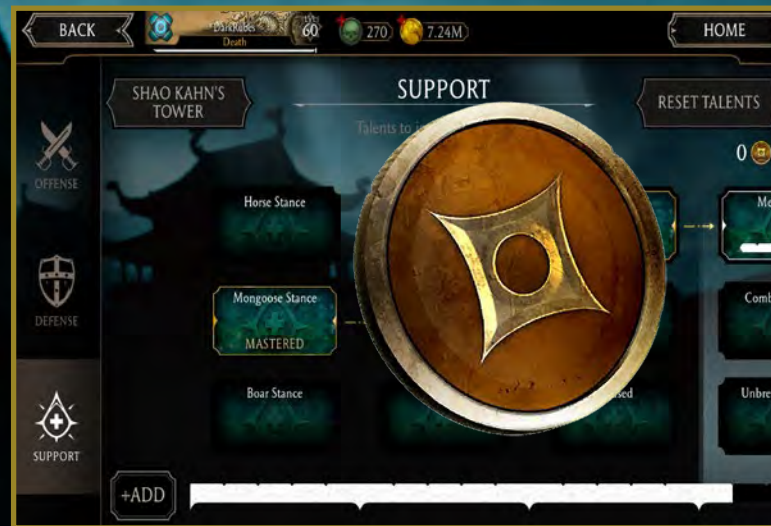


## Shao Kahn's Tower

A challenging 100-story tower that rewards Koin, Souls, Spirit Fragments and Talent Tree Points. Sometimes with unique conditions to overcome, the matches will test your strategy skills and ability to form teams suited to the challenge.

Matches are in increments of three before a refresh is needed to continue. We also will approach this Tower as the warmup to the various Normal and Fatal towers that appear to get you prepped for the real thing.

Individual tower match guides, team formation and strategy will be discussed.



## Talent Tree guide

The ultimate helper in keeping your teams on top is the Talent Tree. Skills will help you stay alive longer, boost your team's damage output or take less damage against the myriad conditions thrown at you in various modes. Talent Tree points are earned in Shao Kahn's Tower and can help change the tide of battle. The talents you unlock give bonuses to your entire account.

We will break down the best choices in the three tree branches and help you chart a path to a well-balanced fighting squad for nearly any situation.



## Character spotlight

Who you have fighting on your side is important, and character analysis helps you stay victorious in Mortal Kombat Mobile.

We're going to look at all available characters, their strengths and weaknesses with rankings for each. We will also spotlight team synergy; who you work with can determine if you're working at all.





## KHARACTER SPOTLIGHT

**THIS ISSUE:**

- MK11 Jade
- Klassic Mileena
- Hat Trick Kung Lao



**MK11 Jade**  
**Tier: 5**  
**Passive:** Embracing the Shadow: MK 11 Jade has a chance to dodge basic attacks, leaving the opponent slowed and open to counterattack for a brief time. MK11 teammates are healed by fire/bleed/poison.

Embracing the Shadow, MK11 Jade's passive, can wreak havoc on your opponent even at low fusion levels. She is an excellent point character, causing a lot of damage at high fusions, and great at creating team synergy with a lot of characters. As a bonus, Face Smash (S2) is a great grapple move and will do massive damage to stun most characters, setting up further open attacks.



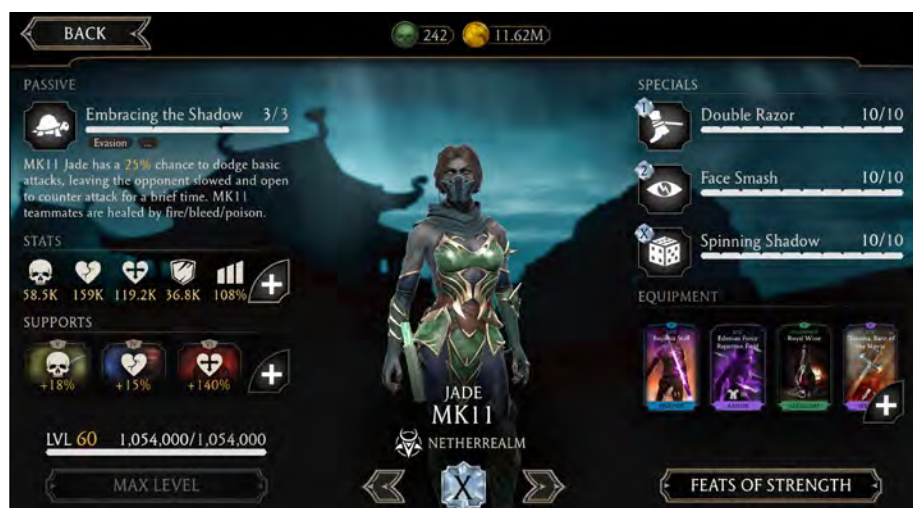
**Klassic Mileena**  
**Tier: 3**  
**Passive:** Femme Fatale: When Mileena KO's an opponent, she recovers a percentage of that enemy's max health. Female teammates gain health when Mileena KO's an opponent.

Klassic Mileena is one of the best mid-tier character cards in the game. Her high health for a gold character means she's in the fight longer than most characters, and she does excellent damage for a gold character. Her passive also is beneficial: She will recover health when she KO's an opponent and heal female characters on her team for a percentage of the health also. This certainly helps when you're using an all-female team.



**Hat Trick Kung Lao**  
**Tier: 3**  
**Passive:** Dim Mak: All martial artist teammates deal +50% critical damage. Kung Lao has +25% critical hit chance.

The hatted monk is an excellent mid-tier addition to any team. The Hat Trick variation has decent health and attack stats, and his passive is useful when you need a martial artist critical hit stat boost. He will become extremely useful when paired with any martial artist but Flaming Fists Liu Kang is an excellent partner to consider for any team featuring Hat Trick Kung Lao.





## TIER RANKINGS

**Tier 1: Garbage tier.** This tier is for cards that don't do a lot of damage or contribute with their passives, even with add-ons from Shao Kahn's Tower or gear. Use these only if you absolutely are required. These mostly consist of the bronze and silver characters, except for Kenshi Prime.

**Tier 2: Slight useful.** Their passives either contribute or a special move is useful in service of another card. They can be made to be somewhat useful with gear and add-ons and higher fusions, but they struggle to be useful even with

the best gear.

**Tier 3: A solid mid-level card.** These cards are useful in passives and special moves. They can hold their own on point and win matches.

**Tier 4: An above-average card.** These are highly useful and can be used in any of the Challenge Towers (Shirai Ryu, Lin Kuei, etc.) and are more than capable of holding down a roster spot and surviving against high-level cards if their close in level. These cards have

excellent special moves and do a lot of damage quickly.

**Tier 5: The top echelon of cards.** These cards are the best in the game and their special moves and passives have game-breaking potential. They are the cards that you buy packs for and try to build up for Challenge Towers and will potentially make it to the 170 and higher levels of a tower at even a low fusion. They are most diamonds but there are a few gold cards in the mix.





## SHAO KAHN'S TOWER GUIDE

**THIS ISSUE:**

- Match 04: No conditions
- Match 05: Off Balance
- Match 06: No conditions

SHAO KAHN'S TOWER • 4/100

REWARDS

Win this battle to climb Shao Kahn's Tower!

SHIRAI RYU

19

838

828

KANO

18

1,440

1,722

SCORPION

10

1,316

1,204

VS

REPTILE

12

960

1,024

SONYA BLADE

12

1,380

1,184

SUB-ZERO

12

960

1,216

**Match 04: Reptile (Prime), Lv. 12/Sonya Blade (Prime), Lv. 12/Sub-Zero (Prime), Lv. 12**

Even with an increase in level, the cards here aren't much of a fight. Use your highest-leveled cards.

**First tower run:** Anyone  
**Second tower run:** Anyone

SHAO KAHN'S TOWER • 5/100

REWARDS 280 1

MODIFIERS: Off Balance 1

SHIRAI RYU

19

838

828

KANO

18

1,440

1,722

SCORPION

10

1,316

1,204

VS

KUNG JIN

15

1,353

1,368

D'VORAH

15

1,518

1,482

Farmer JAX BRIGGS

15

1,353

1,900

**Match 05: Kung Jin (Prime), Lv. 15/D'Vorah (Prime), Lv. 15/Jax Briggs (Farmer), Lv. 15**

**Match conditions: Off Balance – Your team randomly tags in and out**  
This match is the first to feature some type of condition. In this case, it's random tagging applied to your team. The AI isn't going to hit with its hardest attacks, so try to attack quickly and keep your team on its guard. You want to avoid one character taking the brunt of the damage. Use this match as a warm-up for things to come.

**First tower run:** Anyone  
**Second tower run:** Anyone

SHAO KAHN'S TOWER • 6/100

REWARDS 300 1 1

Win this battle to climb Shao Kahn's Tower!

SHIRAI RYU

19

838

828

KANO

18

1,440

1,722

SCORPION

10

1,316

1,204

VS

JOHNNY CAGE

18

1,404

1,848

SCORPION

18

1,692

1,892

SUB-ZERO

18

1,152

1,672

**Match 06: Johnny Cage (Prime), Lv. 18/Scorpion (Prime), Lv. 18/Sub-Zero (Prime), Lv. 18**

The AI's level is increasing by three levels. There are no conditions on this match, but the damage output from the opponent team is becoming noticeable. Do your best to avoid taking damage and begin using Special 1 a little more often to quickly finish the fight.

**First tower run:** Anyone  
**Second tower run:** Anyone





## TALENT TREE GUIDE

THIS ISSUE:

- Defense Tier 01
- Defense Tier 02
- Defense Tier 03

BACK

DarkRubes  
Dark

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11.57M

OFFENSE

DEFENSE

SUPPORT

SHAO KAHN'S TOWER

DEFENSE

Talents to improve your survival.

Bear Stance  
MASTERED

Rhino Stance

Hawk Stance

Intimidating Presence

Stalwart Defense

Reaver's Armor  
MASTERED

Oni's Blood

Shokan Dominance  
MASTERED

Centaurian Defense

+ADD

Bear Stance  
MASTERED


Reaver's Armor  
MASTERED

Shokan Dominance  
MASTERED

**Tier 1**  
Choices: Bear Stance (25% Max health boost), Rhino Stance (Take 20% less basic attack damage), Hawk Stance (20% resistance to all debuffs)  
**Best choice: Bear Stance**

**Tier 2**  
Choices: Intimidating Presence (20% opponent unblockable attack chance reduction), Stalwart Defense (20% opponent critical hit chance reduction), Reaver's Armor (20% chance of Lethal Blow immunity)  
**Best choice: Reaver's Armor**

**Tier 3**  
Choices: Oni's Blood (Blocked basic attacks deal 50% less damage), Shokan Dominance (Blocked Special Attacks deal 20% less damage), Centaurian Defense (20% chance to reflect 100% damage from unblockable attacks)  
**Best choice: Shokan Dominance or Centaurian Defense**



### WORKING WITH TALENT POINTS

Courtesy of TestYourMight.com

**Earning Talent Points**

There is only one source of earning talent points: SHAO KAHN'S TOWER. Before you play the tower for the first time, you are given two talent points to start. The tower has 100 battles with increasing difficulty, and you are rewarded one talent point for winning each battle.

However, you are limited to playing three matches each day by default. However, you can play more than three matches by spending 50 souls to refresh the limit, and this can be done twice in a 24-hour period, which increases your limit to nine matches a day if you decide to spend souls to progress at a much faster rate.

**Investing Talent Points**

On completing Shao Kahn's Tower, you are rewarded with a total of 102 talent points which you can spend any way you like. There are two areas of the talent tree in each category where talent points can be invested, unlocking skill tiers and buying skills and their upgrades.

There are seven skill tiers in each category and there are a total of 20 skills to choose from. The first six tiers have three skills each to choose from and the seventh tier has two skills. The first tier is unlocked by default, and you are allowed to invest in one of the three available skills. To unlock the subsequent tiers, you are required to buy a skill in the current tier that is accessible to you and then spend five Talent Points. This is done by clicking the Add button at the bottom left of the tree. You are given a choice of spending one, three or five Talent Points towards unlocking the next tier. Selecting the five-point option will automatically unlock the next tier.

Additionally, skills can also be upgraded as well to increase the effect beyond what the skill provides at default. There are five upgrade levels and each upgrade costs one Talent Point, so a skill costs five Talent Points to master. To have a 100 percent complete tree in a category, you have to buy and master seven skills and also unlock six tiers in the process. This will cost a total of 65 Talent Points. To have 100 percent completion in all three categories, the cost is 195 Talent Points.

**Choosing your skills and upgrades**

This is the most crucial part of the whole talent tree system, and it requires careful planning of knowing what skills to invest in. This requires a thorough understanding of your own play style, the kind of characters you use and knowing which skills from the list will bring the most benefit to the majority of the cards you use more often in Faction Wars.

You cannot purchase more than one skill in a tier per category at a given time, so you are only allowed to choose seven out of the 20 skills in a category. The fact that you only have 102 Talent Points to spend means that it is possible to master seven skills only in one of the three categories.

After having a look at all of the available kills across all three categories, investing of Talent Points more on the DEFENSE and SUPPORT categories is highly recommended.

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retro game corner



# SONG SPOTLIGHT

By Lyndsey Beatty



Don't forget to download our DDR glossary of terms!



**Difficulty:** 5/8/10/10  
**Chosen difficulty:** Standard  
**BPM:** 72.5 - 290

This is my favorite song in all of Dance Dance Revolution and probably my favorite Paranoia version. Paranoia Survivor Max is a test of will that shows in all levels of difficulty for the song. The Standard version of the stepchart is moderately easy for an 8-footer, but you will need to pay attention to several parts of the song. I also strongly recommend the following: Do not speed this up unless you can handle high BPM stepping, and make sure to apply the Mirror mod to turn the steps back to Paranoia Survivor's stepchart.

**Part 1: Intro**

The opening measures of the song are not hard to decipher but be prepared for the BPM change. There are a few blue 1/8th notes sprinkled in, but the real challenge is the slowdown with the BPM change. The slowdown features some yellow 1/16th notes, which will mess you up if you're not prepared.

**Part 2: Bridge**

The second part of the song features another slowdown and BPM change, which is tricky to navigate. It has two double taps on the slowdown, and it will quickly get back to normal speed. The problem is the section after these double taps. The song goes slightly offbeat and though it follows the music very well, it's still offbeat. There are many two steps and triplets to tackle, and a Freeze arrow only gives a brief reprieve.

**Part 3: Death Run ending**

This is where it begins to get hard. There is a long stream of red arrows to contend with and it is not made easier even though the song is basically repeating itself in composition. The focus here is to make it through what is known as the Death Run section. This becomes more apparent with the Heavy steps why it's named as such, but the Death Run is still present in the Standard steps. The Death Run is punctuated by the defining moment of the song: the final eight seconds, which adds a coda to the song and is not found in Paranoia Survivor. The additional section features a few 1/4th - 1/8th triplets and double taps, which by this point, will be tiring. Conserve your energy to make it through this part because it's the true ending.

**Suggested Speed Mod:** None  
**Suggested Mod:** Mirror



**Difficulty:** 4/5/6  
**Chosen difficulty:** Heavy  
**BPM:** 150

One of the elder statesmen of DDR songs is Drop the Bomb. It tends to be a favorite of older players because it's one of the first songs newer players make the effort to master. It's not hard on all difficulty levels and provides a significant progress gauge. The Heavy stepchart is mild, with the steps only ranked as a 6-footer. The best tip to remember here is that the steps follow the music, not the lyrics. The steps are mostly on beat, and the trickiest part is the end. That's where the steps breakdown in a mix of red 1/4th and green 1/32nd notes that match the synth notes. The ending is the worst that you will have to look out for if you're prepared for triplets and the short run in the middle.

**Suggested Speed Mod:** x2



**Difficulty:** 4/6/8  
**Chosen difficulty:** Heavy  
**BPM:** 130

Groove is a fun dance track that gives a little bit of challenge. The Heavy steps are rated as an 8-footer, and it shows in the complexity of the jumps and triplets interspersed. The song has a quick pace, but you will need to speed it up to spread out the arrows. The steps are synced with the lyrics, so pay attention to the singer to safely get a sense of where to step and the timing of the jumps and triplets. Some of these pockets of steps are tricky, and they seem like they're designed to be tiring.

**Suggested Speed Mod:** x2

## UPCOMING SONGS

GRADIUS CYBER

I DO I DO I DO

KAGEROW (DRAGONFLY)





# Don't get robbed by 'Home Alone' adaptation

Like most of creation, think Home Alone is a fun-filled Christmas movie. Overflowing with the simple hijinks of actors of esteemed value, Home Alone is cute, wholesome fun at the behest of one Macaulay Culkin. But, that said, the game version of this indelible classic has my language flowing akin to Macaulay's brother Kieran Culkin's foul vocabulary on Succession.

Home Alone the video game is a middling affair that involves defending the McCallister home from marauding thieves hellbent on looting at any costs. These thieves — who totally aren't Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern — have infiltrated the home after casing the joint for some time. The only thing stopping them is you, Kevin McCallister, who was mistakenly left home alone while the family jetted off to Paris.

We all know the plot to Home Alone at this point, given that the movie is at least 30 years old. All of this is to say that the game adaptation is not nearly as smart or fun as the movie. You've been forewarned.

I might have been able to stomach the game if it weren't for the fact that it's terrible. There is no joy in having to randomly search for valuables throughout the house's floors and dump them in the garbage shoot in a desperate bid to protect them. It just seems so pedestrian and ridiculous that the thieves don't catch on. Also, there's no indication of how this mechanic works. Really, there's no explanation of anything; you're just thrown in as Kevin in his bedroom and expected to figure things out.

Then there are the actual movement mechanics. Controlling Kevin is a chore best left to professional troublemakers. If you like to move as slow as molasses to get away from pursuing thieves, you're in luck because it's the special of the day. I lost count of the number of times I was captured, or my weapon merely slowed down pursuers when I expected it to kill them. I'm not a violent person



by any means, but if I remember correctly, these dudes were focused on robbing the house blind and trying to kill a child while committing multiple felonies. I'm not playing around; I'm expecting to kill these guys.



Cartoon violence aside, the game is just terrible overall, and I expect better.

But much like Kevin was underestimated in his ability to defend his homestead alone, I'm underestimating how much a quick cash-in

video game adaptation can suck.

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On tap this issue:

**STRIP TALK**  
Editor Lyndsey Beatty talks about DC's recovery

**PROPERTY REVIEW**  
Loki's Season 1 is outstanding

**MARVEL HIGHLIGHT**  
Everything you wanted to know about Blackheart

**OTAKU CORNER**  
We finally reach the end of Death Note

**ANIME LOUNGE**  
We show the love to Cowboy Bebop

**TOP 5**  
Things we are anticipating from DC

View this content at [www.gaminginsurrection.com/TheStrip](http://www.gaminginsurrection.com/TheStrip)

## PROPERTY REVIEW

**LOKI SEASON 1**  
Marvel Studios, 2021



### Loki Season 1 unburdened with glorious purpose of multiverse

**T**hat mischievous scamp. Loki, who slithered and slunk his way into our hearts in 2011's Thor, has managed to somehow get looped in this illusion that we don't love him the way we do. Naturally, he's gone back to the beginning of his love affair with us, the Marvel faithful, and found a way to get us talking about him again. And we do it because, despite ourselves, we love him. And we love doing it because Loki's debut season was burdened with glorious purpose and delivered.

We join our loveable narcissistic God of Mischief moments after he has teleported to the Gobi Desert in Mongolia in the 2012 timeline. If you'll recall from those harrowing and chaotic moments of Endgame, the Avengers have just captured Loki after the Battle of New York. Loki's been Hulk smashed, knackered and silenced with a mouthpiece, and the 2012 Avengers are ready to pack it up at Stark Tower while the 2023 Avengers are skulking around trying to acquire the Space Infinity Stone. But the Time Heist engineered by the 2023 Avengers has gone sideways. Within the confusion of the Hulk entering the scene in a complete rage, the Space stone is scattered and somehow lands at Loki's feet. He seizes his opportunity for freedom, grabs it with all his might and teleports from the scene, thus ruining the Avengers' attempts to temporarily borrow that stone. We all know what happens in Endgame after that, but where Loki managed to get off to was the question at the time. That's answered in the fantastical world of his summer timeslip.

In the opening moments of this vaudeville delight, we're reintroduced to the devil. This isn't the Loki that we've come to love

#### HOW WE GRADE

We score the properties in three categories: Casting (or voice acting in cases of animated), plot and similarities to its source material. Each category receives points out of the maximum of 10 per category and 30 overall. The percentage is the final score.

and mourn in Infinity War. This Loki is one who hasn't quite redeemed himself. He doesn't know who he really is just yet. He's still at the beginning of the journey without the lessons learned. And this is where Loki shines. The introduction of the Time Variance Authority by way of Hunter B-15 — the wonderful Wunmi Mosaku — sets the tone immediately and gives the first clue that something is different. And everything is different, because we're not in the MCU main timeline anymore, Toto.

The first episode alone steals the beatings of the heart by showing Loki — and us the viewer, by extension — the journey he should have taken. The TVA's ruling power over the Sacred Timeline is mighty and powerful, and the true concept of the multiverse begins here with this one storyline beat. Years of buildup have prepared us for this, and it does not disappoint. Each beat of the story — multiple timeline branches, different universes, multiple versions of each character, time branching instead of being linearly shaped — hit one after another and it's so much to take in. But this is the rub: It's so expertly crafted here and done with so much care and nuance that months later,

See LOKI SEASON 1, PAGE 34



### DC finally getting back on track

**L**isten to me good when I tell you all something: DC has to do something. They're getting hurt out there in the ring, and they can't take too many more hits before it's lights out. They need that ring bell to save them and fortunately for them, it's coming in a few projects.

How they got here is not a mystery. Incoherent, nonsensical decisions with stars for their movies, the movies themselves being atrocious, and a lack of obvious planning and forethought. It was a lot, and it seemed like every time the company took a step, they stumbled. And their rival, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, was churning out hit after hit at the box office, adding insult to injury.

But there were beacons of hope: Television and animated properties.

DC has always had strong television and animation. Their Justice League characters are so well known that almost all have had multiple shows that have done well. Their animated movies and shows are so good that decades later, they're still producing spinoffs that are just as good if not better than the originals.

So, this is their go-to in the bleak times. When faced with hard times, Warner Bros. does what it knows how to do best: Milk something to death and ride that cash cow until the wheels fall off. And that's why we're getting great television in the form of Titans. That's why more animated Batman is here to put the DC name on his back and carry everything across the finish line. That's why we're getting more Batman spinoff films and a Flash spinoff bringing back the Batman version that worked — Michael Keaton for those of you still playing along at home.

DC trades on what it knows works best for them: Nostalgia. And they are smart to do it. That bell has rung finally for DC, and they can get a breather from that beating the MCU and Kevin Feige has been delivering for the past 10 years. The body shots can maybe slow down, they can regain their footing and they're finally doing something. Something worthwhile and exciting. It's about time they come in with gloves ready for the fight game.

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## The Death Note saga comes to an end in Volume 12

**H**ere we are, at last. The last volume of Death Note is here, and I could not be any happier to close the chapter on manga's most self-righteous and sadistic character, Light Yagami. From the very beginning, he weaved a great web of deceit by utilizing a weapon of mass destruction. From test killing various criminals to intentionally killing international police officials (including this millennium's Sherlock Holmes) and having the audacity to play God while wielding absolute power over every well-known police and security agency on Earth, Light has done it all. Rest assured, I will soldier through Mr. Yagami's foolishness while doing this review.

After a successful attack on NHN studios, Mello and his partner, Matt, were able to capture Takada, bringing a slight interruption to Light's and Near's decisive battle set to take place in days. Mello, being clever, forces Takada to undress herself to remove any tracking devices, preventing her bodyguards and the police to find them. Mello cleverly places Takada's outer clothes in a shipping box and leaves it at a package delivery company. Unknown to him, however, that Takada had a piece of the Death Note, a pen and a secret cell phone to contact Light.

Once Takada contacts Light, she tells him that she killed Mello, and Light fiendishly acts concerned in front of the task force members by asking where she was. At the same time, the news reports Matt's death as he was shot by Takada's bodyguards while attempting to fire smoke bombs at them. On the way to rescue Takada, Light uses a hidden piece of the Death Note to kill her after she calls Mikami to tell him to text her two days' worth of criminals to kill. Near also tries to help with the search but is too late when the task forces find Mello and Takada dead after a fire, thanks to Light.

While Light and Near made their final adjustments for their last battle, NHN and other television stations begin to plead Kira to host his messages. On the day of the final showdown, Linder of the SPK drives Misa and Mogi, dropping the former at a deluxe hotel suite while driving to the meeting site. After arriving at the Yellow Box Warehouse and checking for wire taps and hidden camera, Light, Near and their allies met face to face. Near then asks everyone to wait 30 minutes for Mikami to show up and instructs everyone to act normal should he try to peep in on the meeting. Unknown to Mikami, Near has tampered with the real pages of the notebook. Once Light figured out that he was exposed as Kira, he first claims Near is setting him up and finally confesses that he is Kira.

As Light continued to bask in his "victory," Near interrupts that he not only tampered with the Death Note Mikami had on him, but also he messed with the other one he kept in a bank deposit box. Light, still delirious, tried to kill Near with a hidden piece of the Death Note, but Matsuda shoots him multiple times. Light asks Ryuk to kill Near and the others with his Death Note. Ryuk refuses, stating that Light is near death because of his wounds; he would take Light's life and did so without a second thought.

A year later, Matsuda and Ide talk about the case, and Matsuda stated that he believed that Near controlled Mikami. At that moment, Ide gets a call from Aizawa, who is now deputy superintendent of the NPA. Aizawa



states that Near needs help investigating a drug syndicate's deal in Japan occurring at the Yellow Box Warehouse. Once arriving, they join Mogi and the task force's newest member, Yamamoto, joins the meeting with L. Meanwhile, a gathering of Kira worshippers convenes in a secluded area where their priestess (looking like Misa) place places a candle and prays for Kira's return.

From beginning to end, Volume 12 of Death Note did not disappoint. All the writing and artwork surpassed previous editions, giving a great series a well-earned sendoff with hopes of continuation in the future. Ohba-san's writing was spectacular in building suspense. Obata-san's artwork was brilliant, keeping the suspense and action alive and allowing readers to see the aftermath of Kira's (possible) demise. I am giving well-deserved praise to Viz Media's Tesuichiro Miyaki for translation and adaptation that perfectly told the story, making this final volume — like the other English releases of Death Note — re-readable from beginning to end.

Death Note Volume 12 did not disappoint. I would like to thank you, Otaku Corner readers, for joining me through this series. One piece of advice: Be wary of shinigami and always leave out juicy apples for them.

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**Series:** Cowboy Bebop

**Episodes:** 1 to 12

**Premise:** Space bounty hunter Spike Spiegel is always in search of his next target, and he finds unlikely helpers in retired cop Jet Black, the mysterious Faye Valentine and later legendary hacker Ed and the scientific genius pupper Ein. Spike must confront his past — running around in the mafia — in order to move forward with his future. How he does it to start leads to more questions than answers, ending with his first confrontation with former friend Vicious.

**Is it worth watching?:** YES.

This is one of the god-tier anime that every new anime enthusiast should be required to watch. Production values, voice acting, cool characters and an awesome soundtrack ... this anime has it all.

**Breakout character:** Faye Valentine. Yes, it could be all of the characters, but Faye definitely stands out. You want to know her deal, why she can't remember anything and how she will ever get herself together. And then you find out later in the series, and it's like, wow. The payoff for Faye is amazing, and you still want more.

**Where it's going?:** Spike has to take on Vicious once again, reclaim his honor and handle unresolved business. He's taking the crew along for the ride, and where they end up is the mystery.





# MARVEL CHARACTER HIGHLIGHT

**Name:** Blackheart

**Alias:** Black King, Legion, Lord Blackheart, Mayor Winston Agnew, Prince of Hell, Son of Mephisto

**Affiliation:** Hell Lords, Hellfire Club, Spirits of Vengeance, Corrupt, Legions of the Night

**Special abilities:** Superhuman strength, durability and speed. He also has some telepathy, can levitate, is capable of interdimensional teleportation, size alteration, physical alteration, regeneration, energy generation, soul capture and mind control. He is also omniscient, immortal and immune to Ghost Rider's Penance Stare.

**Background:** Son of the demon-lord Mephisto, Blackheart was created from the mystical energies found in Christ's Crown, N.Y. The location was known for many murders over several centuries and provided the necessary evil to create a being such as Blackheart. The demon began learning under his father and clashed several times with Daredevil, Spider-Man and members of the Inhumans. After failing to corrupt any of these beings, Blackheart was taken captive by his father in Hell, and he wanted freedom. To escape, Blackheart entangled himself with Misha of the Warheads. He was successful in his attempt and got out disguised as Doctor Strange. Once free, he lured Wolverine, The Punisher and Ghost Rider to Christ's Crown to corrupt them but failed. They then took on Blackheart in Hell, and he successfully used them to defeat Mephisto and take over his father's portion of Hell.

**Relationships:** Mephisto (father); Mephista (sister); Greylight (brother); Daimon Hellstrom, Satana Hellstrom, Mikal Drakonmegas (siblings)

**First Versus appearance:** Marvel Super Heroes

**Appearances in other media:**

Film: Ghost Rider (2007)

Video games: Marvel Super Heroes, Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter, Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, Ghost Rider, Marvel: Avengers Alliance



## TOP 5 ON THE STRIP — DC ANTICIPATION EDITION



### Flash's new movie with return of Michael Keaton

You all know how much we here at GI love Michael Keaton's portrayal of Bruce Wayne and Batman. And we're practically jumping up and down for joy that it's been confirmed we will see him again in this upcoming Flash solo film. Yes, we do love Ezra Miller as the Flash, but it's been 30 years since we've seen Keaton don the cowl. That's worth any price of admission.



### Future seasons of Titans

This past season of Titans was fantastic. Vincent Kartheiser, of Mad Men brilliance, as the Scarecrow was on point with the long game the entire season, and we finally got Jason Todd as the Red Hood. We all knew it was coming, but how and why was expertly done. We're expecting great things in the upcoming seasons now that the focus is shifting back to Dick Grayson being the leader of the Titans in San Francisco.



### Black Adam coming with the Rock

Black Adam's long development has been simmering for a while, and now it's boiling if you smell what the Rock has been cooking. We're more than ready for Dwayne Johnson take on the character — who, in the intervening years, has been drawn in his likeness. The movie looks to be great, and we support Johnson in anything and everything he does. We're looking forward to Shazam going one on one with the Great One finally.



### Blue Beetle film with Xolo Maridueña

We have so grown to love Xolo Maridueña, best known for his role as Miguel in the brilliant Cobra Kai. His earnest and awesome portrayal of the cute karate powerhouse means we will follow his projects, and Blue Beetle is one that's taking shape for DC. The character is cool, and we expect that Maridueña will bring the heat when he finally gets started.



### Henry Cavill returning as Superman

Given that he's been the best choice for the Man of Steel for nearly a decade, we welcome the return of Cavill if he'll have us. His Superman is believable and decent, and we loved his version in Justice League. We also happen to be big fans of Cavill in general — he was fantastic in The Tudors — so if he's willing to don the cape and House of El symbol once again, we'll take it.



# Beloved Loki Season 1 has our vote, for all time, always

LOKI SEASON 1, from PAGE 31

we're still talking about all six episodes and what they mean for the future of the MCU. There are so many story branches opened now because of this that the dizzying nature of the multiverse slips in unnoticed to seep into later episodes and blow everything wide open.

And yet, even with its open nature, the show also has an isolated and insular draw. One of the core strengths is its ability to be humorous and thought-provoking with in-universe gags, easter eggs and references.

Somehow, Loki managed to be a miasma of questions about the implications of time travel and free will on the MCU while hilarious. No other show could feature a biting and witty villain who jumps through disasters in time (*Category 8 hurricane in 2050, what?*) with a bureaucratic pseudo-governmental agency represented by a time clock with a Southern drawl, who finds out he's got female, child, future, supreme liar and alligator versions of himself, have them work together and tie it together as a subtle discourse on climate change.

There is no shortage of eclectic shenanigans going on in Loki, and it's hilariously on point always. As is the soundtrack, because let us state this right now: Composer Natalie Holt outdid herself. The soundtrack is phenomenal and so well done in the way that it epitomizes what it means to be Loki.



**Loki (Tom Hiddleston) and TVA Agent Mobius M. Mobius (Owen Wilson) brainstorm on how to catch the variant Loki, who is jumping through time.**

The themes used here could have easily been used in any Marvel theatrical release with Loki and they would have done well.

But let us not opine that everything in Loki going beautifully according to plan wasn't also made possible with quality performances. Tom Hiddleston, at this point, is Loki. There's no question that the dark brat prince of the MCU has cornered the market on

our hearts through Hiddleston's portrayal. Who else could make us simultaneously hate the Asgardian fool and love him so fiercely? The delicate touches he places on Loki's motivations will have you rooting for the character from the moment he crashes into the Gobi Desert.

And along for the ride is, surprisingly, Owen Wilson. He's a good actor, but in the confines of Loki, he's in another echelon: Great. Wilson's believable skepticism bleeds

through and we're all nodding our heads at his totally in-universe disbelief of the foolishness that is unredeemed Loki. He sees it through to the end, and he is the needed pin to tone things down to a believable state of affairs. Sophie Di Martino and Gugu Mbatha-Raw are refreshing and fun to dissect, given the nature of their characters. And the Loki variants — played by the equally fantastic Richard E. Grant, Deobia Oparei

and Jack Veal — are important pieces of the puzzle who raise the bar of the cast exponentially.

And, let us devote a moment of reverence for Jonathan Majors as He Who Remains. Majors' appearance is a master class in character development through exposition and narrative, moving the story forward while reminding you where it's come from. He needed no crazy props, just charisma and charm, to explain not just who he is, but also why he is. His appearance in the sixth and final episode — For All Time. Always — is the most pristine entrance ever done in the MCU, and quite frankly, the most exciting in television in a long time. Majors delighted and enthralled us, luring us out to the precipice and having us hanging on his every word and action. We are unfathomably excited to see where he is going with the variant Kang the Conqueror in the upcoming Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania.

Loki, long known to be equally parts vexing and enthralling, will return in Season 2. We are burdened with glorious purpose to be there from the beginning. Because after all, with one of the best scripts, best casts and best in-universe introduction, the sun is guaranteed to shine on its creativity and brilliance yet again.

**Acting:** 9.5

**Story:** 9

**Production:** 10

**Overall score:** 28.5/30 or 9.5

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**dance dance revolution spotlight**

1st mix	2nd mix
3rd mix	4th mix
5th mix	6th mix
7th mix	Extreme
SuperNova	
SuperNova 2	

LIGHT STANDARD HEAVY CHALLENGE

**GI talks anime**

**anime lounge**