SILVER HORSE AWARDS 2023

BEST IN CLASS

GI names its faves across gaming

from the editor

It's starting to look a lot like summer around these GI parts.

While we're dodging the heat and trying to remain cool, we're also playing and talking about some of our favorite games in each genre. Sure, some of these already appeared on our greatest games of all time list in Issue 40, but think of this as a more comprehensive list of retro games for most of the more popular genres. Spoiler alert: Simulation games didn't make the list because there are few games that we usually play, but know that we are an Animal Crossing enthusiastic household here at GI.

The Silver Horse Awards makes its triumphant return as we tackle each genre with picks from the NES to the Dreamcast. It's been a long while since the Silver Horse made its way into GI as a feature, and we're happy to see it return.

We hope you love our curated list of video game genre best.

Enjoy the issue!

Lyndsey

STAFF

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LYNDSEY 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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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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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.

All images courtesy of ChainedEchoes.com

Lyndsey Beatty
BEAT.TRIP.GAME

Great sound reverbs in Chained Echoes OST

C hained Echoes is a breathtaking modern RPG that harkens to the days of 16-bit JRPGs like Chrono Trigger and Final Fantasy VI. These comparisons mostly come from the graphics, but more importantly, it's referenced in the soundtrack. And, make no mistake, the soundtrack is a masterpiece. Having discovered the game and hearing the soundtrack during a playthrough stream on Twitch, I immediately bought the album. I was not disappointed. These are our favorite tracks from the stunning work of art of composer Eddie Marianukroh and developer Mattias Linda.

1. **Never Forget Our Promise:** This is THE track of the album. So many elements go into this to make the most perfect track that I've ever heard in an RPG. It goes so well with the background fighting that it nearly overshadows the game itself. The guitar is sublime, and the main bass line is absolutely perfect. This is a special fight theme, but it could easily work as a final boss theme as well. I bought the album off the strength of this track alone. Audio perfection.
2. **Prologue – Against All Odds:** This opening track is close to perfection. The choral voices lend a sense of grandeur to the track, and the pace is just right. The horns are just as good, and the key changes are beautiful. This would entice me just on its sound alone.
3. **A Day in the Valley:** This track immediately draws comparisons to Chrono Trigger, and they're great comparisons. It's beautiful and whimsical, with triangle flourishes that dance lightly. The guitar here is also beautiful.
4. **Calling Upon Bravery:** This track is one of the best battle themes ever in an RPG. It's multilayered and brilliant in the way the sounds meld and work together to make a consistent and cohesive sound. It's gorgeous and fun.
5. **Flower Fields of Perpetua:** Dreamy and romantic, this is a beautiful track that draws you into the mystery of the surrounding area. The background voices make the track a sort of ethereal dream, and you can't tell if it's a

nightmare or something good.

6. **Fractured Echoes:** Much like Calling Upon Bravery, this track is fast and will have your toe tapping. It also evokes Chrono Trigger comparisons because it sounds like something that would have also been in that game. The horns are a standout on this track.
7. **Iron Scraps for Breakfast (Can You Hear the Beat of My Hammer?):** Fun and delightful, this is almost a dance track. The horns, which have been a standout on other tracks, are prominent here alongside what seems like an accordion. It's an odd combination but it works. I also love the hammer beats that punctuate the track.
8. **The Empyrean Ruins:** This jungle track is beautiful. There's a flute and voices and an infectious beat that just won't quit. It's dark yet bright in waves. There's so much going on that works well together. It's well-put-together and sultry all at once.
9. **The Mystic Forest:** This is a slower track but it's just right. Of all of the tracks on the album that remind of Chrono Trigger, this is the one that draws the most comparison. It sounds a lot like the forest track of that game — Secret of the Forest. And that's good because that's a great track. This is lush and slow, just how it needs to be.

10. **The Rainy City of Tormund:** The dreary intro to this track is what sets the tone for a perfectly spooky environment with a beautiful acoustic guitar base. It's mysterious and haunting, though it also sort of invokes the 007 James Bond theme slightly, which is a nice surprise.

Lyndsey Beatty is editor-in-chief of Gaming Insurrection. She can be reached by email at lyndseyb@gaminginsurrection.com

SILVER HORSE AWARDS 2023

BEST IN CLASS

By Lyndsey M. Beatty | Gaming Insurrection

We love video games. That much should be obvious by now. Even if you're a casual reader of Gaming Insurrection, you know that we love something in every genre. And the second thing that you know is that we love talking about our favorites. That's where this year's Silver Horse Awards comes in.

This issue, we're talking about our favorites in nearly every category of video games. Whether it's first-person shooters or rhythm games, there's something for every class of video game. They're spread out over a wide swath and there are mainstream favorites as well as obscure titles you may have never heard of. We're here to highlight the best of the best as we feel showcase a particular genre and to maybe hip you to something you've never heard of but might whet your appetite. These are the best in class.

GAME SYSTEMS COVERED

ARCADE NES GENESIS SNES

NINTENDO 64 PLAYSTATION DREAMCAST

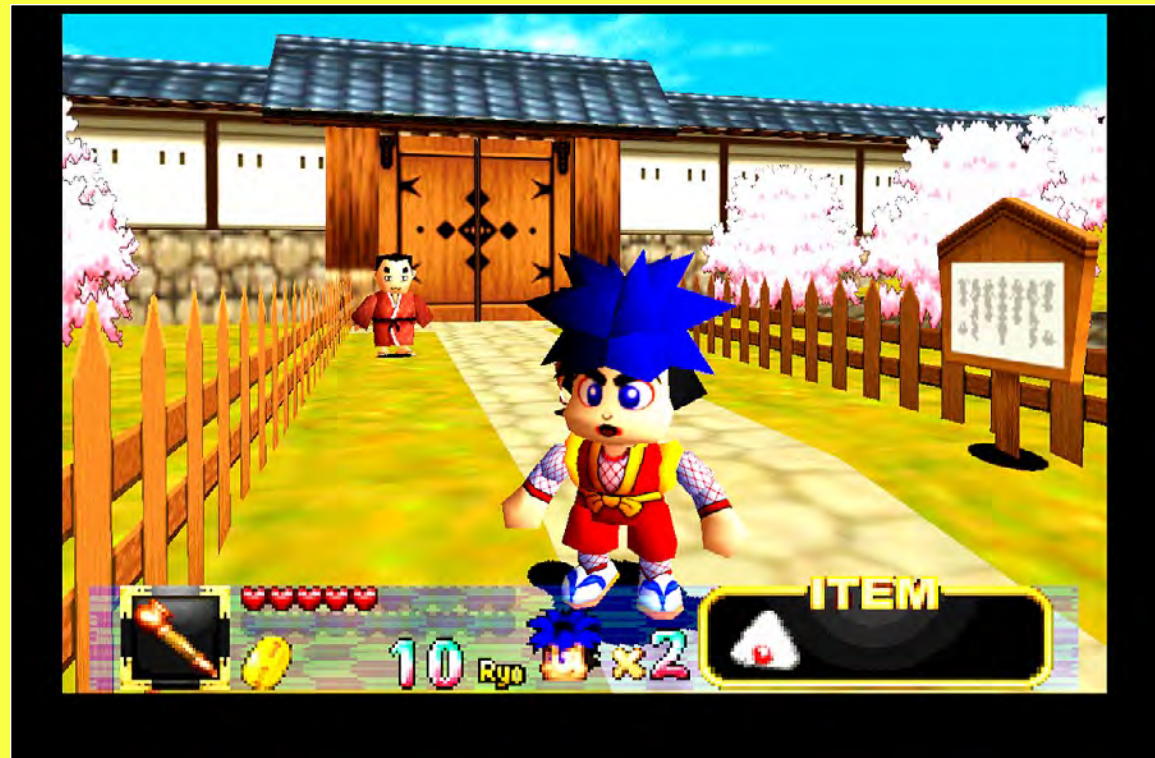## INSIDE

ACTION-ADVENTURE

Super Metroid
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1993

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1992

HIGHLIGHT: MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON

Mystical Ninja has always been a quirky weird Japanese-centric series, and the Nintendo 64 version is no different. It starts in an alternate Edo/pre-Tokyo where spaceships and shogun from outer space are normal. Don't judge a book by its weird cover, however; Goemon is a multilayered romp from start to finish with RPG elements, accurate Japanese geography and mech fighting sequences surrounded by a banger of a soundtrack. It's a hidden gem of an experience for the N64.

Developer: Konami/Console: Nintendo 64/Year Released: 1998

Resident Evil 2
System: PlayStation
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1998

The Legend of Zelda
System: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1986

Metal Gear Solid
System: PlayStation
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1997

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1997

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Year released: 2000

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis
System: PlayStation
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1999

Sonic Adventure
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1999

BEAT-'EM-UP

TMNT II: The Arcade Game
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1990

Double Dragon
System: NES
Developer: Technos
Year released: 1987

X-Men: The Arcade Game
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1992

The Simpsons
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1991

Final Fight
System: SNES
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1991

Batman Returns
System: SNES
Developer: Acclaim
Year released: 1992

HIGHLIGHT: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME

We're big fans of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles around these parts, so it stands to reason that we love their final outing for the arcade/SNES. Turtles in Time has everything you could ask for: Solid co-op gameplay, characters that we know and love and an awesome soundtrack that still holds up. We love being Turtles.

Developer: Konami/Console: Arcade/Super Nintendo/Year Released: 1992

Golden Axe
System: Genesis
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1989

Altered Beast
System: Genesis
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1988

Captain Commando
System: SNES
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1991

FIGHTING

Street Fighter Alpha 3
System: Arcade
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1998

Mortal Kombat II
System: Arcade
Developer: Midway
Year released: 1993

HIGHLIGHT: GUILTY GEAR X

Arc Systems knew they had a hit on their hands with this sequel, and it shows. Everything about it is elegant, and it's one of our favorite old-school games to play. It was an import title for the Dreamcast and well worth tracking down to complete the fighting game collection. Memorable characters and an interesting story complemented a rocking soundtrack for a game that plays like butter. Sign us up any time for this fight.

Developer: Arc Systems/Console: Dreamcast/Year Released: 1998

Rival Schools
System: PlayStation
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1998

Vampire Savior
System: Arcade
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1997

Mortal Kombat Trilogy
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Midway
Year released: 1996

Mortal Kombat
System: Arcade
Developer: Midway
Year released: 1992

Super Street Fighter II Turbo
System: Arcade
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1994

Super Smash Bros.
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1999

Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 2000

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Doom
System: SNES
Developer: ID Software
Year released: 1993

Quake
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: ID Software
Year released: 1998

Unreal Tournament
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Epic Games
Year released: 2001

Duck Hunt
System: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1985

House of the Dead 2
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1999

Point Blank 2
System: PlayStation
Developer: Bandai Namco
Year released: 1999

HIGHLIGHT: GOLDENEYE 007

GoldenEye 007 set the standard for first-person shooters on consoles right out of the gate. Based on the popular Pierce Brosnan first-time-turn as James Bond, GoldenEye showed the industry how a first-person shooter should be done in the solo and multiplayer arenas. Sure, there have been others to come along after and do some of the things GoldenEye does better, but you'd be hard pressed to find many games that play as well GoldenEye.

Developer: Rare/Console: Nintendo 64/Year Released: 1997

Perfect Dark
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Rare
Year released: 2000

MUSIC/RHYTHM

DanceDanceRevolution 5th Mix
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 2001

DDRMAX -DanceDanceRevolution 6thMIX-
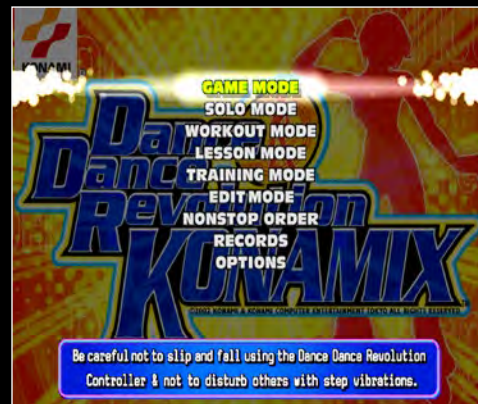System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 2001

HIGHLIGHT: DANCEDANCEREVOLUTION EXTREME

It felt like the end of an era because it was the end of an era with DanceDanceRevolution Extreme. This was the culmination of a lot of good music and danceable tracks, and Naoki and Konami couldn't top it even with later mixes. With favorites from every game in the series up to this point available and stellar new tracks such as Paranoia Survivor and The Legend of Maxx just waiting to be conquered, we couldn't take off our dancing shoes.

Developer: Konami/Console: Arcade/Year released: 2002

DDRMAX2 -DanceDanceRevolution 7thMIX-
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 2002

Pump it Up The Rebirth: The 8th Dance Floor
System: Arcade
Developer: Andamiro
Year released: 2002

In the Groove
System: Arcade
Developer: Roxor Games
Year released: 2004

In the Groove 2
System: Arcade
Developer: Roxor Games
Year released: 2005

DanceDanceRevolution Konamix
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 2002

Pump it Up The Premiere: The International Dance Floor
System: Arcade
Developer: Andamiro
Year released: 2001

DanceDance Revolution SuperNova
System: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Year released: 2006

PLATFORMING

Super Mario Bros. 3
System: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1990

Sonic the Hedgehog 2
System: Genesis
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1993


HIGHLIGHT: SUPER MARIO WORLD

There isn't much that could top Super Mario Bros. 3 in terms of sheer volume, but Super Mario World somehow managed to do it. Gorgeous SNES graphics, a stunning soundtrack and a new companion in Yoshi make Super Mario World one of the best platformers ever.

Developer: Nintendo/Console: Super Nintendo/Year released: 1991
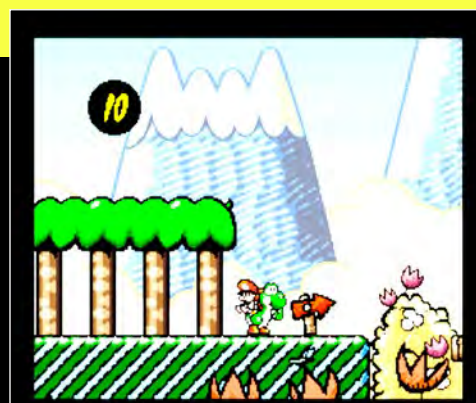

Super Contra
System: NES
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1988
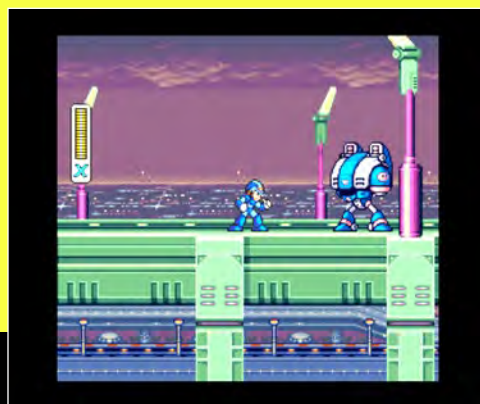
Mega Man X
System: SNES
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1995

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1995

Donkey Kong Country
System: SNES
Developer: Rare
Year released: 1994

Ninja Gaiden
System: NES
Developer: Koei Tecmo
Year released: 1989

Super Castlevania IV
System: SNES
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1991

Aladdin
System: SNES
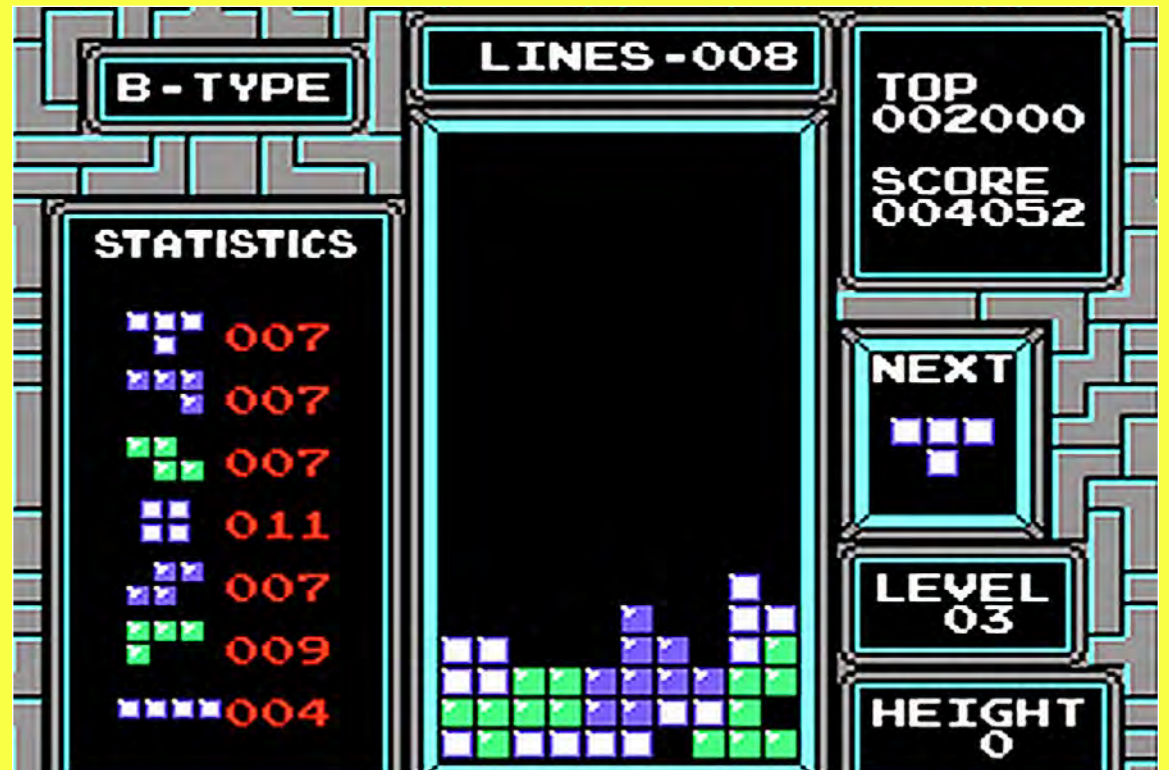Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1993

PUZZLE

Tetris Attack
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1996

Dr. Mario
System: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1990

HIGHLIGHT: TETRIS

Nothing is more satisfying than a rousing game of Tetris. It doesn't matter if you're making lines from scratch in A mode or clearing lines in B mode; there's something for everyone here. It's simple yet addicting and fun shapes-based action that has been around for decades at this point. Tetris is on every console post-1985 for a reason. Can you even call yourself a console if you don't have a version of the ultimate line puzzler?

Developer: The Tetris Company/Console: NES/Year released: 1989

Wordtris
System: SNES
Developer: Spectrum Holobyte
Year released: 1992

Bust-A-Move
System: SNES
Developer: Taito
Year released: 1995

Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo
System: PlayStation
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1996

ChuChu Rocket!
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Sega
Year released: 2000

Super Bomberman
System: SNES
Developer: Hudson Soft
Year released: 1993

Pokémon Puzzle League
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 2000

Kagero: Deception II
System: PlayStation
Developer: Koei Tecmo
Year released: 1998

RACING

Beetle Adventure Racing
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Electronic Arts
Year released: 1999

Super Mario Kart
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1992

Mario Kart 64
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1997

Mario Kart: Super Circuit
System: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 2001

Crazy Taxi
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Sega
Year released: 2000

F-Zero
System: SNES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1992

HIGHLIGHT: R4: RIDGE RACER TYPE 4

R4 is smooth and cool, exactly what we need in a racer. A robust collection system and nice story mode rounds out the package. And, let us not forget the outstanding soundtrack. We still listen to it even now whenever we're cruising around. Namco outdid itself with this one and set the standard for racing titles.

Developer: Bandai Namco/Console: PlayStation/Year released: 1998

Gran Turismo
System: PlayStation
Developer: Polyphony Digital
Year released: 1997

Pole Position
System: Arcade
Developer: Bandai Namco
Year released: 1982

Excitebike
System: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 1985

ROLE PLAYING GAME

Parasite Eve
System: PlayStation
Developer: Square Enix
Year released: 1998

Final Fantasy V
System: SNES
Developer: Square Enix
Year released: 1992

HIGHLIGHT:CHRONO TRIGGER

Time traveling never looked or played so well until Chrono Trigger. A premier RPG for the SNES, Chrono Trigger deftly weaves a tale of life and destruction against the backdrop of different timelines. Great characters, graphics and a beautiful soundtrack put this in a different echelon where few other RPGs tread.

Developer: Square Enix/Console: Super Nintendo/Year released: 1995

Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars
System: SNES
Developer: Square Enix
Year released: 1996

Pokémon Red & Blue
System: Game Boy
Developer: Game Freak
Year released: 1998

Paper Mario
System: Nintendo 64
Developer: Nintendo
Year released: 2000

Final Fantasy VI
System: SNES
Developer: Square Enix
Year released: 1994

Phantasy Star IV
System: Genesis
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1995

Phantasy Star Online
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Sega
Year released: 1999

SHOOT-'EM-UP

Metal Slug X
System: PlayStation
Developer: SNK Playmore
Year released: 2001

Super R-Type
System: SNES
Developer: Irem
Year released: 1991

HIGHLIGHT: IKARUGA

Treasure generally doesn't know the meaning of the word mediocre. Ikaruga is a masterpiece in visual storytelling in the SHMUP genre. Learning to change the polarity of your ship is a trial and tribulation that will richly reward in the end. Ikaruga set the standard for SHMUPs and should be regarded as the treasure it is.

Developer: Treasure/Console: Dreamcast/Year released: 2002

Super Smash TV
System: SNES
Developer: Midway
Year released: 1992

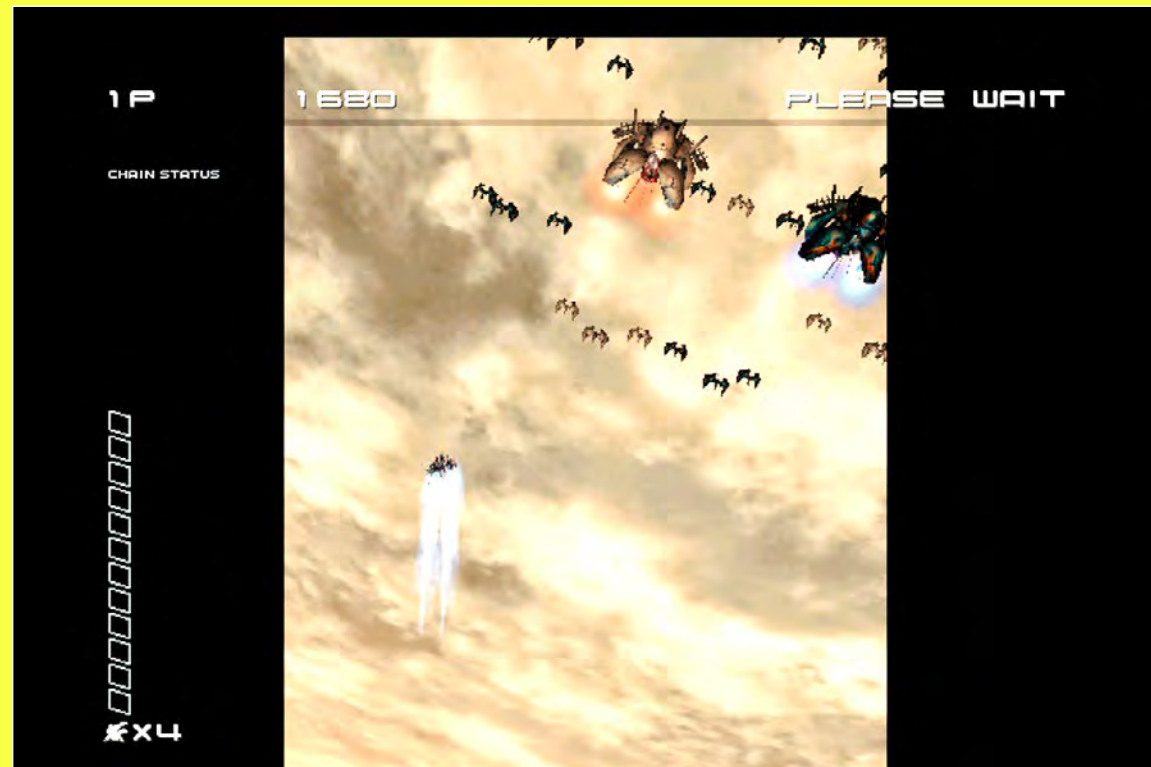**Galaga**
System: NES
Developer: Bandai Namco
Year released: 1988

Gunbird 2
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Psikyo Games
Year released: 1998

Galaga Arranged
System: PlayStation
Developer: Bandai Namco
Year released: 1996

1942
System: NES
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1986

1943
System: NES
Developer: Capcom
Year released: 1988

Centipede/Millipede
System: Arcade
Developer: Bandai Namco
Year released: 1981

SPORTS

Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run
System: SNES
Developer: Rare
Year released: 1996

NBA Jam
System: SNES
Developer: Midway
Year released: 1993
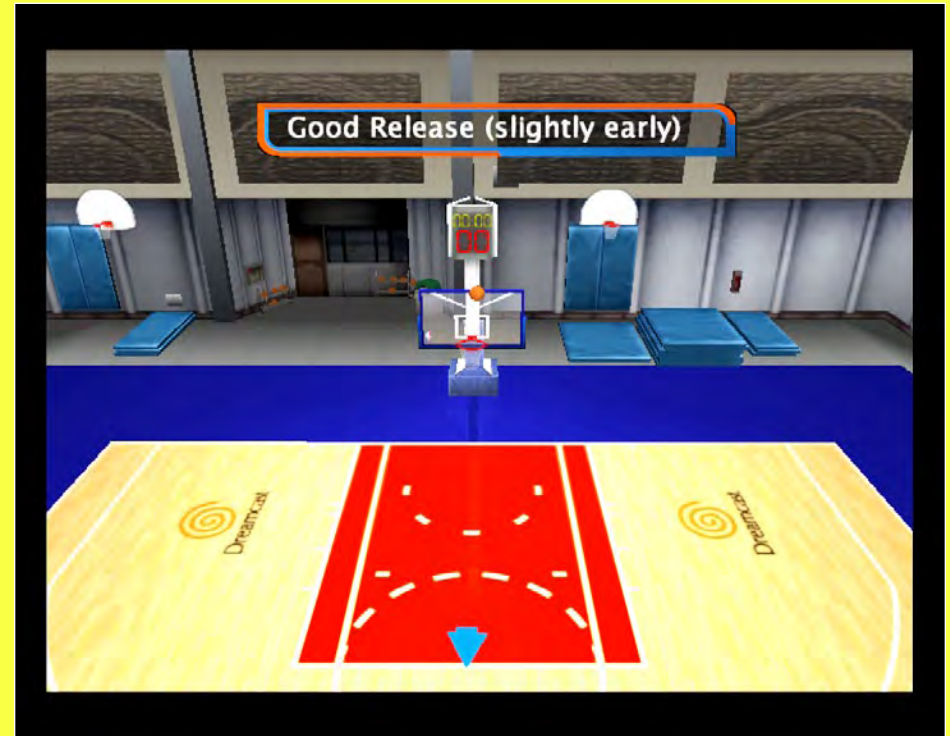
HIGHLIGHT:NBA 2K1

Basketball games weren't the same after NBA 2K1 hit the scene in 2001. Beyond the clean aesthetic, the mechanics are smooth and it's super easy to pick up and play a good game of hoops. Add the fact that you could play against other people with SegaNet in the infancy of online multiplayer and you have one of the pioneers of online sports play that still plays incredibly well.

Developer: Visual Concepts/Console: Dreamcast/Year Released: 2001

Bases Loaded
System: NES
Developer: Jaleco
Year released: 1988

Double Dribble
System: NES
Developer: Konami
Year released: 1987

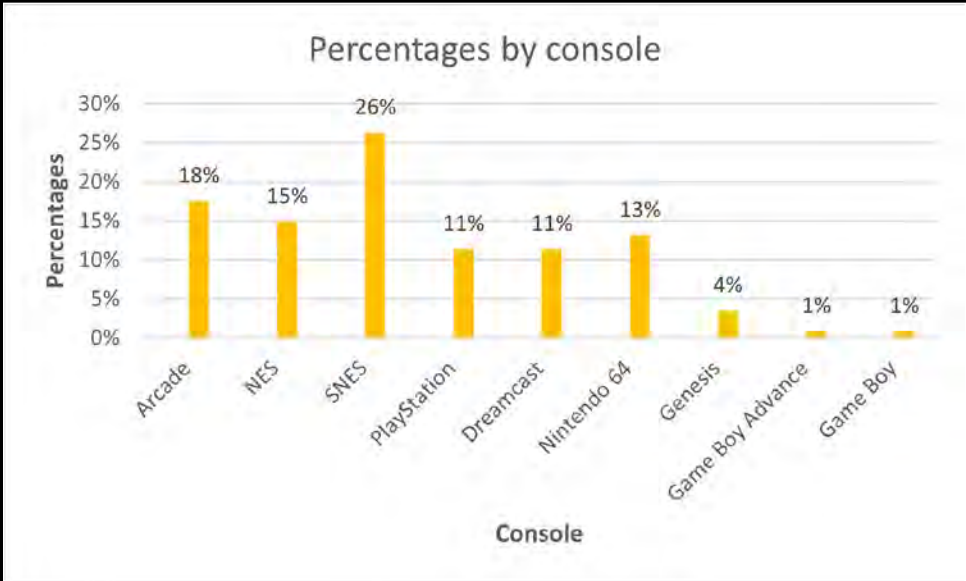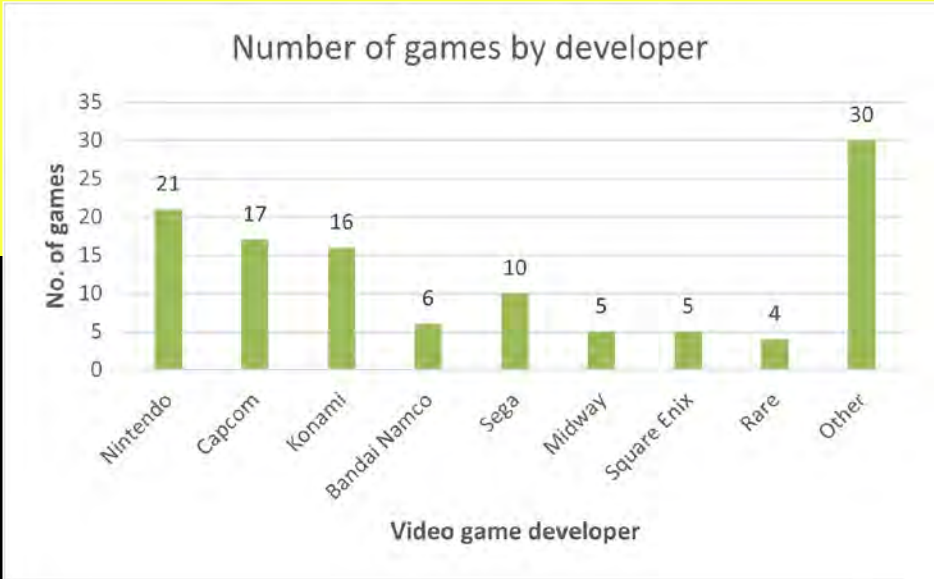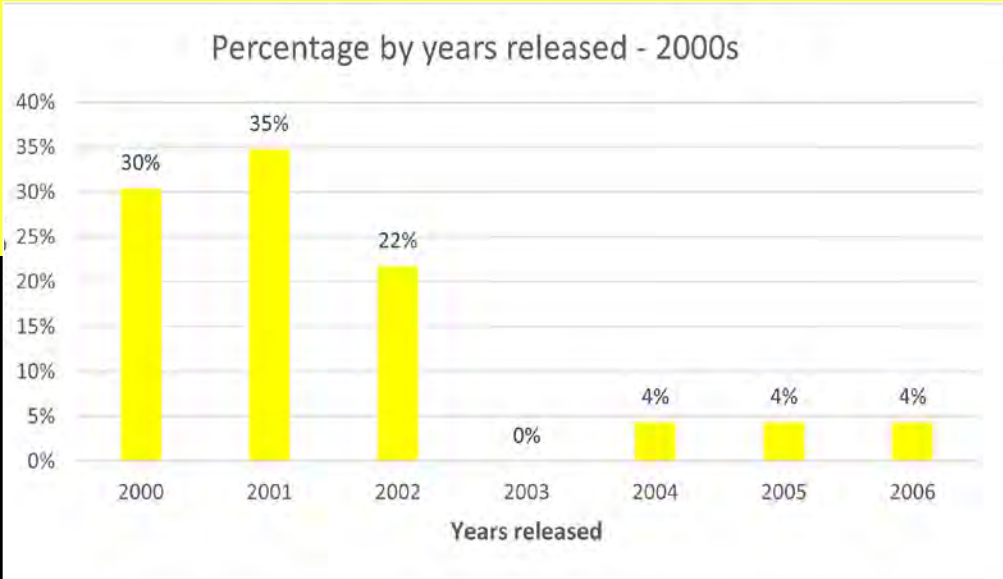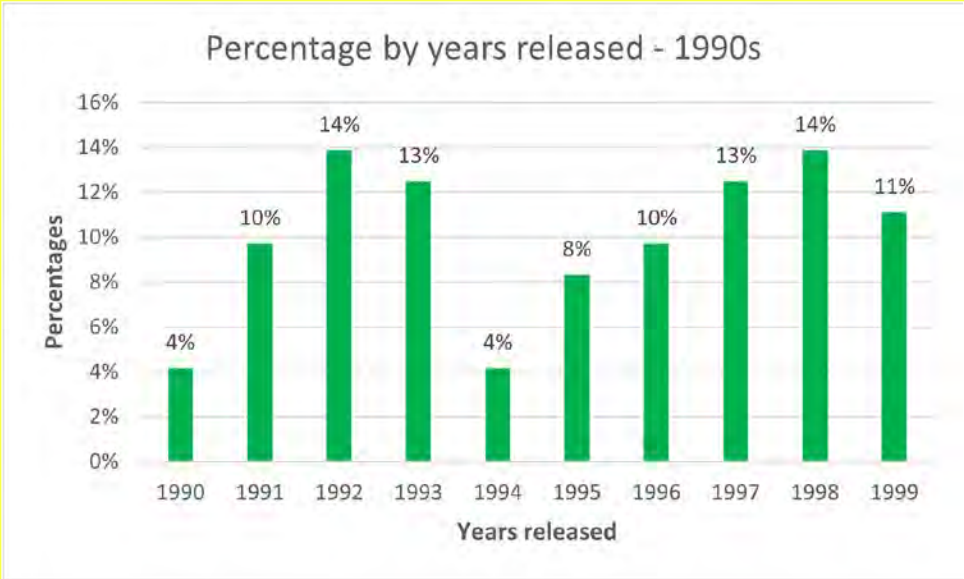# BY THE NUMBERS

Percentage by years released - 1980s

Percentage by years released - 1990s

Percentage by years released - 2000s

Number of games by developer

Percentages by console
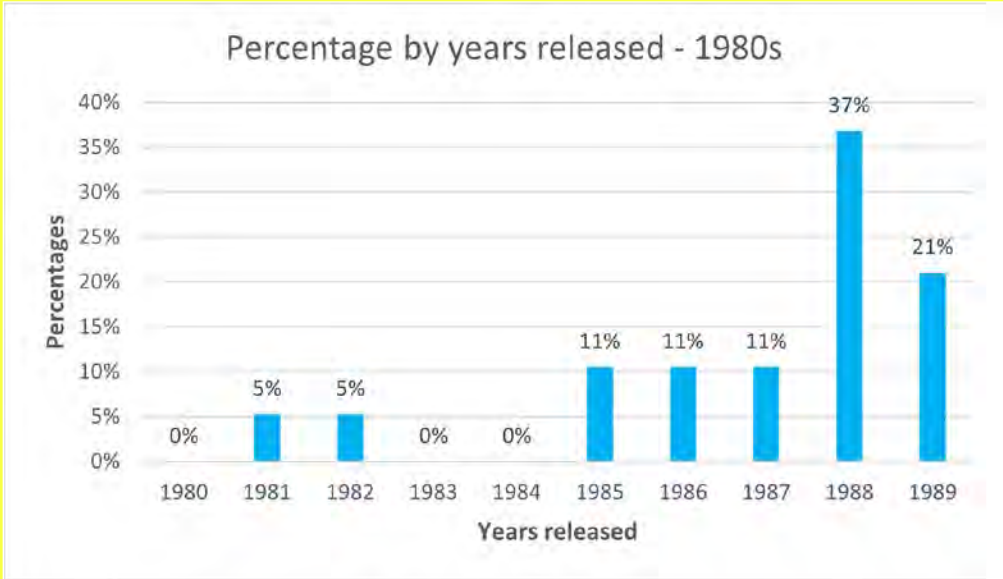
TECH GEEKS

Skullcandy Air Pods

For these to be off-brand Air Pods, Skullcandy's version of the popular earbuds are sturdy and economical. In a time when Apple still asks for $200 for their version, these are well worth the money at only $30. Skullcandy is known for solid products, so these aren't shoddily made.

The construction quality of the earbuds is good, and the storage/charging case is nice and compact. The earbuds have great life out of the charging case, and the case itself is a relatively quick charge. The sound quality is also excellent. The stereo sounds crisp and clear, and there are plenty of options to change the sound to your liking.

Our only gripe with the earbuds is that they are prone to falling out of our ears. It's often enough that it's mildly annoying and requires constant readjusting, but it's not a dealbreaker. At this price point, we'll put up with some minor irritation.

Price: $26.98
Where to buy: Amazon.com

Dell keyboard

Dell makes excellent accessories for their PC lines, and this keyboard is no exception.

This model — KB216 (580-ADMT) — is one of the nicest models that Dell makes for a standard issue wired keyboard. The keys are nice and clicky without being annoying, and we love how it sounds when we type with it. It also has a nice black finish. While we'd have liked for it to have a calculator key, the numeric 10-key pad included is fine. The keyboard feels nice and works nicely with our setup. And, as a standard keyboard, the price point is just right. It won't break the bank for a solid keyboard.

Price: $18.99
Where to buy: Amazon.com, Dell.com

Hyperkin Nintendo 64 controller adapter

Because we're a video game collector and we still have and use our Nintendo 64, we have original controllers hanging around at GI headquarters. Rather than use a USB controller with game capture, we'd prefer to use our original controllers, if possible. Enter Hyperkin's Nintendo 64 controller adapter.

In our tests, we used the latest version of Project 64 version 3.0.1, our original N64 controller and the N64 version of Super Smash Bros. It works beautifully, and with some quick reading to get emulator settings correct, we were in business. It also features a compatibility switch that allows changing between console (Nintendo Switch) and PC. That's a game-changer if you're unable to get a USB N64 controller from Nintendo but still have your original controllers.

The main selling point of this adapter is that not only can you use an official N64 controller with USB-based devices, but also the price point is fantastic. It's sturdy and while slightly bulky in the connector portion, it gets the job done with not too much fuss.

Price: $19.99
Where to buy: Amazon.com

JET GRIND RADIO

Bombastic and beautiful, Jet Grind Radio set the benchmark for skating fun for the Sega Dreamcast, **PAGE 19**

POWER

TECHNIQUE

GRAFFITI

GAME OF THE ISSUE

INSIDE

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Sonic the Hedgehog 2

One of the best sequels ever made set the tone of the console wars of the '90s and let everyone know he was the answer to the hype of Mario.
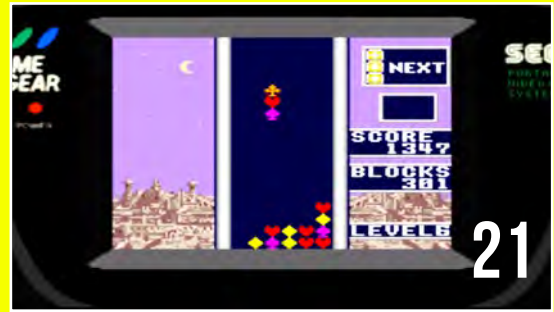
21

Columns

This Sega property provided a decent challenge to the Tetris juggernaut and actually has sound fundamentals. Do not sleep on this great on-the-go puzzler.

22

Beetle Adventure Racing

Racing in the then-new Beetles was unbelieve-ably fun with a banging soundtrack to take along for the ride.

23

Harvest Moon

The king of the farming simulation genre got its start with the Super Nintendo and it was fruitful and multiplied.

Jet Grind Radio sets cool standard

Bombastic yet cool. This is the dichotomy you encounter in the atmosphere of Jet Grind Radio. There's nothing quite like it — except its sequel — and that's a blessing because I don't think the world could handle anything else. It's quirky, futuristic, stunning, and undeniably cool when you get down to it: Jet Grind Radio is the future.

Set in a futuristic Tokyo, Jet Grind Radio features a wide cast of rollerblading graffiti gangs vying for supremacy and struggling against an egomaniacal madman and his conglomerate, which are attempting to take over the world. The storyline serves its purpose but it's the characters that are the draw here. Each character — including the unlockable — has an interesting look and story going on. They are the lifeblood, and it's fun to learn about them and their motivations.

While we're loving the characters, let's also give love to the art style that brings them to life. The art style is gorgeous and still holds up after 23 years. The graffiti cel-shaded look has aged well; graffiti never fails to be awesome and impactful, and Jet Grind Radio looks phenomenal. It's the first game to use this technique, and it set the standard in 2000 in terms of presentation. The backgrounds are also well done and inspire runs through the game. It's clearly an early 2000s game, but that only portends good things about the Dreamcast and what it was capable of.

And as good as the game looks, the graphics almost don't hold a candle to the soundtrack. This is one of the best soundtracks ever done, and it will have you bopping while you're running around on inline skates. This is one of those soundtracks that you put on while working and you get some of your best work done. Funky and pop-centric, the soundtrack has so much going on thematically that there's bound to be something for everyone.

And in terms of appealing to mass consumption, the controls are a common denominator kind of sensibility. The immediate

By Lyndsey Beatty

comparison here is Tony Hawk, which isn't surprising since the Hawkman had just released his first game — Tony Hawk's Pro Skater — a year earlier to critical acclaim. Jet Grind Radio doesn't necessarily grind on Hawk's coattails, but you're bound to say to yourself at least once, "These controls sure feel familiar." And you wouldn't be wrong. That's a good thing, because it plays like early Tony Hawk, you know when it was good.

While everything is great in terms of presentation and control, I'd be remiss in mentioning that there is one bothersome flaw with Jet Grind Radio. While the controls are easily analogous to early Tony Hawk games, it wasn't easy to pick up the game and know what's going on immediately. It's a little too inaccessible at first, like it's asking you to have some in-depth knowledge ahead of playing for the first time. You may not be familiar with the concepts the game is throwing at you, and it's the game's responsibility to ease you into the fray.

Thankfully, the surrounding game is so good that you'll come back to get more in-depth with the trappings of Tokyo-to.

The Jet Grind series has lasted into the modern era with re-releases and a rumored reboot, and the original game details exactly why. Easy controls, varied modes, an engaging cast (love Pots, Piranha and Beat!) and popping soundtrack make for an immediately unforgettable experience. Get in-line to get down with the fantastic Jet Grind Radio.

SCORE: 4.5 OUT 5

Sonic reigns supreme in second outing

Ah, Sonic the Hedgehog. Sega's top mascot has had a bit of a revival lately. From trilogy games on the Genesis and other systems developed by Sega and its competitors to comic books and various merchandise, cartoon series and two blockbuster movies, Sonic and Co. are living large. He reached a similar zenith in his second game — Sonic the Hedgehog 2 — which also introduced fans to his equal-yet-unique partner, Miles Prower aka "Tails" (because he's a two-tailed fox) who joins our favorite blue speedy demon in a new battle to stop Dr. Robotnik.

In Sonic 2, Sonic and Tails and their friends are enjoying peaceful days on West Island until Dr. Robotnik and his cronies arrive, kidnapping the inhabitants, and transforming them into robotic slaves. The slaves would help Robotnik search for the legendary Chaos Emeralds, which he plans to use to power his space station. With Robotnik's latest threat, It's up to Sonic and Tails to find the Emeralds to foil Robotnik and his dreams for world domination.

By Brandon Beatty

Gameplay in Sonic 2 is much like the first Sonic game, but with some new additions. Each level or "act" (there are 20 in total) will have you bashing enemies and avoiding various hazards such as spikes and bottomless pits. While dashing through you must utilize some patience and timing to avoid these various obstacles. Sonic is still easy to control but he now also has a cool new trick called the Spin Dash. This lets him go even faster and take down more enemies. Tails has the same skills, but his two tails give him a little more flair.

Sonic 2 has the option of Sonic or Tails going after Robotnik alone or joining forces in either single- or two-player modes. Robotnik has some new allies in the form of a robotic monkey named Coconuts and a robotic crab named Thrasher whose shell is comprised of a pinball bumper. With Robotnik having new methods to attack and hench bots to carry them out, the usual powerups (Rings, Speed Sneakers, and invincibility) are vast and abundant, but Sonic and Tails can take advantage of a new power shield that gives temporary protection against hits.

SCORE: 4.5 OUT OF 5

The graphics are of 16-bit quality, but they do an excellent job of shining, whether it's characters or backgrounds. Each stage is bursting with high energy color; the Chemical Plant Zone, Metropolis Zone and the bonus stages are my some of my personal favorites.

I was pleased with Sonic 2's music from beginning to end as it paired perfectly with the stages, beat by beat. The Green Hill, Chemical Plant, Casino Night and Mystic Cave zones hit the spot with special recognition for the Sky Chase Zone for its relaxing beats.

Sonic 2 is worthy of revisiting often, especially if you want to experience 16-bit gaming at its finest. There is no doubt that Sonic 2 would be a sure-fire hit game to introduce to a new generation of gamers looking to experience good old-school gaming.

Sonic the Hedgehog 2 is a certifiable banger in the annals of video game history. One of the best sequels ever released kept Sega in the 16-bit wars and gave us legendary Sonic gameplay that still holds up. Spin Dash on blue blur.

Columns stacks up against Tetris

As the faithful readers of GI know, I'm a child of the '80s and '90s. I owned an NES, Genesis and a Game Gear, but not a Game Boy. To satisfy my portable gaming needs, I got a few Game Gear games that would hold my attention. I'm not much of a puzzle man, but one stood out as an alternative to the highly popular Tetris at the time: Columns.

Columns' gameplay is similar to Tetris, except that you're matching various gems with each other before their row known as — you guessed it — columns stack up, ultimately ending your game. The game backstory claims that its origins hails from Middle Eastern merchants with also a little bit of Greece mixed in.

Control of the columns is simple: Guide the columns' rows and arrange pieces to fit. It's a simple concept that is quickly understood. You can be a newbie or a puzzle expert and still jump into playing. There's also an option to change the items from jewels, to fruit, dice, or traditional playing card suits, which livens up the gameplay slightly.

The graphics are top-notch in both versions. The graphics are colorful and more than just bricks being moved around. They look good even in a small setting like the Game Gear.

The music in Columns varies from ancient Roman tunes to a futuristic beat that is calming during gameplay. The soundtrack is a nice mental break for the mind, which helps when you're possibly frantically making matches.

Columns is an underestimated crown jewel that shines on all Sega systems. It's a fun alternative to Tetris with a nice calming effect to boot. Hunt down this different but brilliant puzzle choice.

By Brandon Beatty

SCORE: 4 OUT 5

Building blocks of Columns

In 1989, Jay Geertsen, a developer for Hewlett-Packard, was looking to port a software tool to HP's in-house operating system for its work computers. Geertsen believed there was a better way to learn skills and have fun at the same time. He came up with modifying Tic Tac-Toe and applied it as a way to help software engineers practice their programing. The result: Once they heard about Geertsen's work through third parties, Sega called him and inquired about development. Check out his story through this link: https://www.pressreader.com/uk/retro-gamer/20190711/281599537055264.

Adventure of a lifetime races on to the scene

Smooth with no chaser. Beetle Adventure Racing is like a fine cognac: No filler, no BS. It's just a fine racing game featuring the popular-in-1999 redesigned Volkswagen New Beetle. Like that cognac, it's what you want in an experience, but you wish there was more at the end of the glass.

Beetle Adventure Racing, while short on story, is a racing dream. There isn't much to the story other than you're racing against other Beetle drivers on six varied tracks. There are several modes including a time trial, championship and two-player duel, but that's about it. You're also racing with only Beetles, though they vary in color with different stats. There are two unlockable Beetles, but that's pretty much all there is in terms of rewards. The depth really lies in the tracks and their nooks and crannies. There are a ton of secrets and shortcuts that help in the point-gathering modes or to shave time in the time trials, and that sort of makes up for the lack of everything else. Sort of.

While the rewards are sparse, the presentation is not. Beetle Adventure Racing looks and plays wonderfully. The environments look great for a Nintendo 64 game and really make the game pop overall. And it also plays well. The racing is smooth and lithe, making for a satisfying experience when taking curves or finally landing a shortcut path.

Of special note is the soundtrack. It's only six tracks plus a few other menu tunes, but this is a fantastic soundtrack. The tracks work well with the racing locales, and almost all of them are bangers. Our long-time favorite is Mount Mayhem,

By Lyndsey Beatty

the snow lodge mountain track. We've been bumping that as long as the game has been out in various formats, and 24 years later we continue to do so. It's that good and comes with high praise.

Our only caveat with Beetle Adventure Racing is that the difficulty level is slightly out of balance. It could use some tweaking so that you see the later racing tracks a little more often.

Given that it's hard to find some of the point boxes on the tracks and you need them in order to earn continues, it should be easier to obtain for the latter portions of the game.

Aside from the punishing difficulty, the game is practically perfect. There isn't much to feast on, but when you can feast it's among if not the best racing game on the N64. It's a heck of an adventure whether you're a Beetle enthusiast or not.

V dub or bust.

Developer: Natsume, **Release:** 1997

Farming life begins with SNES simulator classic

By
Lyndsey Beatty

Leaving everything behind and taking up the life of a farmer doesn't seem to be half bad. Sure, it's back-breaking daunting work with a large reservoir of potential failure. But it's honest work and highly satisfying. Or, at least that's what Harvest Moon wants you to believe. In a tale as old as video game time, the original farming simulator wants you to live that life and succeed, no matter the cost.

Harvest Moon's original entry is the starkest of all in the series. You, the nameless farmer, are tasked with rebuilding the family farm and property. There are animals to raise, crops to nurture and sell, and — if you play your cards correctly — a family to start. You have roughly a year to do this before your parents come back and judge your efforts. If you've succeeded mostly, you're in the clear. If not, well, you've failed and it's game over. This is the basis for the series that you see today in Harvest Moon and Stardew Valley, and though mostly unchanged in basis, it's simple and effective.

The depth comes in learning the game system. Crop nurturing and animal husbandry are not easy, but once you've got the nuance it's a whole new world of profits. The controls are simple to pick up and once you've built yourself up stamina-wise, the fruits of your labor are obvious. There's something super satisfying about working the land, planting crops and caring for your animals in a day's work and then reaping the benefits. There is planning involved also, which adds an extra layer of depth. Knowing how to spend your day wisely — whether it be tending to the farm or socializing in town — is important, and adds to the overall experience.

Part of that experience is the presentation, and it's not bad for a SNES game. Given that this is 16-bit, the sprites are bright and pop with the gorgeous SNES palette. Some areas are a little too brown but overall, it's a pretty game. The music is slightly monotonous but it's a little catchy so it doesn't necessarily grate the way you'd think hearing the same tune would for more than 20 minutes of farm work and socializing.

Because this is the entry point to the modern series, Harvest Moon has work to do. Time — though not explicitly shown on screen — runs too quickly. Also, the starting handicap of low stamina and mediocre tools is not fun. This does become easier in later entries, but this frustrating mechanic began here and does not enhance the series in any way.

Despite some frustrations with the game, it's a nice, relaxing start to a fun, quirky series. Modern features may be a draw for the later games, but don't let the original fool you. There's a wonderful life to be had even in the 16-bit starter.

Bemani Beach Blast

By Lyndsey M. Beatty | Gaming Insurrection

With summer heating up, it's time to head to the beach. We love a good beach theme in Bemani and other rhythm games when the temperatures are blazing, so here are our picks for some of the best themes to listen to while squishing your toes in the sand.

La Señorita
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 3rd Mix
BPM: 182
Artist: Captain T

Conga Feeling
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 4th Mix Plus
BPM: 130
Artist: VIVIAN

Get Me in Your Sight ~ AMD Cancun Mix~
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 4th Mix
BPM: 127
Artist: SYMPHONIC DEFOGGERS with 1479

My Summer Love
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 4th Mix
BPM: 100
Artist: MITSU-O! with GEILA

17sai
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 5th Mix
BPM: 142
Artist: BAMBEE

Sana Mollete Ne Ente (B.L.T. Style)
Series: Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix
BPM: 90 – 180
Artist: Togo Project feat. Sana

Solina
Series: In The Groove
BPM: 129
Artist: Evolution

Peace-Out
Series: Dance Dance Revolution Max
BPM: 133
Artist: dj nagureo

Air
Series: Dance Dance Revolution Extreme
BPM: 130
Artist: DJ SIMON

Vem Brincar
Series: Dance Dance Revolution SuperNova 2
BPM: 132
Artist: Caldeira feat. Téka Penteriche

D-Code
Series: In The Groove 2
BPM: 100
Artist: Dust Devil

EZ Do Dance
Series: Dance Dance Revolution X2
BPM: 140
Artist: TRF

Heatstroke
Series: Dance Dance Revolution X2
BPM: 140
Artist: TAG feat. Angie Lee

Sola
Series: Dance Dance Revolution 2013
BPM: 135
Artist: Hideyuki Ono

Hustle Beach
Series: In The Groove 2
BPM: 128
Artist: Papa J

SONG SPOTLIGHT

By Lyndsey Beatty

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

MY SUMMER LOVE — mitsu-O! with GEILA

Artist: MITSU-O! feat. Geila
Difficulty: 3/6/9
Chosen difficulty: Heavy
BPM: 100

My Summer Love is an early slow jam that takes full advantage of its glacial pace to try to trip up dancers. Alleviate your pain by recognizing that the song goes by the beat and Geila's vocals, and make the appropriate adjustments. The middle of the song definitely goes by Geila's vocals and has a nice section predicated on her words exactly. The beat also matches it so, as per the usual, if you learn the song and the lyrics, you're going to do well with the 1/8th notes and patterns thrown your way. Speeding things up quite a bit is also a smart thing to do.

Suggested Speed Mod: x3

Lupin the 3rd '78 — VENTURA
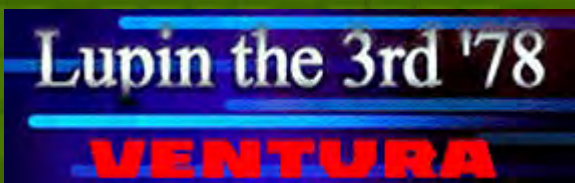
Artist: Ventura
Difficulty: 3/6/9
Chosen difficulty: Heavy
BPM: 150

Lupin the 3rd '78 is one of the more annoying older songs to attempt stepping. It's overly long and the stepchart is a mess of turns and triplets that don't always make sense. Your best bet is to speed it up, because unlike most DDR songs, learning the track and the music isn't of much help. The stepchart attempts to follow the track, but sometimes it veers into run territory, usually at a most inconvenient time. Keep in mind that it's slightly speedy to start with so speeding it up is tricky.

Suggested Speed Mod: x2

おどるポンポコリン — CAPTAIN JACK

Artist: Captain Jack
Difficulty: 1/4/7
Chosen difficulty: Heavy
BPM: 142

This is an odd choice for Captain Jack to cover, and as such, the stepchart is not one of my favorites. It's simple enough with a lot of 1/4th-1/8th-1/4th note runs, and a few simple jumps thrown in, but the song is not very interesting to play. For a 7-footer, it's about the right difficulty, so it's not too hard. Learning the song will help here because the stepchart in the beginning tends to follow the lead female vocalist while the middle and end follow Captain Jack and the instruments in the back fairly well.

Suggested Speed Mod: x2

夜空ノムコウ YOZORA NO MUKO — EUROBEAT LOVERS

Artist: Eurobeat Lovers
Difficulty: 2/5/8
Chosen difficulty: Standard
BPM: 156

This is one of my favorite songs in DDR, so I play it on my chosen difficulty a lot. The Standard stepchart introduces a few post-DDR Max foundation concepts such as Freeze Arrows and standard 1/4th-1/8th-1/4th note groupings as triplets. It's a fun song to play and it's good for light foot work when you're winding down a session. Learn the track but it's not really necessary to understand it on Standard difficulty. That's reserved for the Heavy difficulty, which is much harder and follows the track more closely.

Suggested Speed Mod: x2

UPCOMING SONGS

MUGEN

## GHOSTS (VINCENT DE MOOR REMIX)

XEPHER

SYSTEMS

One of the best fighting games ever released, Street Fighter Alpha 3 probably has something for everyone who loves Street Fighter. Whether you like the base Alpha series, Custom Combos or Super Turbo, the game has you covered in the mechanics department.

THREE PLAY STYLES

SFA3 has three play styles — called ISMs — to choose from.

A-ISM, represented by green, is most like Street Fighter Alpha, the first game in the series. Super moves can be done in three levels of strength, Alpha Cancels and Alpha Counters are available and normal moves can cancel into special moves.

V-ISM, represented by blue, is the enhanced Custom Combo mechanic found in Street Fighter Alpha 2. Manual Custom Combos can be activated with two meter portions — 50 percent or 100 percent.

X-ISM, represented by red, is akin to Super Street Fighter II Turbo. A powerful one-meter super move is available, and blocking in the air is removed.

Moves for specific characters can be removed or added depending on the ISM.
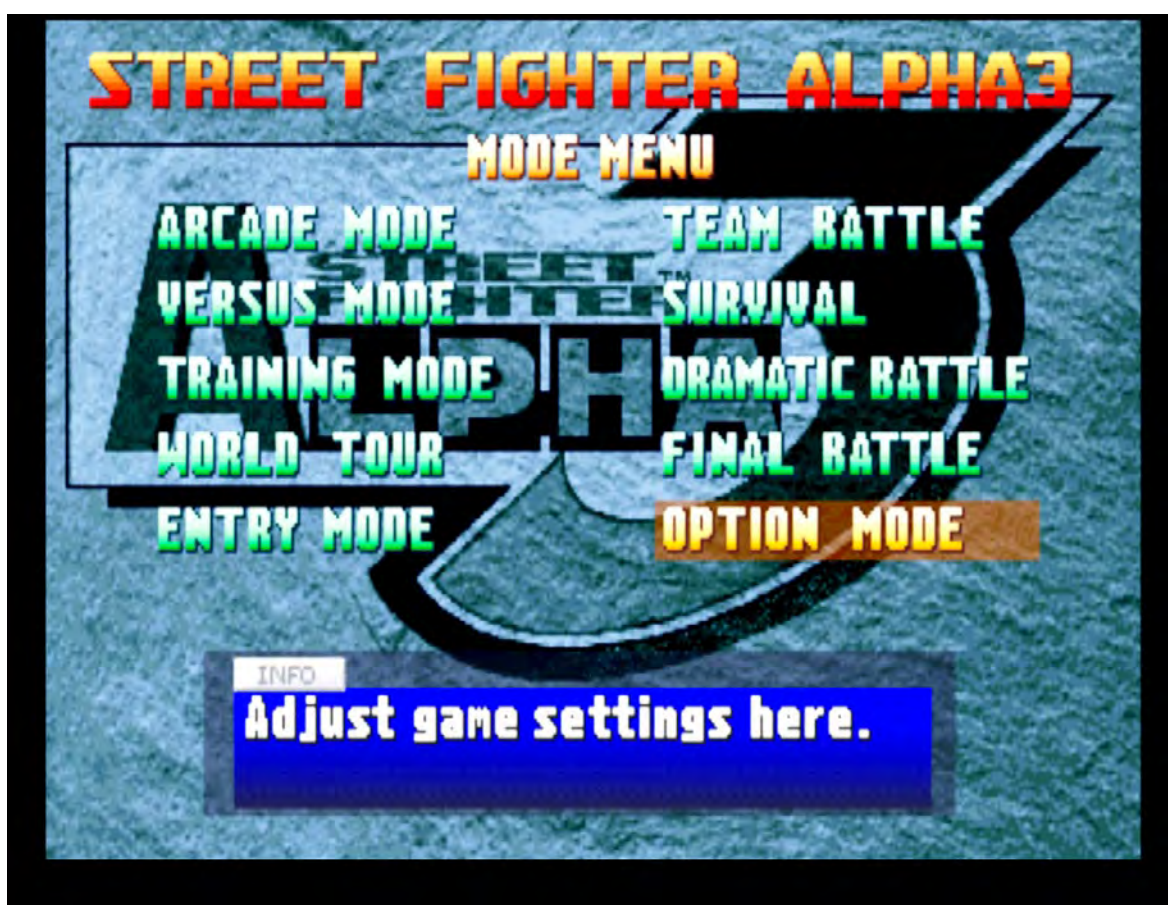
MULTIPLE MODES FOR PLAY

Arcade Mode: The arcade ladder unique to your chosen character features 10 or 11 battles. Your character will face their rival in battle nine, and depending on who you've chosen, your final battle will be against Shin M. Bison, Ryu or Shin Akuma.

Versus Mode: Two-player battles take place here.

Training Mode: Practice your combos and moves against a chosen CPU opponent. The training dummy can be set to stationary or AI controlled.

World Tour: Character development in a level-based, fight-based training mode happens here. You can take a chosen character through the paces of worldwide fights against the roster.

Team Battle: Your character can fight on a team with other characters or a second player.

Survival: Fight through a gauntlet of characters, in groups of 10, or through the entire cast. World Tour registered characters can be used here.

Dramatic Battle: Depending on the sub battle that you choose, your character will pair with a specific character from the roster. If a second player joins, the chosen character pairs can be freely chosen. The pairs fight against Adon, Akuma, Boxer, Claw, Sagat and Dictator.

Final Battle: Any character can be chosen to fight against Shin M. Bison in this mode. However, you can use a secret code to change the fight to Shin Akuma.

WHAT IS WORLD TOUR MODE?

Your chosen character will travel to fight under different and increasingly difficult scenarios to build up the three ISMs. Some fights are straightforward "defeat your opponent," and some fights require a certain ISM or mechanic, such as Guard Crush, to do damage. Once the mode is completed, the character can be registered for other modes of play (Entry Mode). As a plus, most if not all of the game's secret characters can be unlocked here.

THE ROSTER

The entire Street Fighter roster from Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Street Fighter Alpha and Street Fighter Alpha 2 are included. The final roster, including the home console additions of Evil Ryu, Shin Akuma, Balrog, Guile, Fei Long, Dee Jay, Juli and Juni, and T. Hawk bring the lineup to 35 characters.

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**: 158
- **Total number of cards (as of press time)**: 162
- **Percentage owned**: 97.5%

Cards missing (as of press time):
- MK11 Nightwolf
- Ace of Knaves The Joker
- Lizard Noob Saibot
- Lizard Jade

Shao Kahn's Tower

A challenging 100-story tower that rewards Koins, 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.
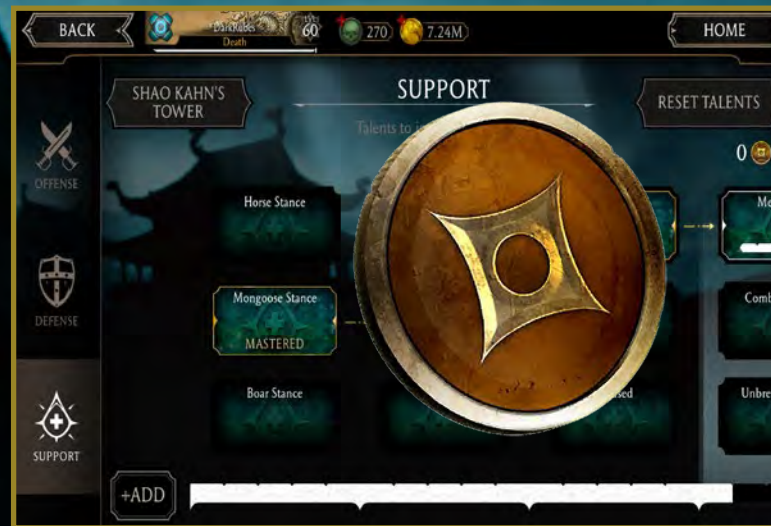
Talent Tree guide

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.

Kharacter 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

Konqueror Shao Kahn
Tier: 4

The big bad hulking brute of the MK series has always been dangerous but here he's even more so. His passive — Culling the Weak — instantly takes out an opponent if they're under 40 percent health. That's a game-changer if facing weak opponents. Also, he can assist his Outworld teammates with a damaging hammer throw, which is always useful. Throw in his ability to have four bars of special and he's a nice addition to any Outworld-based team.

Konqueror
Shao Kahn
56,700   115,200

Hanzo Hasashi Scorpion
Tier: 4

One of the more interesting versions of Scorpion in the game, the Hanzo Hasashi variant is highly damaging in the right situations. His passive, Crimson Strikes, can apply the Bleed DOT and stack. Any chance for continued damage on top of what you're putting down is always going to come in handy. Overall, the variant does a lot of damage, is great for a Gold character and is fun to play with varied specials.

Hanzo Hasashi
Scorpion
46,305   90,240

Prime Jax Briggs
Tier: 2

Farmer Jax really doesn't do anything special to set himself apart from the other Silver cards. His passive is middling, though he aids in recovery for his Spec Ops teammates. He does decent damage for a Silver card, but it's not enough to make him special. Use him only if your other teammates are Spec Ops or you like Jax and need a Silver card for a requirement. Otherwise, there are better choices on the Silver side of the roster.

Jax Briggs
15,750   33,280

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

Match 19: Jax Briggs (Prime), Level 45/Johnny Cage (Prime), Level 45/Kotal Kahn (Prime), Level 45

Conditions: None

This isn't anything special, other than the fact that the AI is now Level 45 and Fusion Level III. Use anyone you want here and end the match quickly.

First tower run: Anyone
Second tower run: Anyone

Match 20: Cassie Cage (Prime), Level 50/Ermac (Prime), Level 50/Kotal Kahn (Prime), Level 50

Conditions: Enraged

This match is somewhat challenging for an early bout in the tower. The AI is Enraged, meaning it generates Special meter faster than normal. It shouldn't be too much trouble; just be careful and be ready to guard against spammed Special attacks.

First tower run: Anyone
Second tower run: Anyone

Match 21: Johnny Cage (Prime), Level 40/Cassie Cage (Prime), Level 40/Jacqui Briggs (Prime), Level 40

Conditions: None

Just because the AI's level has decreased doesn't mean anything. In response, their Fusion level is now at VI. This makes them a little harder but not much. It just means you'll be facing Golds with fusions shortly. There are no conditions for this match, so take them out quickly and move up the tower.

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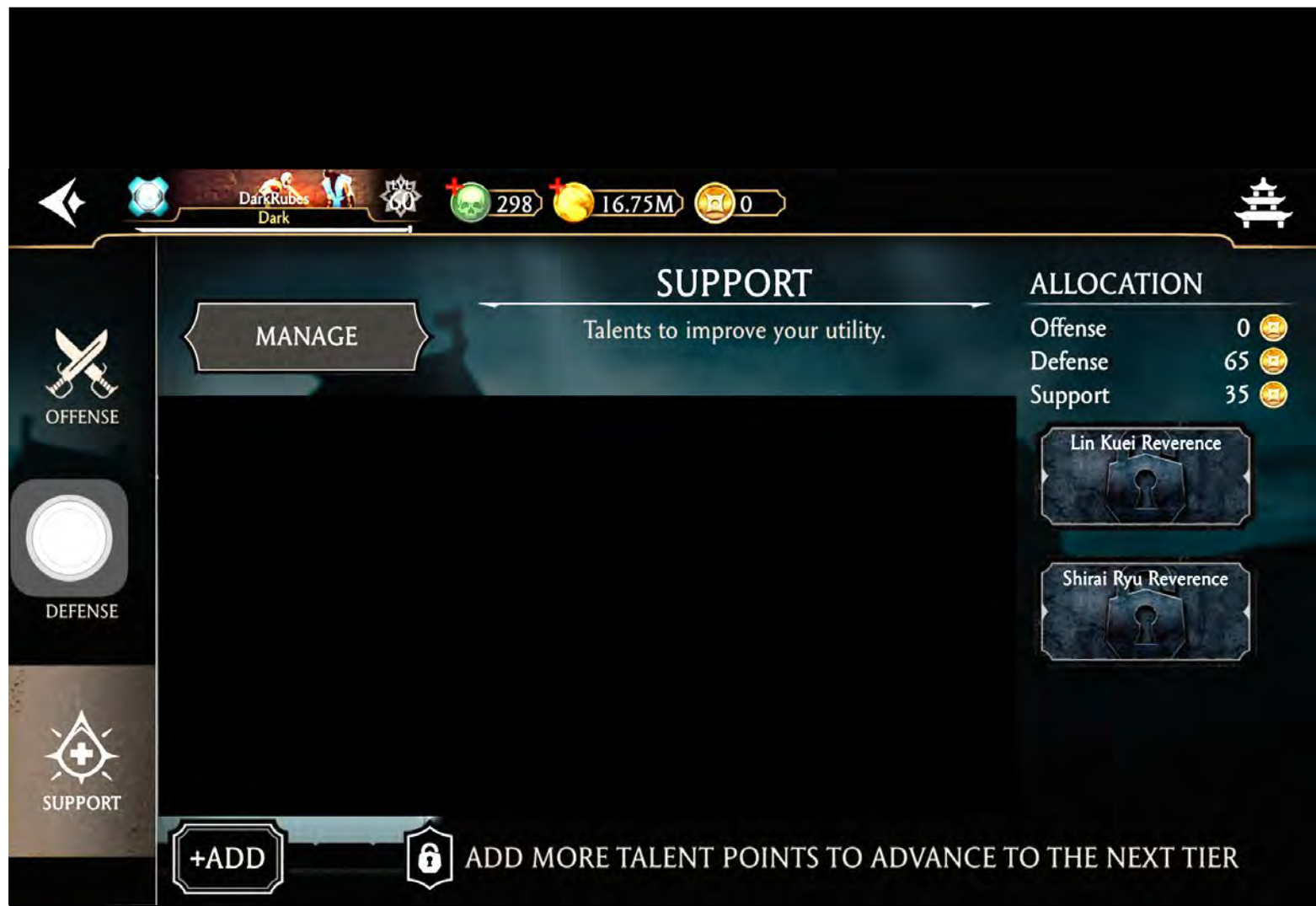**Second tower run:** Anyone

TALENT TREE GUIDE

THIS ISSUE:
- Support Talent 07

Support Tier 7

Lin Kuei Reverence vs. Shirai Ryu Reverence
Best choice: Lin Kuei Reverence

This is a tough one to choose considering the recent changes to the game. Usually, reflecting Special 2 would be the one to go for considering that those attacks deal more damage. However, with gear like the Devastator increasing Special 1 damage by 50 percent, it makes the Special 1 reflection also a good option since cards like Triborg deal heavy damage on their Special 1 attacks. This would require some experimentation to see which one works best and stick with that choice as both are viable.

Lin Kuei Reverence offers 50 percent chance to reflect 100 percent Special Attack 1 damage while blocking.

Shirai Ryu Reverence offers 20 percent chance to reflect 100 percent Special Attack 2 damage while blocking.

The best choice is Lin Kuei Reverence, for two reasons: It offers a higher chance, and the AI is more likely to use Special Attack 1 unless it's a special circumstance in battle, such as the AI starting with more than one bar of power.

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.

Mediocrity at its finest, destined to bore you silly

Mediocrity is never something you should ascribe to being. Being "basic AF," as the kids these days like to say, is nothing to be hyped about, yet Fighter's Destiny is out here existing in pick-me mode with little beyond subpar to show for it.

This is one of the blander fighting games I've played in my long fighting game career. You can tell that it was created in a time when anything was thrown out to see what would stick against the wall and then we call it a fighting game. The graphics are polygonal and boring, the character design is derivative, and there is nothing redeeming about any of it for me to say it's a pretty game.

Also terrible is the soundtrack. There is nothing there that catches my attention. It's bland rock tracks that don't say anything unique. It's as mediocre as the graphics, if not worse.
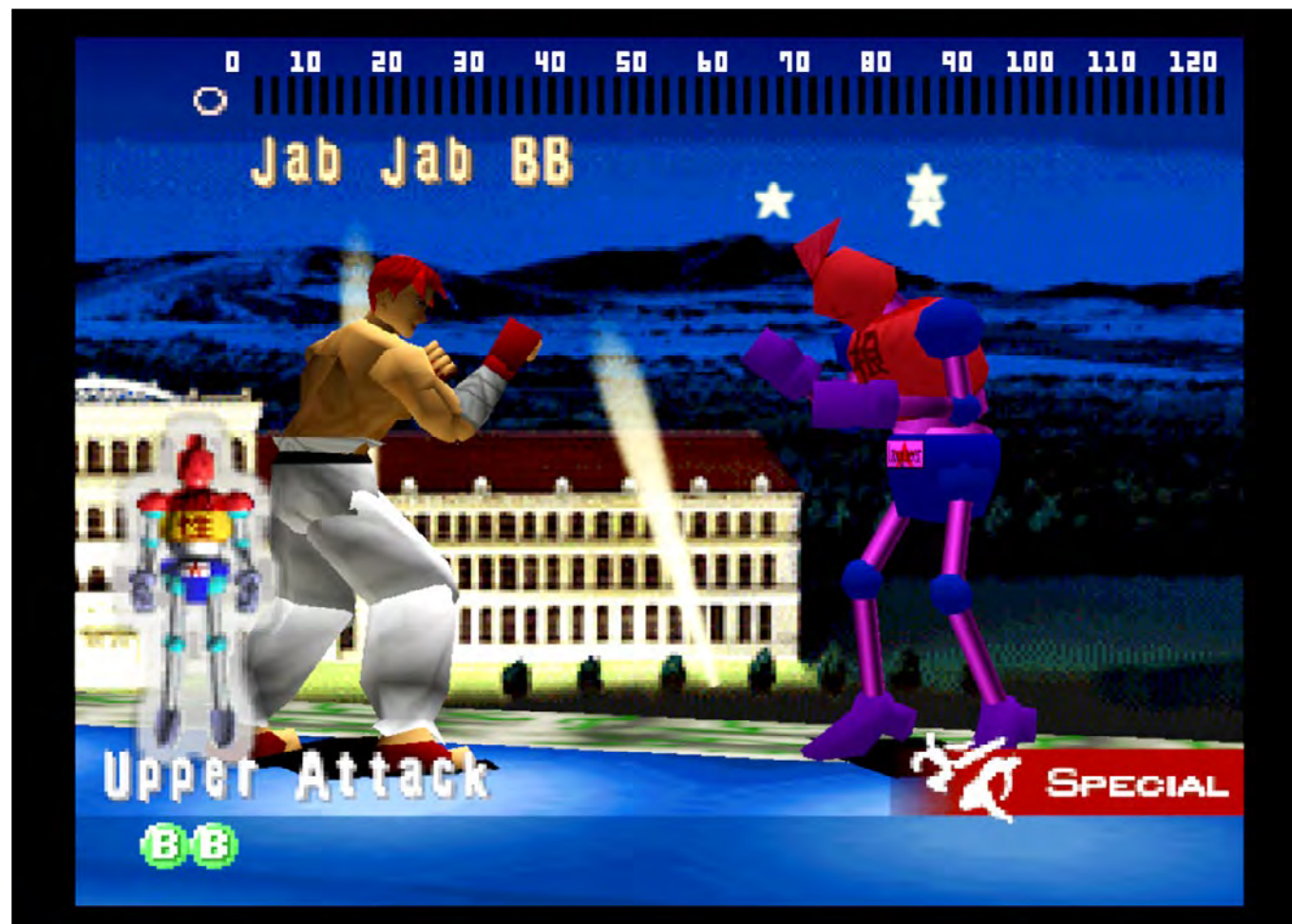
And then there is the fighting game system. While it's impressive in concept, in execution it doesn't work. Too many moves are centered on three buttons. You can assign buttons, but it's just too much without a coherent thought process to hold it together to be good. And the controls aren't exactly responsive once I figured out some of them. It's like sticking my hands in molasses and trying to type.

I want to like Fighter's Destiny, I really do. The point system is unique and interesting, but that's about it. There's nothing there to make it stand out against other offerings of the day in the 3D fighter sphere, like Virtua Fighter or Tekken, and it shows in every facet of the game. It's a hodgepodge of mediocre ideas thrown together to make a fighting game. We've seen all of this before — minus the points system — and it's nothing that makes me say I should play this instead of Tekken or Virtua Fighter or later Soulcalibur. And it's so lame that the sequel interests me even less. Friends don't let friends make boring fighting games.

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TORTURE OF THE ISSUE

with
Lyndsey Beatty

View this content at www.gaminginsurrection.com/TheStrip

PROPERTY REVIEW

Thor
Marvel Studios, 2011
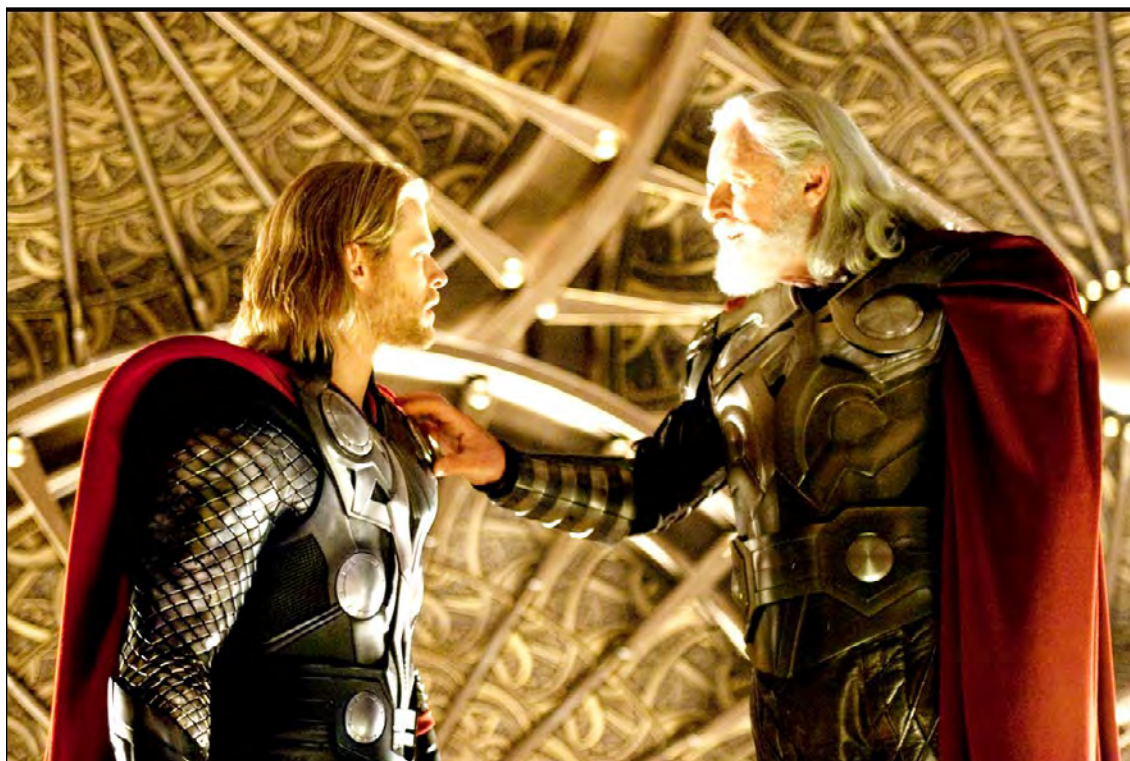
All photos courtesy of IMDB.com

Thor's initial outing lightning in a bottle for Marvel superhero

Thor has always been a fan favorite in Marvel circles. Whether it's the pseudo-Shakespearean vibes of Asgard or Thor and Loki's relationship, there's something about Thor that entices. And, it does well to keep you entertained in the first outing for the God of Thunder.

Thor sets up the story of the titular god (played by Chris Hemsworth) and his quest to rule Asgard as his birthright. Thor's father, Odin, previously battled the Frost Giants of Jotunheim, defeated them and took their prized possession — the Casket of Ancient Winters. During this time, Odin also found and spirited away an infant Loki, raising the abandoned Frost Giant child as his own. The Frost Giants attempt to retake the Casket, after secretly being allowed in by Loki. They are repelled but Thor decides to take the fight to them, against his father's wishes. After Odin intervenes to save Thor and his group, he exiles the wayward and brash prince to Earth without his godly power and his beloved hammer, Mjolnir, which is protected by an enchantment that only one worthy may lift it.

Once we get into the meat of Thor is where it gets fun. Thor, as a character, is fun. You already know Thor is a hero. You can see it as soon as you get a glimpse of him. How-

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.

8.5

ever, it's the journey of him learning to be worthy that makes this film more than just a passing fancy. It's your usual "the power was inside of you all along" kind of tale, but what makes this a good origin story are the characters. Thor is the hero and shines brightly — weird blond eyebrows and all — and the supporting cast has fun riffs and moments that make you glad Thor has support among his friends in Lady Sif, Jane Foster, Eric Selvig, Darcy Lewis and the Warriors Three. Chris Hemsworth is sublime as Thor, and not only has the brawn required for the role, but also the range required to play the character as more than a meathead with a heart. The support is great as well, with Natalie Portman doing a serviceable job

Lyndsey Beatty
STRIP TALK

I fear Marvel burnout has finally arrived

Welp, that time I dreaded way back when has finally come: I'm tired of Marvel stuff being released.

There, I said it. Dear readers, you all know how much of a fan I am of all things Marvel. I mean, I claim a Marvel PhD that technically doesn't exist. I go hard for Marvel and all of its associated properties. But somewhere along the time of Avengers: Endgame, I thought to myself, there will come a time when I'm tired of Marvel movies coming out every year. And that time is now.

Don't get me wrong: I love seeing the lore for the MCU expanded after Endgame. I love seeing the future of a movie series that I spent the better part of my adult life loving. But between the releases after Endgame in theaters and the TV shows, I seem to get less excited every time something is released. I haven't seen anything in the theater since Endgame because of the ongoing pandemic. No Spider-Man: No Way Home, Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness, Shang-Chi and the Ten Rings, Thor: Love and Thunder, Black Widow, or even more regretfully, Black Panther: Wakanda Forever. I haven't seen any shows beyond Loki Season 1. I just haven't been in the mood to watch anything, though I know the plots of all mentioned here.

I know it's partially because I felt everything release as I watched the credits roll in Endgame. My favorite actor was done (Chris Evans), and the band was breaking up as it were. But the other part of it is the fact that I've been surrounded by Marvel stuff since 2012, latecomer to the party as I might have been. Eleven years is a long time to care about something so passionately as I have with Marvel. And we still haven't even touched everything that could be coming down the pipe. Doom and the X-Men are on the horizon and I'm just, I don't know, tired.

One day I'll get my groove back and fire up everything I've been dodging on Disney Plus. One day.

Brandon Beatty
OTAKU CORNER

Tokyo Tribes Vol. 3 looks at dynamics of gang life

Previously, I reviewed Santa Inoue's Tokyo Tribes, an experiment mixing hip-hop with manga. Volume 3 is here and to be honest, this volume is a collision course of fathers concerned with their sons' futures and the beginning of a three-way battle for Tokyo's streets with a hint of vengeance mixed in.

At the outset, Saru members are running from Unkoi's bodyguard, Galileo, who severely injured them. When Kai is told about what happened, he, Hasheem and Steno set out to help the wounded Saru members, leaving his father who is determined to get Kai to be more productive. When they get to the injured Saru, Kai, Steno and Hasheem come face to face with Galileo.

During dinner at a Japanese restaurant, Bubba and Unkoi along with Mera are finishing a dinner with planners for a new subway connector/flood prevention tunnel being built in Bukuro. When one of the planners asks Bubba who would help supervise the project, he suggested that Unkoi take up the job to help him prepare to inherit his father's business.

On the other side of town, Kai and Galileo are battling on the back of a trash dump truck, headed for a local waste processing center. During the fight, the dump truck dropped its load and its unknown passengers into its assigned waste field, briefly giving Kai and Galileo time to catch their breath before they fought again. Steno and Hasheem were able to track down Kai, having to go through the waste center. Once they found Kai, they fought against Galileo during which Galileo got stuck in a tunnel. Hasheem, sensing an opportunity for payback, kicked Galileo in the backside. Galileo was able to get out of the tunnel and was ready to strike Hasheem until Kai distracted him from continuing the chase.

Meanwhile, Unkoi, Mera, and Skunk met with the supervisor of the subway/flood tunnel project. During the tour, the group stops on the fifth floor, and they approach a service tunnel. Mera opens it up and goes inside, not knowing that Unkoi locked the tunnel door as payback. Skunk tries to rescue Mera but is stopped by Unkoi. As Mera calls Skunk to locate his group, his phone call is picked up by a pair of Hand soldiers. One of them named Lefty recognizes Mera and he and his partner, Konpora, go after Mera. When he finds him, Lefty attempts to shoot Mera, but fails, allowing Mera to cut off Lefty's right arm.

As a result of Mera's action, air pressure in the service tunnel drops causing air to travel upward, knocking Konpora out of the sewer. Konpora lands in a tree and, after getting down, attempts to call Iwao. Back in the subway tunnel, Unkoi is listening, impressed by his father's genius plan of the subway connection, when he sees Kai being chased by Galileo. Unkoi jumps off the train to pursue. With Galileo restraining Kai, Unkoi pulls out his knife, ready to kill Kai until Mera arrives, stabbing Unkoi through his chest. Galileo, seeing Unkoi stabbed, runs toward Mera, but Kai sneaks up on him and knocks him in the back of the head. After Kai and Mera recover from the battle, they go through a sewer connection only to be chased by Galileo again. He restrains Kai and motions Mera to stop his sword with the volume ending at that point.

After reading Volume 3 of Tokyo Tribes, I'm still hyped
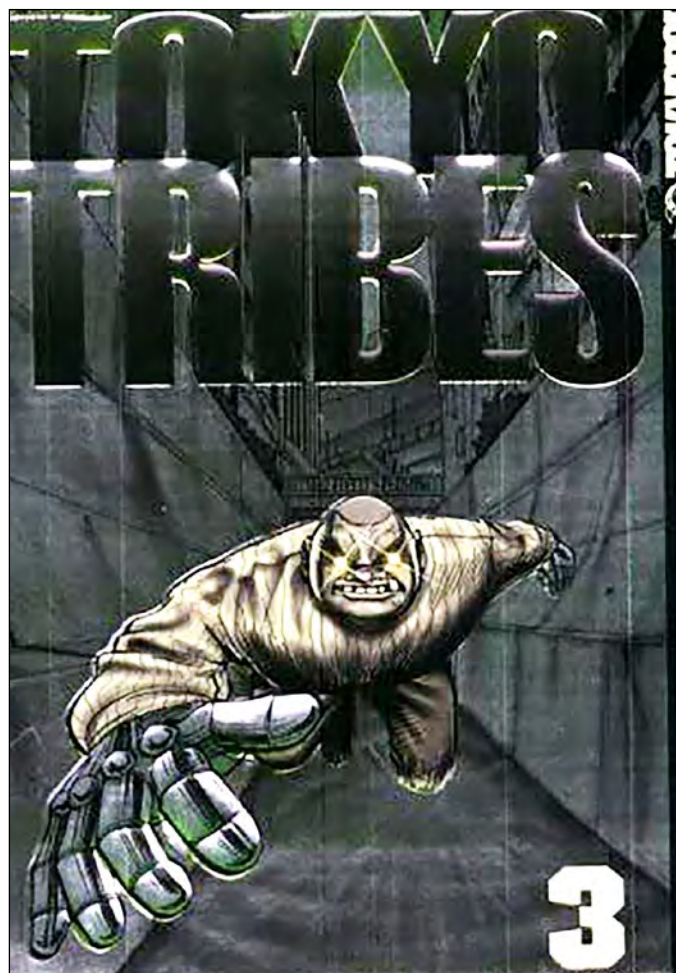
for this series. Santa Inoue's skills of drawing and writing hit the mark, making me invested in the story of each of these "tribes." Inoue-san took care with each character's backstory, from Kai's conflict with his father to Mera's desire for power and vengeance against Kai and Bubba. I loved the backstory of Unkoi having compassion when he helped Galileo get replacement hands because of a childhood accident involving a moving train. Galileo's steadfast loyalty to Unkoi was a calm moment in battle which spoke to me that the Wu-Ronz are not completely heartless. The excellent production is backed up by Tokyopop CEO Stuart Levy executive producing alongside Inoue-san with translation and English adaption handled by Alexis Kirsch and David Walker.

Tokyo Tribes Volume 3 has shown itself to be the wildcard setting a new level in manga. With Unkoi dead in the sewers, Saru trying to regain its footing and the Hands preparing for war, Tokyo is about to be a full-fledged warzone. Who will survive? We'll figure this out in future volumes of Tokyo Tribes.

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RURONI KENSHIN

Series: Ruroni Kenshin

Episodes: 1-12

Premise: A mysterious samurai assassin — the Hitokiri Battousai — stumbles into the dojo of Kaoru Kamiya as a wandering swordsman in need of a place to stay. He defeats another swordsman claiming to be the Hitokiri and offers to help Kaoru. During his stay, the people of the town and Kaoru come to know him as Himura Kenshin and slowly love him for the kind and gentle person he has become since his days as the feared Hitokiri.

ANIME LOUNGE
with Lyndsey Beatty

Is it worth watching?: Yes. It's a classic — premiering in 1996 — and should be on everyone's watch list at least for one viewing. The characters are great, learning about Kenshin's past is interesting and it features samurai and is set during the Meji era. The setting alone is definitely worth the price of admission.

Breakout character: Himura Kenshin. He's the obvious protagonist of the story and finding out more about him is the name of the game here. Also, he's adorable until you learn about his past, and that makes him even more worthy of attention.

Where it's going?: Learning more about Kenshin and his past life as an assassin is going to figure prominently. Folks from his past and future will begin to appear, and the reasons for his new life will start to take shape.

MARVEL CHARACTER HIGHLIGHT

Name: Jennifer Susan Walters

Alias: She-Hulk, Savage She-Hulk, Sensational She-Hulk, Agent Walters

Affiliation: Avengers, Ancient Order of the Shield, A-Force, Defenders, Fantastic Force, Fantastic Four, Future Foundation, Heroes for Hire, Hulkbusters, The Initiative, Lady Liberators, Mighty Avengers, S.H.I.E.L.D., Seven Brides of Set

Special abilities: Fourth wall awareness, superhuman strength, stamina, durability, speed and leaping, healing factor, gamma manipulation, energy absorption, emotion empowerment

Background: Jennifer Walters, the cousin of Dr. Bruce Banner, was shot and seriously injured by operatives of crime lord Nicholas Trask. Because Bruce was there to tell her about his Hulk transformation, he was the only blood donor available. Receiving his blood enabled a Hulk-like transformation of her own. After learning to deal with her transformation, she was transported to the Beyonder's Battleworld to participate in the Secret Wars. After returning to Earth, she temporarily joined the Fantastic Four in the place of the Thing. After preventing a radiation leak, she permanently transformed into She-Hulk, though she retained her intelligence and developed less monster-like features.

Relationships: Bruce Banner (The Hulk), cousin; Luke Cage, partner; Wally Wingfoot, partner; John Jameson III, husband; Skaar, cousin; Lyra, cousin

First Versus appearance: Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

Appearances in other media:
Television: The Incredible Hulk (1982), Fantastic Four (1994), The Incredible Hulk (1996), Fantastic Four: World's Greatest Heroes, The Super Hero Squad Show, Hulk and the Agents of S.M.A.S.H., Ultimate Spider-Man, She-Hulk: Attorney at Law

Video games: Fantastic Four (1997), Marvel Super Heroes: War of the Gems, Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2, Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet, Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds, Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3, Marvel Super Hero Squad Online, Marvel Avengers Alliance, Marvel Heroes, LEGO Marvel Super Heroes, Marvel Pinball, Marvel Avengers Alliance Tactics, Marvel: Avengers Alliance 2, LEGO Marvel's Avengers, Marvel Future Fight, Marvel Contest of Champions, Marvel Avengers Academy, LEGO Marvel Super Heroes 2, Marvel Puzzle Quest, Fortnite Battle Royale, Marvel Snap

TOP 5 ON THE STRIP — MVC2 TIER EDITION

1

Storm
The weather witch has always been a fan favorite and is consistently top tier in the Versus series. She's no different in Marvel vs. Capcom 2. Her rushdown skills, potent super moves, and ability to work well with other top-tier characters makes her an instant anchor for a lot of tournament teams.

2

Magneto
So, let's establish that any version of Magneto is top tier and godlike. Especially deadly in MvC2, Magneto's chain bread and butter Hyper Grav-Magnetic Tempest is potent enough to one-character victory nearly everyone in the game if used by the right player. Many tournament teams center on Mags with a setup assist such as Psylocke.

3

Cable
The MvC2 newcomer is one of the most divisive-yet-high-usage characters in the game. Cable dominates nearly every matchup, he's countered by himself and Spiral, and learning the tricks to his repertoire (Tiger Knee Air Hyper Viper Beam and no ground beam mean a whole new level of play) only helps better play. It's almost inevitable that you'll have to learn the character because you'll be seeing him often.

4

Sentinel
The machine beast is nearly perfect. Highly damaging and capable of destroying teams quickly, Sentinel is a frequent anchor on tournament teams. Throw in fly/unfly combos and he's a force to be reckoned with. He also pairs well with the other top characters and can be played as a point character or a deadly assist just waiting for his chance to wreck entire teams.

5

Spiral
Quirky yet effective, Spiral is a great point and assist character. Mostly, she's used on point to counter Cable, as she can teleport around his Air Hyper Viper Beam easily. But her main attraction is the Wall of Swords tactic: She initiates Dancing Swords in a rhythm that locks the opponent. She can hang and bang with the rest of the top-tier echelon, and she works well with nearly every other lockdown pairing on the roster.

Best in class are favorite choices in video games

Lyndsey Hicks
CRY OF WAR

Here we are again, waxing poetic about our favorite video games.

Sure, it seems like a retread of Issue 40's Greatest Games of All Time, but we promise it isn't what it seems like. This time, we're talking about the genres of video games and our favorites in these categories. Yes, there are some repeats but that's to be expected. This is the best of the best, after all.

I like a variety of different games and this list shows that, I'd wager. To be fair, I love video games in general so there's a lot of stuff that's going to show up here that you'd expect. However, there are some obscure games that you've probably never heard of. Not too many folks that I know can actually claim that they know what Kagero: Deception II is or actually have played it all the way through to the end.

I've got some random choices that aren't everyone's cup of tea, but that's fine. I'm really hoping here to open a few eyes and minds to something differ-

ent. Broaden your horizon, so to speak. I believe that every game on this list should have been played and should be in your collection. That's the point of the Silver Horse Awards: Excellence in gaming.

This is the best of the best, after all.

Lyndsey Beatty is editor-in-chief of Gaming Insurrection. She can be reached by email at lyndseyb@ gaminginsurrection.com

Loki steals the show in first 'Thor'

as Thor's love interest in Foster.

But let us get to the real breakout star here: Loki. So much has been said about his development from beginning — here — to end — Infinity War — that it's almost a waste to retread it. But we cannot talk about the first Thor film without mentioning the scene-stealing brute force of nature that is Tom Hiddleston's portrayal of the God of

Mischief. Hiddleston glides in and finesses the movie away in his favor in every scene he's in, whether he's the focus or not. It's an effortless, quiet theft whether he's brooding or plotting or both that takes you by surprise and delights. This was Hiddleston's role of a lifetime — as evidenced by the fact that he's still playing the character — and he knows it.

Thor's origin story in the Marvel Cinematic Universe has all of the right ingredients and still shines

12 years later. There's been more Thor stories since and nearly every character has gone on to other things or Valhalla, but this was a great way to get the Asgardian god started.

This particular version of Thor showed his brand was deemed worthy of more to come.

Like the comics: 8.5
Acting: 8.5
Story: 8.5
Total: 25.5/30 or 8.5