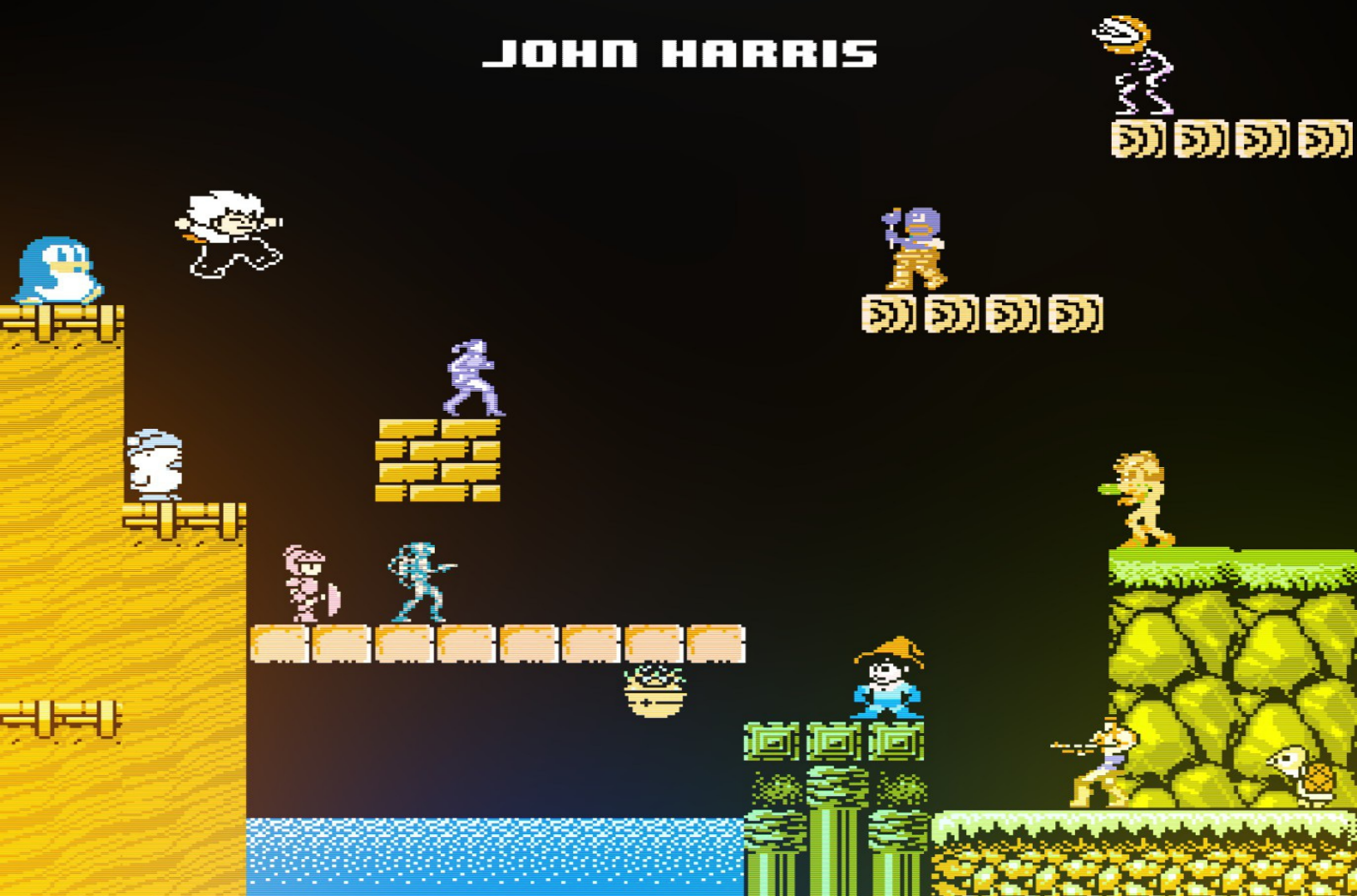


# SOMEBODY SET UP US THE ROM

**PART 2**  
**PRESENTING 47 MORE OF THE BEST  
ROMHACKS AND FAN TRANSLATIONS**

**JOHN HARRIS**



Books by John Harris

@Play: Exploring Roguelike Games ([Amazon](#), [itch.io](#))

Bug Voyage

Somebody Set Up Us The Rom, Part One ([Amazon](#), [itch.io](#))

Somebody Set Up Us The Rom, Part Two

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This book would not have been possible without the tireless work of many websites, especially as [romhacking.net](#) and [Hardcore Gaming 101](#).

## Notices

The opinions expressed in these hacks, and on linked websites, are not those of the author of this book. The best and worst of internet culture is on display in romhacks. Since the purpose of this book is to show a wide audience of people interesting things they may like to try, the author has taken it upon himself to exclude negative content from this book. If the choice is between completeness and kindness, the author chooses the latter.

A couple of images have been slightly edited to remove artifacts, specifically, text notices overlaid upon the image. The intent has always been to accurately present these games as they will be seen by a player.

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This is version 1.14 of the text.

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## Introduction

This is Part Two of a book on romhacks, modifications of console games, usually played in emulators, that provide different experiences from the original. Some romhacks just change graphics, some are pretty juvenile, some are misguided or just exist to spread pop culture references or memes. But many are truly worthwhile. Many make the game harder in some way, but many translate a game into a different language from the original, so that others may more easily understand it. Some fix flaws caused by bad design, hardware limitations, or prevailing attitudes from when the game was made. Some change the levels of the game to produce a new adventure, some change the main character of a game, and some do both. Some turn the game into something completely different altogether.

If you wish to know more about romhacks, how they're made, how to get the patches for them, how to patch roms to construct them, and how to play them in an emulator, I refer you to the introduction to Part One.

In this, Part Two, we cover a number of notable hacks in the Sonic the Hedgehog, Legend of Zelda, and Mega Man (aka Rockman) series, as well as an assortment of other games, and, again, a sizable section covering more fan translations.

With a work of this size, invariably mistakes will be made. Please send corrections to [johnwh@gmail.com](mailto:johnwh@gmail.com).

## What the heck do these numbers mean?

This is repeated information from the first book.

Sometimes it's helpful to be able to tell at a glance if a hack will be worth your time. Different people will like different games and no scale can encompass them all, but we can still arrive at some descriptive numerical measures. So, we rate hacks on three scales:

### Difficulty (1-10)

What does it mean for a game to be *hard*? It is not as simple a question as you might think!

Which of these is harder:

- An RPG that can be finished in a set, but large, amount of time, or an arcade game designed to increase in difficulty indefinitely, that cannot be "won" but is nearly always over in a few minutes?
- A game that requires many attempts to finish it, or a game that, because of a bug or ill intent, can't be finished?
- A game that can be rendered very easy if the player knows the proper strategies but is all but impossible without them (we might say that these games are "vulnerable to walkthroughs"), or a game where you must have sharp hand-eye coordination and reflexes to have a chance at all?
- A game that the great majority of players will take many attempts to finish but on a random chance (like maybe the drop of an ultra-powerful weapon from a defeated monster) might be rendered simple to complete, or a game that takes everyone a middle amount of time?

For purposes of this book, we define difficulty as the ability to cause frustration to a determined player. Unfinishable games are rated on the ability to have a decently good play, whatever that feels like for that game. (Although both Pac-Man and Defender are nominally endless, Defender feels like a *much* harder game!) For "beatable" games, this scale generally reflects how difficult it is to complete them. We assume that a player has an ordinary amount of free time and interest in playing and finishing (if possible) a video game, does not look for walkthroughs or FAQs, and has no willingness to use tool-assists like save states, methods of assuring frame perfect input, controller playback or memory interrogation. Because the field of romhack difficulty is rather wider than that of commercial game releases, our scale is also wide-ranging. As a result, most of the games of an NES-playing childhood, even some very hard ones, would rate only from 4 to 6 out of 10. There is a lot of wiggle room at each tier. Battletoads, a game so difficult that very few have finished it honestly, is a 7! Games with a difficulty of 9 are not generally playable with just human effort.

Practically all published games fit into the scale somewhere from 3 to 7. All translation hacks will be found within those limits unless something has gone wrong.

1. Trivial difficulty. Possesses no challenge. "Yay, I've beaten Microsoft Word!" We're happy for you, but what does that even mean?
2. Very easy. Most people will finish in one attempt.
3. Easy. May take a few tries. Running out of lives in a game with infinite continues, and continuing, means you're trying again. About as hard as Castlevania 2, *if* the player has a good walkthrough and knows where the traps are. (With traps, CV2 is a 4.) I figure that most people can complete a game this hard without much difficulty. *This is the easiest difficulty you tend to find for games available commercially.*
4. Moderate. Average NES difficulty level. About as hard as Super Mario Bros. 2 or Ducktales. Note that typical game difficulty has fallen since the NES days, so this might be harder than casual players are used to. An average player can complete a game this hard, but it might take them some determination to do it.
5. Hard. Requires many plays to finish. About as hard as the original Legend of Zelda or Castlevania. For an average person, games like this may be at the very upper end of their skill, liable to get stuck hard in places, maybe for days or even weeks, but eventually pull through.
6. Very hard. Of extraordinary difficulty. About as hard as Zelda II or Solomon's Key. An average player probably cannot finish these without aid. Over time, average players become skilled players, so it's not hopeless in the long term.
7. Extremely hard. Of infamous difficulty. About as hard as Battletoads. Some people may not be able to finish these no matter how much practice they get, such as due to exacting hand-eye coordination requirements. *This is the highest commercially-viable difficulty.*
8. Ridiculously hard, or "Kaizo." Difficulty so high as to be unsuitable for general commercial release, at the limits of human ability. Examples: the Super Mario World romhacks Kaizo Mario World and Item Abuse.
9. "Pit," or Super Kaizo. Technically beatable on your own, but practically cannot be completed without tool assistance or a great deal of luck, due to factors like exacting timing requirements, hidden elements or uncontrollable factors.
10. Game cannot be completed (if it's meant to be finished), even using tool assists. That is, if you don't hack it *yourself* in some way, it cannot be won. Note that classic arcade games are generally expected to be harder and unfinishable. Those usually get rated lower.

### **Stability (1-5)**

This basically means how professional the game seems. Low frame rates, visible glitches, amateurish graphics, and difficulty from unfair sources, among other things, can lower this rating. This is independent of the original game. For example, we rate Super Pitfall as having a stability of 3. The 30th Anniversary Edition hack, which fixes many problems with it, is still rated at a 3 because it's still got a low frame rate, among other reasons. Assuming the original game is of decent quality, though, a hack of it will still be rated 5 assuming there are no visible errors.

1. Unplayable. It may crash or freeze, the screen may be so glitched that you can't tell what's going on, your character may not respond or be so bugged that it can't function, or anything else that breaks the game.
2. Glitches detract from play. Technically you *can* play it, but you probably wouldn't want to. A translation with more than 20% garbled text counts here. Nothing in this book scores less than 3.

3. Glitches can be seen once in a while, but do not detract from play. A major glitch that is warned about is acceptable. Lower quality than this generally will not have made it into this book.
4. Glitches exist, but are hard to spot. You might even play the whole thing without spotting one. A major glitch that affects gameplay, even if it is well-warned about, disqualifies from this level.
5. Flawless in workmanship, with no glitches visible. Even a single evident glitch will disqualify from this. Note: lots of great hacks, and even some commercial games, wouldn't rate a 5. This scale is merciless.

## **Fun (1-5)**

How interesting and playable is this hack? How much fun could a generic player have? This is an intrinsically subjective measure, but I try to be consistent about it. You may find that this is rating is on the high side, but I try to be optimistic. In fact, all games have a potential audience that will greatly enjoy in. This is an estimated measure of how large that audience is.

1. Actively offensive. This is rated according to a general audience, which includes many types of people.
2. Uninteresting, boring, annoying, or otherwise unenjoyable.
3. Somewhat enjoyable. This is the lowest rating used for items in this book.
4. Entertaining if just for a while. Some people may be entertained for longer than that.
5. Either entertaining for a longer period, very entertaining, or especially interesting. Even if this specific hack isn't your thing (not everyone is into hardcore shooters or JRPGs, for example), I have tried to represent some objective quality of greatness here. A person might possibly consider this a favorite game of theirs.

Games with very small numbers of hacks may gain a point just from novelty, and similarly, hacks of games that already have many other hacks will have to be more distinguished to be relevant.

## **About broken links**

Nearly every site on the World Wide Web exists because someone pays an amount of money periodically to keep its DNS active and servers running. This means that it is the nature of websites to disappear with time.

When possible, I have tried to link to the most stable source for each hack. The priority goes: a page on an established site is best (like the venerable [romhacking.net](http://romhacking.net) or [Sonic Retro](http://SonicRetro.com)), then comes the hack's homepage on the creator's site, a hack's forum page, then a link to a Dropbox or download service such as Mediafire only as a last resort.

Yet, sometimes I have had to knowingly link a URL that I suspect will go bad in the near future. I am thinking specifically of the contest entries to the 2016 Sonic Hacking Contest. (Not in Part One, but lots of these will be in Part Two.) Their pages regularly get moved into an archive section once that year's contest ends. For the time being, I'm addressing this by providing the

contest page now (if I have found no more stable source), and releasing an update to this book once the page has moved to its archival home.

Even so... the moving of these pages is just a premonition of a greater problem in the future. This is a book, basically, of links to content that is more susceptible to link-rot even than most sites. If you're reading this book five or more years in the future and half the links are broken, well, I'm sorry, but it cannot be helped. A good place to look for copies of old sites is [the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine](#). (And a good place to contribute money to, if you're of the mind, is the Internet Archive.)



## **SECTION 1: HACKS**

As with Part One, the subsections here have a few extra hacks that, for one reason or another, didn't get full writeups. Give them a look too!

## Hacks: Sonic the Hedgehog

Hoo boy. Talk about *mania*....

Please take this section as proof of my commitment to you to document these hacks. Most people, writing a book like this, would tick every hack towards the book's count. Here, the "hacks" are sometimes whole groups of related hacks. All the "simple" character hacks are lumped together into one entry, leaving extra room for other items later on! The same goes for remixed Sonic games and joke Sonic games! Yer gettin' quite the bargain here, I'd say!

This is because there is perhaps no romhacking community as fruitful, in general terms, as the Sonic the Hedgehog community. In addition to having multiple websites supporting it (among them Sonic Retro, the yearly Sonic Hacking fan contest), most of the main, 16-bit Sonic games have full commented disassemblies available, allowing fan creators to outright remake the game's programming as they wish.

Most code hacking is a frustrating and piddly game involving finding unused space in the ROM image and setting up jumps or calls into that space to implement features there's no room for in the program's flow. This issue goes largely away when you have a disassembly to work from; in it, you can just add the code you want, wherever you want, and let the assembler take care of reflowing the rest of the code around it. You're still limited by bank sizes and total rom space, but all in all, it's a lot easier job. Plus you don't have to muck around with translating opcodes; the disassembly has already done all that for you.

I haven't counted the number of Sonic hacks there are, but there is definitely a qualitative difference between your standard Sonic hack and that of, say, Super Mario World or Super Metroid. Of course, there are standout SMW and SM hacks, but most of them are just new levels, maybe with some fan-made engine patches inserted. Meanwhile there are many Sonic hacks that implement entirely new characters, sometimes with new gameplay styles and modes. Nearly every character that has been seen in a 3D Sonic game has been backported to the 2D world, including and especially the (unfairly!) maligned Amy Rose and Big the Cat, and also a couple of characters from the comics and cartoon series, as well as a handful of OCs (with varying results).

By this time, the gaming world has been hit by the release of the awesome Sonic Mania, which grew directly out of this subculture. Project lead Christian Whitehead created his own Sonic fan engine based on studying the 16-bit games, and in so doing created a 2D Sonic game far truer to its 16-bit roots than anything Sega, or developers they contracted like DIMPS, have since been capable of, and several other people who work on the project also came from the fanscene.

Will this signal a new era, one in which developers commonly hire fan romhackers, who by this point know their work far better even than themselves, to make new games in the style of the old? I am not going to hold my breath, but good on you, Sega, for your foresight.

A special note about Sonic hacks. Since many of them are built off of source code (I believe), the standard types of patch files would be unwieldy to distribute, possibly exceeding the size of the rom itself. So frequently entire roms are distributed instead of patches. I don't know where this fits into the whole legal schema. IANAL. (Pronounced: "I, anal.")

Another interesting note is, many Mega Drive/Genesis games are available on Steam, as part of the compilation [SEGA Mega Drive & Genesis Classics](#). Interestingly, wonderfully, amazingly, some of these hacks are actually available through that conduit, via Steam Workshop! Not only does that get you out of having to mess about with RetroArch or other emulators and download roms, by buying the package you're supporting Sega while engaging in your romhack playing fun! I don't know where this stands legally (remember, I, anal), but it does help one feel a little better about playing them.

Three sites in particular are invaluable in keeping up with the Sonic hacking scene:

[Sonic Retro](#) takes the form of a big database of all kinds of Sonic information, on classic games, on modern ones and on hacks. [Forums](#).

[Sonic Research](#) is the former home of the Sonic Hacking Contest. Many of the hacks on Sonic Retro, and some of those talked about here, were at one point entries in this contest. [Forums](#).

[Sonic Hacking](#) is the current home of the contest.

Here are a few more hacks. There are far more than these out there, but it could take weeks to cover the breadth of the scene:

Sonic Zoom: [Sonic Research-Video](#)

Pretty nifty, took two years to make and it looks great, although it uses remixes of music from other games.

Sonic Bash: [Sonic Research](#)

Makes Sonic the Hedgehog into a competitive game where two players compete to inflict as much damage on a boss as possible.

## 1. Sonic Character Hacks



**Platform:** Sega Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** Multiple

**Difficulty:** 4-5/10, **Stability:** 4-5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** With each writeup

**Description:** Play classic Sonic games with all manner of anthro-critter.

This is the first of three epic conglomeration articles, first on hacks that simply change the main character of the game, the second that go a further step and change the rules to the game itself, and the third... well, I won't spoil the surprise, lest you jump directly there.

The first Sonic character hack game was made by Sega themselves. When you lock a two-edged Sonic & Knuckles cartridge to a Sonic the Hedgehog 3 cartridge, internally the two games combine into a single memory space and provide expanded adventures for all three characters included. But while this is a terrific idea, it isn't really a *romhack*, because Sonic 3 and S&K were both designed around this possibility.

But additionally, you can also attach a Sonic the Hedgehog 2 cartridge to S&K, and create a Frankenstein the title screen identifies as Knuckles in Sonic the Hedgehog 2. Sonic 2 was not created with this possibility in mind, so the result is solidly, I say, a *hack*, a makeshift edit of one game to turn it into another. (You can also attach Sonic 1, but the resulting game, Blue Sphere, is actually completely contained in the S&K cartridge; the presence of Sonic 1 just unlocks it.)

Sonic 2 & Knuckles is pretty much what it sounds like, the entirety of Sonic 2, just with Knuckles in the starring role instead of Sonic and/or Tails. It's not just a graphics change though; Knuckles comes with his signature abilities intact. He can attach to the sides of walls and climb them up or down indefinitely, and he can glide through the air over long distances. Unlike Sonic 3, where Sonic has somewhat different abilities from Knuckles in that he gets special powers from that game's elemental shields, in Sonic 2 Knuckles' abilities are a superset of Sonic's, so

there's nowhere Sonic could go that Knuckles cannot. But because he can get to more places, Sega hid some extra monitors in out-of-the-way places, that only exist in K-in-S2 mode, to reward exploring players.

Taking a cue from Sega themselves, fans have gone on and added many other characters, from other Sonic games and beyond, to the 16-bit games. Unlike Knuckles in Sonic 2, often these characters' abilities are *not* supersets of Sonic's, so sometimes the games are not completable. I'll leave it for you guys to discover which character can, or cannot, complete each game. Also note that this isn't *all* the character hacks there are as of this writing, but I felt that I had to draw the line somewhere. These are divided by character.

I'm sorry not to have screenshots of all of these. There's so many!

Amy Rose, by E-122-Psi (with help from others)



Sonic 1 - [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 2 - [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 3 & Knuckles - [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Also: Sonic 2 Pink Edition (with Cream the Rabbit) - [Sonic Retro](#)

The only Sonic character who gets more hate than the beleaguered Big the Cat is Amy Rose, the pink girl hedgehog who Sonic first saved in Sonic CD (because the series helpless female ratio was deficient, I guess) and has been a fixture in most (if not all) of the 3D Sonic games, as well as many of the later 2D ones.

But the only 16-bit Sonic game she appeared in she wasn't playable, and all the later 2D games, with the exception of Sonic Mania, don't use an engine that plays like the classics. The Sonic Advance games are okay, but adapted Amy's moves from Sonic Adventure into the 2D world.

Well, these hacks adapt her right back into the classic engine. Amy plays differently from the main trio: she doesn't get a roll-into-ball move unless a playfield gimmick expressly puts her into that state. To compensate, she's got a really big hammer that she can pull out and whack enemies with. Unfortunately, despite its apparent size, it doesn't have a very large range, and while Sonic, Tails and Knuckles just have to jump onto an enemy to burst it, Amy usually must swing her hammer with the right timing, and sometimes has problems getting out of half pipes with high sides (such as found in Spring Yard Zone). So she has a tougher time of it than the boys, especially since the zones are built around rolling ball physics. Amy does have more moves than the others, requiring more control manipulation to make the most of her abilities. A skilled player can get to some hard-to-reach places more easily with Amy than Sonic.

Of special note is Sonic 2 Pink Edition, which has slightly different graphics for Amy, but also replaces Tails with her friend from the other later 2D Sonic games, Cream the Rabbit, with her own moves.

Sally Acorn, by E-122-Psi (with help from others)



Sonic 1 - [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 2 - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 3 & Knuckles - [Sonic Hacking Contest](#)

Unlike Amy, in terms of gameplay Sally Acorn was created from whole cloth. She's not *technically* an OC though; she comes from some of the Sonic Apocrypha, one of the Saturday Morning cartoon shows and the now-defunct Archie comic stories. (At least, I think that's where she came from. I realize that I am risking the wrath of a large and vocal fandom if I misrepresent her origin.) Like Amy, however, she cannot spin into a ball at will, and gets most of her agency from a weapon, in her case a dual-use laser pistol. Pressing 'A' causes it to fire a shot that can



burst badniks; pressing 'B' can change a monitor's contents, giving the player a bit of strategy by letting them change each box between one of two choices. She also gets a quick flip move than can be used to get up steep slopes, and her laser can be fired down as well, which is helpful for breaking blocks underfoot.

Metal Sonic, by Darkon360 and LoneDevil



Sonic 1: [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 2: [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 3 & Knuckles: [Sonic Retro](#)

Metal Sonic is a recurring major boss in the Sonic games, basically a robot clone of the hero. Since he's similar to Sonic himself in concept these hacks are mostly graphics hacks. The version in the Sonic 3 & Knuckles hack gives him a few extra moves.

Mighty the Armadillo in Sonic 1, by E-122-Psi: [RHDN-Sonic Retro](#)

Charmy Bee in Sonic 1, by E-122-Psi: [RHDN-Sonic Retro](#)

Vector the Crocodile in Sonic 1, by E-122-Psi and others: [RHDN-Sonic Retro](#)

Who the heck is Charmy? He's a member of the "Chaotix Detective Agency." Until the release of Sonic Heroes about a decade ago he was one of the more obscure bits of Sonic lore. He was one of the potential helpers you might be burdened with in Knuckles Chaotix, a bizarre co-op Sonic engine game for a bizarre piece of hardware, Sega's 32X Genesis add-on. Everyone thought that Sega had forgotten about ol' Charmy, and his pals Mighty the Armadillo, Vector the Crocodile and Espio the Chameleon, until Sega revived them for Sonic Heroes, one of their experiments in making a 3D Sonic game.

We'll talk more about Sonic Heroes in a bit. This hack is... only okay? Charmy's only means of getting off the ground is by air dashing. It seems to be his only move in fact! He can't roll into a ball, he can't jump attack, heck he can't even jump! What he can do is air dash over and over, and soar way way above the zone, and easily make it to the end of levels. But eventually Charmy will reach a boss, and then Charmy will have to rely on his air dashes for battle damage, and they're inconsistent. It's kind of frustrating.

Mighty gets a wall jump & has the Sonic 2 spindash. Charmy doesn't roll up usually, but is tiny and can *fly*. Vector is pretty large and gets both the wall jump and spindash moves plus an air dash, but can't jump as high or accelerate as fast, moves that prove to be essential to his play. Interestingly, Vector doesn't roll into a ball when he spins, but into a circular loop, which I find rather cool. All these characters are from Knuckles Chaotix, an oft-forgotten 16-bit game that uses the Sonic engine but doesn't actually have a playable Sonic. Chaotix is bizarre and tricky to get used to, but has its fans.

Knuckles the Echidna in Sonic 1, by Stealth: [Sonic Retro](#)

Remember when I said above that technical issues proved too difficult to allow Knuckles to be playable in Sonic 1 via S&K Lock-On? Well fans have the luxury of lots of spare time and effort, and went ahead and put a version of Knuckles with all his Sonic 3-era moves into the original game.

Bunnie Rabbot (Sonic 1), by E-122-Psi: [Sonic Retro](#)

Bunnie is another TV-and-comic character, this one a cyborg with an extend-o-arm and limited, jet-powered flight. She also cannot roll into a ball at will, but being able to fly a bit helps compensate for that. Her arm can collect rings, too.

Super Sonic in Sonic 1, by Puto and others: [Sonic Retro](#)

This is actually a backport of the "Super Sonic" feature from later Sonic games, the reward for getting all the Chaos Emeralds, into Sonic 1, where they only changed the ending in a slight way. Get all six (in this game) Chaos Emeralds and then collect 50 rings in any stage and then jump to transform. While super, Sonic is invincible to enemies and spikes (but not crushing or falling out of the zone), but loses one ring per second. When they run out, Sonic reverts to normal, still ringless.

Shadow the Hedgehog (Sonic 1): [Sonic Retro](#)

The infamous 3D Sonic character has been backported into Sonic 1. His moveset isn't hugely interesting here.

"Somari the Adventurer" (Mario, hack of Sonic 1): [Sonic Retro](#)



Somari was a bootleg of Sonic the Hedgehog made by pirates for the Famicom, but starring Mario instead of Sonic. This hack is a kind of homage to it, putting a full-fledged Mario character into Sonic the Hedgehog itself, even with a little "Mushroom Kingdom" zone at the start.

Kirby:



Sonic 1: [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Sonic 2: [RHDN](#) - [Sonic Retro](#)

Now we're gettin' weird. Kirby plays surprisingly like his expected style, although without copy abilities. He can float around the screen in the Kirby manner, inhale badniks and either swallow them or shoot them at other foes. The most interesting aspect of these hacks, from a gameplay perspective, is that there's multiple difficulty levels, and each change the health rules of the game. At the easiest, the rings and extra lives in the world work exactly as they do for Sonic. At normal difficulty level, the life counter actually represents Kirby's health. Gain lives (that is, health) for every 50 rings you collect, finding 1ups and hitting checkpoints. If you run out of lives/health, you're sent to the Continue screen, for you still get continues by collecting 50 rings in Special Stages. The hardest difficulty disables continues all together, and reduces the sources of health you can obtain.

Motobug in Sonic 1, by Polygon Jim: [Sonic Retro](#)



Motobug, an enemy from the first zone of the original Sonic the Hedgehog, is playable as a protagonist with this hack. Motobug's moveset is limited, and the game is not finishable without cheats, but it's still interesting. Sadly, [the creator of this hack](#) passed away in 2013. He is memorialized in the game Sonic Mania in the form of a Motobug named Jimmy, ridden by one of the "Hard Boiled Heavy" sub-bosses, who has some graphic resemblance to the Motobug in Polygon Jim's hack.

Yoshi in Sonic 2, by Xenowhirl: (not easily obtainable)

This hack is a little controversial because it was never supposed to reach public eyes. It was an entry in the yearly Sonic Hacking Contest that was later withdrawn. It only reached the outside world due, I have heard, to a tester leaking it. As such there is no official homepage where it can be obtained, and even if I posted a link to it, that link would probably be along the lines of a Dropbox share, and would not have an acceptable life expectancy. It is a real shame that the hack

is hard to obtain though because it is amazing, technically accomplished and filled with unexpected features, including a baby Sonic to ride Yoshi, adapting Yoshi's Island's ruleset to Sonic 2's worlds, being able to eat enemies and earn throwable eggs, reworked bosses, and an entirely new style of Special Stage. There's even a cameo by the "Fuzzy" enemies from Yoshi's Island, complete with psychedelic effects if they're touched. `The game is known to lock up at odd times, including if you win, but it seems it *is* winnable. Observing this hack, by the way, was the whole inspiration for the *Somebody Set Up Us The Rom* series. [A video demonstration is up at YouTube.](#)

## 2. Sonic Hack Games

**Platform:** Sega Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** Multiple

**Difficulty:** 4-5/10, **Stability:** 4-5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** With writeups

**Description:** Taking character hacks a step further, these games not only often change which character you play as, but implement different rules too, making them into new games all to themselves.

Knuckles' Emerald Hunt: [Sonic Retro](#)

Quickly! What's your least favorite thing about the Sonic Adventure games? Besides frequent interruptions by episodes of Pro Frog Fishing with Big the Cat? My own least favorite parts were trying to A-rank emerald hunt stages with Knuckles. Well, here's that in side-scrolling form! They do bring an interesting vibe to the 2D Sonic games. Emerald locations are randomly selected from a list of possibilities each time you play, lending replayability. There's even a two-player mode, in case you can find another player who can stand hunting for emeralds!

Dr. Robotnik's Creature Capture: [Sonic Retro](#)

Dr. R. (aka "Eggman,") has always had a weird place in the Sonic canon. Originally designed as a completely different kind of character, I've never entirely bought into the mad scientist identity. He's just too friendly-looking in the 16-bit games! The 3D games gave him a more ruthless look, but they also made him playable in Sonic Adventure 2. I hear in Sonic Forces he finally succeeds in taking over the world, which might make him a credible threat again.

He'd have to be pretty darn successful at the evil biz to make up for his appearance in Dr. Robotnik's Creature Capture, in which the rotund scientist runs around with a butterfly net trying to catch wily animals to serve as badnik batteries. As is frequently the case with fangames, it's actually pretty difficult. Each level has a time limit and it's easy to run out.

BTW, apropos of nothing, my favorite character detail in all of the Sonic games is, in Sonic Generations, when Dr. Robotnik has a heart-to-heart talk with himself about whether this world-domination thing will ever work out, and considers going back to school to get his teaching degree. Go for it, Eggman! After you're accredited to teach Evil Genius studies, I'm sure Dean Wily will hire you!



Big's Fishing Derby: [Sonic Retro](http://tinyurl.com/p8xtea2)



Let's get back to the subject of Big the Cat. I've always been big on Big, so to speak. Sonic Adventure is full of so many weird ideas that some of them may have been a bit half-baked, perhaps. They were competing with their rival, Nintendo, whose own 3D mascot offering, Super Mario 64, was, and still is, regarded as a masterpiece, paving the way for all 3D platforming adventures to follow. Mario 64 did this by extensive play experiments and prototyping, and the Nintendo 64 system and controller were pretty much designed to run this game. The pressure was on Sega to make something comparable. Rather than reinvent the wheel, they threw tons of ideas onto that Dreamcast game disk, including six distinct playable characters, each with its own game style. Sonic aimed to reach a goal, Tails had to race Sonic to that point, Knuckles (as mentioned before) had to hunt down emerald shards, Amy was harassed by a stalker robot, and Omega the robot got involved with blasting his fellow machines.

In stark contrast with all that was Big the Cat, the cartoon embodiment of THC, who wandered around dangerous landscapes in search of his amphibian life partner Froggy, who unfortunately

had swallowed a Chaos Emerald and thus was Target #1 for the Eggman Army.

In hack terms, they threw out all the exploration and made it into a simple 2D fishing game. The screen is split in two; the game can be played either two people competing, or solo, or with periodic fishfights against Eggman.

You have a limited number of lures, and a limited amount of time, to try to catch Froggy, who swims around at the bottom of the screen. In the water above him are several robot fish. Catching a robot fish delays you a bit, but awards you a powerup that you can use later. You can store up to two of these powerups. If you try to catch something, though, and your quarry comes in contact with another robot fish, you lose a life. So the idea is to clear out the other fish to give you a clean shot at the frog, but that plan is complicated by the enemy fish being reintroduced at a steady pace. When "fighting" Robotnik, his robot is trying to catch Froggy too. The only way you can directly interact with the other player is through powerups, so make good use of them.

One of the special features of this game is the wide variety of locations to fish in, which utilize graphics taken from all the 16-bit Sonic games, including Sonic CD and Knuckles Chaotix. Pretty darn slick!

Sonic Omochao Edition: [Sonic Retro](#)





This is called a *segue*. The last thing in one article leads into the next one. The article to follow this one is on Sonic mini-hacks, which are often joke games, and Sonic Omochao Edition began as a joke game. It just, improbably, became an actual game on top of that.

First you have to know who Omochao is. In the Sonic Adventures games and followups, Omochao is a robot creature who provides advice to players as they go through the game. Think of him as a blue mechanical Navi. Like Navi, his interruptions to explain the game get more and more annoying the further you go.

Sonic Omochao Edition, originally, was intended as a humorous commentary on this. When you do anything of note in Sonic Omochao Edition, the game freezes, plays a musical fanfare, and Omochao pops up in a text box to explain to you what you just did. "You collected a ring! (fanfare!)" "You smashed a badnik! (fanfare!!)" "You got hit! (fanfare!!)" Infuriatingly, but entertainingly to onlookers, the fanfare gets *longer*, and higher in pitch, every time it triggers in a level. But one thing that does not freeze is the game timer, and considering there is no upper limit to how long the fanfare can get, players who are doing very badly end up wasting the whole 10 minutes.

But for many levels, with very careful play, it's possible to avoid triggering Omochao at all. It became kind of an interesting challenge, to navigate through a whole classic Sonic 1 level without doing anything of note.

It wasn't possible to *entirely* avoid contact with the Great Blue Explainer, so what they did was, they assigned each level a "par score," which is the minimum number of times, it was thought at that point, one could trigger Omochao on the way through the act. All the levels were hooked into a (very nice-looking!) level select area, and could be played in any order. They even simulated battery backup, to record a player's best (that is, lowest) score in each level.

All this is cool, but it doesn't change the fact that you have to be pretty fanatical about Sonic to put up with Omochoao's interjections, even if avoiding them is the main goal of play. [This video features a hapless player trying out the game.](#)

### 3. Sonic Novelty & Joke Games

**Platform:** Sega Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** Multiple

**Difficulty:** 3-7/10, **Stability:** 3-5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** With writeups

**Description:** Here come the weird ones, this is a compilation of short and/or strange Sonic hacks. All of these hacks are of Sonic 1 unless otherwise stated.

When you have as many people making hacks as the Sonic mod community has, you're bound to get some funny and/or sadistic ones. A few of these are actual legitimate gameplay styles; I'm using this as a kind of catch-all category for things that don't fit elsewhere.

[OMG THE RED RINGS](#), by Fiz - [Video](#)



The yellow rings are gone, replaced by erratically-bouncing rings the touch of which means INSTANT DEATH. Amazingly frustrating, and probably impossible to win.

[Sonic 2 XL](#), by Captain Bozo - [Video](#)





While a bit insensitive, the hack is well-made and presents interesting gameplay challenges, so it's a borderline inclusion. The game is normal Sonic 2, except the rings are *onion* rings. As Sonic collects them, he visibly gains weight at a rapid pace. The more weight he gains, the slower his maximum speed becomes, and he also can't jump as high as usual. After about 30 he dies from heart failure. Fortunately, just by running around, he exercises off the extra pounds. This makes the game a bit annoying to play, as every so often you have to stop what you're doing and run around for no reason. In addition to this, the rings serve their ordinary protective function, and if Sonic is hit he drops them, but not the weight he gained from them.

[Jester's Challenge](#), by MarkeyJester - [Video](#)

This is actually more of a game to itself than a joke. It's a pretty challenging one too! The whole game is one giant maze to navigate. Hitting certain monitors can change the layout of the maze. Good luck with this one, it's hard!

[Portal Gun in Sonic 2](#), by snkenjoi - [Video](#)

This is pretty much what you'd think it is. I'll spare you all the jokes about cake and falsehood and move on.

[Sonic 1 Easy Mode](#), by LOst (converted from Sonic Team's version) - [Video](#)

Sonic Jam for the Saturn was a compilation of several previous Sonic games and was the closest to a mainline Sonic title that Sega made for the system. The included games were actually rewritten for the Saturn and featured "easy modes" with simplified layouts, more powerups and fewer Acts. This is a backport of Sonic 1's easy mode from Jam back to the Mega Drive/Genesis.

[Sonic 1 Reverse Curse](#), by Campbellsonic - [Video](#)

Another example of how changing the rules of a game can turn it into a completely different play experience. All the levels are the same, but, Sonic starts with five rings. When you collect rings,



however, they count *down*, subtracting from your count. If you collect a ring when you have zero, you lose a life. If you get hit by an enemy you still lose all your rings! Additionally, invincibility lets you collect rings normally (total increasing), there are "reset" monitors that reset your total back to 5, shields protect you from rings (but are still lost when you get hit), and ring monitors scatter rings around the screen for you to avoid.

Sonic 1 Smooth Edition, by MarkeyJester - [Hack is available from MarkeyJester's user page at Sonic Retro](#) - [Video](#)

This simple and beautiful graphics hack simply gives Sonic many many more frames of animation. Now when he accelerates into a run, his legs move a lot smoother. When he runs up or down a hill, and especially when he runs around a loop, he is depicted with twice as many angles. It's not a huge change, but if you're used to Sonic's normal animation, it's definitely pretty! Check out the video at least.

[Sonic 1 Special Stage Smooth Rotation](#), by Sonic Team - [Video](#)

This hack is special because I can present it right here in the text! There is no patching to do, you just need a way to enter Game Genie codes. You can even use them on an actual system! The codes are:

US & PAL: ATBT-AA32, RG2T-C6XA, RG2T-C6XC

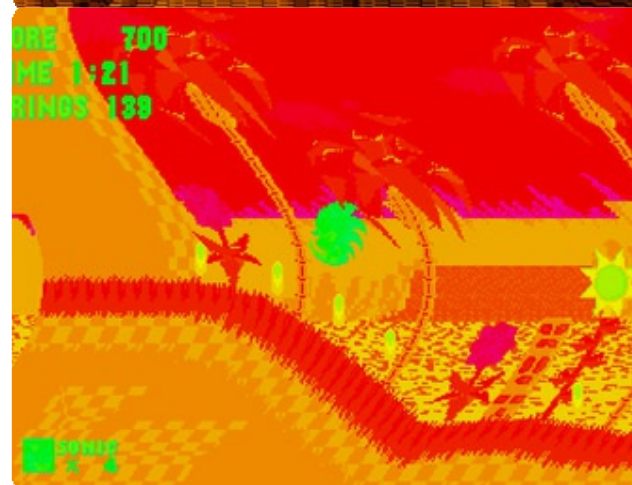
Japan: ATBT-AA32, RG6T-C6T0, RG6T-C6T2

Shicky's video, linked above, shows the codes in action on a physical console. The result is, the maze in Sonic 1's infamous rotating Special Stages rotates much more smoothly, and beautifully! The reason the code could be implemented with Game Genie is because the support for it is written into the game by Sonic Team! It's just disabled with code. Nobody seems to know for sure why the game uses jerkier scrolling.

[Sonic 1: Bouncy Edition](#), by Xenowhirl - [Video](#)

Sonic 1, but Sonic bounces all over the place! You can bounce higher with the A or C buttons, or less with the B button. You can also roll by holding the control pad Down, and also spin dash that way. You can stop and stand temporarily by holding up. Give *that* one a shot, whydontcha? Additionally, the screen doesn't scroll in normal levels but pages forward one screen at a time, and in Special Stages you control the rotation of the screen.

Sonic 1: The Ring Ride 1, 2, 3 and 4, all by MarkeyJester





1 - 2 - 3 - 4

[Video compilation](#)

Each of these supplies a different graphic effect that intensifies as you collect rings. They're all pretty striking to watch, although the game itself is stock Sonic the Hedgehog. These are personal favorites, although they're a bit glitchy.

[Sonic 1: Gotta Go Fast Edition](#), by VadaPEGA - [Video](#)

Sonic is very very slow, but gains speed as he collects rings. If he gets enough rings, his top speed goes beyond even that in the original game. Since getting hit makes you drop all your rings, leaves you defenseless *and* decreases your speed substantially, you'll probably die pretty soon after taking that first hit.

[Sonic Mega Mushroom](#), by MarkeyJester - [Video](#)

Remember New Super Mario Bros.? Remember how they made a big deal out of the Mega Mushroom item, which made Mario not just "Super", but gigantic, screen-sized, utterly invincible and course-wrecking? Well pshaw, Sonic can do that too, and on Mega Drive/Genesis hardware. Have a look!

[Sonic MT](#), by Natsumi & others - [Video](#)



MT stands for "micro transactions." This hack (of Sonic 3 & Knuckles, for a change) requires you to unlock features with points that you earn while playing the game. (The "PayPal connection" screen is just a joke.) Note, however, this hack is more than just a gag, and expect some other unexpected changes to the game as you play, to the extent that, like Omochao Edition, it's become rather its own game instead of just a joke. It includes extra bosses and a variety of new level music.

[Sonic: The One Ring](#), by Mercury - [Video](#)

Every level has one ring, and you can't complete the level until you find it! The game has been reworked to turn it into a search for that ring in each Act.



[The Naked Hedgehog](#), by MarkeyJester - [Video](#)



I'm not going to say it'll make more sense, but this one is a lot funnier if you've seen either the Police Squad TV show or the Naked Gun movies that are based on them.

[CrazySonic](#), by The Ducks Team - [Video](#)



This one requires a bit of explanation. Some time back there was a homebrew program created for the Mega Drive/Genesis platform called CrazyBus. Created merely as a test of the author's compiler, the "game" picked up a certain notoriety for its amazingly harsh and discordant music and graphics, which are kind of like what you'd imagine a Brillo pad would produce if played in a videotape deck.

CrazySonic is basically an homage to that bit of electronic madness. But lest you think you've escaped CrazyBus itself, you should know: it's included as a replacement for the Special Stages.

#### 4. Sonic 1 Megamix



**Platform:** Mega Drive/Genesis, Sega CD

**Creator:** Team Megamix

**Difficulty:** ?/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

Sonic Retro:[http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic\\_the\\_Hedgehog\\_Megamix](http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic_the_Hedgehog_Megamix)

Homepage:<http://www.teammegamix.com/>

**Description:** Formerly the great hope of Sonic hacks, now canceled, but what there is of it is still playable.

Sonic Megamix was one of those pie-in-the-sky "ultimate" kinds of hacks that ambitious romhackers envision, a game to contain every feature imaginable and then some. For a while, it looked like it might have stood a good chance of being finished, although efforts over years eventually resulted in the project getting moved to the Sega CD platform, then eventually falling apart.

It started way back in 2004, which gives you some idea of how fanatical Sonic fans can be.

"[Team Megamix](#)" was a whos-who of the Sonic hacking scene. They had planned an extravaganza of content, new zones, several characters who had never been in a Sonic game before, some characters with abilities inspired by the 3D Sonic games, and generally just more of everything. Alas, it was not to be. The team drifted apart to other projects, and finally, in 2016, then-project-leader Stealth decided to call it quits. The note of defeat in his cancellation message on the Team Megamix website is impossible to mistake.

It is difficult to get too broken up about it, however, for a number of reasons:

1. Sonic Mania became the big super-extreme Sonic fangame everyone wanted, and it's an official release from Sega to boot! And Stealth had a hand in its making! Not only did they get to

make a dream project, but they all got paid for it too, *and* you can play it on all the big consoles, *and* it became one of the greatest indie success stories! Good for them!

2. Stealth promises that he'll clean up the code and eventually release the source to the public, which is very nice of him.

3. We do have a few WIP versions that we can play.

There are two major versions of Sonic Megamix that are available. There is the last rom release, which is fairly polished. The most recent version was part of their efforts to transition the project to the Sega CD add-on, but the only available version of that has bugs and is not as polished as previous releases. I have tested both. The cartridge (.BIN) version has remixed levels. I wasn't able to get to the level select for that, from which you can get to the extra features. The CD version (.ISO) has rather more bugs and isn't very polished, so be prepared to do a little extra searching (you'll see what I mean at the second boss) but you can go to its level select by pressing Up, Down, Left then Right (it'll play a sound) then holding A and pressing Start a couple of times. Not only does this let you play all the levels in Megamix, but levels from Sonic 1 as well.

And, most importantly, from the level select, you can access four other characters by changing the number by CHAR. #00 is Mighty the Armadillo, which plays like Sonic did in Sonic 3, with extra abilities from the elemental shields. #01 is Sonic himself, who has abilities inspired by his 3D appearances, where he has a homing attack on enemies, and zoom along lines of rings with the A button. #02 is Tails, who can fly, natch. #03 is Shadow the Hedgehog, who gets a special edgy HUD and a double-jump. And #04 is Knuckles, who has his glide and climb moves. There's more about the character abilities than I can relate here, check the page on the hack at [Sonic Retro](#) for more.

There's a lot more to discover too, so go check it out. Maybe take a moment to think about what might have been, but also, be grateful for what we have, both what exists of Megamix, and Sonic Mania, which is really quite something.

Of note: Getting CD-based systems going in an emulator generally takes a bit more work. You'll have to find an appropriate BIOS, rename it to the right thing (in this case bios\_CD\_U.bin, or something similar depending on the territory of system being emulated) and put it in the right place: the system directory within the RetroArch home directory.





New graphics! The level art is a highlight.

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They even update the rotating Special Stages. Good luck with those.

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While each zone is of the same general style as its Sonic 1 version, the new tiles offer a change of pace.

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You can turn this message off in the options.

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Simon Wai found a prototype version of Sonic 2 on a Chinese website.

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What could make a Rotating Special Stage even scarier? That's right, playing it in Earth orbit!

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The code for this is Up, Down, Left, Right on the title screen, then hold A and press Start twice.



One of the alternate characters accessible from the level select is Shadow. The "ultimate lifeform," he's such an edgy garden mammal!

## 5. Sonic Classic Heroes



**Platform:** Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** flamewing, ColinC10, others

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** [http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic\\_Classic\\_Heroes](http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic_Classic_Heroes)

**Description:** It's like six character hacks in one, in an expanded game combining Sonic 1 and 2.

One of the problems with the Sonic section of this book, I admit, is that while there are tons of Sonic hacks, unlike Mario, fewer of them focus on recreating the game as something else. There are not as many things like My Little Puzzles or Extra Mario Bros to be found. Many hacks content themselves with just changing the main character. It is true, changing your character's abilities can entirely change the significance of pre-existing content, but that doesn't mean it's not nice to have new levels, like in Sonic Megamix.

Sonic Classic Heroes probably goes about as far as the new character approach can take you. It's not one but *six* different characters played three at a time! Remember how Tails tagged along behind Sonic in games 2 and 3? Well here, both Tails and Knuckles are along for the ride, and you can instantly switch between them with a press of the A button. Being AI controlled most of the time means they sometimes get themselves into predicaments, so you don't always *want* to switch over to one of them, but it's good to be able to use Tails' flight, or Knuckles' climbing and gliding, when you want them. Note that the game, played carefully, is a bit easier than the originals, since picking up a shield gives it to all three of your characters simultaneously, so if your leader loses his you can just switch to another one.

As an added feature, you can choose to instead play as Sega's team of Sonic understudies, Team Chaotix, here consisting of Vector the Crocodile, Espio the Chameleon and Charmy Bee. They play differently than the default group of Sonic, Tails and Knuckles. Both Vector and Espio have wall grabs, Vector has an air dash as well, and Charmy doesn't really "jump" at all, he just air

dashes everywhere. You can also enable the Knuckles Chaotix "ring chain" feature to keep everyone together, although I'm unsure how wise that is.

The cherry on top of this technically impressive new feature is the ability to have other players control the other guys, like how a player can pick up and play Tails in the original games. With the Sega "Team Player" adapter (or its emulated equivalent) three people can play at once, presuming you can find three people in the same place with such interest in replaying Sonic the Hedgehog, of course.

Sonic Classic Heroes is a merger of two other hacks, Sonic 2 Heroes and Sonic 1 & 2. The expanded character selection is just part of it; the rest is the combining of the first two Sonic games into one long adventure, with save functionality added in to help players through the long, long game. Chaos emeralds are handled by putting in the Special Stages from *both* games, accessed in their respective ways throughout. So, Sonic 1's lampposts have been replaced with the Sonic 2 style, and hitting one when you have 50 rings lets you into Sonic 2's half-pipe Special Stage for a Sonic 2 Emerald (here renamed "Sol Emeralds" to distinguish them). And at the end of Sonic 2's non-boss levels appears the Sonic 1-style Giant Ring if you have 50 rings, letting you into the anxiety-inducing Sonic 1 rotating maze Special Stage for a go at one of the original Chaos Emeralds. If you get all of one kind of emerald you get Super power; if you get all of both types, you get Hyper power.



The number of characters on the Starring screen is formidable. I don't know how Amy fits into this. I didn't see her anywhere.



That's a lot to take in! The game is very customizable and offers save support.



Critters on the move.





The Half-Pipe Special Stages were made harder by Tails taking hits. So now, you have TWO ring-losing sidekicks to worry about.



Eggman is smiling here. He doesn't know he's already dead.





The Chaotix guys finally get to run around in 2D without that damn chain.

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I always liked Vector. He rolls into a circle instead of a ball!

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This is not a crocodile's natural habitat.



Fun times at the capsule.

## 6. Sonic & Knuckles 3: The Challenges & Sonic 2 Adventure



**Platform:** Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** ColinC10 and MainMemory, respectively

**Difficulty:** 6 & 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5 & 4/5

**URLs:**

Sonic & Knuckles 3: The Challenges:

- RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1049/>

- Sonic Retro: [http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic\\_3\\_%26\\_Knuckles:\\_The\\_Challenges](http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic_3_%26_Knuckles:_The_Challenges)

Sonic 2 Adventure:

- Sonic Retro: [http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic\\_2\\_Adventure\\_Edition](http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic_2_Adventure_Edition)

**Description:** A different play style for these two games: completing challenges and collecting emblems, like the 3D Sonic Adventure games.

Sonic & Knuckles 3: The Challenges (S&K3:TC) is quite a terrific set of minigame challenges set in the zones of Sonic 3 & Knuckles. Each challenge asks you to complete a level under some restriction. Some of them are really ingenious, although due to a design decision I personally don't understand, most of them are "locked" until you complete a number of challenges already available. An exception to this is the first time you play, however, at which time all the challenges are locked except one, so you can try any one of them before the "lock" is applied. My suggestion is to do what I did and save state at the challenge select screen when testing things out, and only rely on the included SRAM support when you're ready to start unlocking things.

(A personal note: locking major game features is one of those things about video games that I've never really understood. Maybe if the later levels would be unplayable unless the early ones were finished, because those teach the player needed skills? But here, some of the later challenges are not really harder than the earlier ones. If it's just to apply a progression system, I can't say that I approve.)

When you do get to play them, there are quite some interesting challenges in there. One of them puts you in control of a Player 2 Tails accompanying a scripted Sonic through a level, trying to stay on screen. You start with a number of points (like 6) and you lose one every time the game resets Tails (sending him flying back in). At the end, you're rated on how many points you have left.

Another challenge, "High Voltage," hurts Tails every time he touches the ground of a level. He has to chain together flying, handholds and moving platforms (which don't harm him) and get to the end as safely as he can.

"Ring Drain" starts Sonic off with 10 rings, and he loses one every couple of seconds or so. He loses a life if he runs out. Of course, he can pick more up during the level, but the more he has, the faster they are lost. Losing your rings from injury isn't instantly fatal, as he's safe while flickering, but you'd better collect another ring as quickly as possible.

"Bodyguard" is another challenge that plays with the 2P function. In it you play as the 1P character as normal, with a 2P Tails along for the ride like normal play. But when either you or Tails takes a hit, all your rings are lost, and if either of you dies, both end up reset back at the last checkpoint.

"Tag Team" and "Double Team" both let you switch between two characters, but Double Team is the more interesting of the two. In that, Sonic and Knuckles are effectively on parallel tracks through the level, simultaneously. You only control one at a time; the other is understood to be on his track at the same horizontal position. You can switch to the other character, on his route at where your current character is on your route by pressing A, but at the cost of 50 rings. The idea is to be playing the character that has the most straight-forward route at a given time. Sometimes routes double-back. If you switch characters where that begins to happen, you might end up on a part that goes forward more directly, and thus avoid a time-wasting backtrack.

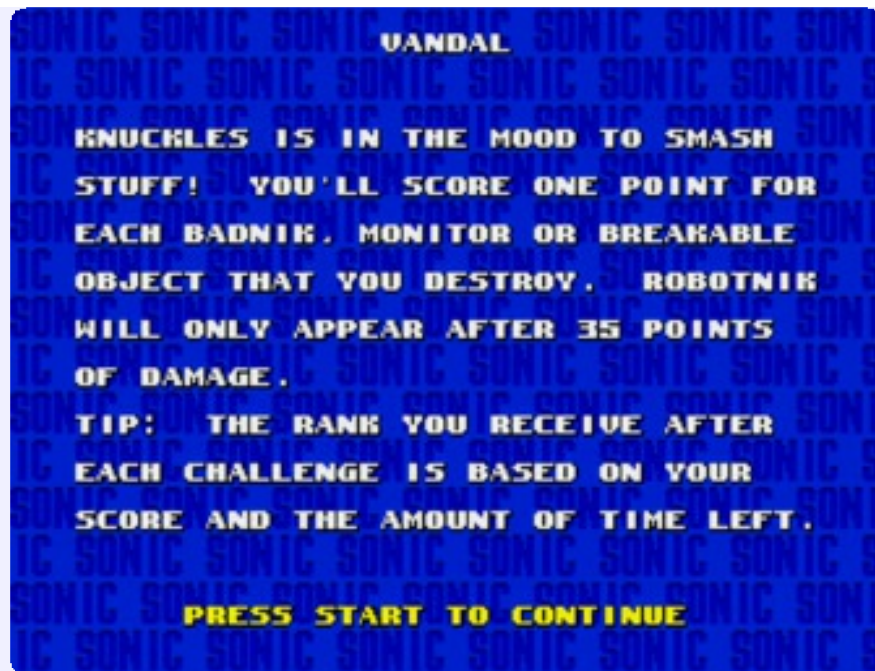
These challenges, and many others, are all entertaining changes to the Sonic ruleset. If you're looking for something more traditional, you might instead want to try Sonic 2 Adventure.

In that hack's title menu, you can choose whether to play "Adventure" or "Trial." In Adventure, you're just trying to complete the level, but in Trial you go back into already-finished levels with other objectives like finishing with at least 50 rings or under a specific time limit. You get



Emblems for each of these challenges you complete. Sonic and Tails' movesets have been adjusted too, to change the Spin Dash and add in Sonic Adventure's homing attack. It's worth reading the directions on the hack's Sonic Retro page (the one linked in the header, above) to get the full info on how to play it.

Ultimately, Sonic 2 Adventure isn't that much different from playing stock Sonic 2 (although with different moves), while some of the tasks in S3&K:TC are new and unique. But it's also much more difficult and has that unlock system. Both games save your progress to SRAM, so you don't need save states to play them.



All of the missions are challenging. You'd think this would be easy, but it's not.

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This mission reverses gravity every time you jump!



In this level, you're constantly losing rings, and fail if you run out. And the more you have, the faster they drain!



This is one of the most interesting missions, an escort mission where you're the escort.

---



Poor Tails, always stuck following Sonic around.

---





This screen is the Sonic 2 Adventure stage select. There are fewer mission types than Sonic 3&K Challenges, but they're generally easier.



## 7. The S Factor: Sonia and Silver



**Platform:** Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** Aquaslash and others

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (encountered one crash), **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1065/>

Sonic Retro: [http://info.sonicretro.org/The\\_S\\_Factor:\\_Sonia\\_and\\_Silver](http://info.sonicretro.org/The_S_Factor:_Sonia_and_Silver)

**Description:** An OC and Sonic series C-lister Silver in a pretty darn challenging game.

I can verify to you that it is possible to get sick of Sonic romhacks. Here we are at the end of this section, and I've probably looked at 50 hacks or more, both emulated and on YouTube. The Sonic engine is excellent and does a lot of things that most programmers would never try: slopes, loops, realistic momentum, pinball bumpers, half-pipes, accurate jump angles, running up walls and across ceilings and more. It's all great, and yet I'm ready to take a break from Sonic hacks now.

It's fitting that we got to this one last. It's one of the most polished complete hacks, with original characters *and* music. I say original, but of course Silver comes from the 3D games, this is just an adaptation into 2D. His special trick is being able to telekinetically grab some things and throw them at enemies, but I couldn't get it to work very often. He can also float at a constant height in midair for several seconds, an ability which is somewhat useful for soaring over dangerous areas, although at the cost of being so high above those areas that you can't see exactly where they end. Sonia is 100% OC ("Original Character") through and through, but fortunately not an obnoxious one. There's nothing like Sonic the Hedgehog for furry OCs. Sonia has a whirlwind move she can call on at will. One thing neither character has, I must emphasize, is the spin dash move. In terms of building up speed we're back in Sonic 1 territory, where you have to either find a runway or jump at a downslope at the right angle to pick up speed.

The zones are all original, with mostly original graphics too, which is worth extra points with me. The areas are usually fairly well-made, they feel Sonic-y to me, although they're more loaded with enemies than usual. Most of the badniks come from the first Sonic game, but some have been adjusted to make them more difficult. The shots of the bee enemies, for instance, burst into flame when they hit the ground, and spread along it horizontally. Flying enemies like to attack suddenly at high speed from off-screen. It'll definitely keep you on your toes.

This is one of the few Sonic hacks that attempts to do something new with the series' trademark Special Stages. Some will supply new maps for the famous Sonic 1 rotating maze stage, but here they're replaced with a single very difficult zone, with fast enemies and treacherous, ring-draining water. Each visit to the stage sends the player through with a new mission, like collecting 50 rings or destroying enemies. I suggest using save states for these unless you're some kind of a purist. Usually, I can sympathize, but this is a very difficult game.

One thing The S Factor has over most other Sonic hacks is original music! At least I don't recognize many of the tunes, if they're borrowings from other games or not. That's a pretty refreshing feature in romhackland, where many people think nothing of finding a Yoshi's Island or Earthbound chiptune remix and just shoehorning it into the game.

[PC Magazine called it a romhack that everyone should play.](#)

[Here's Razor & Zenon's playthrough of The S Factor on YouTube.](#)



What's the deal with hedgehogs? One's super-fast, another's the "ultimate lifeform." This one's got telekinetic powers. Only Amy seems normal. Relatively speaking.

---



A situation tailor-made for Silver's steady hovering move.

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Sonia's a bit more traditional Sonic in play style. BTW, Eggman Nega is the bad guy of this one, as you can see on the monitor.

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A screen from the new Special Stage. It's one short level, but you get a new mission to accomplish here every time you earn an Emerald, and the liquid drains rings from you fast while you're submerged.



## Section: The Legend of Zelda series

And now we've come to the Zelda portion of our program.

You'd think there would be more here. Most Zelda fields appear to be basically tilemaps with connections between them, enemies and the odd puzzle. Yet this series has fewer substantial romhacks than you might expect.

The original Zelda has some notable hacks but is held back by the weird way it was constructed to fit it all, first on an FDS disk, then on a 128K cartridge. The overworld (itself made of 128 screens) is stored as a series of pointers to vertical "strips" of metatiles, each itself a pointer to a 2x2 block of hardware tiles. There aren't a large number of these strips, which are reused all over the place throughout the game world. When you think about it, this explains many of the odd elements of the game's construction. The big tree that serves as the entrance to the first dungeon, for instance, has tiles from three separate strips. The left and right tiles of the tree are drawn in such a way that, elsewhere on the same screen, they are joined together to make smaller trees. Just like how the bushes in Super Mario Bros. are recolored tops of clouds, Zelda makes clever reuse of some of its graphics so they can serve a dual purpose.

And yet, if you don't edit the overworld, you can do some surprising things with the original Zelda. fcouglin's Windows program [Zelda Randomizer](#) is basically an automated romhack builder, that takes a rom of the game and scrambles it, moves items and enemies around so as to force players to rediscover how to complete the game. Recent versions of the program can even redesign dungeon maps, removing some of the benefits of being familiar with the game. Other games have randomizers too (notably The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past), but so far few randomizers can actually reconstruct maps to the extent that Zelda Randomizer can.

Zelda II has a few notable hacks (and its own randomizer, which can even redraw its overworld), but many are excessively difficult. Most people who are fans of Zelda II (I myself am one) are not generally turned away by a hard game, but some Z2 hacks defy belief. The original is known as an exceptionally difficult game; its romhacks start from there and pile it on.

So we come to A Link to the Past, which, at first, one would think resided in a sweet spot between engine flexibility and difficulty. There even is a prominent fan-made rom editor made to work with it, Hyrule Magic. The problems are, there's a lot more going on beneath the hood of the third Zelda game than it seems at first, and the editor has been abandoned for over a decade, and contains many many bugs that, if not carefully worked around, can easily irreparably corrupt the game. It's recommended by everyone who seriously uses it that you make frequent backups, one before every major edit, because of the likelihood that the program is just going to mess up your rom.

As with the other sections, there are some games that are notable, but for one reason or another don't have writeups. I present here a few of them, to give you a bit more to play around with after you've tried the others.

### **Zelda Graphics Hacks**

Probably because it looks a smidge more primitive than the standard A-list NES game, The Legend of Zelda is a popular target for hacks that change the graphics to look a bit more modern, or just different. Here's a few:

Gameboy Graphics, by Mucilage: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1391/>

Pocket Edition, by Fantendo: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/117/>

DX, by pacnsacdave (includes Automap Plus & quick health refill, see next writeup): <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2236/>

Modernized Graphics, by Fantendo: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1295/>

Cute Zelda, by Crabby Gabby: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/26/>

The Quest of Zelda, by elric: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1290/>

### **Other Hacks**

[The Legend of Zelda Simplified](#) (The Legend of Zelda), by Megafield64:

Unlike Castlevania Simplified, which made its game fairly easy. this is a "just a little" hack. Just a little fewer enemies. Just a little cheaper items. Just a little more rupees. If you find LoZ's difficulty a little too formidable, give this one a try.

[Ganon's Curse](#) (The Legend of Zelda), by Vintagames

This one's also pretty good and is a recent arrival on the scene.

[Conker's High Rule Tail](#) (Link to the Past), by SePH and others

While one of the most technically proficient hacks out there, your appreciation for this one will vary according to how compatible your sense of humor is with it. I have to admit, it didn't connect well with me (the makers themselves say it's just for adults, which I have usually found to mean *really juvenile*), but at least it tries to do something different with the Link to the Past game engine, which is made nearly unrecognizable by its conversion into a story about Rare's most infamous character. It is *full* of pop-culture references. I'll say this much, that it must have been murder getting Hyrule Magic to construct it.

## 8. Zelda Automap Plus (The Legend of Zelda)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** snarfbam

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/796/>

**Description:** Eliminates one of the biggest obstacles to a new player getting into The Legend of Zelda by giving you an automap.

This is another of those hacks where, like Castlevania 2 Retranslated and Metroid Saving + Map, it's unquestionably useful while also astonishing that it was even possible.

People familiar with the internals of NES-era games will tell you that, while by no means restricted on the same level as the Atari VCS/2600, games of the time, they still had tremendous limitations. Usually, it's safe to answer any questions along the lines of "why didn't they do that?" with "the hardware didn't let them."

This is even the case if you've seen another NES-era game perform the trick you're asking about. The cartridge media platform is unique because, unlike CDs and magnetic disks, extra hardware can be included inside the cart. This was actually very common, and was done even in the Atari-era, to allow for bankswitching schemes to increase program size, and enhanced audio and visual capabilities. There are things that carts do in the later years of the NES' life that actually weren't possible in the early years because the custom chips hadn't been designed yet. Metroid's routes could only scroll horizontally or vertically at a time because the PPU didn't have enough RAM to fill out all the scroll buffer at once.

(For the ultimate example of this in the Atari age, check out Pitfall II, a game that makes the VCS do extraordinary things using custom silicon.)



One of those things it's hard to do is to keep an automap of the player's travels. Even the Metroid map hack I mentioned in Part 1 wasn't an *automap*, it just gave you a complete map of the game accessible from the pause screen. It didn't remember where you had been, it just showed you the whole thing. The starting room, the endless shafts and corridors, the elevators, the powerup rooms, the boss rooms, the final area and the escape tunnel, they're all visible from the moment you start to play. It's useful in helping you not get lost, but it doesn't hide places you've yet to visit, which both means it gives things away, although not really *that* much because it doesn't disclose the contents of any of those rooms, while also making it difficult to track where you've already been.

The wonderful thing about this hack is, it *does* remember where you've been, and in the overworld. Zelda's dungeons already did this, but each of those is much smaller in size, typically 20-30 rooms instead of the 128 regions of the connecting land above them. An overworld map alone is an amazing addition to the game. The original game was even considered, by Nintendo, to be confusing enough that new players should have a leg up on exploring, which was why the original cartridge came with a sealed, fold-out hint map revealing the layout of the early portions of Link's quest. While a great addition, none of the later, post-NES versions of the game sold by Nintendo come with that map, and modern players are also missing the aid of the experience and advice of school kids, shared at recess and after class.

Having an automap is of use not just in not getting lost, but also in tracking down the locations of dungeons. A lot of Zelda's more important locations are easy to overlook; the automap makes it clear where you haven't been, just look for the unseen dark areas of the map.

What is also surprising is the resolution of that map. That snarfblam could fit a graphical representation of Zelda's complete overworld into that little space, and also find enough graphics space in the cartridge's rom to display it, *and* reveal only the portions that should be visible, *and* remember it after you've saved the game... it's amazing that the hack even exists, let alone that it works so well.

As an added bonus, the hack also displays your health in more detail (1/8th hearts instead of half-hearts) and reduces the delay when you get your health refilled, just to save your ears from that terrible grinding noise.



It's Zelda! With a map that's built as you play! If you're not impressed with that I don't know what to tell you.



I mean they didn't even expand the rom, and they had to find room for the code and the graphics tiles, and display them.



I like that the map actually has the resolution to show you a bit of the contents of each overworld screen, it's not just a record of where you've been.

## 9. Zelda Challenge: Outlands (The Legend of Zelda)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:**GameMakr24

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/10/>

**Description:** It's the Legend of Zelda, remixed and trickier.

The original Legend of Zelda is such an interesting game in many ways. It was one of the earliest really substantial games to be released for the Famicom/NES, and although it came after Metroid and Kid Icarus, it's so much deeper than either of them.

What is of special interest is how well the game has aged. In terms of graphics, of course, the game is primitive even by NES standards, with its countless fields of identical trees and repeating mountain textures, and how there's only a little more than a dozen different dungeon rooms that get reused everywhere. But in terms of gameplay, it's incredibly prescient, even in ways that game designers have yet to plumb. Tevis Thompson made waves some years ago with his essay [Saving Zelda](#), in which he argues, persuasively to my mind, that the best Zelda game, of the more than a dozen of sequels to follow it, was still the first one, with its large, mysterious world, filled with optional secrets, challenging monsters, and no strict roadmap for how to tackle it. (The most recent Zelda game as of this writing, Breath of the Wild, plays almost like the director of the game had read Thompson's article and said to himself, *huh, he's right.*)

Not only is Zelda still fun to play now, but it's also adapted extremely well to speedrunning. Unlike many other games, and despite lots of research, we're still not sure what the absolute fastest route through The Legend of Zelda is. Enemy item drops appear random to most players, but turns out to be exploitable to get bombs, which are important weapons and exploratory tools, if you know what to do. Even some of its bugs have had the effect of deepening the game.

Taking advantage of all of this is one of the earliest popular gameplay romhacks, distributed by romhacking group Challenge Games, called the Legend of Zelda: Outlands.

When you start playing, it's obvious that the game means business from the beginning. The cave with the Wooden Sword, the famous one with the old guy saying "It's dangerous to go alone," is not present! Instead, Zelda hands you the sword herself in an early room in the first dungeon, so don't go around the rest of the game world before Level 1 looking for the sword. The other dungeons have something of a non-linear thing going on where sometimes you have to return to an earlier dungeon with an item found later, which will be evident later in that first dungeon.

The overworld has this kind of puzzle aspect to it, where the right way to proceed is not always clear. You'll probably have to spend a good amount of time exploring. There are also these caves where a Wizzrobe tells you "One way!" then when you come out you're in a different place in the room and can't backtrack, forcing you to find another way. There's one clever puzzle involving this game's version of the Lost Woods, where you have to not only go the right way through but also take certain exits from the screen, so that when you finally get through the screen-exit pattern, you're also in the right place on the next screen. In places like this "Challenge Games" certainly lives up to its name.

For experienced Zelda players, this is the follow-up challenge they've been waiting for. But for you less obsessive players, if all this sounds like a big bag of too much trouble, some of the more touchy aspects of Outlands, especially its restrictive Overworld, were noted by LexLuthermeister. Long after its release, he made an updated version of the hack he calls Outlands Zed Edition. [It's available on RHDN](#) and is worth checking out. Its map is much easier to navigate, and the White Sword appears in the starting screen saving you from searching for the wooden one. A few more enemies have been added to compensate, but it's overall a less frustrating experience.

[Zelda: Outlands was noted by PC Magazine as a hack everyone should play.](#)



Oh hey, horde of Goriyas! Whatcha doin', horde of Goriyas? Guardin' something important, horde of Goriyas? Why yes, I've horde of Goriyas.



"Oh, Zelda. Yeah, I was looking for that. All over I looked. And you had it here, all along. Yeah. You just... picked it up and had it here."  
Zelda: "I'm helping!"





I can't tell if it's supposed to be a "Manhandla" or a "Digdogger," but either way, it's an unpleasant surprise in Dungeon Freakin' ONE.



One thing Outlands does is take existing enemies and give them different graphics. Like these Deelers from Zelda II. They act just like the Octoroks did.



Oh, a room of Red Bubbles. They take your sword away permanently when they hit you, until you hit a Blue Bubble, use a Potion or find a fairy fountain.

They're a personal touch of evil from everyone's favorite madman, Shigeru Miyamoto.

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These are the One Way areas. You go into a cave, a guy says "One Way!", and when you come out, you're in a place where you couldn't have gotten to before, and can't go back. Outlands loves stuff like this.

---



You'll have to abandon several dungeons before completely exploring them, then come back when you have more items. Even the second quest didn't do that.

## 10. The Legend of Link (The Legend of Zelda)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** infidelity

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 3/5 (but it's a work-in-progress), **Fun:** 3/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2136/>

Forum post: <http://acmlm.kafuka.org/board/thread.php?id=7308>

**Description:**

Notices: This hack is currently still being worked on. Furthermore, this hack is known not to work on two notable flashcarts: N8 Everdrives and PowerPaks.

Y'know, when you're working on a project as large as this one, which so far catalogs and reviews well over 200 romhacks (Shh! The book titles claim only 97!) it's possible for some things to slip through the cracks. That was nearly the case of this amazing hack, which has a rather generic title that I didn't think much of at first since it's similar to that of Zelda's sequel, *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*. I had downloaded and applied the patch, but it sat in my work folder, ignored, until just now.

The thing that brought this game to my attention was the listing of file sizes of the hacked roms in the folder. All the other *Zelda* hacks had a reported filesize of 129K, like the original game. This one had a size of *two full megabytes*. Sixteen times bigger!

So I loaded it into RetroArch, and I'm glad I did. This has got to be the most extensive Legend of *Zelda* hack around, and I am including in this the ridiculous *Shin Zelda Densetsu*, a Chinese hack designed to look roughly like the SNES *Zelda*, *A Link to the Past*. But that hack is still 129K, and it also plays incredibly badly. (It's got an English translation too if you dare to try it. Just remember, I am *not* recommending it. [RHDN](http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2136/))

This game basically remakes Zelda into the image of some of its later sequels. It's practically a different game; the patch file alone is 1.4M, far overwhelming the basic rom. The overworld is twice the size of the original, *and* there's a full Dark World, the graphics are extensively hacked to look like the Game Boy editions (but in color), there's lots of new music and items, and so on.

There is so much new content in this that it's amazing, it passes easily by that line of what you expect from a romhack. It almost feels like it would have been less work to have written this from scratch rather than retrofit it onto Zelda, but it is what it is, and I am grateful to see it made in whatever form.

I wish I could be unreservedly effusive about it, but as of November 2017, there are some questionable design choices. It is the nature of video games that 99% can be excellent and beautiful and sound great, but one little thing can ruin the experience. It's possible that some issues may get ironed out in later versions (or even in a new version released before this sees print!), but I can only review what I have to work with. Still, this is definitely a hack to keep an eye on. There's so much hard work on display here that I am confident that these wrinkles will eventually be ironed out. In the meantime, you should keep in mind these things:

Buy the Overworld Map as soon as possible. It should be your first purchase (it only costs 20 rupees). Until you get it, the game's automap feature won't record your travels.

The item menu is a bit harder to use than in LoZ. It's not enough just to point to an item in the subscreen, you must select it with the A button. Also, there are three items you can have "in use" at once; select between them with the Select button. But unfortunately, there's a bug that sometimes causes Select to stop working.

The Blue Lantern only works when it's your current item, and while the B button is held. This prevents you from using other subweapons while seeing what you're doing. It's also easy to run out of magic and leave you in pitch-black rooms, and magic doesn't refill when you continue after dying. At that stage of the game, the only way to get your magic back is to find the refill fairy in the overworld. Note that dungeons are all dark here, so this means that the lantern will be your constant companion in dungeons.

The water and lava lakes in dungeons in the original game are replaced with pits here. Even slightly edging over a pit will result in you taking a fall for a half-heart of damage. Also, the Stalfos skeleton enemies are now all the sword-throwing type, which makes them much more dangerous when they show up in level 1! Be careful around them. Use Link's new ability to swing his sword in an arc to take care of them without lining up with them.

It seems that, unlike standard Legend of Zelda, bomb walls are visible. That is good, because, while the bomb inventory cap is higher in the hack, bomb pickup items give you many fewer



bombs, often just one. You absolutely need bombs at the end of the second dungeon; if you run out at the boss, you'll have to kill your character off to escape the room.

While the dungeons look very similar in layout to LoZ, there are important differences. Particularly, you need need NEED the special item in Level 2, which you find by pushing a block in one of the dungeons. (In LoZ, Level 2 was the only dungeon in the first quest without such a tunnel.)

Finding Level 3 will give you problems. First, you need the item in Level 2. Then, search for a left-going passage leading out of the starting village. Trust me, this is the *only* route that leads to Level 3; all the others dead-end eventually. (Let me tell you, the Zelda theme song gets mighty cloying when it's played for the 40th time when you're exhaustively checking EVERY OTHER SCREEN looking for the one right way.) Then when you finally find the dungeon (use the "skull" function when the dungeon map is open to help track down its location), you have to unlock the door from a different way into its screen than the one that goes to the door.

In my tests, I managed to finish Level 3 and explore a bit with the item it gives you, but I've yet to find out how to get beyond that. Good luck on your travels from here on....



That's an *animated* picture of Adult Link up there. That's called "I've got 2MB to work with, and I'm going to flaunt it!"

---



They even remade the classic Zelda file selector.



It's to this hack's credit that it looks so much like Link's Awakening DX. Unfortunately, while the bush can be slashed, the grass is not cuttable, at least not yet.



Keys can be found in the overworld, and you'll need to use them sometimes in overworld contexts.



Treasure chests, too, are innovations to this game. I wonder whether it'd have been easier just to start from scratch with a new engine?

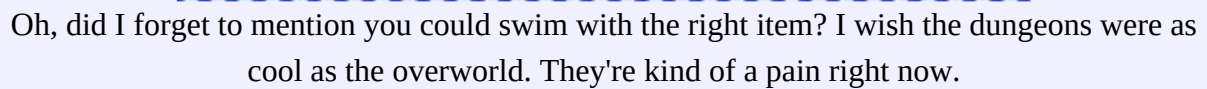
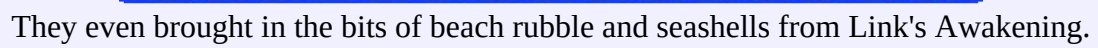




They even implemented that falling-off-ledges mechanic from Link to the Past.



There's an automap, but you have to have bought a map to see it.





## 11. (Zelda II) Journey of a Day & Shadow of Night



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** the\_icepenguin

**Difficulty:** 7/10, Stability: 5/5, Fun: 3/5

**URLs:**

Journey of a Day: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/456/>

Shadow of Night: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/728/>

Leaf of Inertia: <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1399/>

**Description:** You thought Zelda II was hard before? Well....

Note: Both versions of this hack have an Easy and Hard version. My tests were done with the Easy version. (I don't even want to guess what Hard is like.)

### Aside

We are now entering the realm of Zelda II hacks. This game, popularly regarded as the black sheep of the series, is also probably the hardest Legend of Zelda game of all, a formidable challenge even for expert players. The cost of entry for these games, in terms of commitment, is significantly higher than average.

If you decide to try these but are not familiar with Zelda II itself, you are going to have a bad time. Go play it first. It's available for Wii, Wii U and 3DS Virtual Console. But allow me to give you some advice first.

There is a kind of enemy in the Palaces (this game's version of dungeons) called an Ironknuckle. These infamous shield-bearing knights have been the solid brick wall to many player's attempts to sprint through this game. It turns out there is an easy way to defeat them. Allow me to share it with you.

What you want to do is jump at it. Not ON it, but AT it, you want to land in front, not collide with it. On your way down from the jump swing your sword. You effectively want to slice through its helmet. If you get the timing right this *always* hits, against all three colors of Ironknuckle! The Ironknuckle will be swinging its sword sometimes, so you might take a hit or two depending on your jump timing vs. its swings, but at least you'll be doing consistent, reliable damage to it.

Later on, there are enemies called Dairas. (No, not the MTV cartoon about the sarcastic teenager, that's *Daria*.) They're axe-swinging alligator people. Your shield cannot block their axe. The orange ones can be beaten by slashing low at them as they come into range, and repeating that as it bounces off your sword. Your sword range is slightly longer than its axe, so time it right and you won't get hit. The purple ones are tougher because they can *throw* their axes, and they're still unblockable. To get in close enough to strike them without taking a hit, you must usually jump over at least one axe. You can do it more easily with the jump spell, but with practice, you can leap the axes pretty easy, since Link has a bit of a float at the top of his jump, at just the right point.

In the later stages of the game, you'll face Lizalfos, annoying enemies that have been pretty common in the series ever since their introduction in this game, where they were arguably at their hardest. They have the shield-work of Ironknuckles, but the helmet-slice trick doesn't work on them! Fortunately, in many cases you can just press through and eat the damage, or downthrust over them to bounce off their heads, or use the Jump spell to leap over them, or the Fairy spell to flit over them. They can be beaten consistently though, and are worth good experience. Do a shallow jump in front of them, like the slightest jump Link can make, while pressing down and slashing. Try to imagine slashing its knees or groin. (You don't want to play fair against these guys!) This will frequently hit if done right, but it's hard to get it down. This trick is most useful in the run-up to the Grand Palace, which is infested with them. Once you enter its gates, running out lives while in there will return you to its gates and not the start of the game, so you won't have to run the Lizalfos gauntlet again.

If hearing about these tricks intrigues you and primes you for a challenge, then good luck and Dinspeed! If they make you think this one might be a little out of your league, there is absolutely no shame in not being good at video games. Read about these hacks if you wish, or move on to the Link to the Past.

## Journey of a Day

I'll admit, it might be a bit indulgent of me to include a couple of the Zelda II hacks in this book. Adventure of Link is already a game most people consider to be too hard.

I like it a great deal and have played it (the original Zelda II) to the point where often I can finish it on one "credit," that is to say, without running out of lives. But the fact that I've completed it so many times, yet can't say I can *always* finish it, should tell you all you need to know about its difficulty. This is the Zelda game with a lives system, and that really really needs it; if you were sent to the beginning after every death I don't think anyone would finish it. Well, start with that game, then add the extra spicy sauce to it that is a layer of typical romhack difficulty, and you've got yourself Journey of a Day.

The rating in the header telling the difficulty of this hack says "7." What does that mean? Most things in these books are rated 3 to 6. 3 is trivial to finish, and 6 is very hard, basically the difficulty of stock Zelda II. Well, this one goes up to 7. By my yardstick, that's Battletoads difficulty. That means, many people will simply not be able to complete this game, even if they expend serious effort. I don't know if I can finish it myself, although I've tried a fair bit.

This one is a controller-snapper. This is a game to make you kick things. This is a game to inspire ridiculous looks on players' faces. This is a game to ruin your whole day. This is a game for Zelda II experts.

Me, I like things like this, usually. This one though, I don't know.

You start with three life meter sections instead of four, and only *one* magic section. But that magic isn't going to see use until at least you get the Candle, after your *first* pass through the Desert Palace (yes, it's another of those games that expects you to return to dungeons later to previously visit unreachable areas). The experience system has been completely reworked, in such a way that it seems to almost encourage grinding.

One thing that I see as a design flaw in it is, the game requires exploration, but you don't benefit from it generally unless you find just the thing you're supposed to go to next. At the start of the game, for example, there is one town you can visit. While you can fill up your health and magic there, the progression requirement is to get the Jump spell from there. There is a particular place you cannot go to without that spell; if you spend all the time, health and lives to find that place before you get Jump, they're wasted. But if you go to the town before you get the Wreath, which unlocks it, it's also wasted time. To get the Wreath you have to explore a different cave, but you can't navigate it without the Candle. Unlike the original game, dark caves are *even darker*, you can't even see yourself in one, and if you happen to gain a level while in a dark cave *you cannot see the prompt asking you what to advance*.

To get the Candle you have to find the right route through the first Palace, which itself may involve finding a couple of dead-ends first. To get to that Palace, you have to go through a *different* superdark cave, but this one only has one enemy in it. A similar trick, it is true, exists in the original game. But it's less obvious which cave you're supposed to navigate Candle-less here. Unlike Zelda II, when you find a dead end here you probably won't have as much to show for it, since experience adds up differently and you have less health to buffer your lives against enemy attack.

The result is a game... well, I'm not going to say it's not fun because I do enjoy sometimes the Hard Climb school of gameplay. But if you're not already a Zelda II expert, and by that I mean having *multiple* clears under your belt, I would pass on this one.

(BTW, Link only jumps two blocks high by default here, he cannot leap three like in the base game, and the Jump spell extends your jump height to three blocks, not five.)

YouTube user NewHope has a playthrough of this game on YouTube, but their playlist doesn't have them in forward-going order, [so I made one that does](#). Note that his version is hacked for infinite lives. When you see how hard this is, you won't begrudge them that.



Right off the bat, you get scenes like this. Never too early to start killing Link.

---



If you can master encounters in the first forests, you'll find them great sources of experience points and early levels.

---



While it's good that the experience system has been rebalanced, it makes experience draining enemies like this Tinsuit hugely annoying. A single hit by one can drain 10 whole XP.

---





My least favorite thing about these hacks is the occasional deathtrap. If you knock this mace thrower back off that ledge, good luck getting by him without taking at least two hits.

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Here's another deathtrap. You have to land in front on that Octorok and kill it without getting knocked in the drink. The low ceiling is just the cherry on top.

**Shadow of Night**

Even if you're not made out of solid titanium and don't chew carpet tacks like candy, you might be interested in seeing the hack snarfbalam made after that one. Shadow of Night is a little better designed and has a lot more to recommend it in terms of shaking up the Zelda II formula. It's still super hard though.

The dark caves have been changed yet again: now Link is visible, but the ground isn't, so you can't even tell if there are death pits. The apparently-mandatory early dark cave on the way to the first Palace (the one with the single enemy in it) has bumps in its road, and the only way to tell if Link is caught up on one of them is to notice that his walking pace slows down when pressed against a wall! There is a clue in the first town pointing Link towards it, which is good because otherwise players would be loathe to explore that area.

Another thing to watch for is that, in towns, you often can enter closed doors, contradicting one of the little unspoken rules of the original game. A clue in the first town can help the player realize this.

One thing about this game is that, unlike the original, while enemies flash when they take damage, they are not paralyzed, not even weak ones like Bots and Deelers (the spiders that hang out in trees). They can't hurt you while flashing, and you can strike them again during that period, but they won't remain in place while you smack them to death. (Bubbles, the bouncing skulls in the palaces, are an exception, so skull farming is still a viable way to get some extra XPs.)

You might consider the following to be a spoiler, but it's playing a bit unfair with player expectations so here it is. Another odd thing the game does, visible in the first palace, is it uses the way the game hooks Palace areas together to do things like backtracking from a room to go to a different place than the route that led there. It uses this in the first Palace to present you with an unexpected boss fight.

Lest you still think this game is a pushover, it does some other things to unsettle players. First boss Horsehead (aka Mazura) has been given a much longer range with his mace, making him much harder to defeat than before.

There's a number of other things, too, that you'll probably want to consult a guide for, like: Where the hell is that last Golden Leaf? Where is that lady's cat? Why do I have to do these stupid things when I'm just trying to save the damn world?

[Here is video of NewHope's playthrough of Shadow of Night](#), in a playlist



Zelda II has these subquests you have to fulfill sometimes to get your magic spells. This one in Shadow of Night is extremely annoying; one of the leaves is in a secret overworld place.

---



Another trap. No matter how you tackle it, that Ironknuckle's probably going to get in a couple of hits.

---



Could someone please tell Mazura here maces don't do that? If you know how to beat this jerk without taking a hit, answers on a postcard please, to....

---



Here's one of those damn leaves. They're a reference to Link's Awakening, which itself was a reference to For The Frog The Bell Tolls, later on in this volume.

---





Instant death jumps, everyone's least favorite part of Zelda II, are all over the place here.

---



You do have to admire some of the effort that went into making Zelda II's sparse dungeons prettier. I can't imagine it's an easy engine to work with in that regard.

### Leaf of Inertia

Oh god, not more! A third Zelda II hack by the\_icepenguin, with the unique property that Link can't jump at all in it without using the Jump spell, which gives him his old jump back. I played a



bit of this but got dismayed with the possibility of getting stuck in places. I leave it for you to try, I'm out.



## 12. Boss Endurance (Zelda II)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** njosro

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3442/>

**Description:** Zelda II's overloaded with challenging platforming and combat. Why not just cut to the chase and play the bosses? You don't get to heal though....

Boss Endurance is, as the name implies, Zelda II stripped down to just eight fights: the bosses of each palace. Each fight gives you experience points, and the experience system has been reworked so that you max everything right before the next-to-last boss. Life and Magic levels do not refill those gauges, however. You start with all the spells but Fairy (which has no use in boss fights). You begin with all the Heart and Magic containers, which is a big advantage. The overworld hasn't been entirely removed, but has been reworked to give you some say in what order you take the fights. The keys you get from bosses are used to unlock minor perks and tools; you can get one full magic refill from one key, and the Downthrust move (necessary to beat Boss #3) with two. After beating four you can get the Raft and access to the next two bosses. After that, you get one more magic refill, then the final two. To do all of this, you get only one life. Out of your starting magic and those two bottles, you have to budget enough to cast any necessary spells. There you go. The complete itinerary of Zelda II: Boss Endurance.

What does it say that, in its way, this is *easier* than beating all of Zelda II? If you use save states I think anyone, armed with good strategies, can eventually do it. Without them it'll take longer, but then, there is technically nothing you can do with save states that you can't do without them.

And in the process, you don't have to do obscure quests for townsfolk, worry about 99% of Zelda II's death pits, search for secret overworld tiles with important items, deal with damn

Moas, or navigate more than three rooms of the epically-trolly Great Palace. And it's over with in fifteen to thirty minutes! What a deal!

Now that I'm explained the hack and why you should play it, I have enough room left to tell you some of those useful strategies!

#1 Horsehead ("Mazura"): Focus on your task. Jump about a block away from it, slash high when you're starting on the way down, then back up; the force of your sword should also push him away. Try to get a perfect fight on this, or take just one hit. If you can't use the Shield spell and aim to take no more than two hits. But if you can kill him without taking damage you're well on your way. If you lose more than half your health, start over.

#2 Helmethead ("Jermafenser"): Use the Shield spell for this. Leap at him like you did Horsie, but do shallow jumps, and slash *low* in the air. With practice, you can hit his head weak point effortlessly this way. Then the main problem is dodging/blocking the fireballs he and his floating buddies fire at you. It's hard to get through it perfectly, but with effort and luck, you won't take much damage... if you used the Shield spell.

#3 Mounted Ironknuckle ("Rebonack"): This fight can make or break your game. First, make sure to get the Downthrust from the Southern Cave, which requires two keys. This is a good time to grab the full magic refill in that cave before the fight if you need it. (Tip: if you use the Life spell to get three bars of health back while the potion is filling your magic up, you can eke out some extra magic from it!) After you've unseated the Ironknuckle, use the tactic I mentioned in the previous writeup to beat him, but watch for his swords. Casting Shield before the fight, and Life if you need it during or after, is a good idea, but don't forget to save enough for Reflect.

#4 Carock (big ol' wizard guy): You can't beat him without the Reflect spell. Try to get to one of the sides of the screen, face the other way, hold down on the controller, and win. The damage you take then mostly depends on how many times he teleports on top of you, so there's a big luck component to this one. Because beating this boss is relatively easy, it can be a good tactic to do this one before Mounted Ironknuckle, and tackle him with the benefit of higher levels.

#5 Gooma (ogre-thing): You probably should cast Shield for this, which should be cheap by now. Run in, strike low, get the hell out of there, repeat. This fight is mostly reaction speed.

#6: Barba/Volvagia (dragon): If you focus, are patient, and don't miss your jumps, you can easily beat this guy without taking damage. I suggest *not* casting the Jump spell, it makes your jumps all floaty and greatly increases your chances of taking a lava bath. Instead, stand on the middle platform by one pit, hanging slightly over the edge, and keep striking low in case he appears in front of you. If he did, jump and hit his head again. In any case then, jump to another island to

avoid his fireballs. Repeat this cycle and it'll take a while, but you can kill him without much danger. You might want to do him before Gooma because of this.

#7 & #8: Don't miss the second magic refill. You *must* use the Thunder spell, as expensive as it is, on the first boss. Shield is extremely useful, Jump is also of aid, and Reflect might save you from a hit or two. Good luck. For the last boss, of course, retreat to the left side and constantly slash down. Use Shield if you can still afford it.



We start with all the spells except the possibly game breaking Fairy. (In case you didn't know, the fairy can fly through locked doors.)

---



At level 1 in everything, Mazura here can be a challenge. I try to get into a rhythm where I slash at his head coming down from jumps.

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Rebonack is a serious knight, and he rides a serious horse.

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An oddity of Zelda II is that some of the later bosses are easier than the early ones. It's not hard to kill Barba here without taking a hit.



The game's balanced that you get up to level 8 in everything after beating the first six bosses, but there's still two to go....

### 13. Goddess of Wisdom (Link to the Past, European release)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** Francais, Omega, PuzzleDude, SePH, jammer506, community contributions

**Difficulty:** 7/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

RHDN:

<https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/662/> (original)

<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3449/> (improvement, recommended)

**Description:** A new Link to the Past adventure! That might just crush your puny human skull!

Of note, you must apply these patches to the European version of LttP. Just apply one or the other; there is no need to apply both. The original version is supplied to satisfy any reader curiosity. You really should be playing the later version.

Ah, this game. While not perfect, this is the best Link To The Past romhack I've seen, much less frustrating than Parallel Worlds, but still, very tricky. And yet, it includes an item available in the starting house, Hero's Clothes, that you can always choose to pick up to cut damage done by enemies substantially, included as a combat difficulty selector. If you're up for a challenge, leave them in the chest and play through the game normally. Unless you're really *really* careful or intend to abuse savestates like never before, I suggest you accept the clothes. They give Link his normal colors to boot.

I appreciate the game a lot because it knows to leave stuff for Link to find outside of dungeons. Just exploring in Goddess of Wisdom is likely to find you goodies, sometimes necessary goodies, sometimes just a heart piece. it does succumb, sometimes, to Romhack Zelda fever, which happens when it blocks off way too many passages than is necessary with item-related obstacles. When you look in a cave and find a treasure chest, even if there are still enemies and

challenges between you and it, you still feel rewarded. When you look in a cave and find hammer posts when you don't have a hammer, or walk down a passage and find dash rocks when you don't have the Pegasus Boots, it's *worse* than not getting a reward. This is now a place you have to remember to find again later, when you do have the right item. Done once in a while this is okay, but Zelda romhacks tend to do this all over the place, turning what should be an exploratory game into a test of memory. Fortunately, it's not nearly as bad here, or so it seems like, as in Parallel Worlds. (The worst case scenario, of course, is not getting to see the item-check obstacle until three rooms into a cave, or halfway into a dungeon.)

Here are some getting-started tips. Skip down to the screenshots if you don't wish to be (very slightly) spoiled:

- There is a second Big Chest in the escape-with-Zelda dungeon (we might call it Dungeon Zero) that you won't be able to get to, at least I don't *think* you can get to it, for quite a while, I mean, at least two dungeons later.
- The item in the first "main" dungeon is the "Goron's Bracelet," which lets you lift heavy rocks and blocks. In the standard Zelda style, once you have it, you should immediately return to the place in the dungeon you've seen before that requires it.
- That's just a specific instance of what I'm going to call the Zelda Rule: the item you just got is necessary to get to the next objective in your quest. If you're at a loss for where to go, remember the last major item you got, and try to think of places you could use it.
- One of the dirty tricks of this game that you should be aware of is disguised objects, that is, a thing that looks like one kind of thing but is really something else. If you're not looking out for that, you're going to get stuck hard in Dungeon Two. There is a trick to it: there are star symbols on the floor near the disguised objects. (I don't think stepping on them matters.)

Late in Dungeon Two is what you might call a Threshold. You've just finished several rooms of extremely tricky puzzles, to be confronted by a locked door. Behind it is a room with another locked door. The next room *also* has a locked door. If you don't have the keys necessary at this point (many hidden under pots, so be sure to check them all!), you might be on the verge of giving up. If, after going back and laboriously looking for and finding them, then returning and re-doing those puzzles, then, after opening all those doors, *you are not dismayed by the locked door beyond **that***, you might have what it takes to finish this hack.



Zelda here is easy to rescue. Opening that chest, however, you're not going to do for a long time.

---



We're not even out of the escape dungeon yet and we've got obnoxious switch puzzles to solve.

---





I see someone's been reading 1984.



Dungeon Decor 101: Why have one of a thing, when you can have hundreds?





Quiz time! Q: how do you get past this obstacle? A: Are you kidding? No one has ever gotten past this.



Flying tiles and a red bumper enemy. A swarm of bees and a room full of mouse traps. A bed of nails and a baseball bat to the face.



I present this screenshot as a memory trigger. When you play this hack, you're going to be SO ANNOYED when you figure out what you have to do to solve this puzzle. Then you'll remember this screen, and you will KNOW.

## 14. Parallel Worlds & Parallel Remodel (A Link to the Past)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creators:** Euclid, PuzzleDude, SePH

**Difficulty:** 7/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

Parallel Worlds: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/197/>

Parallel Remodel: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/956/>

**Description:** An early full Link to the Past hack, and still one of the best. Very challenging, though!

There's nothing like a good challenge hack to abolish one's notions of video game superiority. Video games, of course, go through extensive testing and QA to make sure their puzzles aren't *too* puzzling, and their combats aren't *too* combative. Romhacks don't have that luxury, and some of them wouldn't avail themselves of it if they could.

That is how we get things like the infamously difficult Link to the Past hack Parallel Worlds, where just getting from one place of the map to another is a major hassle. No Breath of the Wild-style open-endedness here, the overworld is practically a dungeon of its own, with routes and corridors locked off until you find the necessary items. Like Zelda Outlands, you don't get your sword until a chest in the first dungeon. Unlike that game, you have to go through half of the dungeon before finding it, and you can't even save the game until then! Until then you have to rely on thrown pots to inflict damage upon foes while searching for extremely well-hidden floor switches to open doors. That single ball-and-chain guard in the basement guarding Zelda is joined with several comrades, and many you have to fight without jars to toss at them.

Some enemies have what many would consider an unfair amount of health: the Gibdos in the third dungeon take *sixteen* normal sword hits to kill. Zelda players are used to a dungeon system

where there are "chokepoints," places you can't get through until you've found a necessary item in a part of the dungeon accessible from the starting room. There's the Boss Key chokepoint, the Major Item chokepoint, and usually multiple Small Key chokepoints. Here, the first dungeon has a missable item, something not generally seen in Zelda since the first two games. And it's easily missable too, and you are going to be frustrated searching the overworld for it unless you think to go back to that dungeon and seek it out. Which is not necessarily *bad*, but runs adverse to what most players are expecting from Link to the Past.

Once you get to the overworld in general, be prepared to face tough monsters, including many you normally wouldn't see until the Dark World, with damage levels to match. Those Chain Chomps hanging around do four hearts of damage to Link in his basic tunic, enough for an instant death the first time you see them!

Some useful tips:

- As I said, you can't save until you get the sword, and that's like halfway in the first dungeon. It can take more than an hour for an unspoiled player to get up to that point, so either make up for the lack of saving by using savestates or block that much time ahead of you to get to that point.
- In the cave paths leading up to the first dungeon, there is a room full of pits and fireball shooters. You have to navigate this to get to the dungeon, you with only three hearts! If you're having trouble, there is no dishonor in using savestates or rewinds in this room.
- Spikes on floors near south walls in rooms can be passed without injury by hugging the walls.
- In the escape-with-Zelda dungeon, and in general, be sure to pick up *\*every\** jar! The game can hide keys under them. (This also applies to Goddess of Wisdom, by the way.)
- Similarly, an important early key is in the hands of one of the ball-and-chain enemies--and you have to kill him before getting the Sword.
- Your magic meter naturally refills over time! For all the game's frustrating qualities, it is nice to not get up to a magic-requiring puzzle and not be denied by an empty bar.
- It seems to be standard Zelda romhack policy to let players screw themselves over by having difficult-to-obtain items in dungeons that can potentially be missed, requiring them to eventually go back. What I'm saying is, you might not want to move on from the Guardhouse dungeon without the Boomerang, it's in the big chest. Note, the first dungeon has *two* Big Keys, one for prison doors, one for the Big Chest.
- The Hammer is in Nayru's Bay, and you absolutely need it. To get it, you'll have to do a side-step of a bumper that skirts the edge of a pit at the corner, a non-obvious move that I think qualifies as a Stupid Zelda Trick, like knowing that the bounce from slamming into a wall with the Pegasus Boots can be used as a jump to get you over a gap. (You didn't know that?)
- The game is complex enough that I recommend not taking any long breaks in trying to complete it. A period of months separated my initial plays of it and my writing it up for this book, and it's amazing how much you forget. And they took out dungeon maps too, because hey, doesn't everyone have a photographic memory?

If this all sounds imposing, there exists a greatly toned down version of the hack (which is still very difficult) called Parallel Worlds Remodel. I recommend that first to new players, but it's still no pushover.

Romhacks tend not to be as exhaustively play-tested as commercial game releases, so their difficulty edges towards unfairness. A walkthrough might be useful for getting you through tricky bits. [Here is one](#).

YouTube user Nicholas Steel put together [a playlist going through the game](#). If you get stuck, try watching a likely part of the video at double speed until you get close to the part you need.



There's mummies. Floating electric jellyfish that split in two. Periodically a giant hand descends from the ceiling and tries to grab you. Link knows the Goddesses have it out for him personally.





Good news! There's now another essential collectible in each dungeon!

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Although it might be a little early to be facing the Moldorm, the fact that there's no holes in the floor makes this fight easier than in LttP.

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Here's a helpful little tip. When you get the shovel, you can generate an endless supply of hearts by just finding some suitable ground and digging around.

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This place is crawling with knight enemies. There are a lot of them in general in this hack.

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I don't think you can actually get to the sunken areas of this dungeon. I believe they're just decoration.

---



Mothula here appears immediately after you face another boss. I don't even think I have the right item to kill it!



An ominous place.



## 15. Link to the Past feature patches



**Platform:** SNES

**Creators:** Item switch: Kazuto, HP: Puzzle Dude, Day/Night Cycle: JaSp

**Difficulty:** N/A, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

Item switch with L/R: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2879/>

HP increase patches: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1529/>

Day/Night Cycle: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/155/>

**Description:** A few little things about A Link to the Past, each addressed by a small programming change.

Not all of these patches are compatible with each other, but some are used, in modified form, by other LttP patches.

**Item switch with L/R:** Allows you to use the L and R buttons to cycle through your items, saving you a time-consuming trip to the inventory screen. That may not sound like much, but for some rooms that require the use of multiple items, this helps to cut down on the annoyance of having to pause click click click select unpause use pause click click click click select unpause use use use pause click click click....

**HP increase & item start patches:** Of special interest to people who aren't good at action games but want to play classic Zelda, this collection of patches simply starts you out in the game with help. You can choose to begin with either 10 or 20 hearts, and/or the best armor (reduces all damage to Link to a quarter of normal), the best sword, or with a special "super," better-than-best sword. What's more, these patches are generally compatible with each other (20 hearts *and* best armor!) and also other hacks, so you can apply them to super-tough Parallel Worlds and greatly

reduce the frustration of playing that game, or put them into Zelda Starring Zelda and start with a buffed-out princess.

**Day/Night Cycle:** This is a mostly cosmetic feature that, simply, adds a time of day to the game. It's shown at the top of the screen, below the status display, progressing at a rate of roughly three game minutes to real-time second. That's a pretty quick progression, but Link to the Past flows pretty fast, so you might be surprised what you can do in a day. The game also adjusts the palette of the overworld to match the time, although the effect is a bit subtle. Watch for screen brightness to change on the hour.

Other than the visible game time and the brightness of the above-ground world, the game is unchanged. Merchants are open 24-hours, houses never lock their doors, and enemy patterns are unchanged. A lot of the appeal of time-of-day systems is how the game world changes with the rise and fall of the sun, so you might consider this patch to be fairly pointless. Still, there it is.



The darkest it gets with the time-of-day patch...





...compared with the brightest it gets.



Fancy seeing you here!



Some minor glitches and spelling errors don't spoil the novelty of the villagers crying "Help help, it's that princess what kidnapped Link!"



Video game protagonists don't catch no even breaks.  
Welcome to the club, Z.

## **Section: Mega Man (Rockman) series**

Capcom's Mega Man games have fallen out of favor with the powers-that-be at that company as of late, which is a real shame because after Nintendo's own properties there is no more iconic NES-era character. In Japan the character is called Rockman, which may seem nonsensical at first, even after learning that before being retrofitted into a combat robot our hero's name was just Rock, counterpart to another housekeeping robot named Roll (geddit?), but makes sense when you realize the major bosses of the game basically are components in a big game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Traditionally, each boss has a specific weakness from all the others that make beating it a cinch, but in the better games in the series, there are multiple ways to go about tackling the bosses. Your standard Buster weapon is weak, but quick-firing, and works against all the bosses, and sometimes it's good to go with an underpowered weapon that's easier to hit with.

One important note for patching these, some patches expect to be applied to the US versions (Mega Man) and others to the Japanese versions (Rockman). If you patch the wrong file, it's not going to work well, if at all.

If Mega Man games are your thing, you might also want to check out [Mega Man 2: Revenge of the 8 Robot Masters](#), by DurfarX. In difficulty, it is a less extreme modification than Rockman No Constancy and is thought to not be excessively difficult.

## 16. Rockman Endless 2, 3 & 5 (Mega Man 2, Rockman 3, Rockman 5)



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** Misty (2), Rock5Easily (3 & 5)

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

Rockman 2 Endless: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2294/>

Rockman 3 Endless: [https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/478/-](https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/478/)

Archive: <http://dragonsbrethren.slickproductions.org/rock3endless.html>

Rockman 5 Endless: [https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/460/-](https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/460/)

Archive: <http://dragonsbrethren.slickproductions.org/rock5endless.html>

**Description:** It's Mega Man and Mega Man and Mega Man and Mega Man and Mega Man and....

These are hacks close to what suffices, to me, for a heart. These hacks take the original games they are based on, chop them up into small sections of platforming goodness, and send the players into them randomly, turning them into skill-based, scored action tests. All the levels of the game are fair game for supplying these pieces. At the beginning of each is placed an In teleporter; at the end is an Out teleporter. You are given only one life, a single energy bar, and no E tanks, but start out with all the weapons and utilities of that game unlocked and with full energy. You are scored by the number of "screens" you pass, with scrolling areas counting by their length.

Solid knowledge of that game's subitems is essential. In the Rock/Mega Man fashion, many situations are made trivial, or at least much easier, when you use the right weapon or item. That works for a while, but your subweapons are never refilled except with the random drops produced by defeated enemies, so it's a good idea to stop when you encounter an area with



endlessly regenerating enemies and fill them all up, for there's no telling what area will be coming up next. Your health also carries from area to area, so try to keep it as full as possible too. Every so often (I think on the order of 30 screens) the next area will be a boss room, so you'd better hope you have whatever that villain's weakness is.

These hacks are, of course, based on the similar modes in Capcom's legendary retro titles Rockman/Megaman 9 and 10. They are something of a revelation. I get the feeling, when playing classic Mega Man titles, that the basic levels are maybe just a bit too short, relative to the number of subweapons you get, and the game only really gets rolling when you get to the Wily Stages (and the areas before it), where rationing weapon power becomes much more important. These marathon hacks require that you always use your weapons efficiently, because you never know when you'll wish you had that specific weapon or else be called to do an extremely difficult platforming feat with just your blaster, like doing Quick Man's laser gauntlet without the Time Stopper, or Heat Man's high speed disappearing block trial without Item 2.

Note that Endless 2 requires the American version of the game (Mega Man 2), while the others need the Japanese version (Rockman 3 & 5). Despite that, the first hack still seems to be called Rockman 2 Endless.

If this appeals to you, you might want to try the fan game [Mega Man Endless](#).



The way into this section of Flash Man's level...





...and the exit from it. If you took the right-hand path through the above area, you skip having to face that walker.

---



Mega Man just blew up. Cause of death: spikes.

---



Robot Masters are always nerve-wracking in Endless games. If you kill one you tend to get an energy capsule.



This one's from Rockman 3. The graphics in that one were pretty good!

## 17. Megaman 3 Prometeo (Mega Man 3)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Jriva

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I encountered a place where I had difficulty getting a ladder transition to trigger), **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3241/>

**Description:** A fun and clever remix of Mega Man 3, of normal difficulty.

There isn't really a whole lot to say about this one, except that it's just a solid game. There is a place for that in the world, isn't there? When I play these hacks to consider them for inclusion, it is rare that I get far into them. Time constraints, and overwhelming difficulty, conspire to keep me away from the game's deeper reaches. That was not the case here; I managed to clear out nearly all of the Robot Masters in this one before being forced to move on.

I was able to do that because it's not overwhelming in its difficulty like many hacks. The bosses seem unchanged from the normal game, so your preferred order from stock Mega Man 3 will still work, but the levels themselves have been reworked greatly. The Rush items, obtained after beating specific bosses, come rather in handy for getting extra items, making it maybe a little easier to stock up on E-tanks and extra lives. Whether you use save states for this one is, of course, up to you. I had a deadline to meet, so I used them. There are a small number of places where they helped me greatly, but in retrospect, most of those places could have been made up for by taking things a little more slowly, or farming for powerups in an easy place, or using the Rush items to get through. It is a lot like the original in that respect, and it feels rather like an alternate version of Mega Man 3, which is not a bad thing. It is harder, mind you, but the difficulty can often be mitigated.

Mega Man 3 is considered by some where the series began to go into decline, but really, it might be the most fully-realized Mega Man game. You reenter four of the starting eight stages (which



are also remixed in this hack) and effectively reflight the bosses from Mega Man 2 with different weapons, a gimmick none of the other NES Mega Man games tried. I recommend it, and this hack of it.

[YouTuber Amy Rose plays through Megaman 3 Prometeo in this video.](#)



Why is the big mean robosnake so slithery? How does that stop Mega Man? Those are just the touches that show Dr. Wily cares about his work.

---



The life of a Grenade Man is short and melancholy.



"Why get menaced by a generic machine, when it can look like a cat and throw balls of killer yarn at you! That's the Dr. Wily Difference™!"

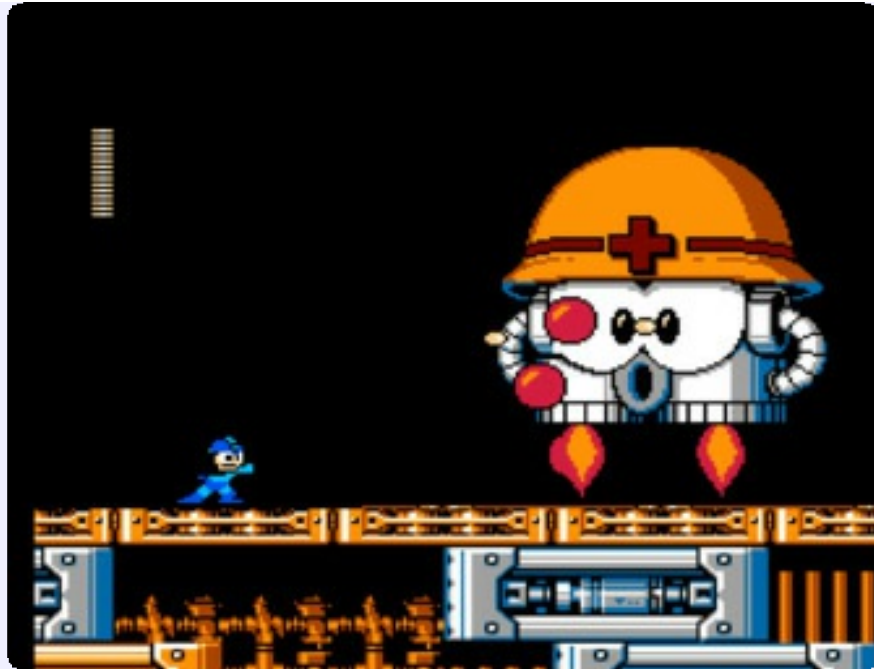
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Snake snake snake snake snake snake snake SNAKE!  
([Vi Hart: How to Snake](#))

---





One of those lowly Metools finally made it to the big time.

## 18. Rockman No Constancy (Rockman 2)



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** IKA

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/321/>

**Description:** A very nice hack of Rockman (that is, Mega Man) 2, where the bosses, levels, weapons and their abilities have been mixed up considerably.

Everyone knows how the Mega Man games work, right? I have to explain anyway, just in case. This is called *establishing*.

Every game in the (original) Mega Man series lets you choose the order you play the main levels. When you beat the boss to a level, you get their weapon. That weapon is good against one of the other bosses, so once you beat one of the bosses with the default weapon, it's the entry point to a cycle, where one of the remaining bosses is easy to beat using it. Of course, the chance of you picking the right level is one in seven after you beat the first boss. But presuming you picked wrong but still beat the boss, the chances of the boss after that being easy increase to one in three, and from there on the rest of the bosses, once you pin down their weaknesses, fall like robot dominoes.

That is the popular perception. Sometimes it's more interesting than that. In Mega Man 3, there are actually two such cycles, and all bosses are somewhat weak to their own weapons, which is useful when you have to fight them all again in the late-game boss gauntlet. In Mega Man 2 the Metal Blade is useful even against some enemies it's not "strong" against, because of its ability to fire in all directions and its low energy use. And some of the weapons have alternate, platforming-related uses that make it easier to get *to* a boss.

But here is a question for you: how is a player supposed to know which weapon beats which boss other than through wretched trial and error? Word is that one of the reasons the Japanese series is

named Rockman is in reference to Rock, Paper, Scissors. Well, okay, but does "Heat" beat "Flash?" Does "Quick" beat "Crash?" And rightfully "Snake" should beat everything, but it doesn't, and there's gotta be something that beats it ("Needle").

Well, Rockman No Constancy changes that; the cycle of weaknesses is different. Actually, the weapons themselves are different. They behave in different ways, both in boss fights and when you get them. And the boss AIs are different. And their stages are different, I don't just mean different maps but the themes and music are different too!

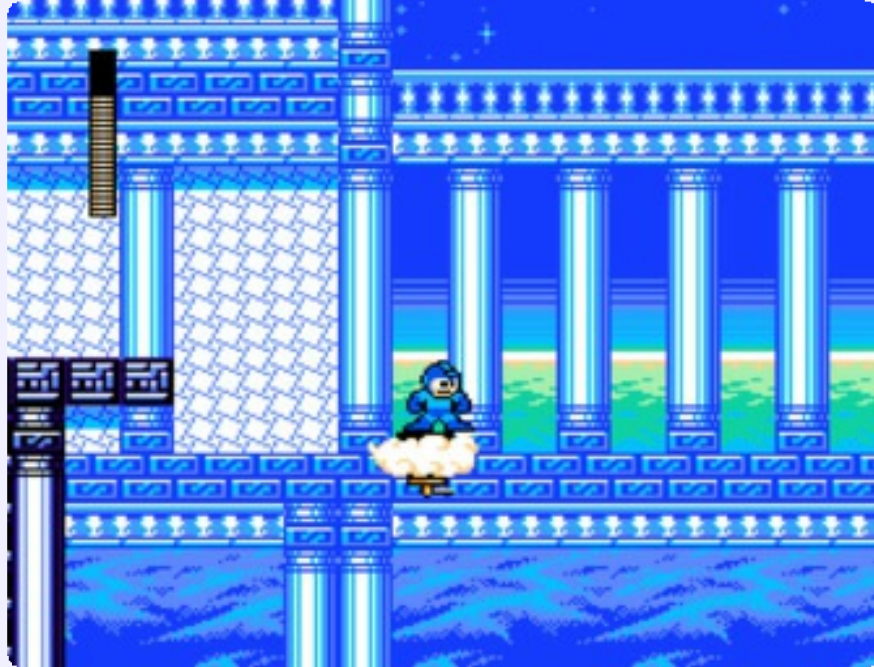
IKA basically remade Rockman 2 into an alternate version of itself. Even the levels and music are different (see below). So much has changed, I wonder if it wasn't in fact meant to be named Rockman No *Consistency*. Part of the fun is finding out just what's been changed. Woodman's level now has an ice theme! Flash Man's has a space theme but with Heat Man's old fireball throwers. The levels have been kicked up a notch in difficulty: if Mega Man 2's Normal mode was a 4, and its Hard mode was a 5, Rockman No Constancy is a 6: still beatable generally, but you'll die a lot more often. Save states help out a lot if you choose to utilize them. Some people on the internet say it's been made much harder, and I've seen one person state that it's even of "Kaizo" difficulty. It's definitely harder, and the design is a bit worse than the original with more cheap hits, but it's not insurmountable. You will have to practice at it though, especially if you don't use save states.

Heat Man's fight is especially weird because it's different than the others. Touching Heat Man is instant death, and after you shoot him he'll rush at you. Most of the time he'll aim for where you're standing, meaning you have to try to jump over him. But, randomly, he'll jump to just in front of you instead where you'd go if you were trying to avoid him! It's maddening when the margin for error is so slim, but it's definitely successful at changing up the Mega Man formula.

Note: The archive comes with a hard version of the patch. It reduces the invincibility you get after being hit drastically, so you take much more damage. I cannot recommend it, but it's there if you want to try it.

A note on music: Something I've not mentioned yet is the romhack propensity to use remixes of music from other games, which is one solution to the one-man-band problem, that few people have the skill to do absolutely *everything*, that's generally unavailable to indies. I feel like I should make special mention of the theme of Air Man's stage from this game, which is a great Famicom remix of Valkyrie's theme from the arcade version of Valkyrie no Densetsu.

[Here is video of Ness Kirby's playthrough of Rockman No Constancy on YouTube.](#)



Not only is the music based on Valkyrie, but the art to Air Man's level uses tiles from Kirby games.

---



A nighttime stroll in 20XX.

---



You might be asking yourself, why are there spikes down there, buried in the ground? And why are there also single blocks in the air, supported over them? You must be new here.

---



For Rock to reach a robot rabbit requires a rapid rocket. (Okay it doesn't, but saying that would mess up my alliteration.)

---





They can't use the name "Hot Dog" for this wolf anymore.

## 19. Mega Francesca (Mega Man 4) and Magical Rockman (The Krion Conquest)



**Platform:** NES/Famicom

**Creators:** Korxtendo, Kozakurainko

**Difficulty:** 4/10 & 7/10, **Stability:** 5/5 & 4/4, **Fun:** 4/5 & 3/5

**URLs:**

Mega Francesca: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2196/>

Magical Rockman: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2159/>

**Description:** A couple of graphics hacks, but remarkably weird ones.

Which Wrench is Witch?, a bad Mega Man/Krion Conquest fanfiction by Boors Julie

Chapter 1: Switched Worlds

"Dr. Light read the newspaper. While Dr. Wily had escaped and was nowhere to be found, that had to be put aside for the time being. A new threat had arisen. Someone calling himself 'Dr. Cossack' had taken a page from Wily's playbook, and was threatening the world with his own eight Robot Masters. He didn't like to ask it of his housekeeping android Rock, but in the past the only force capable of countering such threats had been Rock retrofitted with combat apparatus. He mused, not for the first time, at what it was about housekeeping robots that made them so suitable for battle operation. *Something about having to clean toilets*, he figured.

"He put down the paper and stroked his beard in thought for a moment, which he had had ever since his youth as a Unix admin. He got up from the table and walked to Rock's recharging pod, preparing to open it. The lights flickered, a gust of steam blew out, and the doors opened. Dr. Light spoke. 'Good morning Rock! I hope you slept well, I'm afraid I have another mission for-- who the heck are you?'"

"As the steam cleared it became evident that Rock wasn't there. In his place was a young woman in a stereotypical witch's outfit, dressed in red. What's more, she was definitely not a robot. She stretched, gave a yawn and looked up. 'It's about time you opened those doors, I could hardly breathe in there! It looks like the summoning spell messed up. If you wouldn't mind telling me, where is this?'

"Roll walked in the door to see Dr. Light starring flummoxed at what looked to be a witch lady standing in Rock's recharging station. She stammered, 'A-am I interrupting something?'"

-

Vic Tokai, who released more than a few crazy games like cult favorite Clash at Demonhead, made a game in Japan called Magical Doropie. In it, there's an alien invasion of Earth that is opposed by a witch girl. It's almost a prototypical anime premise, and the game looks the part, with lots of anime-styled cutscene art. The anime storyline and art are just about all there that's really interesting about the game--wait, there is one other thing. Doropie controls almost exactly like Rockman/Mega Man, her jump height is the same, the pause screen is very similar with selectable powers that change her color, the bug-eyed robot enemies could have been built by Dr. Wily himself, and Doropie even looks a bit like Rock, just in red, with a big hat, and pixel breasts. It plays a lot like someone either directly ripped off the Rockman engine, or made something that purposely works a lot like it. Mega Man's challenging, but that's mitigated by the fact that you can choose what order you take the levels in, and most of the hard areas can be bypassed by using the right weapon or item. Doropie's game is completely linear, and while she has several alternate weapons and abilities, she starts the game with all of them, and, knowing this, the game expects you to make full use of them right off the starting block. What I'm trying to say is, Magical Doropie is a very hard game. Unreasonably hard.

Strangely enough, the US got a localization of Magical Doropie, with a lot of the cutscenes shortened or removed. It was renamed The Krion Conquest and the heroine's name was switched to Francesca. Without the cutscenes the game was even less interesting, and it didn't help that they didn't tone down its crushing difficulty.

These two hacks take what was just a sneaking suspicion and going the rest of the way with it. Mega Francesca puts the witch girl into Mega Man 4, complete with all of her robot playalike's abilities, meaning she gets their weapons as she beats them. Magical Rockman does the same thing but puts Mega Man in The Krion Conquest.

Magical Rockman contents itself with a graphics change. Mega Francesca also changes up some of Mega Man 4's levels, just because. They haven't been made anywhere near as bad as Magical Doropie's, thankfully, but there is one major difference you should be aware of:

*Doropie/Francesca can't breathe underwater.* As long as she's submerged, a breath meter will be displayed, and she loses a life if it runs out.



"What kind of messed up world is this?" Rock asked himself as he prepared to fight. "The city looks nearly destroyed. Did Capcom make a 'Rockman Forces' game or something?"

---



"Look at that robot, standing up there and dropping bombs from a position of safety. That's not Dr. Wily's *modus operandi*, how is that fair?"

---



"I remember Fire Man, but when did I beat Freeze Man, Ball Man or Shield Man? I'd say Wily ran out of ideas, but after Top Man and Ring Man I'd assumed that happened years ago."

---



"What the heck? That bird weapon took off half my health! Who'd make a gun that kills its wielder?"

---





"Well what do you know, I can fire up! Why didn't I try that before? Probably because it makes me look like a dork."

---



"This really sucks! I'm starting to think that I got put in the wrong game here. How could anyone stand to play this?"

---



"A giant gatchapon machine? And I thought the robot cat was bad."

MEANWHILE...



"Robot penguins? How do alien invaders even know what penguins are?"





"Tricky platforming I'm used to, but these amoeba-bots are new."

---



"These robots should be challenging for me, but I'm losing a lot less health than usual. Maybe I should consider staying in this world...."

---



"I'm a little creeped out that there are little dolls of ME scattered here and there in this place."

## Hacks: Other

Here are a few other things that may be of interest, that I didn't have time to give more attention to:

[Rygar Ultimate](#), by Jimo, is a hack of one of the weirdest popular action games on the NES. It changes the maps around a bit. There are some intensely frustrating jumps, but they're nothing save states can't help you through. Overall the changes are not huge though, which is why this is in the also-ran section. Mere level packs are not generally enough for inclusion, although many are entertaining.

[The Guardian Legend, SRAM Saving Edition](#), by 8-bit fan, does away with the greatest flaw of Compile's Zelda-ish shooter, the insane password system. Or rather, it keeps it in as an option but also lets you save. Best used with physical cartridges, of course, since you can save state on emulators. [The Guardian Legend Secret Edition](#) is a level and map hack of the game. Would you like both in one patch? [Here you go](#).

Ducktales 2 has a patch in this book, and is generally overlooked anyway, but you might be interested in [Duck Tales Deluxe 2013](#), which greatly expands the game.

We mostly covered Castlevania hacks in Part One, but a recent arrival is [Ultimate Castlevania](#), by Khefz, which both tightens the game up a bit (hearts are less common, you keep the leather whip a little longer) while making the late game a little easier (later enemies, including bosses, do less damage). And meat heals you completely instead of just for six bars of health. It looks like an interesting set of changes, so have a look!

We also had a look at a Zombies Ate My Neighbors hack last time. ZAMN is a fantastic game that needs more love. It happens that another romhack for it, that may be even better, came out not long ago, [ZAMN: The Sequel](#), by Droter, but with lots of help. If you liked Oh No! More Zombies Ate My Neighbors, you should definitely have a look.



## 20. Arkanoid Revised (Arkanoid)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Nesrocks

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I noticed one level, #10, had invisible blocks, but it's in such a way that it doesn't affect the game much), **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3649/>

**Description:** Taito's Breakout clone (with powerups), made considerably more playable.

Hey, you know Breakout? It's probably the best-known pre-Space Invaders arcade game, other than Pong. You used a rotary control, a free-spinning dial with stops at the ends of its range, to move a paddle to bounce a ball up at a wall, to try to destroy it brick by brick. Back in the Shareware age of PC software, it was a popular thing to recreate by independent developers wanting to make a few extra bucks. The best Breakout clone (better even than Atari's own return to the concept, Off The Wall) is the arcade game Arkanoid, made by Taito. It introduced new kinds of blocks, floating enemies that make the ball's path a bit more unpredictable, and most importantly, powerup items hidden in some of the blocks. These ranged from marginally useful, such as Catch and Split, to nearly essential, like Laser and Extend. One of them, Break, opened a hole in the side of the screen that sent your paddle, sorry, spaceship "Vaus" in the game's scenario, out of the board entirely and into the next.

In the porting to the Famicom & NES, the game survived mostly intact, just with a graphical downgrade. To help replicate the arcade experience, Arkanoid came with its own rotary controller to plug into the console. This is nearly essential to play Arkanoid well on a console, because, without it, the Vaus has a certain top speed, and the ball's velocity can easily overcome it, forcing you to read the ball's motion much further in advance to have a chance of hitting it before it falls out, costing you a life. The game can be played with a control pad, in case the rotary controller isn't available, but the game is much harder without it, and not as much fun.

Even with the rotary control, however, the game is dang hard. To clear a level the normal way, every block that can be destroyed must be destroyed. Silver blocks take extra hits; Gold blocks can't be destroyed, but are usually placed so you have to bounce the ball around them to get to the normal blocks they guard. There is a continue code, but if you don't know it it's not going to do you much good, and if you enter it wrong, you'll start a new game, and in so doing destroy your chance to continue from your last level.

Arkanoid Revised, another interesting improvement hack from Nesrocks, changes a few of these things. For starters, with a gamepad you can now move the Vaus quickly by holding down button B. The speed at which it travels is difficult to control, but then, that's largely the point, an easy-to-control speed wouldn't get across the screen fast enough. If you are playing through emulation you can probably configure your emulator for mouse control and thus get through this issue, but it's nice to have the option.

The Continue code has been replaced with an explicit offer to let the player continue from the title screen. Arkanoid is a game where continuing is practically essential; only speedrun-caliber players are going to be able to get through all 33 rounds on one credit, even in the NES version, so hiding such an essential feature behind a code is bad design, fixed by this hack.

Most interestingly, "Breaks," the game's skip-the-level powerup, have been made into a resource instead of an occasional gift from the random number god. When you start a game, you can see at the side of the screen three "Break" capsules in an inventory display. You can use one of those at any time by simply pressing Select, which activates the usual side-of-screen opening and escape opportunity. Further, Breaking out of a round not only immediately ends the current stage but skips the next one as well! Players who realize a troublesome stage is ahead can skip it by Breaking the level before, while players in a hard level may decide to tough-it-out instead of Breaking if the next round is relatively easy. Break capsule powerups collected in a round do not activate immediately but go into inventory. And finally, Breaks do not reset when continuing, but only upon starting a new game, so that potential exploit has been handled.

It's an issue with many arcade games that their required difficulty doesn't translate well to home play unless the game is substantially diluted with player helps. The choice of the home version designer is, keep it the same and earn points for accuracy, or make concessions for playability. Nesrocks, by choosing playability, has arguably made NES Arkanoid into a better game.



The levels are generally unchanged. It's not a bad idea to keep starting over and replaying Round 1 until you get an extra Break capsule in it.



Taito made both Arkanoid and Space Invaders. These guys even found their way into Bubble Bobble.



This level is different. I don't know if it's a patching error or what, but the normal blocks in Round 10 are invisible! Fortunately it doesn't matter much, they're all in the blocked-off area.



Died again. Arkanoid is a relentlessly difficult game. Fortunately you don't lose your Break capsules if you continue.

## 21. Alex Kidd in Radaxian Rumble (Alex Kidd in Miracle World)



**Platform:** SMS

**Creator:** JaSp

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2599/>

**Description:** A series, and a console, that's gotten little romhacker love gets a mod of one of its best games.

Note: If you use a standard IPS patcher to apply this it's likely to fail. Instead, use the Java program [KiddEd](#). Load an unmodified Alex Kidd rom into it and then choose Apply Patch from the file menu.

These books have been pretty Nintendo-heavy, I'll admit. Part of that is because, for whatever reason, Nintendo systems just seem to have gotten the lion's share of hacking attention.

Look at it this way. If one player in a thousand has the magic intersection of technical skill, fan obsession, drive, energy and free time to make a romhack, then that favors systems that had large audiences. Meanwhile, more recent popular systems, like the PlayStation, are a bit trickier to hack in terms of graphics data. Once your modification starts to touch model geometry, you get into places where direct byte-fiddling won't do and you need special tools, whether you make them yourself or get them from other fans.

The combination of ease of modification (relatively speaking) and popularity has meant that the majority of romhacks I've seen have focused on Nintendo systems. That doesn't mean hacks for other systems don't exist though. Here is one.

Alex Kidd games have always played as kinds of also-rans to Mario. Both are platformers where block manipulation is important. But where Mario, calling back to the Mario Bros. arcade game, strikes blocks from beneath to break them/reveal their contents/defeat enemies standing on them, Alex punches them from the side with his freakishly huge fists, utilizing his powerful "Shellcore"



martial art. Or so I seem to remember. Details of Alex's backstory are not so firmly burnt into the mind as is the Mario lore. Once hit they smash open revealing their contents. Blocks at that time, in video game land, were like presents, containing all kinds of money and powerups. Alex can't catch a break though, so some of his blocks contain evil wizards that want to kill him. The block gods are capricious.

There were several games starring Alex Kidd, but significantly, many of those don't play like his signature game, Alex Kidd in Miracle World. Alex Kidd in Hi-Tech World was a very different kind of game, actually a reskinning of an anime tie-in. Alex Kidd in Shinobi World basically shoehorned in the character (he was kind of Sega's mascot at the time). Alex Kidd in The Lost Stars is, for the most part, a straight-forward action game. Only Alex Kidd in Miracle World and Alex Kidd in the Enchanted Castle (for Mega Drive/Genesis) are what we might call Kidd games proper, with blocks, shops, infuriating Rock-Scissors-Paper matches, and, towards the end of the game, surprisingly mean traps. I suppose they're in there by the reasoning that it's never too early to teach kids that life is suffering.

Alex Kidd only got two games before his spotlight was stolen by Sonic the Hedgehog, so it's only proper that he get an unofficial sequel in the form of a fan-made romhack game. The game is, unfortunately, of standard romhack difficulty, which is to say a level or two higher than the original game, and Alex Kidd in Miracle World was no slouch in that department. You start out with seven lives, but will probably use them all quickly, especially if you aren't an expert. Still, it is refreshing to play what amounts to an alternate universe Mario, playing by some of the same rules, but that does lots of weird stuff of its own. If you haven't played one of the "real" Alex Kidd games yet, go do that (especially Miracle World), then once you've finished it (good luck), come back and try your hand at what amounts to a "second quest."

Special note should be given of the music, which is unexpectedly excellent for a romhack like this. I recognized a good version of Sonic's Marble Zone and a good rendition of one of the many Lemmings tunes among the soundtrack.

The word is a fan is working on another Alex Kidd level replacement hack. [There is video of a demo of it, with download instructions, on YouTube](#). There is another Alex Kidd fanhack out there, called [Alex Kidd in Miracle World 2](#). It's easier than Radaxian Rumble, but may be unfinished.

[Video of Alex Kidd in Radaxian Rumble.](#)



The initial descent area in Radaxian Rumble is considerably more complicated. If you fall into that little lake up there you're trapped and can't escape without dying.

---



This is one of the Sukopako Motorcycle areas that most people end up playing on foot. Notice that here, there are pits the cycle can fall into.

---



I don't know why the words DO IT are in so many places in this hack.



Those skull blocks are annoying! The yellow ones just freeze you in place when broken, but the pink ones, if you touch them, make a death spirit appear and chase you down!

## 22. 8 Eyes With Simon Belmont (8 Eyes)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Elbobelo

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 3/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1400/>

Forum thread: <http://acmlm.kafuka.org/board/thread.php?id=3623>

**Description:** The long-lost NES Castlevania that never was? Not quite, but you gotta admit, it fits like a glove.

Castlevania was released in 1986 and was a great hit for Konami, spawning sequels for decades and recently an anime show. One thing about Castlevania is that it's *distinctive*. It doesn't feel like a game that was inspired by Super Mario Bros. It has a specific way of going about things. It sets up conventions for itself, and the weird/amazing/wonderful thing about them is it's not obvious where they came from. Things like:

- Simon Belmont jumps in a specific way. Unlike Mario, he can't control his jump at all once he leaves the ground.
- He has a powerful, long-ranged main weapon, but it only attacks straight ahead, so there are subweapons that make up for that, each able to hit enemies in a different way that makes up for the whip's limitations.
- Every enemy has a specific way it can overcome Simon's strengths; none of them treat him to a fair fight.
- Items are hidden in blocks in walls, but also in candles, for some reason.
- Platforms are very obvious, made out of stone cubes that it's difficult to mistake for a piece of background.
- Secret bonus treasures that appear in out-of-the-way places, by performing specific tricks.
- Staircases! There aren't many other platformers with modal staircases to climb like these.
- The game has a strong sense of place. There's a map screen between levels with no gameplay use, but establishes the castle as having a structure beyond what you see on-screen. As

observed by Jeremy Parish, the game foregrounds and backgrounds are consistent with each other, to create the impression of architecture greater than the size of the screen.

The great thing about a thing as stylish and innovative as Castlevania is, when another game borrows its conventions, it's obvious. Take the 1987 game Wizards & Warriors, from Rare, which in its way plays like a crazy riff on Castlevania. While hero Kuros in no way jumps like Simon Belmont, and his main weapon has a pitifully short range, there are a ton of other similarities: the pointless map screen, background objects like torches that conceal bonus items, enemies that gleefully take advantage of Kuros' limitations, secret bonus treasures (they even rise up out of the ground the same way!), and subweapons. You can even get a shot multiplier for the subweapons.

Rare at the time had excellent designers who didn't *need* to borrow from Castlevania to make a good game. They were new to the platform, and took inspiration from a prominent early hit. Later W&W games don't borrow nearly as much from Castlevania.

Another game that takes after Castlevania, in quite an extreme way, is Seta/Thinking Rabbit's 8 Eyes. It's got the stiff jumps and subweapons of Castlevania, staircases that work almost exactly the same, and it's also got something of a sense of place. It's also an even more frustrating game though, with high-damage enemies it's very hard to avoid taking a hit from no matter what you do, and a secret "order" you're expected to play the game's eight levels in if you want the bosses to be reasonable. One of its biggest problems is that 8 Eyes' hero Orin's sword is not nearly as far-reaching as Simon's whip, and it's much weaker besides. You do get a bird, Cutris the falcon, that you can control semi-independently, using him to take out foes and search for secret items in walls. Where 8 Eyes is fun it's largely because of the bird, but it's not enough to save the game from the C-ranks of the NES library.

Elbobelo decided to try to rescue 8 Eyes in their hack by going the extra step: he puts Simon Belmont into the game. It's not just a graphics hack: with the change comes Simon's whip, which is strong even at its weakest level and can be made even stronger, and Simon's subweapons, including the Boomerang and Holy Water, both nearly as strong as they were in the original game. You also get the bird (whose controls have been improved slightly), since some secrets and puzzles require it to continue. The combination of Simon's stronger arsenal and Orin's feathered death drone drops the difficulty a lot, but it's *still* a frustrating game. But at least it's a more playable now.

The hack was never completed, unfortunately, the last beta was released in 2013.

[YouTube user The Beauty of Grind played through this hack.](#) He talks during it, but has a low and soothing voice. He isn't of the Obnoxious Morning Radio Host school of YouPotato.

---





In 8 Eyes, every boss has a specific sword (or whip in this case) they're weak against. Unlike Mega Man though, you lose your old sword when you change areas. My advice is to do India first.

---



Simon's whip is a much better thing to fight with than Orin's sword, plus you get to use his bird too! The bird is essential to search for secret items and clues.

---



One thing about 8 Eyes is, throughout the game, there are clues like this one. At the end there's a logic puzzle where you have to set eight jewels in a proper order. These messages are clues to that order. You can review the clues you've gotten by pressing SELECT from the level select screen.



I always liked the fact that, after you beat a boss in 8 Eyes, you sit down and have tea with them. Tea served by a skellington, in this case. I'm sure this makes some statement in regard to colonialism, but I can't figure out exactly what it is.

## 23. Return of the Sorcerer (Final Fantasy III US)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** Mike Ferrell & others

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 3/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2207/>

Homepage: <http://rotDs.webs.com/>

**Description:** An example of a particular breed of romhack, the fandom ultra-mutation.

Take the story of Final Fantasy VI. You probably know it if you're reading this. Terra and Locke and Edgar and Saban and company all traveling the world to halt the designs of the evil Emperor Geshtal and his lackey Kefka. (*Innocent whistling.*) The fans have played it many times, sometimes to the extent that they want to play a variation of it, and other fans to the extent that they want to make such a variation. These kinds of gameplay hacks are all over the place; like duh, they're the focus of most of this book series. But sometimes people go a bit farther than that, and they change the storyline around too. At this point, things start to get weird.

In one of the short writeups before sections back in Part One, I mentioned Dragoon X Omega and its sequel, a repurposing of the engines of Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy respectively, to tell a completely different story. The result, well, it didn't really engage me, what with all its grimdark dark grimness. Of course, that's just me. I love Mario and Kirby games, light and fluffy things. There's enough sadness in my life as it is without experiencing more of it in my entertainments. I understand other people might think differently. You can't completely control what kinds of things you find enjoyable.

Dragoon X Omega presents an original world, with characters and scenarios invented by its creator. For all its edginess, it definitely has one virtue: it is *new* edginess, created. Return of the

Dark Sorcerer is not like that.

There is a tendency, when looking at something like this massive fandom crossover, to roll your eyes. Well, for me to roll my eyes at least. Or I did at first. There was something distasteful about how it gleefully appropriated things from so many other games. Professor Oak working for the evil Empire? Moogles fighting Prinnies from the Disgaea games?! Cloud filling in for Locke??! What, where, how, and why, the heck?

Well, there is an answer to that question, I came to realize. And it is, why the heck *not*?

There is something about storytelling now that's different from how it was back in the Olden Times, the fact that, if you want what you've written to be taken seriously, by Serious People, you usually have to create it all yourself. Of Homer, that ancient Greek storyteller, we don't think he invented his heroes and gods, but he told stories about them anyway. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is basically Christian Bible fanfiction. Many cultures are built off of a shared body of stories, myths, that take cultural figures and appropriate them, utilize them, put a different speaker's words into their mouths. It is an audacious theft that yet leaves everyone richer.

The writers of today, they don't get to do that so much anymore. Copyright periods in the U.S. now extend for *ninety-five years* beyond the death of the author. As of this writing, the year is 2017, meaning that things written in the U.S. by people who died in 1922 and earlier are just now entering what is called the *public domain*, owned by all. (Note, though, that copyright is a complex topic, there are other ways for works to enter the public domain besides this, and I Am Not A Lawyer.)

Comic fans like to call the big DC and Marvel characters modern-day myths, but they are hardly that because they are owned by corporations who decide what stories get to be told about them. Whatever actual mythologizing is done, it's being done by fanfic writers, people who throw literary decorum to the wind and just write what their fevered minds imagine. It is easy to mock their amateurishness, but I do not mock the impulse to do it, or their audacity in charging ahead and getting it done.

And so it is with Return of the Dark Sorcerer, which in addition to taking these characters and doing with them what the hack creator sees fit, also takes on the many varied difficulties of rom hacking. Sure, it's in the service of a fan game with bunches of characters swiped from other sources, but at least it's being done out of genuine enthusiasm, and not just because the property is owned by this particular corporation, or being overseen by this specific executive, whose vision of what constitutes a valid continuation of a work might not agree with anyone else's.

That said, the game is more of interest to people who have already played all the way through FF6. While several people worked on the hack, it's far fewer than the whole team that put



together the original game, and it, unfortunately, shows in places. I don't even want to guess what Aurora, the OC replacement for Terra, is supposed to be wearing. It's a fan game through and through, along with all that that implies.

Note: This hack is not only still undergoing heavy development, but is full of memes and injokes besides. I cannot vouch that its content is completely inoffensive, only that a lot of work has gone into it (around seven years!), its play is interesting or at least hasn't been wrecked, and it's kind of entertaining with how willing it is to throw so many properties in together into one thing. In addition to the things already mentioned, there's Dragonball Z, Kingdom Hearts, prior and later Final Fantasy games, other Square games and, as a boss later, Mario.



The next thing he says is actually "People call me the Magitech Prof!"

---





Apparently, Moogles and Prinnies have it in for each other. I kind of like that detail.

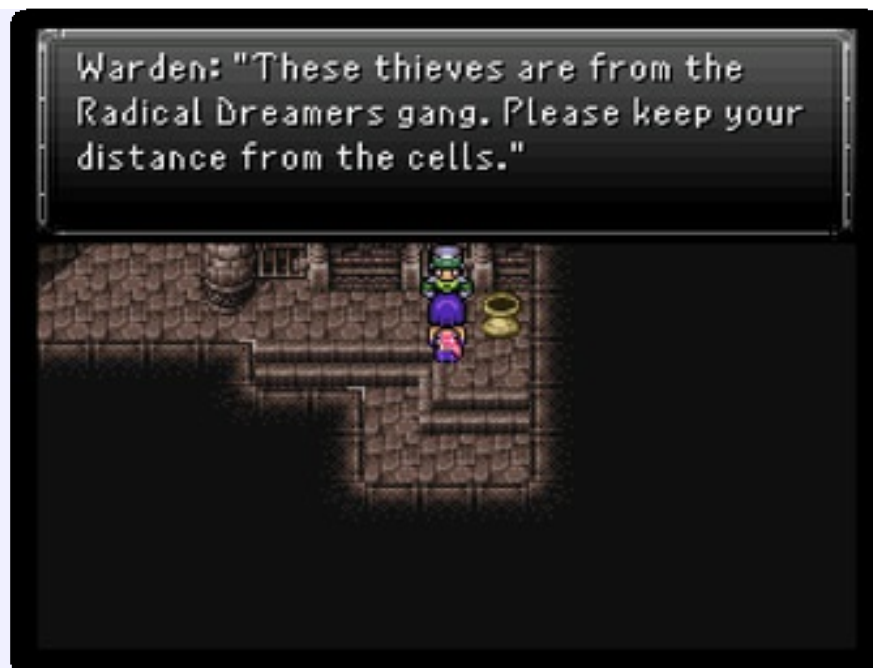


I have to say I've never been a Cloud fan, but his 16-bit sprite is cool-looking.



Cloud is moonlighting in this romhack while he waits for Square to milk the franchise some more with *Final Fantasy VII 358/2 Before Dirge of Advent Cerberus Crisis Children*.

---



I have to admit, their in-joke game is strong. We'll find out more about Radical Dreamers later....

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"Sometimes, if you leave a treasure chest alone and come back to open it later, you will get a better item."



This is also a little-known "feature" of Final Fantasy VI, the fact that, if you leave certain treasure chests unopened and come back later, they'll have better stuff inside.

There's no way to know which chests those are! It's annoying!

## 24. Adventure Island Abridged (Hudson's Adventure Island)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Nesrocks

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3385/>

Homepage: <http://nesrocks.com/blog/adventure-island-hack/>

**Description:** The fine NES platformer Adventure Island (which is really Wonder Boy with a different character), but with only the hardest bits.

Adventure Island is a crazy game with a crazy history. In actuality it's a licensing of Westone's Wonder Boy to the Famicom/NES, but with a cartoon version of then-spokesman for Hudson Soft Takahashi Meijin ([Wired article about him](#)), that guy who could press a button sixteen times a second, as the protagonist, although really the only marks of similarity are a baseball cap (with the Hudson Soft bee mascot on it in close-up artwork) and, I guess, that weird crooked thing his mouth does? I mean there's got to be some explanation for it, right?

The game was unusually polished for an early Famicom release and got a US release where the main character's name was changed to, um, "Master Higgins." The game was popular enough to get at least five sequels itself, not all released in the US, all completely separate from the Wonder Boy franchise, which would go on to Monster Land and Monster World, and eventually get two different recent indie remakes. The Adventure Island sequels went in an entirely different direction from the later, platformer-RPG, Wonder Boy games, being solidly Mario-style platformers.

The first Adventure Island game, the one that's barely changed from Wonder Boy at all, starts out challenging and gets more so. Hudson was clearly trying to give players their money's worth

because the thing's got as many levels as Super Mario Bros., 32, also divided into eight worlds of four levels each, but unlike SMB it's got no warp zones, just a continue code. It also has such tricks as a strict food-based time limit that's got you constantly searching for time-extending fruit, a one-hit-kill damage system, a major powerup (the skateboard) that's usually more trouble than it's worth, and lots of secret item eggs, with many that are hard to find, and even sometimes one that contains a bad item, the energy-draining Eggplant. In the final world its difficulty goes on to exceed that of Super Mario Bros., and, I would say, even that of its Japanese sequel, here called The Lost Levels. It makes strenuous demands on the player, who must run and jump through complex layouts of enemies and obstacles, often at top speed, in order to keep grabbing enough fruit in time to survive.

What this hack does is cut to the chase. The original game's 32 levels are reduced to just nine. A lot of the game is the same level, repeated, but with extra stuff added each time to increase the difficulty. Here, instead, only the hardest version of each stage is present. To counter that, some things were changed to make the game a bit fairer. The health meter was a glorified timer in the original game, so Nesrocks made it so that you actually lose health (though a lot of it) when you hit an enemy. You always get the axe item after you die as well; weapons are very important to give Higgins a chance at survival, but some levels in the original don't even *have* weapons. And the hidden eggs are no longer hidden. In case you want to play the levels under the old, harder conditions, choose "Original" from the title screen; the leavening is applied by choosing "Arranged."

Hack creator Nesrocks hasn't made many hacks, but the ones he's made are all very nice, showing good design sense, and making extremely taxing games, no pushovers by any means, at least doable by mortal hands. The Super Pitfall 30th Anniversary Edition hack from Part One was an Nesrocks production, as is Arkanoid Revised, elsewhere in this volume.





Imagine doing this level without a weapon. I did it, once, or at least I tried.

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It's an egg, and that's good! Unless it contains an Eggplant, that's bad.

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That surprised look on Master Higgin's face is a good match for the player's when confronted with this Wall of Bird.



Hudson, this is simply unacceptable.

## 25. Crystalis Rebalanced (Crystalis)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Red X

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/922/>

**Description:** Crystalis is a cult classic for the NES, but with some baffling design decisions. This patch corrects some of those decisions.

Let us take a moment to consider the nature of an action role-playing game.

Generally, these are games where the primary play is of a real-time, action-based nature, requiring some amount of hand-eye coordination. But when you do connect with an attack against some slime or orc, the amount of damage you do is determined by statistics, usually from a combination of character basis, experience level possessed and equipment used. And when enemies strike you, likely, your statistics decrease the damage you take, or sometimes even say you missed, to your mounting frustration. (Somewhere, Secret Of Mana stops and notices its ears are itching.)

In a pen-and-paper roleplaying game, there isn't much of an analog for those action parts. Your GM might do things like demand you make decisions under time pressure, or with distractions, or figure out riddles with your own brain instead of your Intelligence score, but these are occasional diversions. In an action RPG, you're relying on your controller dexterity, fundamentally; your stats just determine how many times you have to hit, or how much you must avoid attack.

An advantage to this system is that it serves as a form of difficulty balancing, a way to unstick stuck players. A player with lesser action skills that absolutely cannot make headway can grind for experience and money for better equipment, and so make it so they don't have to inflict so many hits to progress, and can suffer more hits before dying. A player with better action skills, or

more practice at the game, can rush through, or even speedrun, and not bother with grinding. While mandatory grind is generally a bad thing, a small amount of grind in these cases can grease the wheels a bit, and enable a wider variety of player to enjoy the game.

But there are limits to how far this should be taken. What if the stats say the player has *no* chance of harming the opponent? What if the game adds up the numbers and they say zero? Should this even be possible? The makers of Crystalis said: yes.

If your level is not high enough, in Crystalis, you can do no damage at all. You aren't given the option to let your action skills make up the difference, your attacks will just bounce off. And maddeningly, the main time that this tends to happen is in boss fights, which, as in the standard RPG scheme, cannot be escaped from. Basically, the rest of the fight has become just an elaborate, interactive death animation.

Crystalis Rebalanced takes this aspect out of the game, it removes the wall that prevents you from making *any* headway. It changes a few enemy weaknesses around too, for interest's sake, but while it is possible to be immune to *some* of your weaponry, you should be able to win out somehow given what you would have in a normal playthrough.



These slimes were first seen (in smaller form) in SNK's ludicrous Athena.

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They look like hats!



## 26. BS Zelda & BS Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets playable patch & translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creator:** Many people

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I saw it crash once), **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

Homepage: <http://bszelda.zeldalegends.net/bszelda.shtml> (Note: instructions for patching and playing are on the website, and are worth reading, as there are many versions of each patch with different features.)

BS Zelda Map 1: <http://bszelda.zeldalegends.net/bs1files.shtml>

BS Zelda Map 2: <http://bszelda.zeldalegends.net/bs1m2files.shtml>

Ancient Stone Tablets: <http://bszelda.zeldalegends.net/sekibanfiles.shtml>

**Description:** The two Satellaview Zelda games, patched, translated and made available for a new generation of players.

### About Satellaview

If anything could be considered *lost* Zelda games... well, there's Navi Trackers, unavailable to play except in the Japanese release of the Gamecube version of Four Swords, but it's just a minigame. Then there's the disk version of Zelda II, which has substantial play differences from the cartridge versions, but it's not hard to find. There's the beta of the first Zelda, but that was never intended for public release. I hesitate to call the CDi games "real" Zelda games.

But these two games, BS Zelda and BS Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets, are the closest there are to genuinely lost Zelda games. They were made for the Satellaview add-on for the Super Famicom,

a special piece of hardware released in Japan for playing games downloaded from a satellite broadcast channel called St. Giga. This was an expensive bit of hardware: not only did you need a special package that contained devices that sat both beneath the Super Famicom and within its cartridge slot, it also had to interface with a satellite tuner, available separately and costing tens of thousands of yen, although they could be rented, *and* pay membership fees on top of that. Quite a lot of money for an add-on for a game system.

In exchange, however, you got access to broadcasts of game data for your Super Famicom that could be saved to the included 8MB "memory pak." There were a fair number of these games, and most of them would never be made officially available in any other format. When the service went down in 2000, the sole remaining traces of all those games left to the public were the data saved to the cartridges. Hackers, game preservationists and others continue to this day to try to rescue the data off of these carts, in some cases hacking them to produce playable game images. The story of St. Giga and the Satellaview are way outside our scope. One place where recovered data is discussed is the website [Satellablog](#).

### **BS Zelda & Ancient Stone Tablets (AST)**

The two Satellaview Zelda games were more than just games released through the service. They were only intended to be played at certain *times*. Each of these games was divided into four separate downloads, each broadcast once a week before a special satellite radio broadcast. Once the game data was finished being sent out to the people playing, the radio program would begin. The game itself was played with a time limit of a little under an hour for each section but synced up with the radio broadcast, which supplied background music and voice acting, with hints, notifications of special event and other announcements made during the game. Some of these events were things like infinite bombs or arrows for a limited period, mysterious magic destroying all enemies on the screen, or the arrival of fairies that could be caught to regain health. The voice acting was supposed to represent characters from the games, like the Old Man from Zelda's caves, Sahasrahla, or Zelda herself, and added a cinematic tinge to the game.

Once the time limit expired, the software saved the player's progress automatically and the session would end, after displaying a synopsis of the player's adventure. The following week at the same time the quest would resume, with a new section of the game program downloaded and using the save file of the player's accomplishments from the previous week. The overworld was divided into sections, and while you could go into the areas of past weeks, various roadblocks would prevent you from entering later areas and dungeons early. The game was designed that you had more than enough time, if you hustled, to complete each week's two dungeons, with a bit of extra time left to search for secrets. The game *could not be played* outside of its scheduled broadcast, so participants were playing a four-hour long Zelda game spaced out into four

sections over a month, with no opportunity to practice or do-overs. This is not what I could call an optimal play experience.

Yet, the format was unique and could be considered a predecessor of the kind of time-sensitive play present in *Majora's Mask*. It remains one of the few Zeldas to offer the player a *score*, indicating how well they played. Your score in the first game was your rupee total at the end of each week. In the second, it was what you managed to get done, with various bonuses and penalties from things like rupees on hand, how much damage you took and how many times you died. While players were at home, struggling to solve Hyrule's puzzles and collect the necessary items, all over Japan other players were doing the same thing, effectively engaged in a big competition with each other, with no player having an edge. Each game was broadcast at least twice, so if you didn't do well the first time through you'd have another chance eventually, although you'd have to start from the beginning.

Because of the time limit, which could offer no respite because the game had to remain sync'd up with the broadcast so it ran even while paused, the games are a bit easier than the standard for Zelda at the time, to give the player a better chance of keeping up. BS Zelda is like a graphically-improved version of the original Legend of Zelda, but with a simpler, and much more linear, world map. Ancient Stone Tablets is a remix of Link to the Past, but with extra things hidden in its overworld, but without the Dark World gimmick and a much condensed Death Mountain area (necessary since players had to finish two dungeons *and* find and defeat Ganon within time).

Both games are available from the hack's homepage in many different versions. The most complete preserves the time limit from the original game, and using a special "MSU-1" feature in some emulators even offers a recreation of the radio broadcasts so players can get the whole experience. BS Zelda is a single rom, but Ancient Stone Tablets is actually four separate roms that you play in sequence; after each one, you must manually rename the file your emulator created representing the game's save data to match the name of the next rom, so that it'll get loaded when you begin that session. This may be too much for some less-technical players.

There are also versions that remix the game into something more resembling a normal Zelda game, so you can play those if you like if all that time limit stuff sounds a bit too hardcore for you.

Note: You should follow the directions in the patched rom archive closely, as this is a more involved hack than usual. Think of it as a journey with playable versions of BS Zelda and Ancient Stone Tablets at the end. Particularly, if you choose to download and use the sound files that represent English versions the original broadcasts, you have nearly a two-gigabyte download ahead of you, and you will probably need to use a special emulator; RetroArch may not cut it this

time. For the current version of the BS Zelda rom (the one that comes pre-patched from the site), you do not need the audio broadcasts to play the game successfully.

Here is some further information on each game, along with some tips:

### **BS Zelda**

All the main roms (the smc files) from the website are pre-patched for the no radio version of the game, ready to play.

Each of the four stages of the game is played over 50 minutes, from :07 to :57, and not a moment longer. If you're focused on your task, it is not horribly difficult to finish all the dungeons in a stage with time to spare. There is always the danger of getting hung up on something minor though, like not finding Level 2. Many dungeons contain essential items, and if you don't find the necessary item in a dungeon, or the entrance to the dungeon itself, you're stuck until you figure it out, helplessly watching the clock count down. It definitely adds some excitement to the game, but it also introduces the real chance that you could actually lose the game. You can always try again though; the patch's current version even adds a Zelda-style file select screen for tracking the progress of up to three players.

The content from the radio program is delivered in one of two ways. If you're playing with a rom with the MSU-1 patch, and have the huge sound files for the radio broadcast at hand, and are playing a supporting emulator, and have everything set up correctly, you can play an English version that generally matches what Japanese players experienced. When there's something important the broadcast has to tell you, the game will actually pause and let you listen to it. If you're playing with the "normal" rom instead (which is not what went out over the air, it's been hacked to make it playable without a Satellaview, among other things), then when there would be a broadcast message the game will still pause, but a large text box will appear presenting the important information to you. You cannot page past it or skip it; it appears on-screen for the same period of time as the voice acting was being played in the broadcast. Most people should have more than enough time to read the whole thing before it disappears on its own. If you've already read it and just want to get on with the game, consider using a fast-forward feature if your emulator has one.

Unlike The Legend of Zelda, your rupee cap is a lot higher than 255. There is not nearly as much issue here of missing out on money because of the cap. On the other hand, in the first map at least, you won't have a lot of uses for your extra time other than farming money. Watch out for a timed event where all defeated enemies drop fairies for a limited time. If you defeat several enemies in a row without taking damage, they will start leaving behind blue rupees instead! You can farm two or three hundred rupees during this period before it ends.

If you've played through Zelda 1, you'll have a general sense of the lay of the land in the first map. It's different (and much smaller) but familiar. Dungeon contents are roughly similar to that of Zelda 1, but the layouts are completely different.

Each leg of your quest has two dungeons. Try to make sure you complete both in each stage. If you fail to finish one you can still make up for it in later stages, but of course, you'll have other goals competing for your time. Still, if you end up missing a dungeon in the first couple of days, it's not hard to pick up the slack. The last day has a couple of fairly large dungeons though. BTW, Level 9 is just a few rooms.

The Silver Arrows must be found to win the game. The game gives you two clues to its location, one in the timed hints/voice acting, one from a dungeon hint guy. Other than that they're a bit tricky to find. I'll say there is something weird about the room they're found in.

Your score at the end of the last chapter is the number of Triforce pieces you got, whether you beat Ganon and your rupee total.

By the way, you will find on the site two different "maps" for BS Zelda. The second map rearranges things for a different experience. Think of it as like the original game's Second Quest.

### **BS Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets**

BS Zelda is kind of a mishmash of original NES ideas with SNES-era graphics. Ancient Stone Tablets, on the other hand, is very close in presentation to Link to the Past. It probably runs on the LttP engine.

AST actually consists of four separate roms. Once unzipped, their filenames should be `bszelda_ast1.smc`, `bszelda_ast2.smc`, `bszelda_ast3.smc`, and `bszelda_ast4.smc`. When you finish the first stage, RetroArch will create a file named after the rom, but with the extension `srm`, in its saves folder. The filename is how it knows which save file goes with each rom. When you're done with a stage, go into the saves folder of your RetroArch installation and rename the save file so it matches the filename of the next rom in the sequence. So, if you're going from stage one to stage two, the rom you played was `bszelda_ast.smc`, you'd change the name of `bszelda_ast1.srm` to `bszelda_ast2.srm`, then you'd play `bszelda_ast2.smc` to continue your game.

The clock in this runs from :06 to :56, so again you have 50 minutes in each stage to find and complete the two dungeons and any ancillary objectives.

BS Zelda freezes the game during the voice acting part of the program. Ancient Stone Tablets had the actors speaking while the player progresses in the game. If you're not playing the voice acted version, the patch makers implemented the script as part of a running ticker at the bottom



of the screen, with lines displayed roughly at the time the actors would be speaking that text in the show.

The old style of special event (unlimited amounts of some item, destroy all on-screen enemies, temporary max hearts, etc.) is still present, but now, once in a while, you'll be alerted of a new happening in the game world. For example, in stage one, at some point, Zelda will be attacked by monsters in a specific area. If you can get to her in time and defeat the attackers, you end up rewarded with 300 rupees.

Dungeons have a bit more going on in AST, and they contain many more hidden rooms with extra rupees and carry capacity upgrades in them, and unlike Link to the Past, bomb walls are not usually clued in by cracks in the walls. Sometimes you can find those areas as unexplored rooms the map, or a bombable route might appear there as if were an ordinary passage.

Scoring is a bit vague, but I *think* it's foremost a measure of major and minor accomplishments, with bonus points added for rupees-on-hand and subtracted for damage taken and lives lost.



New features are added to these hacks from time to time. When I first played through this, I don't think the file select screen was there.



To make up for the time limit, most rooms have fewer enemies they would have in Zelda 1.



Here is one of those messages that interrupt the game occasionally. There is no way to skip past these, you have to wait until they go away on their own.



Some rooms are nearly identical to their Zelda 1 counterparts.



The trees over there are a roadblock that can't be passed without the Blue Candle, which you can't get until Day 2.





Patra here appears much earlier in BS Zelda than original Zelda. They aren't as tough here, thankfully.



There's an event on Day 2 that gives you unlimited Candle usage for a while. It's an excellent chance to search the woods for secret staircases.



After every day you'll get this results screen. You should have two Triforces per day you've played, or you've got some making up to do the next day.

---



Before and after each day, you'll get some hints about the upcoming challenges.

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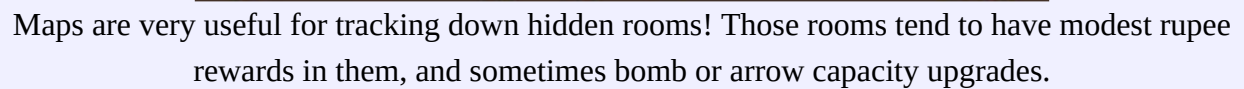
This is an early screen from BS Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets (AST). The Big Bag is just the game's name for the normal Zelda inventory screen.

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That text at the bottom of the screen cycles as you play. It tells you what the voice actors would be saying if you were playing along with the broadcast.

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Late in Day 1 you get a message saying Zelda is in trouble. If you save her in time and escort her home, you get a big 300 rupee bonus!



In each day there's a mole character hidden somewhere in the world. If you find him and go where he says, you'll find an underground passage with lots of rupees in it.





At the end of each day, you'll get this screen. There'll also be a message reminding you to migrate your save file.



Zelda AST has weather that changes during the game. While it's raining you can't use bombs outside. It puts out their fuses!

## 27. Secret of Evermore Two Player (Secret of Evermore)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** FuSoYa

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (sometimes one character gets stuck in a door), **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2141/>

Homepage: <http://fusoya.eludevisibility.org/soe/>

**Description:** The game Square of America gave us instead of Seiken Densetsu 3 is better than people remember. This patch makes it better still.

The details of Square's failure to localize Seiken Densetsu 3 for western audiences are mentioned elsewhere in this book. They didn't leave North America entirely bereft though, they gave us a game, which is similar enough that it may be running on the Seiken Densetsu 2/Secret of Mana engine, specifically made for the US, and apparently developed by their US branch called Secret of Evermore.

Secret of Evermore is an unusual game. In play style, it's very very much like Secret of Mana, a real-time, action RPG with stats working in the background to determine damage (and misses, and critical hits). Your characters, just two here, work the same way as your three characters do in SoM. The spell system has been reworked into "Alchemy," in which you mix materials found in the game together in order to produce magical effects that you can use in battle. As you used each alchemy result, you gained in experience using it, so your character's magic skills became customized with play style. Another surprisingly unique thing about the game is how each of the game's lands has different currency. The talons you earn early in the game are worthless in a land that takes gold coins unless you find someone to convert currency for you.



Whether the story is to your liking or not, one way the game is definitely inferior to the Seiken Densetsu games is in the number of players it supports. Secret of Mana supported three simultaneous players. Even though it required a device called a "multitap" to host the third controller, I can vouch that it was a great experience with three players all working on beating up enemies, casting spells, and getting each other healed before they got killed. There were annoyances, sure, in that any player accessing menus froze the game for everyone, but that was infrequent enough that the game still flowed pretty smoothly, overall, and remained fun. Players looking to Secret of Evermore for more of that would be disappointed. While the player's party consists of two characters, the player can only switch between them. The unplayed character is computer controlled, A second controlled plugged into the system is just ignored.

I couldn't tell you what it takes to convert a game such as this, which was never intended to host more than one person, for multiple players. We saw with Ducktales 2 Two-Player that the result can still be fun, but requires rethinking your approach to playing the game. I can't say that Secret of Evermore is glitchless, but plays surprisingly well. Each character's status box gets a little number in it that indicates which controller is playing it. Either player can become the "leader" by pressing Select at any time, causing the camera to shift to their character. I wonder if the similarity to (and possible reuse of?) Secret of Mana's game engine played a factor in the hack's creation.

[An interview with its lead programmer](#) indicates that the reason Secret of Evermore's original team didn't make the original game support two players was due to kinks in the system, that they had encountered situations play-testing Secret of Mana where players could get trapped and, being a new team, didn't want to risk that happening in their game. Since the standards are a bit lower with romhacks, it's possible that FuSoYa's patch is right in its niche, a thing that was bound to happen and fits perfectly in its role. It is still sad that players couldn't play the game with two people back when it was new; it's possible that a lot of people would remember it more fondly today.

[Here is an article about the making of Secret of Evermore, Square's only US-made RPG.](#)

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Notice the character status bars at the bottom of the screen. The "1" and "2" indicate which controller is playing which character.

---



It's easier to fall into these holes in a two-player game, I think. You have twice as many steps that might trigger the trap.

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An advantage in a 2P game is the dog can be sniffing for items more autonomously, and the player can tell you when something's found.

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All it takes is one player to step on a chute, and both will have to pay for it.

## 28. Ducktales 2 Two Player (Ducktales 2)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Ti

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 3/5 (glitches and weirdnesses from making the game do what it wasn't designed to do), **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2141/>

**Description:** It's Ducktales 2! Woo-hoo! Supporting two players simultaneously! Again I say, Woo-hoo!

Oooh what a weird thing. I have to admit, I'm including this partly because it's amazing that it even works. Ducktales and its much rarer sequel are solidly one-player games. That a second player can be put in, and work surprisingly well to boot, is amazing on its face. Not a lot of 8-bit games are open to this kind of shenanigans, where sprites are limited and spare cycles a precious resource.

I am not a font of knowledge on the inner workings of Capcom's Disney games, but it's generally assumed that they run on the same engine, or a similar one, to that which presented their 8-bit Mega Man games. Two of the games in this series are based on the cartoon Chip 'N' Dale Rescue Rangers, which supports two-player co-op play. If they are running on the same engine, that seems to imply some level of two-player support is possible there. Maybe this hack builds off of that? I have no information here.

I can't say that the game works flawlessly. You're going to have to make special allowances for two-player play. Player 2 is, entertainingly, represented by the hero of another Capcom Disney game, Darkwing Duck. His gas gun has been traded for another Pogo Cane (even if it doesn't look like he's pogo-ing). At least it gives the Terror that Flaps in the Night a second opportunity to spread his 8-bit wings.

Two-player platformers, unless they're carefully designed, are susceptible to a host of issues: how to keep both players on screen, how to keep players from getting in each others' way, what to do if one player loses a life, what happens if a player loses all lives, and so on. This hack solves these problems by *not solving them at all*. The camera doesn't even try to keep P2 on-screen. If P2 goes off-screen, he immediately can't be moved until P1 scrolls him back on. This includes if P2 goes up or down through a transition, but because if P1 transitions first he can't be moved, P2 must always lead the way through those places. The players cannot interact with each other directly, but if a player manipulates an object so that it overlaps the other player, that other player immediately freaks out and starts flickering up and down super fast. If either player dies, both players are reset to the checkpoint.

Yet, there is still something unquestionably fun about this hack! It's just a blast running through the game with Darkwing tagging along, something which never happened in the cartoons. Maybe this is a bit of fan opinion sneaking in? Fun is a very subjective thing, heavily reliant on personal context. At least there's a chance that, for whatever reasons I find it to be fun, you might find it to be fun too. And there are places where it can be helpful to have a Player Two around, specifically during boss fights, where having two attackers participating can make fights easier than they'd be otherwise, provided that both of you are good at dodging attacks, that is.

Here is a really important note for a change. Many copies of this rom that you might find will not work with this patch! This is one of the few patches in either this book or Part One that is made available in xdelta format (see the material in the introduction to the first book), which requires [its own patcher](#) and, furthermore, will fail if the rom you are patching is not byte-identical to the one it expects! The version the creator used had been processed with the program GoodNES 3.14, which subtly changes its header in a way that works the same in most emulators, but xdelta patchers will detect. This makes patching this rom a bit more difficult than usual. You should be familiar enough with command line tools to be able to run "goodnes rename" then "goodnes fixnes" in the directory of your rom. That should get it into a form that will match the hashes on the RHDN page, and so patch without further issues.





I've already talked about fanfiction enough in this book I think. This is pretty cool, though.

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The camera follows Uncle Scrooge all the time. If Darkwing scrolls off-screen, he'll be stuck, immobile, until Scrooge returns.

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If either player runs out of health, both are evicted from the boss fight. On the other hand, you'll often have more opportunities to attack with two people.



Both players get their own extra lives. The question of why 1ups look like the players is, they're actually "Good Mojo Dolls." Huh.



The true joy of this hack is comedy roleplay with friends:

"I am the terror that flaps in the night!"

"Could you stop bein' moody for a wee bit and just open the treasure chest?"

## SECTION TWO: FAN TRANSLATIONS

Here's a couple more that weren't quite up to the general interest level of the others, but I felt deserved mention.

[The Namco version of Famicom Star Wars](#), by Gil Galad, is notable mostly because of its bonkers take on arguably the most well-known pop cultural property of the age. You meet characters in a different order, you fight Darth Vader several times but sometimes he turns into monsters. (One of those monsters is Gyos, from the Gamera monster movies!) Be warned that the difficulty is very high on this one. Oddly, it feels a bit like Alex Kidd in places, with its speeder sequences that failing out of doesn't kill you but leaves you to do the rest of the course on foot, and in its maze sections.

I considered a writeup of the Chrono Trigger fan continuations Crimson Echoes, [Flames of Eternity](#) and [Prophet's Guile](#). [Here is an interesting interview from 2014 with one of the people who was making Crimson Echoes](#), ZeaLitY at fansite Chrono Compendium, discusses their project's demise, the unlikelihood of it continuing, and problems with all these hacks, being, that they are unlikely to work on real hardware.

## 29. Paris-Dakar Rally Special! translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** MrRichard999

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 3/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/2231/>

**Description:** Likely the most insane auto racing game ever made.

The Dakar Rally ([Wikipedia](#), [Official](#)) is an annual off-road race, usually from Paris to the city of Dakar in Senegal, though it's varied. In recent years, security threats along the route have caused the race to be moved entirely to South America, although it's still called the Dakar Rally. Large portions of it are off-road, requiring its mostly amateur participants to cover all sorts of terrain.

Paris-Dakar Rally Special! is a Famicom game covering the race in its traditional incarnation. You drive your car through seven stages of... *varied*... terrain. Avoiding hazards and trying to get a good time.

Here is a description of the game:

**Before the race**



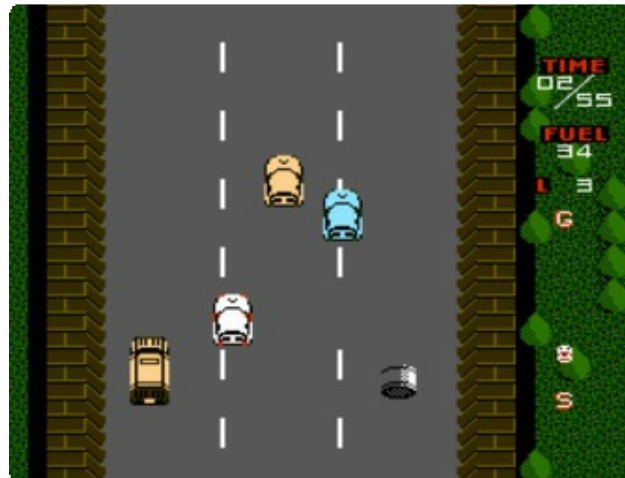


You don't start out at the starting line, no! First, you have to wander around town, trying to get a sponsor, money, a car, a partner, and enter the race. You have to roam around, entering buildings, asking the occupants about the various things. Some people give you hints as to other places to go. When you get your partner from the Car Club, the game instantly shifts to a reflex-testing minigame! You have to press the A or B button as fast as you can when they appear on-

screen, in random locations. You're timed, and you're penalized a second for each incorrect press, but you can try it as many times as you like. Other than that interlude, this part plays out like a traditional Famicom menu-driven adventure game. It'll take you a few minutes to get through this, but there is no danger of losing that I have seen.

Once you've entered the race, we move on to Stage 1.

### Stage 1



After a crowded start, you zoom down the road, surrounded on all sides by cars. Oddly, all the cars are invulnerable except yours. When you get hit by a car, you crack up and lose a life, but they sail on. You start out navigating the traffic ahead of you, but soon cars pull up from behind and zoom through. Strangely, they always appear directly behind you. You only get three lives in this section, and if you run out it's back to the start. Save states are highly recommended here, as sometimes dodging is very difficult. Lives remaining don't carry over from stage to stage, by the way, you get a fresh set for each leg of the race.

### Bonus Game



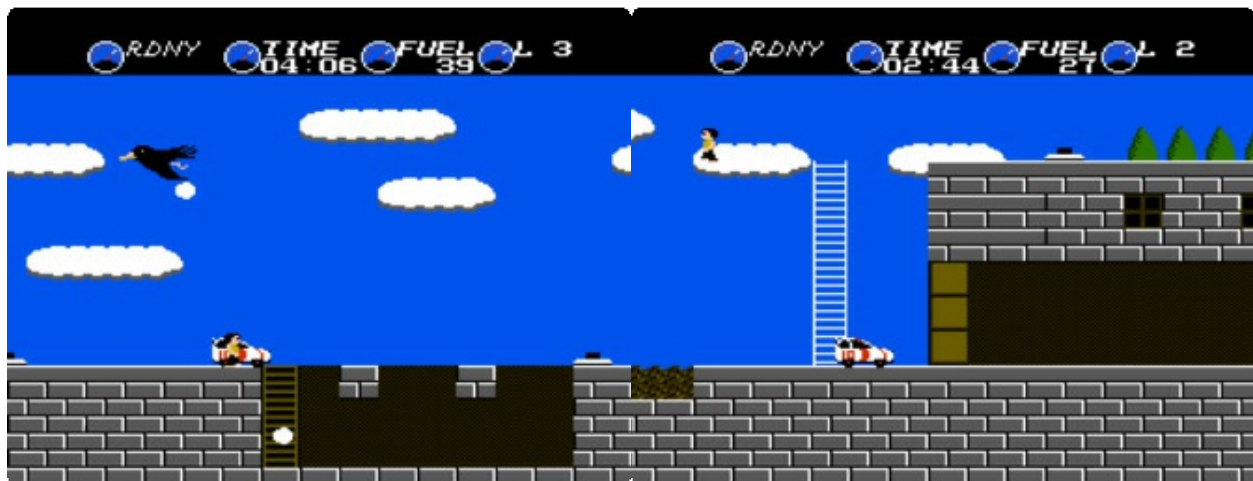
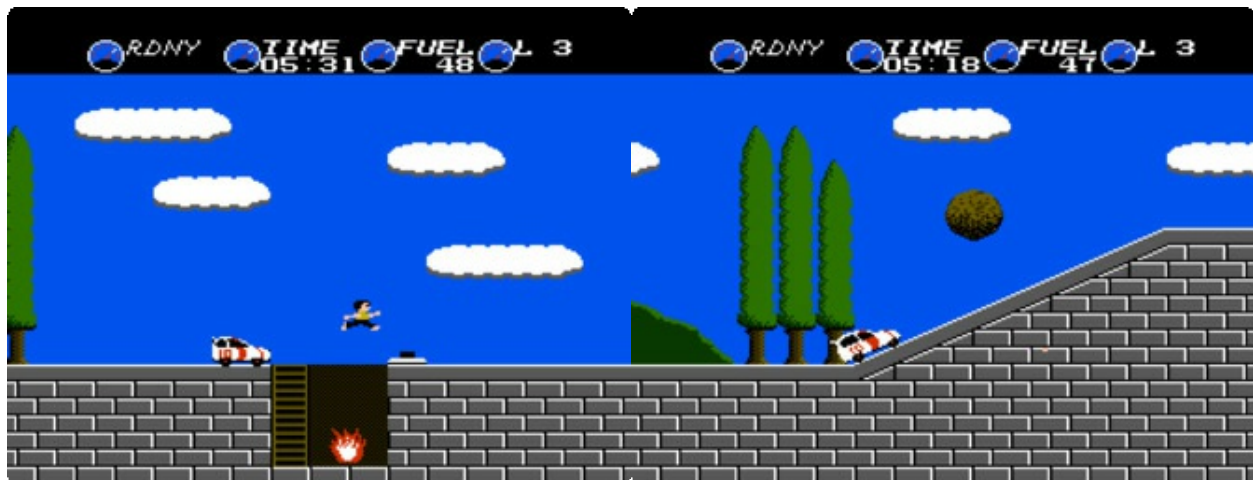
After each stage, you play a short minigame where you bounce a guy off a trampoline on the back of your car, trying to collect goodies hanging in the air. That's done good Stage 2 now!

### Stage 2



Now you drive your car through maze-like streets, avoiding other cars that for some reason appear to be trying to crash into you what the heck. Making things worse is that, if you aren't spot on with your turns, your car will stay on its current street. It kind of feels like vertical-scrolling, automotive Pac-Man. Huh. Save states are recommended here too.

### Stage 3



Now you race your car across a horizontally-scrolling, size view road. No other cars are in sight. They were probably scared off by the gigantic rats, deadly egg-dropping birds, collapsing bridges and raging fire traps along the road. Fortunately, your car is equipped with a gun for handling pesky wildlife, always a must in an auto race. When there's a pit with fire coming out of it, you have to get your partner out of the car, leap the pit with the A button (be sure to get a



good running start!) then press a button on the other side. That stops the fire and makes a road appear over the pit. Good, we can drive on now! Wait, it's another fire trap, argh, better get out again partner, the clock is ticking.

After a bit, your partner has to navigate a much more extensive area underground to make a blocking wall go away. The tunnels, with rolling rocks barreling down them, is basically a platforming game. Just call me Mario Andretti. When they said this race was cross country, I didn't think they meant Donkey Kong country. In another place, your partner needs to walk on a cloud to get the running start needed to clear a wide gap. Why do you look surprised, all race drivers are known for their magical skills. There are also slopes and giant rolling rocks to avoid and I don't know why I got out of bed this morning. Save states are double-recommended. Ah well, onto the next stage!

#### Stage 4



Another side-view area. There's another couple of platforming sections that require your partner to press a button to keep your car out of the deadly deadly water. Keep your car out of the water,



or else you'll lose a life! Then the road itself dips down, and you have to drive your car into the welcoming, route-yielding water. Feel free to drive into the water, it's necessary to proceed!

Now I know what you're thinking. Not enough racing games feature side-scrolling, underwater shooting sections in which your car fires its guns at giant sharks. Your prayers have been answered. What is more, you must also dodge killer starfish, suddenly-appearing squid, bombs dropped by car-hating helicopters, and *torpedoes* shooting through the water, fired by some off-screen adversary. Fortunately, not only can your vehicle maneuver well underwater, but its weapons work there too. Who built this car, Pops Racer? You'd better believe you should be using save states here.

### Stage 5



We're back to overhead stages so the weirdness is over, right? Nope, your guns are still active, and must now be employed in destroying the local endangered desert wildlife before they destroy your incredibly fragile car. Strangely, in this level alone hitting rocks doesn't cause you to lose a life, it just makes you stop. And shooting gophers causes them to leave behind extra lives! It's easy to get up to a maximum of nine lives here, though of course they'll all vanish in the next stage. After a while comes the tornadoes, the extensive rafting section (your car has lost its water-traversal powers), and a whole bunch of falling rocks. Better be safe and use save states.

### Stage 6



Overhead view again, so no platforming. But on the other hand, now the game is an autoscroller. You don't see a lot of autoscrolling *racing* games, for some reason. Your gun is active again, but for some reason only works on the hostile aircraft flying overhead. It's entirely useless against the huge tanks in the road shooting at you. Of course you should use save states you fool.

### Stage 7

Hey, we're back to a "normal" racing level! At high speed, you drive your car down a treacherous beachside road. After the sharks, tornadoes, torpedoes, fire traps, tanks and rafts, here it's just ROAD. Occasionally you pass another car, but at least they're not trying to run into you anymore. Ever get to the end of Life Force/Salamander and have to get through that high-speed, escape-the-base section? This is a lot like that. Better use save states to be safe.

And that's the game. It's pretty primitive graphically by Famicom standards, and all the challenges are fairly simple or needlessly difficult, but this is all made up for by its extreme insanity. It's fun to play for that reason at least. Actually, it's fun to play for that reason *alone*.

[Chrontendo covered Paris-Dakar Rally Special! in episode 28](#), which is where I found out about this crazy game.

[Here's MrPopsicle's playthrough of the whole dang thing, on YouTube.](#)

### 30.Motocross Champion translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** Suicidal Translations

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/191/>

**Description:** Excitebike, but, different.

This is a weird inclusion, I admit. There are hundreds of obscure Japanese games of minimal interest to an ordinary video game player, and of those dozens with translation patches. The purpose of these books is to point out interesting ones, and that doesn't just mean the blockbusters. Like Gyromite without the robot last time, this is a fun little game that deserves a bit more recognition. It didn't set the world on fire then, and it won't now, but if you ever enjoyed Excitebike, which it was obviously inspired by, it's worth a look.

One way the game improves on Excitebike is that its races aren't faked. Excitebike is solely a time-attack game, even when you're on the track with other racers, because those guys are just obstacles. You can easily come in first place with three other riders visible on the track ahead of you. Motocross Champion, on the other hand, does require that you know how to pass people, not just for a good time but to come in a better place, and it matters when you cut one off with your back wheel and send them crashing to the ground.

Another difference, and I think it's an improvement, is that races aren't purely one-dimensional affairs. The track doesn't go forward in an endless, repeating scroll, but each track is an actual circuit, and you have to turn at times. This allows you to cut corners, and this is a good source of advancement over your competitors. The drawback to it is that the left and right directions on the controller have been taken up with steering, and no longer tilt your bike's wheel on jumps to adjust your course and take hills smoothly.

Replacing the function of the left and right directions are up and down, which requires a bit of retraining your muscle memory but it's not terribly bad. All racing games must have things in the game that makes them about more than holding down the accelerator the whole time, some aspect that makes them something more than "Hold A to Win." One of those elements in Excitebike is the Turbo button, and the need to moderate its use to prevent overheating. Here, when you're riding on straightaways at full bore, your bike will naturally tend to wheelie, rearing up. If this happens too much you have to press down on the controller to stop the bike from flipping over, in addition to using it to help land jumps.

Since the tracks are circular, there are sections where your bike rides up or down, which would make the huge jumps that make Excitebike-likes (if that's not a word already I'm inventing it now) fun to play difficult to read on-screen. Motocross Champion handles this, very sensibly, by simply not having and jumps in those areas. You only ever have to land jumps when riding left or right.

The game is entertaining, but one annoying thing about it is that the speed is a bit higher than Excitebike, which makes the game a bit more thrilling, yes, but also sometimes gives you no reaction time when a competitor is down on the track ahead of you. You'll probably suffer the occasional unavoidable crash because of this.

If you like this game and want to try something crazier, look for Motocross Maniacs on Gameboy. It's another Excitebike-like (getting a lot of mileage out of that word) from Konami, but it takes the opposite tack as Motocross Champion; not only is the track again an infinitely scrolling strip, but it doesn't even have multiple lanes! The whole game is a strict, 2D side-scroller, almost like a motorbike platformer, sort of like Joe Danger, but with huge loops and powerups.

[Here is video of Motocross Champion on YouTube.](#)



Where Excitebike has you pressing left and right to adjust your bike's angle in the air, here you press up to drip down, and down to pull back.

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That's because left and right are used for steering around the track!

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The ramps and hills are only in the horizontal portions of the track, that helps to reduce confusion.



Races against other drivers are challenging, and it's hard to come in first. It helps, when you're on long straight flats, to press up to keep from wheeling over backward.

### 31. Cadillac translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** Gil Galad

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/1374/>

**Description:** A challenging puzzle game. It's sort of like harder KLAX with playing cards, and hopefully there's no porn!

If a game is interesting and challenging, I think that's more important than graphics or sound or presentation. I believe this firmly (hey I play roguelikes) but this game puts it to the test. It has practically no graphics, and the sound is an ordinary tune played over and over, using a very basic music engine. Practically the only graphics besides playing card images is some slightly sleazy pixel art of a Vegas-style showgirl. That, plus the exceedingly poor presentation, may lead you to believe this is a porn game. I don't think that it is, although I've not been able to clear even the lowest difficulty level so I wouldn't have passed even the basic porn threshold. Anyway, porn games tend to be hard, but plain in design, and this one's actually got decent strategy to it.

In single player (I have not tested two-player), you've got a 5x5 grid into which playing cards fall slowly, Tetris-like, one at a time. You can shift them left and right as they fall, and you also have 99 seconds of "pause time" every level, which halts their falling yet also lets you look at the board. (The game also supports ordinary, unlimited pause, but it hides the board.)

The idea is to make poker hands horizontally or vertically. The requirements for this are fairly strict in that, for straights, the cards must be in order either forward or backward. 7-9-8 won't cut it, it'll have to be 7-8-9 or 9-8-7! Pairs and full houses are not counted, and you don't need complete sets of five cards to clear. If you have 2-3-4-5-K, the 2-3-4-5 will be cleared out and the King will be left. Cards on top of cleared cards fall into their place, in the manner familiar to Columns, Puyo Puyo, Puzzle Fighter Turbo, and practically all other falling, color-matching

block games. A little bit of thought will show you that you cannot complete five-card vertical hands, and you can only do four-card verticals as part of a combo because hands clear out as soon as a possible match is made. You can't stack 2-3-4-5 on top of each other because as soon as you get 2-3-4, those cards will disappear. The lowest hanging fruit on the poker tree here are flushes, which clear out as soon as you get three cards of the same suit in a row. Sometimes you end up making flushes without meaning to, which can demolish your whole strategy.

You must keep clearing out cards, in the Tetris style, to prevent the board from filling up. The game ends if a card ends up on top of a full column. The game wouldn't be too hard except for an additional, pretty harsh requirement: you must also finish all 52 cards with a completely clean board. *That* will keep you going for a long while! You don't immediately lose if you finish with cards on the board; read below for details on that. The game shows you the next three cards in the deck at the top, a generous preview that you should take advantage of as far as you can.

Before each board, you're asked to wager \$500 of virtual money, from a starting stake of \$1,000, on whether you can finish the board or not. You get small awards for hands you finish. Flushes are by far the least valuable but are easy to make. Straights and groups of three and four are worth substantial amounts. Five-card straights and royal flushes are lucrative but very difficult because you have to put in the center card last to avoid a premature clear.

If you finish with cards on the board, you don't win, but you don't quite lose yet, either. First, you lose \$50 for every card left on-screen. The game will clear the screen and start another round, to let you try again. It's not hard to finish one of these failed rounds with more money than you started, from hand bonuses, but the game will only give you up to 10 of these redeals, [according to a FAQ on the game](#).

The appealing thing about Cadillac, perversely, isn't that every deck is winnable. I think the opposite is true in fact, that some sequences of cards cannot be cleared. Actually, wait, let me start again.

The appealing thing about Cadillac is that not all decks are *obviously* winnable. It seems like an open problem, whether you can always complete a given sequence. That uncertainty puts the top edge of the difficulty of the game out of sight. Does that make sense? I think I mean, there may be times when a perfect strategy (whatever that might be) may not be enough. Or it might! Because of this, you always must do your best, you cannot "coast" on a board, and there is not an obvious algorithm that will both survive all 52 cards and have them all cleared out on the last card.

The easiest thing you can do is chase flushes by stacking them vertically, which isn't difficult to survive with, except there's 13 cards of each suit, and that's not divisible by 3. You must make exactly one four-card flush in each suit to ensure clearing the whole board at the end, and those can only be made horizontally for reasons already discussed. You could try to ensure the last

card of each suit is part of a three- or four- of a kind, or of a straight, but those have their own drawbacks that I leave it for you to discover.

If you're looking for a great puzzle game, then you can add a point to the Fun score. If early NES/Famicom music makes you cringe, then take a point off. I suggest turning the sound way down for this one. And if it *does* turn out to be a porn game, I apologize greatly.



I know it looks like a porn game, but it's just a casino theme. This message is just telling you it's \$500 in-game money per hand.

---



I will say, however, that's pretty creepy.



Ah, the actual game. Cards fall in one at a time like Tetris pieces, and you decide where they land. Poker hands of three or more cards are cleared.



You get money for every hand you clear, but the real problem is playing so that the board is empty after all 52 cards are played. It's quite a challenge because you can only see three cards ahead.





One thing to try is to aim for one three- or four- of a kind. If you get a four-of-a-kind, you can just go for easy three-card vertical flushes the rest of the hand.

**Creator:** Elbobelo

**URLs:**

Forum thread: <http://www.dynamic-designs.us/cocoron.shtml>

Long long ago, in the pages of the NES-era game magazine [VideoGames & Computer Entertainment](#), but before people started using the term "platformer," reviewer [Chris Bieniek](#) named that kind of thing a *Guy Game*, a name that has stuck with me in the decades since, called that because they have a Guy who runs and jumps and sometimes shoots. (This is one of those times when "Guy" should be considered gender-neutral, or maybe a better term should be found.) Guy Games, he wrote, typically have the latest and greatest in graphics and sound, because they all have to distract the player that they are basically the same game.

I think Bieniek was engaging in a bit of humorous hyperbole there, but there is a solid core to his statement. While the rules and physics vary tremendously, Mario, Simon Belmont, Scrooge McDuck, Mega Man, SOPHIA and a hundred other characters are all subtypes of the genus 2D Platform Character. Some of the details of their motion vary from game to game (Mario's got strong momentum, Simon jumps stiffly, Unca Scrooge has a pogo-stick, etc.), but their engines must all perform a basic set of functions, similar enough to each other that there's an excellent [guide to implementing them](#) that covers most of the genre in one swoop.

In the brilliant "Guy Game" Cocoron, what you have is a kind of meta-platformer. At the start and after the first few bosses, the game asks you to construct a character out of three parts: Head, Body and Arms. Each lends a specific ability to your "guy." Head determines the effect of powerup. Body your mode of movement, which could include your speed, hovering, flight, no-slip treads and how you handle liquid. Arms is your mode of attack, where some of your options are simple projectiles, returning boomerangs, bouncy baseballs or explosives. Each choice for Head and Body have alternate skins which do not affect the play but can liven up your appearance.

Lots of options are available, some of which are obviously inspired by Japanese popular culture. One of the bodies is obviously that of Astroboy, and one of the heads is a mecha-style robot. Every part you choose, however, contributes to two other statistics, Health and Weight. Weight slows you down and decreases your jumping power, but Health allows you to take more damage. Through the course of the game you create six characters, but there are enough options that you could play through several times before exhausting all the possibilities.

Once you make your first character you select a destination from a world map. The stages are somewhat dynamic in nature. The first stage you choose takes you into one of five areas. At the end of the area is a boss. When (or IF, the bosses are pretty tough) you beat one you make your next character, then select a new destination. The next level consists of exiting the area you just finished and entering the one you selected. Minor aspects of the levels can change depending on the combination of the two, plus the enemies gradually get tougher the more bosses you clear. The enemies are a highlight of the whole thing. Most of them are some variation on the theme of an insane animal. Penguins puff themselves up, float for a moment, then explode into a gang of smaller penguins. Armadillos use their shells to block your attacks, then roll into a ball and zoom around the walls like Sonic the Hedgehog. Skunks utilize a number of attack skills too, the nature of which you can probably guess.

Not to spoil the events of the game, but after beating all the bosses you have to search through the levels you've already passed for a kidnapped princess. Once you've found her, all your heroes but one are kidnapped, and you have to rescue them all before facing the last boss.

There is a slight bit of genericness hanging over the whole thing, to be honest. There are some nice visual touches in the levels (the living arrangements of the penguins are hilarious), but not a lot of variety within each world. Every piece of every level must be finishable with the weakest possible character, which results in a certain sameness. But the fun of the game, for once, isn't in the levels of the game but in exploring the capabilities of the characters you create. Your heroes are the star of the show; the villains are mostly just a series of tests as to their viability.

Here is [Hardcore Gaming 101's page on Cocoron](#), which was a source for this writeup.

Aside: The game "I Wanna Be The Guy," of course, is a well-known [masocore](#) platformer. I am given to wonder if the use of the word *guy* in its title might be an intentional reference to Chris Bieniek's old name for them? Probably not, but it's an interesting coincidence.



Cocoron is one of those games that's just plain fun! You create little action peoples and run and jump and shoot.



When you make a platforming hero, you get this stats screen. You give each a four-letter name, but don't blow this off like other games, you'll need to remember those names to identify your

characters!



There are two sizes of eggs. Small ones are found both laying around and dropped by enemies.

They contain health, powerups  
and weapon boosts. 10 weapon boosts is enough to power up  
your weapon. Big eggs sometimes contain enemies, so be careful!



"I had a dream last night. I was a formula racing car with the head of a dragon, jumping between eclairs in the clear blue sky through a sea of pink whales--"





I love these little rooms that hint at the domestic life of the enemy penguins.

---



Lookit me, I'm a Tank-O-Lantern!

---



Remember to drink your milk, as it's a rich source of protein and calcium, but don't swim in it.  
When it turns the smell will be horrible. I hope Cheese Land is refrigerated.

### 33. Wagyan Land translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** AlanMidas

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/234/>

**Description:** First in a series of crazy tiny dinosaur games. Harder than it looks.

A "Wagan" is like a small robot dinosaur. Wagan's life is spent running to the right through video game worlds, jumping between platforms, and avoiding video game perils. Wagan is more defenseless than most game protagonists in that Wagan cannot harm his opponents, those angry birds and bugs and balls and moles and more, in any way. Wagan can only shout at them. When the syllable representing his shout hits an enemy, it's frozen in place temporarily. During this time not only can it not hurt Wagan, but Wagan can stand on it.

Wagan continues Wagan's journey to the right, fated destination of all platformer characters. Along the way, Wagan may find little Wagans. (The character, Wikipedia tells us, originated in an arcade amusement machine made by Namco. I presume these little guys were prizes.) With more little Wagans, slightly-bigger Wagan gains in "Pow." Each level of Pow bestows louder, more annoying and paralyzing screams. With the fourth Pow, Wagan becomes invincible for a little while, before returning to having no Pow once more.

Being invincible is the only way to actually defeat an enemy. But even that is of no avail against the level bosses. Fortunately, what does is playing a minigame. These are actually quite challenging! The first one you encounter is also the hardest, the Infuriating Letter Game. There's also Concentration, and others, but everyone remembers the Infuriating Letter Game. All the Wagyan games, it turns out, have these minigames. They're practically half the point of playing Wagyan Land!

Let's get back to the Infuriating Letter Game, which was another of those ways Japanese children were introduced to a harsh and uncaring universe. You get a field of cards, each with a picture on it. Your opponent picks a card and tells you what its picture is of. You take the last letter of their name for it, and within a time limit, have to find another card whose picture has a name that starts with that letter. Like... "Egg" to "Giraffe" to "Easel" to "Leopard," and so on. Chosen cards are taken off the board (until you reach higher levels), reducing the options available to both participants. If you run out of time, you lose a life and get sent back into the platforming level. Why can't we just play Rock-Paper-Scissors like Alex Kidd?

The thing about this game is that each card actually has multiple names for the items pictured. A metal box with an antenna can be either "Radio" or "Wireless," for instance. Most of the time the game will accept the name for the card you have in mind, but there will be times when it doesn't. The computer knows all their names, and will always pick a legal card if one is available. The only way to win is to maneuver the AI into a corner, to pick a card with a name ending in a letter that cannot be matched with the remaining cards. The computer will often back you into such a corner. I didn't call it the Infuriating Letter Game for nothing.

The nature of these minigames, especially of the Infuriating Letter Game, is such that a fan translator can't just replace the Japanese words with English ones and call it a day. The game must still *work*, the letters of the English names for the cards must match up. As a result, Wagyan Land can't just be translated, the Infuriating Letter Game must be reworked and made sense of in English. AlanMidas has done just that, and a sterling job of it. All praise be unto the translator!

Unless your name for that card isn't recognized by the program. All curses be unto the translator! Well, he did a good job of including a number of alternate names. Some amount of practice is necessary to find out what words the game recognizes. Like, the Moon card can also be Night, or even Eclipse. Ah well, it probably was the same deal in Japanese.

[YouTube user David Cooper has posted an example of gameplay for Wagyan Land on YouTube](#), although note that it isn't the whole game. It does demonstrate the letter-matching game at the end of the first level, though.



I'm a cute little robo-lizard! Hey mushroom, don't mess with me.

---



Here, Wagan is full of Invincible Power! It's the only way you can \*defeat\* enemies, rather than just annoy them into paralysis with your screeches.

---





In practice, you spend more time trying to win at the Infuriating Letter Game than platforming. It's worth it to take notes for all of each card's names. That Vase card can also be "WaterJar," a fact that Evil Mushroom there knows instinctively.



Join me, little guy, and together we will rule the playground! If we can find one more... and only for about 20 seconds....



This dragon's version of the Letter Game replaces used cards with new ones! It's much harder to trap him so he can't play. Good luck with him, I couldn't win it!

### 34. Hebereke translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** BMF54123

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1798/>

**Description:** Known in Europe as Ufouria, the Japanese version has significant dialogue changes, as well as two different characters.

Sunsoft's Hebereke is a fairly odd little game. A pretty awesome little Metroidvania, not extremely large or difficult but still challenging, and with a lot of personality. You control Hebe, a little bird person, who's trapped in a weird world and trying to find a way out of it, while confronted with crazy enemies all along the way. After beating some bosses they join up with him, and provide different navigational abilities, thus fulfilling the Metroidvania structure of a series of overlapping regions, each containing somewhere within it a power that lets you escape from that region.

Hebereke got a release for the NES in Europe only, as "Ufouria," but didn't make it to North America until much later, as a release on the Wii Virtual Console. Both official English versions change the scenario and dialogue completely, and also two of the characters, including your starting guy Hebe, who became a hat-wearing blob they named "Bop-Louie." The gameplay in both seems to be the same, but the original dialogue has rather more character than Ufouria, especially that of "O-Chan," who was a little girl wearing a kind of a kitty suit who spoke in a haughty tone. She got changed out for "Freon-Leeon," a lizard wearing a kind of a no suit.

Let us now observe a moment of silence for my self-respect, as a grown sorta-male-person who is reduced to writing about these pseudo-Sanrio characters. Because they *do*, all of them, in both versions, look like things that would have no trouble hanging around Hello Kitty and her cadre of furry and feathery malcontents. (Like Badtz Maru, a penguin with an attitude problem *god*

*how do I know that.*) And like HK and co., if you reject this game because of the cute factor, you'll be missing out on some rather awesome surprises. It's just *good*, not too long, not too short, and properly challenging, and varied enough to get you through the whole thing.

The translation also translated the opening, which is completely different in the official localization. If you've never played it before, that should be enough reason to give it a shot! And if you have played it through, it's worth another pass to check out a version that hews closer to the Japanese original.

[Here's video of a playthrough, from World of Longplays, of the NES version.](#) [Here's VixyNyan's playthrough of this translation.](#) Both demonstrate the intro, which is a good indication of the difference in tone between the text in the two games. Hebereke doesn't take itself seriously *at all*.



That's all you had to say, my good bird. I like to imagine the film sprockets mean this is secretly a Castlevania game.

---



You want yer minecarts, we got yer minecarts right here, fuggetabout it.

---



It's hard to be menacing when you're cosplaying as Garfield.

---





This duck-thing is the game's token ugly-cute character. She is a loving mother who only happened to lose her egg.

---



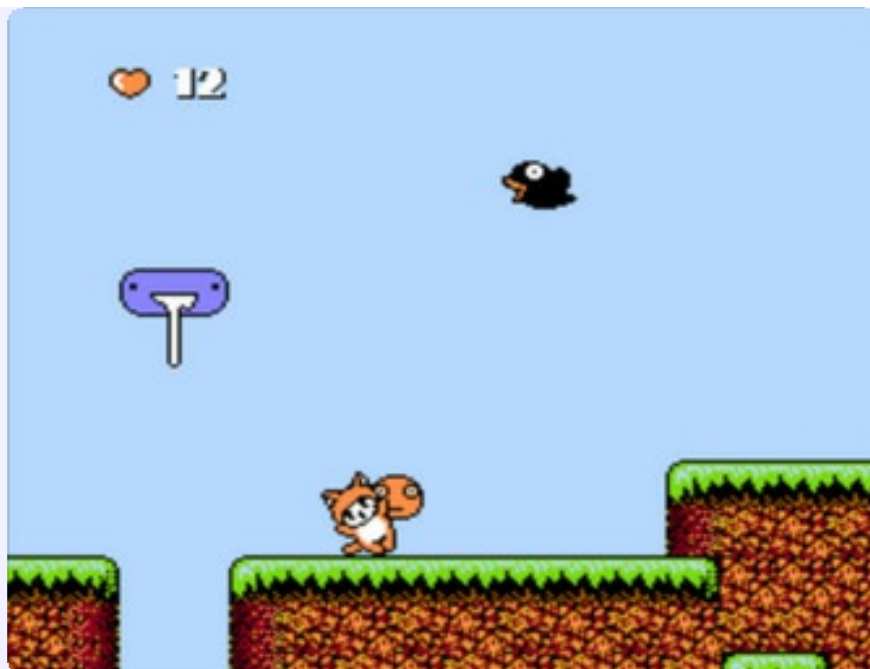
You gain a variety of alternate characters, with a variety of speaking patterns, and with a variety of personality problems.

---



The game never explains these fish-wearing people. Is it a real fish or just a costume? Is it actually all fish and the face is a ruse? Is this Hebereke's version of a mermaid? So many questions.

---



"Hey you! Control us well or I'll throw this weird blob at you! You heard me!"  
BTW, don't think too hard about that blue face.

---



A giant ominous door, huh? I wonder if we might have to come back here much later....

---



Here's the map! I reckon it's about the same size as Metroid's, but it feels smaller as you play, probably because the landscape is simpler.

### 35. Yume Penguin Monogatari translation



**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** Vice Translations

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/678/>

**Description:** A wonderful Famicom platformer where your abilities are constantly changing, in good ways and bad.

Let's get the scenario out of the way. Poor Penta's got a few extra pounds, but his girlfriend Penko is a body-shamer, so Penta decides to embark on an exercise program run by a shady penguin (you can tell he's bad because of his evil sunglasses) with about three thousand henchmen. That eeevil penguin, name of Genji, has his sights set on Penko, yet for some reason also supplies his "Fat-B-Gone" product to his henchmen, so when Penta defeats them he loses weight. And yet he gains it all back if he falls in the water? I guess plain ol' H<sub>2</sub>O is fattening to penguins?

Funny thing about penguin biology. As Penta slims down or fills out, his abilities change. The larger he is, the slower he gets, but he also gets a powerful body slam move. As he gets thinner he gets more mobile, and he gains a shout attack, but he also is very vulnerable to any particle of food that appears on screen, as even a simple apple will cause him to get heavier. This is what happens when you take a species used to a diet of fish and try to adapt them to vegetable matter.

At the end of some sections there's a boss, and naturally all their attacks cause Penta to gain weight. But interspersed between their edible projectiles are canisters of diet shake, which immediately make him lose weight. Some stages are shooter stages, but they still work along similar lines. In the last level Genji outright tries to kidnap Penko, and it falls to Penta to rescue her--but that still doesn't get him out of his weight goal. I have to say, this game's depiction of penguin mating rituals doesn't match up to what Morgan Freeman said.



Whatever our opinion of the game's politics, in gameplay terms it's wonderful and unique, a prime example of what Konami could do in their prime. Many screens are packed with moving objects and projectiles, with a minimum of slowdown. Most bosses fill the screen. They range from the pirate ship of Captain Pooh, the pig, to the incredibly disturbing Frosting Man, who boasts, "I'll make you creamy and smooth, just like me!" No matter how weird and frightening the opposition gets, though, you can count on a good percentage of them dropping the diet shakes Penta needs to win. It's the old Kirby Conundrum: the bosses must secretly want you to beat them because they always give you just the objects you need to defeat them.

There are interesting gameplay implications to the game's fitness system. You lose bonus weight when you finish a level quickly based on the time left (I guess Penta spends them doing jumping jacks or something?), but those extra diet shakes bosses throw out during fights might make the difference between making a level's weight goal or not. Sometimes you might want to delay on beating a boss to just crawl under the goal line.

Of note: This is another of those cases where cultural matters might make a game's content a little more problematic than it was considered when it was made. However, in this case the cultural difference isn't between Japanese and American audiences. It's between the 1980s' and 2010s' sensibilities concerning body shape sensitivity. I agree the game is a bit insensitive viewed from modern perspectives.

[Here's ever-reliable World of Longplays' video of a playthrough of Yume Penguin Monogatari.](#)



You have to race the clock as well as lose weight on your way. I accept no responsibility for the word "Normal" there, BTW.

---





Look at those graphics. Classic Konami knew what they were doing.

---



How does she know, she's just talking to him over the phone!

---



It's times like this, when you're a penguin in an airplane firing shots at a flying pig battleship shooting apples at you for the honor of Japan, that you really have to question your life choices.

---



This is Frosting Man, a Lovecraftian Horror here to break up your cartoon penguin game.

---



"Cringe, beetle! Quail before the power of my mighty 'peeps!'"



I leave you with a giant octopus. It's not your enemy, it's just part of the landscape. It loves you.

## 36. Romancia translation

**Platform:** Famicom

**Creator:** DvD Translations

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5, **Fun:** 3/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1264/>

Homepage: <http://dvdtranslations.eludevisibility.org/romancia.html>

**Description:** One of Falcom's legendary early JRPGs, presented in a somewhat more accessible (yet still challenging) format.



Falcom is a name that a lot more people outside of Japan should know of. Best known for the Ys series, they've made many weird and fun and interesting and usually pretty hard games over the years, especially for Japanese home computers.

Falcom's early games have this sense, like a lot of early RPGs have, of taking some elements of the idea of role-playing but filling in blanks with their own ideas. Like how Ultima II sends you across the freaking solar system, Falcom's games from the time all had weird concepts in them that makes them all unique. Dragon Slayer did things like require to drag powerup items back home to use them--but lets you physically pick up your home and move it where you want.

Xanadu was a side-view game that moved to an overhead view for combat, like the opposite of what Zelda II uses, until you get to dungeons, which are overhead-view until you reach a boss that's fought in side-view! Then there's Sorcerian, which is a side-view action RPG where you have a party of four characters that you create yourself and has alternate scenario disks available that let you take your characters into new adventures, like in Wizardry.

Romancia is one of the less-weird games from them, in that it's basically an action game. The original computer versions had a thirty-minute time limit that made finishing the game really



difficult, but the Famicom version, discussed here, nixes that. It's an odd port that also removes some puzzles, and changes some other aspects of the game, but also increased the size of the game world substantially. It was made by our old favorites Compile, they of Zanak, Guardian Legend and Puyo Puyo fame. Some of the sound effects here may be familiar to people who have played those other games.

There are weird and unknowable things to do throughout the game, ways to mess yourself up just by talking to the wrong person, and you really need [a strategy guide](#) if you're going to play it.

There's a reason its fun score is only 3/5 above. But every game has its people out there, somewhere. Maybe Romancia is for you? I can say this much for it, that there is no other game quite like it. If you're suffering from RPG malaise like I am, where everything these days looks like just another variant of something that came before, then why not have a look?

If you'd rather play one of the original computer versions, time limit and all, there are translations for them too:

MSX: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1515/>

MSX2: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1517/>

For more information on the game, check out the always awesome [Hardcore Gaming 101](#). It'll tell you about things like the weird karma system that comes to matter later on in the game.



This whole section wasn't in the original MSX version of the game. You have to kill enough enemies to get a magic orb to be allowed into the cave.

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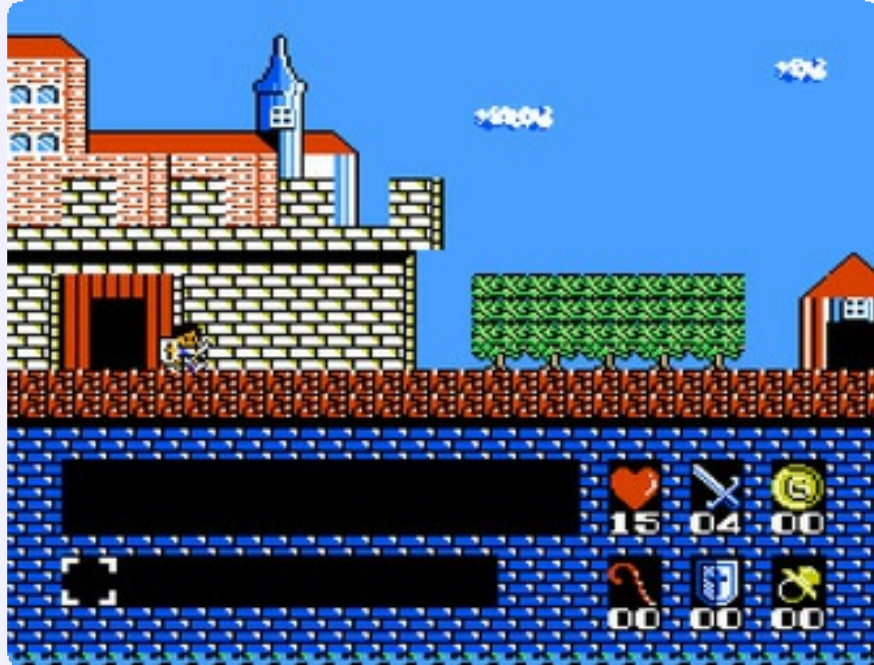




Your instinct here might be to jump on the fish as platforms. Don't try it; the clouds are the platforms!



A guy at the start gives you 15 Swords that you can throw at enemies by holding the attack button. They're best saved for situations like this. They're different from just *swinging* your sword, which you can always do.



Good, a quiet bit. Long enough for me to explain, you can destroy powerups if you hit them with your sword. So be careful!



The variable-width font here is a trick not often seen on the Famicom/NES.

### 37. For The Frog The Bell Tolls (Kaeru no Tami ni Kane wa Naru) translation



**Platform:** Gameboy

**Creator:** ryanbgstl

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1623/>

**Description:** A charming and hilarious Gameboy title, one that should not be missed, brought to the English language.

All the early Legend of Zelda games are formative in their own way, of course, but the fourth one, the one for the Gameboy, is easy to overlook. The first Zelda was a sprawling, challenging, non-linear open-world action-adventure; the second was a crushingly difficult side-scrolling action-RPG; and the third was the first with a substantive world, brought the idea of actual NPCs to the game, and had a story that was unveiled as the player played.

So, what did the fourth Zelda, Link's Awakening, the Gameboy Zelda, bring to the series? The answer is *charm*.

The first two Zelda games didn't have the ROM space nor the NPCs for personality. The third has NPCs, but most of them just say a couple of things during the game, and can be identified easily by their role either as threat, hint-giver, shop-keeper, item-granter or story-advancer. There wasn't much opportunity for people in the game to seem like people. Although a few characters had quirky details (like the bottle seller or the cackling witch), everyone had a role to fill.

Even though it doesn't take place in Hyrule, Link's Awakening was the Zelda that established what Hyrule is like. A quaint and somewhat whimsical place, not just Generic Fantasyland but a place where people could be enthusiastic about the idea of raising chickens, or selling masks, or

running minigames. The *humor* of the Zelda series largely began there. A nation is its people, and isn't it nice when you're saving the realm, when it seems the realm is worth saving?

The humor of Link's Awakening, however, originated in a prior game. That would be For The Frog The Bell Tolls, another Gameboy game that shares its distinctive look, clever writing and probably game engine, and should be played both by Zelda fans and anyone who wants to play a game that's just outright *fun*.

The player is the prince of a country who's rivals with Prince Richard, of a neighboring country. The two are trying to rescue a princess, not just for her sake but to one-up the other. Along the way a crazy chain of events occurs that involves them turning, at times, into frogs. This state isn't permanent but poses both obstacles and advantages on their quest.

One refreshing feature of the game is the combat system, or rather lack of system. Fighting is entirely automated. When you get into a scuffle, a fight cloud envelops you both, and you both lose health at a rate determined by your respective attack, defense and speed stats. You can try to escape or use items by pressing buttons, but other than that there is no interactivity at all, which keeps the pace of the game exceedingly brisk. You do have to watch out for your currently in-hand item. When you use items like an axe, that tool remains in hand until you press B and switch back to your sword. If you get into a fight while so be-axed, the combat probably won't go well for you.

Saving and mapping are both done by using specific items in your inventory. The map is interesting in particular; while you're in the overworld the map shows the whole place, but there is also a huge castle in the game that you return to repeatedly. Using the map while in the castle shows its interior, but it's only revealed a screen at a time when you explore rooms.

A tip to players: in side-view areas you can jump. If you hold up on the controller, your character will ready himself and you'll jump higher. When you're a frog you can jump higher still. If you're not aware of these facts, you might think that you're stuck at a couple of prominent places early in the game, and hack players usually don't have a manual to go by to inform them of these things.

When I played this game and noted its substantial tone and feel similarities to Link's Awakening, I thought to myself that the two games must have shared significant development staff. I went to MobyGames to substantiate that suspicion, checking the staff pages of both [Kaeru no Tami ni Kane wa Naru](#) and [Link's Awakening](#). I was shocked to find out that they had nearly entirely separate teams; the only name in common that I saw was composer Kazumi Totaka (yes, the "[Totaka's Song](#)" guy).



Anyway, that's enough from me. Go find this game, patch it, and play it! If you don't like it then you don't deserve nice games.

Word is that romhacking.net forum member toruzz is working on a colorized version of this game....

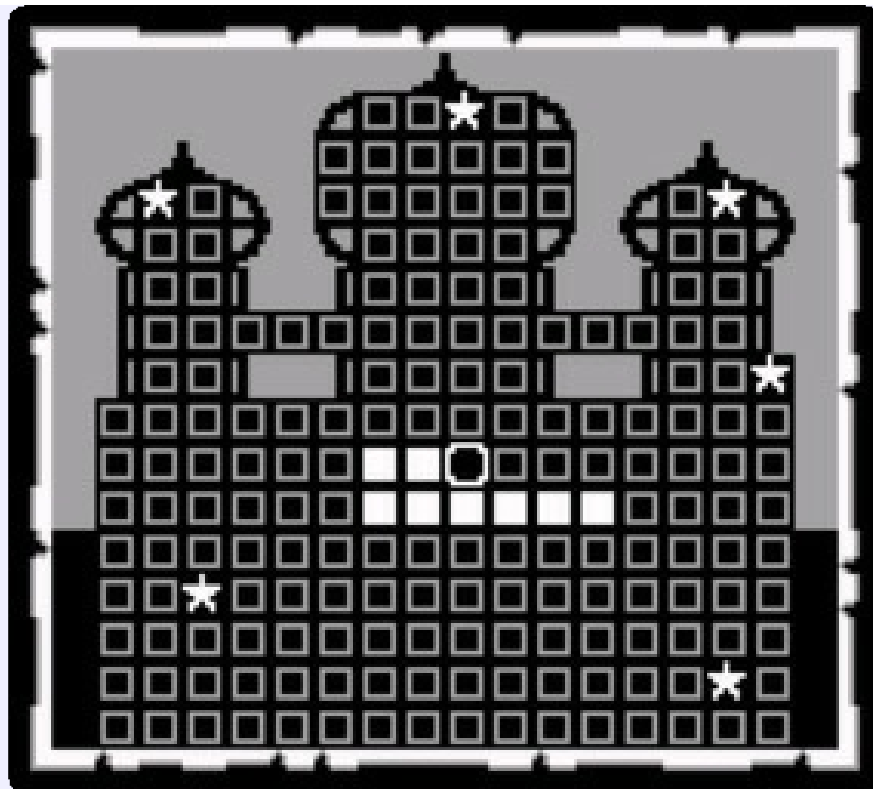
[Here's a playlist of YouTube user Buppux playing through the game.](#)



You're a prince, but slugs know not from royalty. They only know the language of the sword.  
And Swedish, too. I don't know why.

---





The castle has to be mapped room by room. It's your main quest, but you keep having to go into the overworld, and having comedy adventures, to make progress in it.



This tree has an attitude problem! Explore around a bit before you tangle with it!



With observation, you can get through these trees without a fight.



Your inventory screen. Is it any wonder that Link's Awakening feels so similar to it?



Oh great, another show-off. She has a special potion for you. So mysterious-- oh, forget it. It turns you into a frog. That's no spoiler, is it? I mean it's in the title of the game.

### 38.Dicing Knight. translation



**Platform:** Wonderswan Color

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1073/>

Homepage: <https://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=dicingknight>

**Description** A randomly-generated dungeon exploration game (remember those?) created by a one-man indie Japanese developer, translated into English by the good graces of Aeon Genesis.

Random dungeon games are a mixed bag. They can be done well, but far too often you end up with an unexciting game that uses its promise of unpredictability as a crutch. Of what use is a random dungeon layout if the game consequences of that randomness are slight? To make the most use out of randomized terrain, it has to have a substantive effect on the player. This means that sometimes, bad luck will give the player a difficult-to-survive layout. That is the point.

\One of the better random dungeon games out there is "Dicing Knight.", with the period, a former homebrew game for the Wonderwitch development system that won a contest and got released as a commercial product, although a fairly rare one, for the portable Wonderswan Color. Created by prolific Japanese indie PlatineDispotif, its mix of resource management and fast action is quite engaging, and should be tried by fans of roguelikes and bullet hell shooters alike.

Your fighter girl character (a staple of the doujin scene Platine Dispotif comes from) has a sword and an objective to explore to the bottom of a series of progressively more challenging dungeons. Each floor is divided into single screens, and most screens have at least one enemy. Enemies don't generally attack you until they detect you (indicated by a "Seen!" message), so if you're careful you can avoid waking up enemies, and thus probably taking damage. Enemies carry items that they drop the first time you defeat them (they regenerate when off-screen). You can carry up to four of these, mapped to the Wonderswan Color's second control pad. Most of these



are very useful: one type refills your health, one freezes time for a few seconds, one makes you invincible for a while, and another lets you dig through walls, creating shortcuts. One refills your character's hunger meter, which constantly ticks down while you explore. One item, available on every level, is a key that you must find to open the door.

The need to find the key, and keep your hunger meter full, means you generally have to kill a lot of enemies. Many have exploding attacks that must be dodged or fire streams of missiles at you that can be dodged or blocked. The health refill items play a role in mitigating this, but you might not find one when you need it. Making the items you do find count as much as possible is a good part of the challenge of Dicing Knight., for the more dungeon levels you explore, the more of a chance you'll get into a situation where the item generation doesn't go your way. The last floor of each dungeon contains a fairly challenging boss. It is a good idea to try to save as many heal items for it as possible, which of course means defeating more enemies in the main dungeon and not needing to use them there.

Whenever you attack an enemy or are struck, little dice splash out from the impact. It turns out these dice are not just a visual effect, they actually indicate the damage done. There is an item that reveals the state of the random number generator, showing you on-screen what the next die rolls are going to be. It is an interesting ability and one that's potentially very useful, although I have yet to make good use of it. The game's damage algorithm is still too obscure to me to use it well.

As you complete dungeons and gain levels, you also get "lotto ticket" items that can be used to earn orbs you can assign to different stats between dungeon trips, and in so doing customize your character to make up for those parts of the game you find difficult. For instance, you can increase attack if you like to get combat over with quickly, or defense if you want to reduce what damage you do take, or hunger if you'd like to be able to explore longer.

Dicing Knight. (that period really bothers me) is a clever little game that should keep you engaged for some time.

Of note: Emulating this is a little tricky, as the Wonderswan Color had a second control pad, which Dicing Knight. uses to access item slots. The emulator I used mapped those to the four shoulder buttons. Most USB controllers these days have enough buttons, but I figured it was worth warning about.

[Here's video of YouTube user ChangeV playing through the first dungeon.](#)



It's kind of an action-adventure game, but the dungeons are randomized. In each, you have to find the key, then the exit. Finding the key means killing enemies.



And here's a boss! They're difficult enough that you want to save your resources to use against them.



At the end of every dungeon, you get this results screen. I didn't get very far, but then, I have a deadline. If you like random dungeon games, you may enjoy this.

### 39. Monster World 4 translation



**Platform:** Mega Drive/Genesis

**Creator:** DeJap Translations, Demiforce, De Somma Michele

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/1276/>

Demiforce's original: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/77/>

Homepage: <https://dejap.eludevisibility.org/mw4.php>

**Description:** A charming and light-hearted adventure-platformer with no official English translation.

Westone's Wonder Boy games have sort of a convoluted history, with at least two prominent offshoots, not to mention *two* recent revivals. One of them, Monster World, got a Japan-only entry fairly different from the others, starring an adventurous young girl named Asha. Early Wonder Boy games were one-way side-scrollers, but around Wonder Boy in Monster Land the series transitioned into more free-roaming action-RPGs, with money to save and equipment to buy, and lots of secrets to uncover. (A couple of these installments actually made it into arcades. I've always liked it when arcade games try to do the RPG thing, the time pressure helps to enliven them.... sorry, got off the subject there.)

The world itself, in Monster World 4, is a bit more fleshed out than prior games. You actually start in a home village, for instance, instead of just being dropped into the game, and early on you travel to the capital of Monster World and meet with its ruler. Secret areas seem to have a bit more thought into why they're there, instead of just being cool places to find.

The animation in MW4 is pretty good, just for the time it was made. The graphics designers gave the characters in the world a strong cartoon vibe. Asha herself has a ton of personality that comes

out in her movements: the way she swings her arms around, getting ready to open treasure chests, and the spinning animation after a double-jump. The music's also pretty strong and makes good use of the Mega Drive's sound chip.

The combat in the game is particularly interesting. Asha has a huge shield that can be brought out by pressing Down. Many attacks can be dodged or, if you think to do it, blocked. Making timely use of both is the key to avoiding injury. Also, many monsters, including some bosses, don't do damage to you from mere contact. Frequently they have to hit with an attack to score a hit. The exploratory gameplay is also fairly interesting. Monster World IV stands in stark contrast to the prevailing wisdom of game design, which tells players explicitly what moves they have, and how to accomplish them, and what they're good for, and puts a sign near everything telling players the first time it's useful. Asha doesn't have it nearly so easy. Early she picks up a little flying blue friend with a wide variety of uses, and it's up to you to figure out when and how to activate them. A quick tip: if it looks like you're stuck somewhere, there's probably something to do with your Pepelogoo to get you through it. Also, there's a couple of secret areas of the town that exploration can find. Try to find extra exits from the area outside the castle....

Of note: This game, although untranslated, is available officially in North America through the Wii Virtual Console, at least until January 2019 when that service shuts down. It's also available for PS3 and Xbox 360.



Refreshing honesty from a neighbor. Talk to him again and he admits he's kidding.

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Even the save screen looks nice!



The enemies in the game are pretty entertaining at least! Sometimes you feel bad that they have to die. But they DO have to die, oh yes...



This genie guy helps you get around the game world after each dungeon. It's not really a full Metroidvania because you can't return to most areas after you finish them.



You can get your health refilled by praying here at the shrine. You also have to come here to hatch this egg....



That blue guy behind the ogre is your "Pepelogoo," a little creature that assists you through each dungeon. You can hold onto his legs to glide and use him in a variety of other ways. He doesn't mind. These flying critters play a major role in the story.

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A tip, you can hang from either side of these ropes, which is useful in avoiding falling rocks like this one.

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Your Pepelogoo can push buttons from far away, and can also be used as a platform to safely stand on lava fountains.



It's Mr. Boss! It's best to introduce Mr. Boss to Mr. Sword. (Ms. Sword?) Look out for those spiky arms though. Really though, they're at the end of literal columns of fire, the spikes are completely unnecessary.

## 40. Twinbee Rainbow Bell Adventure translation



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/2054/>

Homepage: <http://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=twinbeerba>

**Description:** The Twinbee series' one and only platformer, in its full glory.

The Twinbee games are popular Japanese "cute 'em ups," pastel-colored spaceship games where enemies tend to be at least wacky, and sometimes full-bore zany. Dr. Cinnamon (or "Shinamon" depending on the source) has built sentient spaceships, egg-shaped craft with arms and a windshield. They're a little less stylish than Sega's Opa-Opa, but have the advantage of numbers. There are three ships in the line: Twinbee, Winbee and Gwinbee. Most Twinbee games support at least two players, giving roles to Twin & Win, but Gwen only rarely gets to play. The powerup system involved shooting clouds to make bells appeared. Shooting a given bell over and over would change its color, with different colors meaning different powerups. There was an interesting tradeoff: greater firepower meant hitting more clouds and juggling more bells, but it became much harder to stop a bell on the specific powerup you wanted. Like Twinbee's sister series Gradius, powerups weren't limited by location. You could get most powerups at any time if you had enough skill, and to some degree luck.

The original Twinbee was an arcade game that didn't expand much on the game's lore. Then came an NES port and two sequels. One of those was the only Twinbee game to see US shores during its original release, as a game called, rather plainly, Stinger. The sequels piled on the whimsy: the first boss if Moero Twinbee/Stinger is literally a gigantic watermelon that spits



barrages of seeds at you. Later bosses included an angry faucet, huge boom box and giant snake. The following game's foes were even weirder.

The Twinbee games are a fascinating bit of Japanese ephemera and were at their height during the 16-bit era, when Konami released a couple of popular arcade games in the series, *Detana* Twinbee and *Twinbee Yahoo*. Home systems would get ports of both eventually, but Konami also made a couple more console versions, using the expanded mythos presented in *Detana*. The pilots from the Famicom games were discarded in favor of a trio of anime kids: Light, his cousin Pastel, and her baby brother (literally) Mint. There were three animes, a manga series, audio dramas and a variety of spinoff games, including an RPG and a Sonic-style platformer. That last is our subject here.

In these games, players control Twinbee and Winbee, here with arms and legs, as they run and jet through vibrant and colorful landscapes, collecting bells and finding fairies, while fighting series villain Dr. Warumon and his knockoff Evil Bees. (Cinnamon is to Warumon as Mario is to Wario, of course.) Between levels, the game switches to a map screen on a big computer helmed by Dr. Cinnamon, and they all trade comedy banter. Readers with good memories will recall that Dr. Cinnamon and his computer also presided over Konami Wai Wai World, in all its questionable crossover glory.

If you're wondering how a spaceship with arms and legs, by its nature unbound by the gossamer strings of gravity, well the game doesn't waste much time on that either it seems. You are allowed, at the top of a level, turn on jets and shoot for the stratosphere. The level vanishing far below you, the background quickly recedes, you spy the curvature of the Earth, and reach space after a bit. The game even tells you how high you're flying over the playfield. However, video game logic must intercede; all the platforms, collectibles and exits and stuff are *down there*, inescapable and waiting for you no matter how much you might want to escape the scroll boundaries and jet to Hawaii.

The game feels a fair bit like *Sonic*, from which it obviously takes a lot of inspiration. The controls are a bit more complex though, with attack and item buttons, special moves and the like. The anthropomorphic spacecraft are prone to bounce uncontrollably around the level if not controlled with care. Unlike *Sonic*, the characters' large size makes it difficult to anticipate obstacles as they come into view, which sometimes makes for a confusing experience. If you can get used to it though, there's a lot to search for in this game.

Of note: *Rainbow Bell Adventures* has seen an English release before, in Europe, but in a notoriously cut-down form that removes much of the comedy banter and the branching structure of the game's overworld. The fan translated version is recommended over it.

[Hardcore Gaming 101 has an extensive page on Twinbee and its satellite games.](#)



All the characters have minor differences in attack style and ability. You have to feel for poor Gwinbee, very much the Luigi of the Twinbee series.



Despite what it says, the pilot's name is Pastel. She was the breakout star of the later Twinbee games, and I hear developed quite the fandom. It's a bit disturbing that the game tells us her height and weight.



Yes, Dr. Cinnamon, the guy from Wai Wai World, is back! He invented the 'Bees and the heroes Light, Pastel and Mint are his grandchildren.

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In play, the game feels a bit like Sonic, but with more controls. Also, Sonic can keep going indefinitely so long as he has even one ring, but the 'Bees have health, and regaining it is a lot harder.

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The result is, you can build up a lot of speed, but you still have to be careful, which argues against rapid play. They're competing pressures, you see. Pretty graphics, though.

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You're a spaceship in a platformer, why can't you just zoom up for outer space? Entertainingly, you *can*, although there doesn't seem to be much use for it in the game. You'd think you could just jet out of the level, but it'll be waiting for you back on the ground.

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There are these cave levels that you can bounce around, collecting bells. Some of these areas can be quite complicated.



## 41. I Love Golf! Out Of Bounds Club



**Platform:** Super Famicom (Satellaview originally)

**Creator:** Dynamic-Designs

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (the game crashed for me after a round), **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/2583/>

Homepage: <http://www.dynamic-designs.us/golf.shtml>

**Description:** An adorable gonzo golf game reminiscent of a certain HAL production....

There are cult games, and then there's Kirby's Dream Course. HAL's surprisingly hardcore mix of Kirby whimsy and minigolf evil is a favorite among many of your more discerning gaming enthusiasts. But like all things, it is finite. However popular it is among those in the know, it wasn't popular *enough* for them to have made a second one. And even if they did, would a mere course expansion really be what people are looking for, or another game that could recapture that thrill of initial discovery.

It's not nearly as well known, but there is "a second one" for the game. Well, sort of, it's not made by the original people I think. Maybe it was inspired by Kirby's Dream Course? KDC was published in 1994 and I Love Golf! OOB in 1997 as part of the Satellaview service. See the article on BS Zelda for more on that.

The Satellaview was a strange beast; Nintendo managed to get a good number of other publishers on board to develop software for it, and for a few years it was the source for a huge variety of ingenious content. *Much of it would never see an official release in any other form.* Who knows how most of it got made? Did publishers set aside teams specifically to work on Satellaview games, or did they use it to release polished prototypes, or maybe that one project, the one everyone on staff loved, but would never make enough money to justify pressing ROM

chips? How long had this sat on the disks of Masaya, waiting for its chance at the spotlight? How much did it cost to make, and how much did they get for it? Was there ever a chance that it could have been profitable? Don't indies ask themselves these same questions all the time?

For a brief period people could download and play this game as much as they wanted, and the memory chips in the Satellaview cart have a long life, which is the only reason we have it preserved now.

I Love Golf! Out Of Bounds Club is more a golf game in the mini-golf sense, as much of the play is about dealing with various gimmicks strewn about the courses. Of those there are six each with eight holes, for 48 holes in total. The game plays fast, so it won't take long to see them all, but the real fun is in mastering all the holes, of course. These are divided into half regular (to an extent) kinds of golf holes, and the others are purely fantasyland. Both are so littered with playfield toy that they resemble a pinball machine more than golf.

Taking a shot is super easy. After using the L or R buttons to scroll around the board and get your bearings, use left and right to adjust your angle and up/down the shot's power (hold Y to slow down the cursor), from 1 to 100. There is no power bar; you hit the ball just as hard as you specify. Then you decide where you want to strike the ball, then press A again to confirm the whole thing. If you hit a present during your shot you get a special ability, but I couldn't figure out how to activate them. Maybe they're passive effects.

One aspect of the game, in multiplayer, that is interesting is the ability to affect the other players' balls. A collision with another ball is fair in this game and makes the play into a different, even more chaotic experience when playing multiplayer. This pushes ILG:OOB into party game territory. Drag it out as a gathering and watch the friendships crumble.

[Here's a loving tribute to the game](#), that says of it, "Perhaps the best SNES game you've never heard of."

Note: In a test play, the game crashed after a match was completed. I don't know if this is the result of a faulty dump or patch, or what. It doesn't seem to affect the game.



Most of the levels look like something out of Rube Goldberg's nightmares. Find a way to avoid them, or chain together the gimmicks to get to the hole.



You're helped in that there isn't much randomness in the process of delivering the stroke. You can even specify the exact power from 1 to 100. No moving power bars or aiming windows!



I have to wonder if this game shares any development staff with Kirby's Dream Course? It came out like three years after Dream Course, it's probably just heavily inspired by it.



You'd better believe I'd include this screenshot after birdie-ing such a formidable-looking hole!



## 42. Little Magic translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

**Difficulty:** 7/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/191/>

**Description:** A Sokoban variant *that will beat you up*.

### On Sokoban

Let us, for a moment, reflect upon timeless, perfect Sokoban, that ancient computer game that even now inspires clones, versions and variations.

Sokoban was created by Hiroyuki Imabayashi in 1981, and published Japanese publisher Thinking Rabbit for the PC-8801 personal computer. They and their licenses published a good number of versions of the game, with new puzzles and such, for a variety of platforms, including PC, Gameboy and Mega Drive/Genesis. More than that though, the basics of Sokoban have become the foundation for a large category of puzzles, which we might call *block pushers*, and even if such a puzzle game has substantially more to offer in features and gimmicks than Sokoban did, you can often see where it had been used as a foundation. Now even venerable roguelike NetHack offers a subdungeon explicitly called Sokoban, that makes use of its ruleset.

The rules, like in all the best puzzle games, are simple. You're a warehouse keeper, and your job is to move boxes into their designated places on the floor. Each flood is a grid of discrete spaces, each space containing either a floor, a wall, a box, or you. You can move into the four cardinal directions, up, down, left and right, into adjacent spaces unless they contain a wall. If you move into a box, you push it one space in that direction unless there's a wall or another box in the way; if there is such a blocker, then neither you nor the box move. A puzzle is solved when all the boxes are on goal spots, but once on a goal spot, a box can be moved off of it if needed.



A little playing of Sokoban reveals a few important things. First, any box moved into a corner, blocked on two adjacent sides by walls, becomes forever immovable; you can never get behind the block to move it back out. Similarly, a box pushed against a wall is stuck to sliding along it unless the wall turns away from the box, and even then, there has to be enough room for you to get around the box to push it away. A 2x2 square of boxes is also stuck because you can't push more than one box at a time. As you do more Sokoban puzzles, these facts become more and more second-nature to the player, which helps to make more complicated puzzles doable.

What are some other block-pushing games? There's Eggerland and its US version The Adventures of Lolo; the "Emerald Framers" in those games work exactly like Sokoban's boxes, although they don't have goal spots. They are just obstacles. Puzzle Boy, released in the US as (groan) "Kwirk: He's A-Maze-Ing," has blocks that work like Sokoban boxes, but can be larger than one grid cell in size. And then there's Little Magic.

### **A Magic Porter**

How does this game work? Well, start with the rules of Sokoban. Each level has a single block that looks like a fire but can be pushed around the same way. There's a goal spot in the level too. You want to get the fire to the goal; then the exit stairs can be used to get to the next puzzle. Note that there is no audio-visual signal when the stairs activate. Until they do, they're just a space like any other.

Your pink-haired anime witch girl protagonist, May, has two additional abilities over Sokoban's stevedore. She can push a block an extra space, in the direction she's facing, by pressing the A button. And she can magically create floating bubbles of water in the space she's facing, with the B button. Bubbles act just like the fire blocks generally, although they cannot trigger goal spots, but each has a timer. As time passes, they shrink in size and eventually "pop." When it happens, any other box-like object on an adjacent space is pushed away one space. May can also "pump up" her bubbles by pressing the B button more times. This makes it bigger and bigger, extending its time. If it goes over a maximum size, though, it'll pop immediately. Sometimes you want to do that.

Both abilities work based on the direction May is facing, which is something Sokoban didn't have to bother with. She faces the direction of her last move. There is no way to change her facing without moving unless you walk into an impassible obstacle. This is a subtle, but important, fact.

Also unlike Sokoguy, May has some additional puzzle elements to deal with. Most common are water spaces, which can bear both the fire blocks and your orbs but cannot be walked upon. A frequent early puzzle task is to move a fire across a body of water, and they get longer as the

early puzzles teach you how best to use May's moves. You cannot walk into a space containing an Arrow against that Arrow's direction. (The Arrow only affects moving *into* its space; you can move *out of* it in any non-blocked direction.) Ice spaces cause you to slide along until you hit a wall. Spikes bear no danger to you, but if you're careless enough to push a fire block into one, the box breaks and makes the puzzle unsolvable. There are other gimmicks too, and some of their effects are subtle and require some experimentation to discover. For example, lava spaces act like water spaces, but for some reason bubbles naturally *increase* in size while over them, instead of decrease. There are enemies too.

You'll probably never see 'em, but there's also boring normal blocks, teleporters, breakaway floors, slow-moving grass, enemies that can push things, and spaces that you can't make bubbles while standing on them. You can take that as a challenge if you like. Because....

### **A Plush Toy Filled With Needles**

Little Magic's character is the picture of cuteness, so looking at it you're probably thinking, "Aww! This must be some kind of kids game. Maybe I'll pop it in for a quick finish then go have lunch."

YOU FOOL DO NOT BE DECEIVED BY ITS ADORABLE FACADE IT IS A TRAP

The consequences of Little Magic's ruleset are unexpectedly deep. Here is a minor spoiler:

\* \* \* \* \*

The primary trick lies in noticing that you can use bursting bubbles to move more than fire blocks, but also other bubbles, and you can determine how long a bubble lasts by pumping it full of more water. Some puzzles require you to have bubbles moved into specific places pop in a specific order, and the real puzzle is figuring out how to get them to do that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Level 14. That is the threshold. That is the puzzle that separates the cute pink-haired witch girls from the cute pink-haired witch women. Take a look at it (I supply a screenshot below). This puzzle *can be solved*, and completely with powers you've learned up to this point. If you can do it (it took me a few tries), you'll enjoy the tricky puzzling journey ahead of you. I've made it to level 30, but am not currently sure how to proceed from there. You should feel free to set a save state at the start of each level, by the way, because "Game Overs" only get in the way of enjoying this kind of thing.

If you cannot pass level 14, don't feel bad. It's a hard game, and it gets harder from there. Remember the Kirby Rule: a game's fluffy coating can hide sharp spikes.



I really like this game, but those portraits....

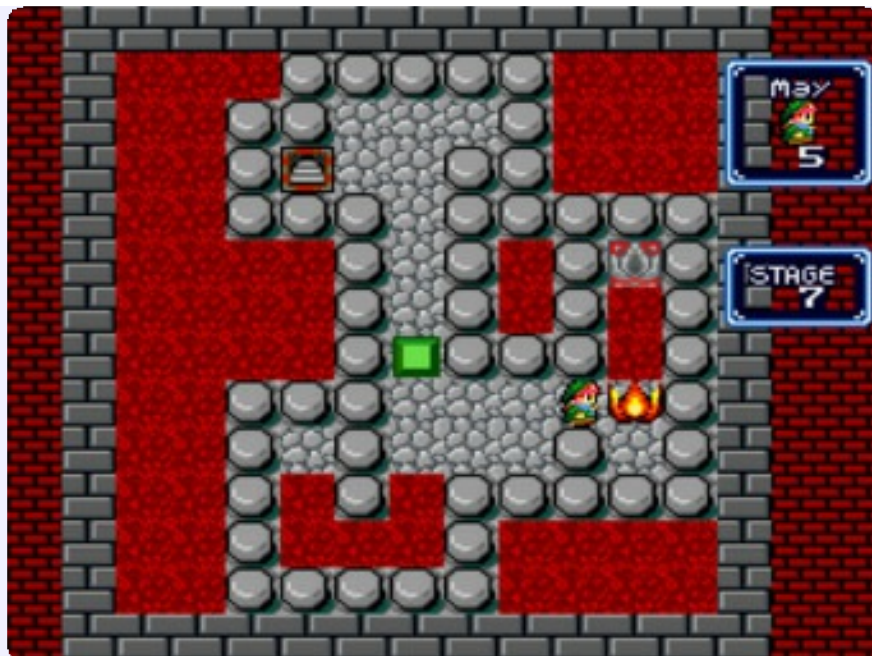


Stage 25. I personally dare you guys to get this far.  
(That will work, right? It'll get people to try this game?)



This is the level I mentioned above as being the place where some people will give up.

Everything up to this point has been fairly simple, and then it throws THIS at you.



I made a mistake on this level. It's nothing save states can't get you out of. Yes, you should use save states on this one, life systems are bogus when applied to Sokoban-style games!



### 43. Wrecking Crew '98 translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creator:** ShadowOne333

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/3214/>

**Description:** A block-matching puzzle game overlaid with Nintendo's NES-era classic.

This late release for the Super Famicom didn't make it to other territories than Japan probably because the Nintendo 64 was already out by then. It's one of the last games made by them for their 16-bit machine.

On the cart is both a faithful (that is to say, boring) recreation of the NES game, possibly there to satisfy people who thought they were getting an updated game like the original, and a fairly interesting block-matching puzzle game. That's the focus of this writeup.

Like games such as Columns, there are colored blocks, and like those games, you're trying to get them in a row. Diagonals don't count in this version, only horizontal and vertical matches. Also, there are only four colors of blocks, so matches are relatively easy to get.

Like Puyo Puyo, the game is generally framed as a versus match between two players, with player two being either a human or a computer-controlled opponent, but always a competition. There is no "endurance" mode where it's just you against the blocks. So, you're always attacking the opponent and defending against attacks, at least if you want to win.

The way the blocks are manipulated is what differentiates Wrecking Crew '98 from other, similar games like Panel De Pon/Tetris Attack/Puzzle League. They act much like the walls you had to demolish in original Wrecking Crew. Your character, Mario most likely, actually stands on the playfield, which has ledges that you can stand on and jump between. The far left column has a bunch of lever controls and additionally can be climbed up and down like a ladder. The walls, or



"panels," that are your focus are set in the background, behind the platforms and Mario. Most of them have a color, and those are the things you're trying to match, and thus clear.

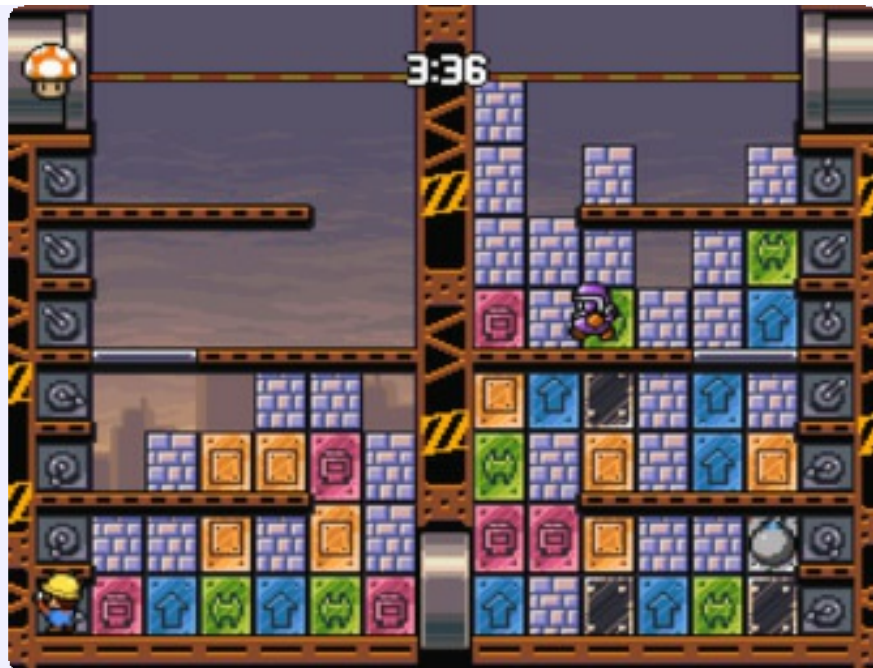
Instead of controlling them as they fall, Mario can smash them with his hammer and make the panels above it fall down. He can also go to the far left column and hit the levers over there, which shift the rest of the row to the right by one space. Periodically, but faster as the match continues, single brick panels will fall from the top of random columns. These don't have a color until hit once with your hammer, which gives them a random hue. Also, if you're running low on blocks, you can summon more at any time by pressing the Y button.

Getting four or more colored blocks in a row, or setting up a chain-reaction combo, affects the other player, but in different ways depending on the color of the blocks. Yellow blocks send over iron panels which are difficult to clear, making them very desirable. If you manage to clear your whole board you're awarded a one-use attack booster, inflicting even more mischief on the opponent's screen.

The game overall isn't hard, but there are challenges in some levels, where enemy characters boast you can't beat them in less than some tiny time limit, and reaching those is pretty dang difficult. The game ends when the blocks on a player's board extend up out of the bin for three complete seconds, so a quick player can often dig out a violating column before its time runs out.

All in all, it's a pretty entertaining puzzler. It's a shame the game has never gotten a chance outside of Japan. Since there's a basic platformer, complete with a jump button, in front of the puzzle action the game doesn't have the timeless simplicity of Tetris or the many other games inspired by it. Still, it definitely isn't bad.

[Here is a video of ShiryuGL playing the game, on YouTube.](#)



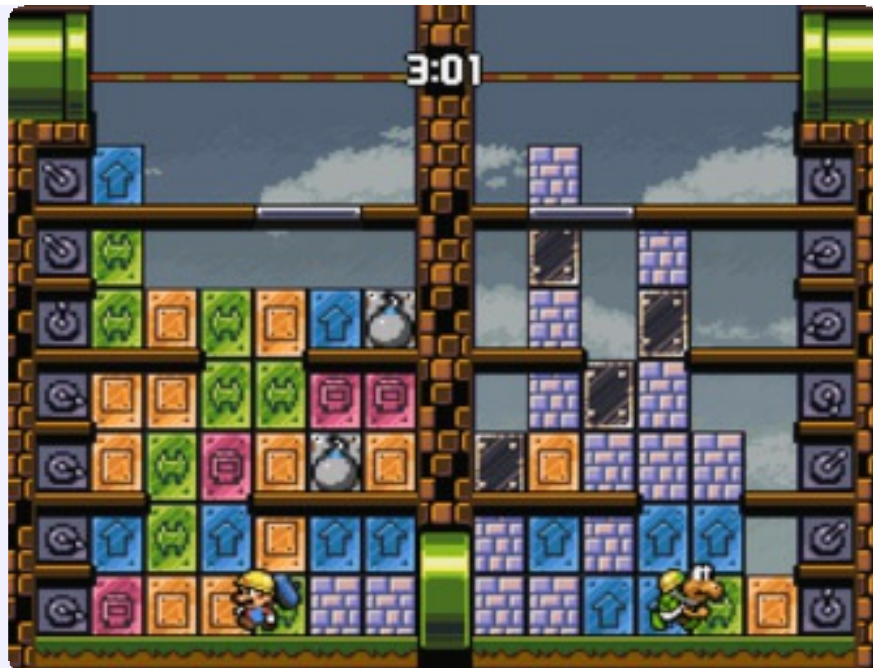
Despite the name, the game is really really different from Wrecking Crew.

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I like that Mario marks his route in crayon. Almost as much as the big KOOPA over the building, a division of EvilCo Inc.

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You can manipulate the panels by destroying one and letting the higher ones fall, or you can climb the side, hit a dial and advance the whole row. Three-in a-rows clear out, but you want larger numbers, or combos, to attack the opponent.

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This is Spike the Foreman, who showed up in Wrecking Crew. He's kind of a proto-Wario. Apparently, he's jealous of Mario's fame.

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The tension of the game comes from the speed of the blocks. The more blocks, the closer you are to losing. But you need lots of blocks to send attacks to mess up your opponent. This is Versus Puzzle 101.



#### 44. Sutte Hakkun translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creator:** Raccoon Sam

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/3280/>

**Description:** Another Super Famicom puzzle game! Here, you're a drinky-bird on a mission that includes colors, blocks and weird, but friendly, creatures.

Yes, I love puzzle games. I find that, over time, I've gotten slightly worse at action games, but much better at puzzle games. Skill at puzzles is not something innate, it's something you get better at with practice. Learning to do one kind of puzzle well makes you a little bit better at all puzzle games, and formerly difficult trials become much easier. We're not talking about a matter of weeks here but over time. Like a muscle, your ability to reason through these kinds of things can be improved.

This is an obscure Japanese puzzle cart. While licensed from another company, it was developed by Nintendo themselves, which shines brilliantly through this game. It exists in both Satellaview (see the entry on BS Zelda) and cartridge forms. The "BS" version of the game has several versions, and they seem to have different levels. [There's a translation patch for one of those too](#), but it doesn't translate the extensive tutorial, which is not a thing you'll want to skip for this one. The patch featured here is for the cartridge version, which is a bit harder to find. It is well worth searching for, though! This patch translates the whole tutorial in fine style. Now, you don't have to go through the *whole* tutorial before playing. You'll want to go through the bits up to the end of the colored block section, then you can play the game. Come back to it when you start to encounter unfamiliar elements.

So, about the game. Hakkun is a mobile drinky-bird. They (gender-neutral terms seem appropriate for these characters) can walk left and right, and jump one-and-a-half blocks high.



They also have a needle-like mouth that they can use to hold colored liquids, available in unlimited supply from pots, like a real drinky-bird. They can also *inject* it, like an avian syringe, into other objects, filling them with color. Once injected into an object, it takes on new properties depending on the color. Particularly, blocks can be colored like this, and each of the colors Red, Blue and Yellow make them move around under their own power in different ways. Using these colors you can make blocks into moving platforms, and then use them as steps in your quest to collect all the Rainbow stones in each level.

In the traditional level-based puzzle style, as you play gradually new elements are introduced, like Makkun, a floppy dog-like thing who also gets special properties when filled with color juice. Rokkun cannot be colored (or rather, he's already got a color), but can be absorbed in one gulp and then placed elsewhere. Burokun and Turokun are fake versions of blocks and paint jars that can't be moved or absorbed. And there are traps and fast-action skills to pick up that you'll need before the end.

Unlike many puzzle games, you are scored for how efficiently you solve each level. Most of your various moves have a point cost, which is deduced from a total of 1,000 that you begin the level with. When you finish, the points you're left with are recorded as a record you can try to beat later, and also added to a grand total that serves as a mark of how well you've played overall. Of course, you can always go back to old levels to better your score and potentially add to your total.

While graphically pretty simple, there are charming details throughout the game, especially in its animation. Rokkun's reaction to being messed around with (especially when they get absorbed) is very funny.






So anyway, there you have it. Sutte Hakkun. And hey, if you find you enjoy it you can then play the BS versions! Extra level packs!

Of note: you can break out of the tutorial in the cartridge version by pressing the Select button from the lesson list. There doesn't seem to be a way to get out of the tutorial, that I can see anyway, in the various BS versions.

Also of note: The readme on this translation patch is interesting to people of a moderate technical bent. If you're looking to sink your teeth into writing a level editor, this might be a good one to start with?

## Rules

In this game, points are determined by **how much you move around**. When you move, **you lose points**. When you clear the level, your score will be whatever points you have left. **Simple!**

Walking  ..... = 1 pts	Jumping  = 3 pts
Exhale  - 5 pts	Switch  = 3 pts
Inhale  = 5 pts	Quicksave .... = 20 pts

**Rapidly turning the power ON/OFF during scoring may result in data loss!**

Even after you solve a puzzle, you can try to optimize your solution for a better score.

---



There is an EXTENSIVE tutorial. You should do some of it, but not all of it right away! A few elements in it you won't see for awhile.

---



This rock creature is suitably aghast as being absorbed.



This is by far the hardest level among the practice set. Don't feel bad if you can't do it right away.



Red blocks move vertically, blue ones horizontally, and yellow ones diagonally. Yellow ones are more versatile, so you can use them to get better scores.

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When you exhale a block, if you keep the button held down and press up, Hakkun will lift the block exactly half a step. You'll be doing this a lot.

---





Switches change the color of all the paint jars on the level. Red -> Blue -> Yellow -> Red. They don't change any already-colored objects.



Blocks can be placed in and extracted from walls, and don't block horizontal movement. They are just platforms you can stand on. Makkuns, on the other hand, do block movement.



## 45. Final Fantasy V translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creator:** RPGe

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/353/>

**Description:** The legendary fan translation of Final Fantasy V, for a while the only way it could be played in English.

Like Seiken Densetsu III (later on in this book), Final Fantasy V was a victim of Square's reluctant to release many of its Super Famicom RPGs in English. To this day fans aren't sure why they dropped the ball on it. Nintendo Power even hyped up the missing game a bit, noting that it might make it to our shores under the name Final Fantasy Ultimate or something like that. Then, nothing. We didn't get an official version of the game in English until the PlayStation release Final Fantasy Anthology, which bundled Final Fantasy VI for good measure. Since then there's also been a Gameboy Advance port. Even now, after all this time, many prefer the fan translation.

Those who wonder at the hype might not realize how lusted after Final Fantasy games were back then. We (yes I include myself in this) felt betrayed, a bit, when they refused to even give the US audience a chance. Even now, thinking back on it with the perspective of two decades, it's difficult to avoid being a bit miffed at them. Now, localization costs money and resources, which Square's American branch didn't have a lot of, which is probably why they relied so much on poor, derided Ted Woolsey, whipping boy for a whole fandom, for their translations. (Did you hear what Woolsey's doing these days? He's General Manager at Undead Labs, the guys who made State of Decay! Always nice to hear about an industry veteran doing well.)

The fan translation created a real stir when it was unveiled. For many people, it was the first time they'd even heard of the idea. "Wait... hacking a Japanese rom image to translate it into English

and then playing it in an emulator? You can *do* that?" As such, it was likely a spur to the romhacking community, a source of inspiration to many. A lot of the hacks in these books probably, at their foundation, have this translation to thank for their existence.

Let's talk about the game itself. It has some of the strongest gameplay of the Final Fantasy series. It reintroduces the Job System from Japanese Final Fantasy III, but is a lot more laid back about it; there is no penalty for switching jobs. The Job System lets you decide what character has what abilities, with little exception. On the negative side, it turns your characters into blank slates, without much statistical individuality other than what you give to them. Hero Butz (Done with the giggling now? Good.) can be a strong fighter type, or an attack wizard, or specialize in defensive buffs, or become your party healer, or become anything any of the other three characters in your group can be. At one point, one of the characters leaves your party for good, but there's this other character on hand who has that one's exact same stats, and replaces the missing one completely seamlessly, at least from a gameplay perspective. The demure princess Lenna can be anyone in terms of statistics--which is actually refreshing, come to think of it.

This statistical flexibility gives the player great power to construct the kind of party they like. But it also allows the player to dig a hole for themselves. What kind of party the player should build depends on what kind of opposition the player will face, and without spoilers, there's no way to know what that is. Final Fantasy V doesn't let players just coast through the game, it expects players to build a strong group, and it is very easy to fall behind if you don't construct one. You could always just grind up some more levels, but that runs counter to JRPG design theory of the time, which was actually partly set by Square, that being: players traveling between points on the map should on average receive just enough encounters to be a minimally viable group. Final Fantasy V doesn't allow you to coast like that. You're expected to build your characters up in at least a sensible way. If you know what you're doing, you can go far beyond that and lay the game's battle system to waste. But most people, on their first time through the game, won't know how to do that.

That, ultimately, may be why Square decided not to risk their resources on an English localization at the time of original release. Final Fantasy IV's character advancement was pretty much set throughout the game, and Final Fantasy VI's gave characters more of a base advancement that at least could be used as a fallback in case their Magicite strategy wasn't working out. Magazines from the time have mentioned, in interviews with Square staff, that the game was considered too difficult for the average gamer.

Furthermore, because Final Fantasy V's character development greatly depends on what classes they have, and have had throughout the game, two different players will effectively have different parties, and this reduces the effectiveness of FAQs and walkthroughs. While a

walkthrough can tell you where to go next and who to talk to, unless you've followed it slavishly from the start, the suggestions it offers for battle may not work out.

Yet these same qualities are also why many fans love the game. Rare among JRPGs of that time, players must pay attention and construct a working party. There are many different ways to play Final Fantasy V, which makes it a great game to replay time and again, trying new strategies with each run.

Tarosan, of World of Longplays, did a complete playthrough of Final Fantasy V in a series of seven YouTube videos. [I have constructed a playlist of them if you wish to see what the game is like.](#)

Kotaku published Jason Schreier's article "[How Three Kids With No Experience Beat Square And Translated Final Fantasy V Into English](#)" back in May 2017. It makes for interesting reading.



A character in a JRPG with amnesia! What an original idea!

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It seems like every Final Fantasy game has its silly sidequest. Here, your main character learns to play the piano.



Remember: undead are damaged by healing magic! That's just one of those little Final Fantasy-isms.



Lots of old-school Final Fantasy have maze-like castles to explore for bonus stuff like items and spells.

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This Chocobo's job is to explain to you the way jobs work in this game. It's the game's biggest selling point, and he put a lot of work into his presentation, so pay attention!

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Boss time! You can think of bosses in JRPGs as power checks. "You must be this strong to pass this point." Here though, you can make up for a lot of power with strategy! FFV is a true player's game.



In FFV, this screen is like half of the game. The jobs you pick, and the abilities you assign, can give you an advantage or set you back. Choose wisely!

## 46. Radical Dreamers playability and translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom (formerly Satellaview)

**Creator:** Demiforce

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:**

RHDN: <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/403/>

Homepage: <http://radicaldreamers.sourceforge.net>

**Description:** A sort of video game choose-your-own-adventure, made entirely of text and illustrations, set in the Chrono Trigger universe.

One is given to wonder, at times, what game publishers are thinking.

Back in the SNES era, Square released what is to this day renowned as one of the best JRPGs ever made, Chrono Trigger. A lighthearted, fast-moving time-travel adventure, if you haven't played it yet then you should go about remedying that now. In addition to the SNES release, there are versions for PlayStation Nintendo DS, iOS and Android.

Although Chrono Trigger is excellent and hugely fun, it doesn't make too much sense to talk about how it plays here, because Radical Dreamers doesn't play at all like it. It does take place in the same universe though, so it'll help if you're familiar with that game's story. The game's scenario is similar to that in one section of Chrono Trigger's PlayStation sequel, Chrono Cross, although in play it is completely different from that as well.

When you start the game, you're treated to a text introduction, with a background of an image of a diary. After a couple of pages of text the title screen appears, and then you're asked for normal or fast text speed.

Then more text appears, now with A-button prompts to move on. Then more text. Then more. Then the screen clears and more appears. There's mood-setting music behind it, and the

background illustrations change to reflect what's being described. But mostly it's text.

It is important to emphasize that *this is the whole game*. Radical Dreamers is basically text gussied up with music and backgrounds. It's not *static* text, though. At certain places, you're asked to make a decision between several choices. Often the decision is time-limited, even; if you take too long to pick something, the game will decide for you. There is combat in the game, but it's done in the same multiple-choice format. You can think of it as being like a video game version of the Steve Jackson *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks, although with a completely different story of course.

The story itself is standard JRPG fare, maybe a bit more atmospheric and evocative because the salient points have to be expressed through the text instead of through event or illustrated through gameplay. It is interesting as a Dungeons & Dragons kind of scenario, and Demiforce does an excellent job of translating the text and keeping it lively and entertaining to read.

One advantage to playing this through emulation is the ready presence of save states. They can be of great aid in exploring all the branches of the story. You should feel free to take extravagant advantage of them.

[A video playthrough of Radical Dreamers, by SaikyoMog, is on YouTube.](#) (As mentioned in Part One, [SaikyoMog died of cancer in February 2015.](#))

“Boy, did her information help. I thought the perimeter’s  
counterspell would be quite a problem.”

Kid’s braid sways gently from side to side in the cool  
nighttime breeze.

So far, we’ve managed to slip through the magical shield  
network undetected and sneak into Lynx’s domain. Still,  
this inner region can make for some pretty rough travel.

Kid, Magil, and I comprise this party of three...@

Some people might call Radical Dreamers a visual novel, but I think it feels more like a gamebook, like *Fighting Fantasy*.

That's a weird feeling to get from a Japanese text game.

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A deep feline growl breaks the uncomfortable silence,  
and I realize we're being hunted by a pack of feral cats. 😬



Sometimes you get into situations like this. I guess the cats are bigger than the usual? I feel bad about fighting them.

---

What will we do!?

- Attack!
- Magic!
- Defend!
- Run!



Sometimes you get a combat sequence like this. This isn't a Lucasarts-style, no-way-to-lose kind of game, either. Some story branches lead to death and retrying. And decide quickly, or the game decides for you!

---

It's been something like three years since Kid and I met.  
Back then I was a drifter, wandering wherever my music  
led me. During my stay in the remote town of Regiorra, I  
ended up running into a girl who later joined me, leading  
to the beginning of all this.  
That girl was Kid...☺

The story is a prototype for part of the scenario to Chrono Trigger's sequel, the PlayStation game Chrono Cross. But Radical Dreamers should probably be considered non-canonical.

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A large fountain sits in the center of this beautiful  
room. Looking across the way, another archway similar  
to this one leads off into darkness.



The game's atmosphere is really nice and unexpected. One doesn't expect art and music from a text adventure game!



## 47. Seiken Densetsu 3 translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom

**Creators:** LNF Translations, Neill Corlett, SoM2Freak

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/440/>

**Description:** The successor to Secret of Mana, long lusted after by players, remains playable in English only in this form.

The English translation of Seiken Densetsu 3 (Secret of Mana was a localization of Seiken Densetsu 2, and the Gameboy title Final Fantasy Adventure was one of Seiken Densetsu 1) was a wonder. The game is an action-RPG very much like Secret of Mana. Six playable characters could be selected, one primary and two secondary, each with their own storyline, allowing for extensive replay. It even supported co-op play, with two of the three characters played by human beings. Why Square never localized it then might be chalked up to limited resources. Why they *still* haven't is anyone's guess.

Back in the 16-bit days, failure to localize such a game was far from unheard-of. Of the first six Final Fantasy games, only I, IV and VI were localized to English in their original versions. The odd thing is, II, III and V have all seen official English conversions since then, while Seiken Densetsu 3 languished, despite the popularity of Secret of Mana.

So it remains to fans to translate the game, and in fact, Seiken Densetsu 3 was one of the earliest major fan game translations, released way back in 2000. What Americans missed out on was a sprawling action-RPG designed from the ground up for replayability. Any of six characters could be chosen to be the protagonist, and two others of the five remaining could be secondary characters. Depending on who's chosen, certain locations might not even appear in a given playthrough. There are three entirely different late-game areas and antagonists awaiting the group depending on the choice of party leader. Each of the characters has two class change

events in their development, for a total of 12 possible final parties even among a specific set of character choices!

The game itself, in addition to being freaking gorgeous, supports a day-night cycle as well as counting the day of the week.

Note: Unlike Secret of Mana, Seiken Densetsu 3 does not support three-player co-op play with a multitap (a device allowing extra controllers to be connected to a console). Despite the fact that the adventuring party has three characters in it, only two can be controlled by human players. A hack has been made to remedy this as well, however, available [here](#). I do not know if this patch is compatible with the translation, but it seems unlikely. It might be best played by people already familiar with the story, and remember, that changes depending on the main character!

Yet another note: While it won't be in English, you *can* fairly easily obtain the original, unpatched version of Seiken Densetsu 3, along with Seiken Densetsu 1 and 2 in their unlocalized form, on Nintendo Switch. Change your system's locale to Japan and it will allow you to access, add funds to and purchase from the Japanese eShop, meaning you can legally obtain Seiken Densetsu Collection, a well-regarded bundle of the first three games, on a US Switch.



Here are your six characters. You pick three at the start; one you begin playing as, the other two will join later.

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How do a bunch of level 1 weaklings take over a kingdom like this?

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Sometimes you open a treasure and you get a trap roulette. Try to score an "OK" to avoid damage!

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The artwork in this game is visually stunning, some of the best seen on the Super Famicom.



All three characters have joined, it's a real party now. The shopkeepers here do that same dance they did in Secret of Mana, what's up with that?



There are these spring guys who send you way up in the air, giving you a chance to look at the Mode 7 world map. The game can be whimsical and charming, but there are dark dealings afoot!