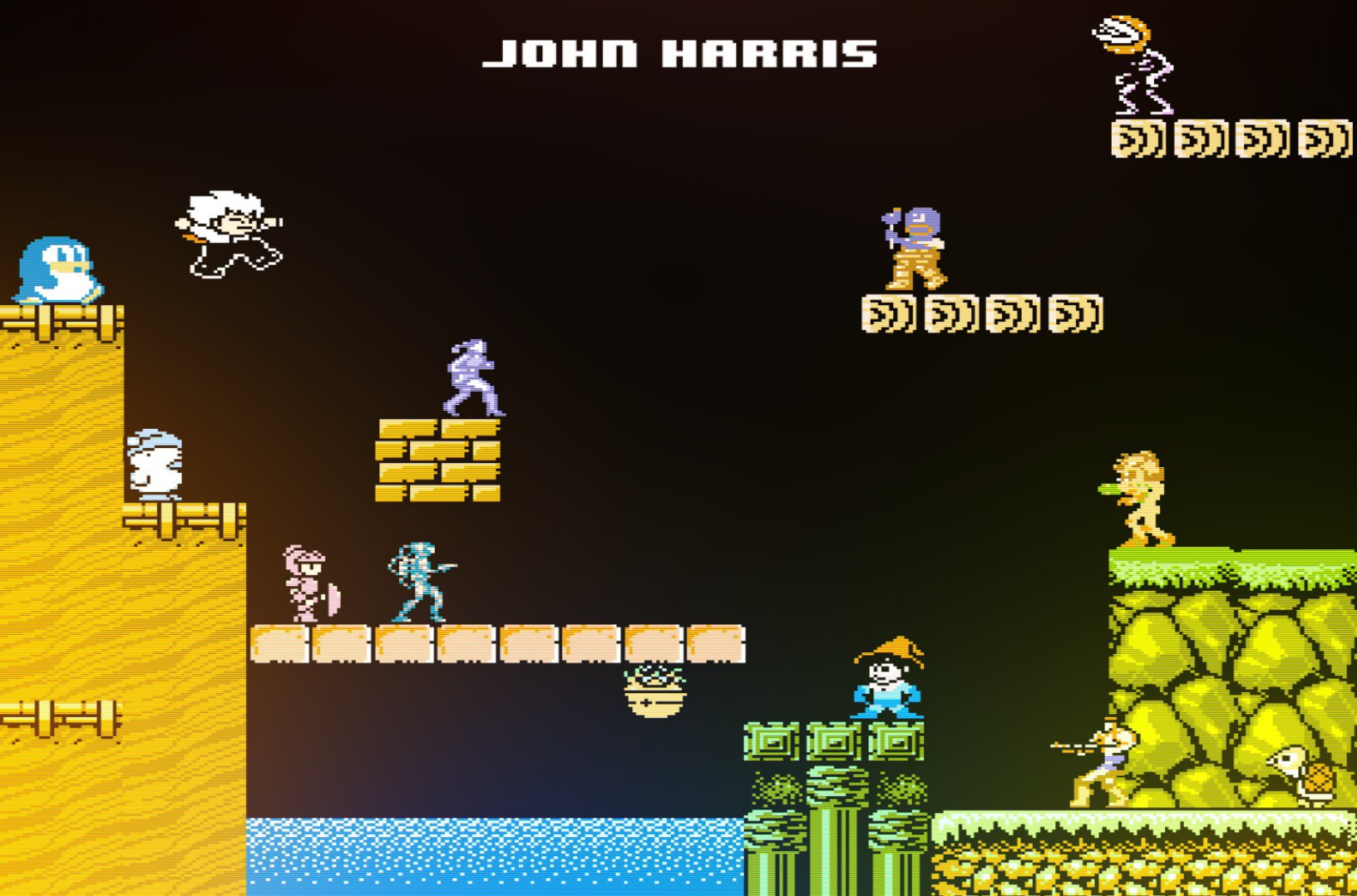


# SOMEBODY SET UP US THE ROM

**PART 1**  
**PRESENTING 50 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

Somebody Set Up Us The Rom, Part Two (forthcoming)

Special thanks to [Simon Carless](#), [Benj Edwards](#), [Matthew Green](#), [Keith Burgun](#), Andrew Scott Green, Jr. and Angela Jean Scheeler.

Also, thanks to the screenshot and fast forward buttons in RetroArch, without which this book would probably have taken another couple of weeks to compile.

## 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 1.06 of the text.

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## Introduction

### What is a Romhack?

This is a pretty basic description in case you're a newcomer to all this. If you already know what this is all about you'll probably want to skip ahead a bit.

So, back in the days of the NES (and earlier, too), video games were distributed on cartridges that could be plugged into a game system and enjoyed. Inside these cartridges were computer chips that contained the programming code and other needed information of the game in a format that could be read by the console. These chips were of a kind of memory called ROM, for "Read-Only Memory." Unlike its counterpart RAM ("Random Access Memory"), ROM was unchangeable and non-volatile, keeping its contents even when power was disconnected. Its data was burned into it at the factory. ROM chips weren't the only things game cartridges contained (there was often other chips called mappers, and in the case of the NES there was the 10NES security chip), but the ROM chips were the most interesting bits, and were different for every game.

The key information here is that the contents of these ROM chips are just data. There is nothing magical about it. What means one thing to a console's processor is just a sequence of numbers to anyone else. These numbers can be read off of the chips, through a process called dumping, and stored in data files. Colloquially these files are called "roms," without capital letters.

A few years later, with the advent of Intel's 486 processor, home computers became powerful enough to emulate the NES. A program called an emulator is used that reads the game's data directly from rom files, simulates the running of the processor and other chips in the console, and provides a display that is a very close approximation of what playing the game on hardware would be like. With time and effort, emulators became better and better at their jobs, and able to simulate games with ever greater degrees of accuracy, and able to play much wider varieties of games, and emulate many systems.

But there is one especially important difference between playing a game from a cartridge on your console, and playing it from a rom file on your computer. The data in files is mutable, it can be changed. In principle, you could treat the emulator as a special computing platform and write arbitrary programs for it. Some people in fact do this; this is called *homebrew*. Or you could content yourself to just changing the data and code of already-existing games to providing different experiences. Many people are doing this, and distributing the changes as patch files on the internet.

A patch is basically a list of changes that can be made to a rom, presented in a format that yet another program, a patcher, can use to transmute a rom, making the specific changes to it needed to play a hack. It is technically a violation of copyright law to distribute roms, being data that is under copyright, but distributing a list of changes to make to a rom is not illegal. This is why romhackers are usually adamant about not distributing their hacks in pre-patched form, as this shields them from a degree of legal liability. Usually, on hack forums, it's against the rules to even ask where one can obtain roms from.

Nowadays there exist flashcarts, which are devices carrying a lot of non-volatile flash memory, much the same kind of stuff you'd find in a USB thumb drive, and the circuitry needed to interface it with a console. With such a device you can load, not only original roms, but romhacks too, into a console, and play them as if they were new cartridge releases. That is the starry, far-future age in which we live.

## **What Romhacks Are Not**

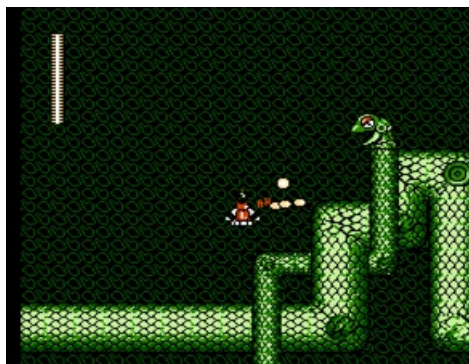
It's not intruding into someone else's computer, and it's not jailbreaking your iPhone, iPad or Android device, nor is like rooting a Wii, Xbox or PlayStation, although if you did that you might then be able to play them on console hardware. The skills needed to modify a game are not breaches of security but of disassembly and programming skill. The processes are completely different.

It is in the interest of game developers, especially those that are also console manufacturers, to cast as negative a light on romhacks as possible.

A few prominent hacks have been persecuted by them, notably, the Chrono Trigger hack Crimson Echoes was effectively killed due to a cease-and-desist letter from rights-owner Square Enix. (A cease-and-desist letter is issued by a lawyer, not a judge, and need not have any legal basis. But since it carries an implied threat of legal action, and many romhackers and teams cannot afford, financially, to defend a suit, it often has the effect of killing such a project outright.) Also, it is not known exactly what caused the creators of the popular Smash Bros. Brawl mod, Project M, to shut down, but it's assumed to be due to pressure, perhaps legal pressure, from Smash Bros. owner Nintendo.

## **The Good, The Bad, and the Grossly Disturbing**

Another reason romhacks have kind of a negative reputation is because of their use as a meme engine and conduit for juvenile content. At best these are just random bits of fluff, like [Wilford Brimley Battle](#). (Which, I admit, is a pretty funny idea.) Others, which I won't dignify by mentioning them here, are really very stupid and bad. (Search the web for "I-Mockery romhacks" for a lot of disgusting images and derisive reviews of many of them. On the other hand, you really shouldn't do this.) Part of the job of this book is to present really good hacks, and enable you to avoid things like: representations of penises and testicles, Mario in blackface, Nazi imagery, and more of the stupidest things one could ever imagine.



^ "Tom Servo" ^

(bad Mega Man 3 hack)



^ "Wilford Brimley Island" ^  
(bad Adventure Island hack)

## Where The Energy Lies

Time is cruel. The classic games of the past, increasingly, rely on nostalgia factor in order to look respectable alongside the shiny-sharp games made today. This is not just due to visual and aural splendor, for newer games are sometimes built off of design lessons established by those games long ago. We can sometimes find wonderful new gaming experiences that would have been considered impossible in the 80s and 90s. I'm not talking about things like advanced 3D engines or virtual reality; I'm talking about things like Katamari Damacy, The Witness and Minecraft. New *kinds* of games. Meanwhile the original Legend of Zelda, for all its brilliance, is not only an obscure and immensely challenging game, but some of its secrets, which are a key element of the game, have become almost cultural legend now. Back then, the idea that a bomb might open a hidden passage seemed a lot more novel than it does today, not the least reason of which being the nearly twenty other Zelda games released since.

Old games rely on nostalgia to remain current, but increasingly, nostalgia is not enough. Old games are seen as relics by some younger gamers. I am a firm believer in the fact that good game design does not go obsolete, but it is true that the great novelty factor of newer games is considerable, and older games themselves don't have that novelty factor backing them up anymore.

The current length of copyright in the United States for most video games is 95 years from the date of publication ([source](#) [PDF]). Those games you played when you were young, unless the law changes, will probably still be protected long after you are dead. And those owners often zealously guard them against modification, and when they are modified, it is usually only in ways of which the owners approve. This is the case in the staid, above-boards world of commercial game publishing.

For some game series, that above-boards world *sucks*, compared to the ingenuity and energy displayed by romhackers.

Now, there is a popular perception that romhacks are worthless, the realm of juvenile graphic mods. These hacks exist, and there's many of them, as one could expect there to be in any field where so much of the creative energy comes from teenagers. But it does a tremendous disservice to the field to assume that they must *all* have little to offer. Most people aren't very creative or ingenious, but you wouldn't think to outlaw literature because few people can write well. The 10% of works that survive Sturgeon's Law more than make up for the 90% of everything that is crap. So it is here.

Some ways that romhacks can be better than strictly commercial originals:

- They have the benefit of hindsight. For example, NES classics Metroid and The Legend of Zelda could greatly benefit from automatic mapping features, but those features were not yet popular at the time, and they would have added time to their development cycles. Hackers have gone back and added mapping features to those games, greatly reducing the mental overhead required for a new player to play them.
- They are created by people for the joy of it, usually *gratis*, without having to worry about profitability. The need for profit is the great secret limiting factor of modern culture. Lots of great things are never done because they aren't sufficiently exploitable.
- Related to the previous item, the profitability requirement implies a certain catering to a wide audience. This tends to bias works in favor of things that have been seen before, as opposed to taking risks with new kinds of game, games that may well fail in the marketplace for reasons entirely unrelated to their quality. And when such a game fails, people all too often assume it's because the idea was bad, when really, failure is



not at all proof that the idea was at fault, and there are wonderful things out there that people would dearly love if it were introduced to them in the best possible light.

## Types

There are two major types of romhacks: those that *change the way games look and play*, which I will call, just, *hacks*, and those that *translate games into a different language*, which I will call *fan translations*. While translating a game's text to another language might seem like an easy thing to do compared to changing a game's play, very often translations also involve some reprogramming, as the differences between languages are greater than just the characters used to represent text, but the line between the two is usually pretty solid. Once in a while you find a hack that is itself based on a translation, but usually the translation is available separately. Most people who play a translation want an unmodified experience. They want to play the original game as if it had existed in their language.

Of course, it's not just in the romhack world that games are converted to other languages. Translations are a long-established element of commercial game development. This process, called *localization*, often involves much more than converting text. In the early days (NES era), games had so little text that sometimes the same game would be released unchanged in Japan and the U.S. The best-known example of this may be the original Super Mario Bros., [whose original Japanese and U.S. versions are byte-identical](#).

Once games started to house substantial amounts of text, the difficulty of converting them for play in other languages quickly increased. Many early NES games are infamous for their use of "engrish," badly-phrased text, often humorously so, that occurred as a result of shoddy translation.

Of these two types, we can subdivide into other types, by difficulty of implementation. The easiest type of hack to make (on average) is one that only changes data. If it's possible for some translations to insert their scripts merely by replacing the old text with it in a new language. That, if possible, is a relatively simple process. Similar is the gameplay hack that only changes the levels in a game; the actual engine lies untouched, it is just

some of the data being operated upon that is different. The hacking of some games has been facilitated by the creation of *level editors*, programs that let a hack creator modify the game's world data in almost a WYSIWYG manner. Some games lend themselves to this more easily than others, but it's worth noting that the games with by far the most hacks (Super Mario World, Super Metroid and the Sonic series) are all games that have editors available.

For translations, usually just changing the data is not enough. For our purposes however, simple script insertions and complex re-localization jobs look like pretty much the same thing. So in the translation list you'll find amazingly difficult jobs that took years alongside games where the only things that are changed are the title screen and maybe credits.

For game hacks there are many more categories:

Graphics Hack: Usually (but not always) the simplest kind of hack to implement. These hacks only change the graphics and little else. Usually this doesn't matter for much, but once in a while it makes a surprising difference.

Level Hack: The next step up is a hack that changes the levels, or maps, in a game. Sometimes the graphics will be changed too, but changing the levels substantially changes the play experience, so that category takes priority. Games that have overworlds might change those too, but that's just another kind of level.

Modification: These involve actually changing the code to a game to produce behavior not present in the original. This might be as simple as fixing bugs or as complex as adding new behavior to a game. Generally though the level data and graphics have *not* been changed; it's a method of experiencing the original game in a new way. Many of these are character hacks, frequent in the Sonic hacking world, where a new character is implemented to play the game with, along with its own moves and abilities.

Easier/Balanced/Harder Difficulty: These are like a subtype of Modifications, but for the express purpose of making the game easier (to make it accessible to new players, to tone down what's considered excessive difficulty, or just to let the player blaze through a game), harder (to give experienced players a greater challenge), or balanced (to correct play issues with the original), without otherwise modifying it.

Major Hack: This covers a wide array of types. Some of these almost turn the original into a new game, while others present changed levels and modifications at once.

Total Conversion: This is when a game is remade to make it into basically a different game. They are the most work to make.

## **Where do Romhacks Come From?**

The great majority of romhacks are made by hobbyists. To produce them, one or more people work to change the bytecode and data in the rom files in such a way that the changed game works in an emulator, or sometimes actual hardware when played on a flash cart. Sometimes they laboriously change the rom's data a byte at a time using a hex editor. Sometimes they use editor programs to change the data more easily. For some games (especially Sonic the Hedgehog and its sequels) they actually have source code available that could be compiled to recreate the object code of the original game, and so make their modifications by changing that source code. This process of recreating a game's source code is called *disassembling* it, and the produced code is a *disassembly*. This is the most flexible method of hack creation, and resembles to a degree the process the developers used to make the original game. But the reconstructed source code is much harder to understand than the original source code would be because the decompiler that produces it cannot reconstruct the labels and comments present in the original source. Without that explanatory data, hacking a ROM's disassembly is not much easier than just hacking its bytes directly with a hex editor. Although fan-commented disassemblies of games do exist; most of the Mega Drive/Genesis games in the Sonic the Hedgehog series have commented disassemblies, which is a major reason those games have so many high-quality (and just plain out weird) hacks.

No one pays hobbyists to construct romhacks. If they did, they would likely run afoul of the law to a greater extent than they already do. Most do it out of sheer love for the game and the desire to contribute to it. Some romhackers graduate from making hacks into commercial software development. Hacking game engines on a bytecode level is difficult, but with

strong effort it can be a good way to learn, on a nuts-and-bolts level, how high-quality game engines are constructed. Christian Whitehead, aka The Taxman, is a noted figure in the Sonic the Hedgehog hacking community, and contributed on Sonic Megamix. He and some other Sonic romhackers were hired by Sega themselves to produce for them the game Sonic Mania, which as of this writing is hotly anticipated, and promises to be the best official Sonic game in over twenty years.

That said, the attitude of companies towards learning a prospective hire has romhacking in their background varies greatly: it can be an excellent way to demonstrate one's skills, but it is likely that console companies look askance at anything that even remotely resembles romhacking. In this way they lag behind the attitudes toward game modding exhibited by PC game companies, many of which have come not only to accept and embrace the mod community, but, recognizing both the increased sales and the positive publicity having popular mods can bring, even provide hooks and tools to assist users in modding their software.

There are also what are known as bootleg carts. These are cartridges produced for sale by others than the legal publisher of the game. In China and Russia, official versions of games were once in short supply, not available at all, or were too expensive, so some people dumped the games, burned the code on other ROM chips (sometimes with minor changes in order to escape casual inspection) and sold them. Some bundled many of these games into "multicarts" [like these owned by YouTuber Pat the NES Punk](#). These were arguably the first romhacks, although the results were usually pretty silly.

There are a handful of "official" romhacks, modifications made by the original publishers and made public through a re-release. These are generally not covered here, but a few deserve special mention. Most of Nintendo's Virtual Console re-releases of their games have been modified to remove sharply strobing full-screen effects so as to be gentler for players who suffer from epileptic seizures when subjected to bright lights. The word is that these effects are toned down as a function of the VC emulator that presents the game, but the result is similar. Many releases, both from Nintendo and other companies, take the opportunity to polish a translation or fix typos. The Legend of Zelda is a game that's been iteratively fixed in

this way several times; prominent game translator Tomato covers [some of these changes](#) in his [Legends of Localization series](#).

One particularly interesting hack Nintendo made to one of their games was to release a Virtual Console version of NES Donkey Kong with the Conveyor Belts (AKA Pie Factory) level of the arcade restored to the game. This version was distributed [pre-installed on special Wii consoles sold in Europe](#), and is now also available on Virtual Console for the 3DS. This is the only official, non-arcade version of the game developed by Nintendo to feature this level.

(Some Atarisoft home computer ports from the 80s have the level, as does Ocean Software's Commodore 64 port, but Nintendo only licensed those versions. The N64 game Donkey Kong 64 notably has emulation of arcade Donkey Kong, but it was developed by Rare. Fun fact: one reason that Nintendo re-releases the NES port so often instead of the arcade version may be because they don't actually own the copyright to arcade Donkey Kong's code! Arcade Donkey Kong is trademarked and copyrighted to Nintendo, and its play and graphics were famously designed by Shigeru Miyamoto, but the programming was outsourced to Ikegami Co. Ltd., who retained rights to the source code. [Source](#). Ikegami worked on a number of games for other companies as well, including the early isometric shooter Zaxxon. Ikegami, now Ikegami Tsushinki, is still in business. More information can be found on the company's [Wikipedia page](#).)

## Legalities

Here it is. The section where I talk about how horrible and evil this all this. Piracy is bad you wouldn't steal a house don't copy that floppy.

The following is my opinion and no one else's:

I'm not going to pretend that there's nothing wrong with copying copyrighted works. But the newest game in this book is a Gameboy Advance title released almost 15 years ago. I wouldn't even be bringing this up if copyright terms were sane. As it is, they're a way for companies to continue to extract profit off of works they otherwise haven't touched for decades,

and that's a direct result of the power of money (Disney's) over (U.S.) Congress. ([Here is more information, from Wikipedia.](#))

My suggestion is, if the game you are applying patches to has a current way to legally purchase it, then do so. This is not for legal reasons, but moral (in the sense of right and wrong) ones. And I'm not talking about buying it off eBay for \$800, I'm talking about using a reasonable current method, such as Virtual Console, if it exists. Buying the game used is okay, if you can find it and its price hasn't super-inflated, but it doesn't feed the original developers any more than just getting it off the web.

The other day I stopped and thought, and realized that I own the original Legend of Zelda no less than five times over, legally: I have the GBA NES re-release, I have it on Wii, Wii U and 3DS Virtual Console, and I have the the Gamecube Wind Waker per-release bonus disk with it on it. Even though I play and enjoy romhacks, I still seem to keep buying the old games over and over, just for convenience, and I dunno, brand loyalty. Nintendo is not hurt by my playing Zelda Randomizer.

## **About This Text**

A few months ago when I had the idea for this book, I started compiling a list of interesting hacks to write about. My spreadsheet of notes quickly surpassed 500 items (it's still growing!), so I figured 100 would be a good target to shoot for. I was so innocent back then. "Innocent," of course, is another word for "foolish."

There are real technical technical and financial issues with producing an ebook of greater than a certain size in megabytes. I had run into this issue before with a previous book, a compilation of my GameSetWatch roguelike column @Play. Any book with a lot of images is likely to be large in size, and when writing about video games, screenshots are a must. Also, it takes time to find, patch, test and write about romhacks, so my original objective for a book with 100 hacks turned out to be a bit too ambitious.

So instead, this is Part One of a projected two parts (with maybe with a follow-up after). Some of the hacks are grouped together by source game series, and the Mario and Metroid games fit in best in this book. The next



one will have the Sonic (a huge category) and Mega Man hacks. Both books will have a selection of 20 notable translation hacks to round them out. After that, we'll have to see. There's certainly more to write about.

You will soon find that, in fact, there are many more than 50 romhacks described in this book! I took the opportunity to group some hacks together into one writeup, and the introductions for the Mario and Metroid sections list many other hacks you might enjoy playing. You may consider those to be a little added bonus.

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

# How to Play Romhacks, From Start to Finish

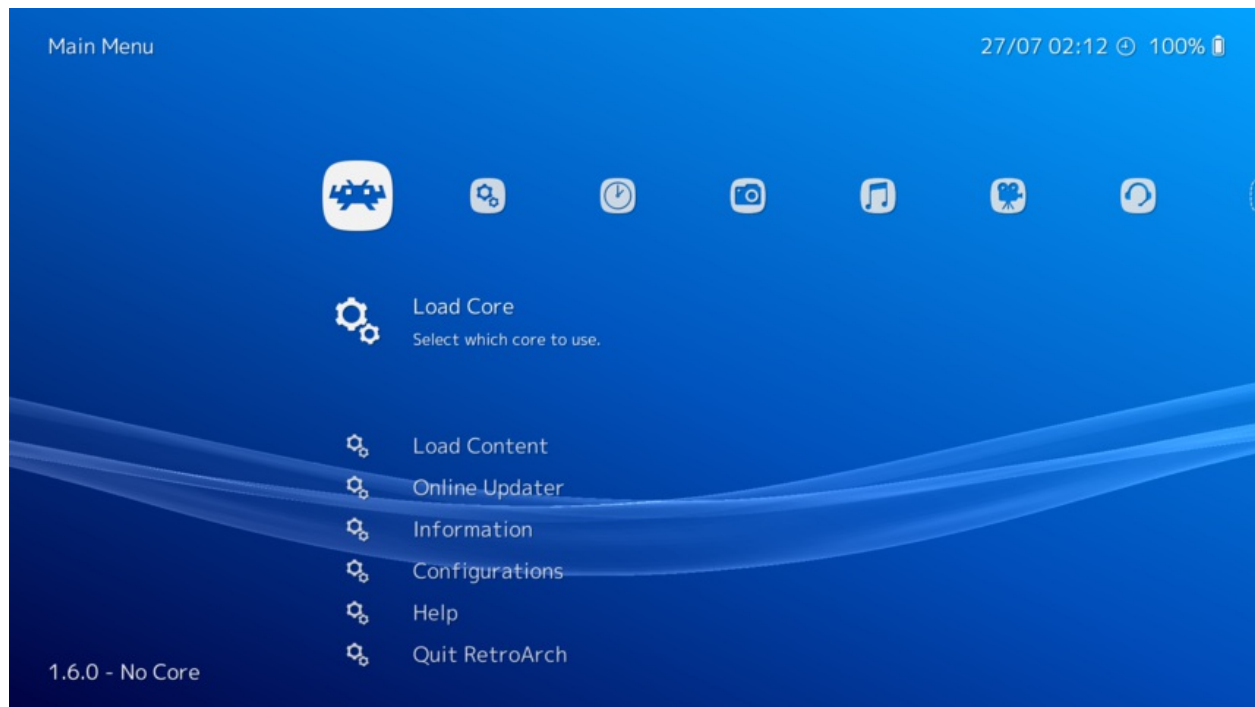
## STEP ONE: Setting up an emulator

To run these games on your PC, at the very least, you need an emulator and a rom. For the emulator, I greatly recommend you download [RetroArch](#), a terrific program that now also supplies both a decent front-end and a means to download and prepare emulators for all the systems you're likely to use, and a good many you'll never need, in one package. RetroArch is also available for a ton of systems: on Windows, Mac, Linux, Android and Raspberry Pi you can pretty much just download, copy it to a folder to live in, and you can run it from there. You're set. It also runs on iPhones, iPads, PS3, PSP, PSVita, Xbox, Xbox 360, Gamecube, Wii, Wii U and 3DS, but you'll have a lot more work ahead of you to run it, as you'll have to jailbreak your device. Remember friends: *open devices are better than closed ones*.

The emulator will probably come in a ZIP archive. Both Windows and macOS are able to decompress ZIP files without any extra software; just right-click the file, usually in your Download folder, in your file manager (File Explorer or the Finder) and choose to extract it to a folder. However, I recommend installing the program [7zip](#), as you can also use it for RARs. Linux users can usually find 7zip in their distribution repositories.

A keyboard can play nearly all the retro games you'd care for, but if you're serious about this you'll definitely want to pick up a USB gamepad. A wired one that works on Xbox 360s will do just fine, and you may already have one.

RetroArch isn't so much an emulator itself as an emulator shell. Once it's running, you can download and obtain emulators through it. The last item (possibly the only item) under the Load Core menu should be "Download Core." That'll present a list of supported cores, and from there you can download and install them in one step. Installing RetroArch and each emulator each need to be done only once. You might want to update to a new version of RetroArch eventually; just extract it over the old version in its folder.



^ RetroArch is your one stop emulation shop! It can automatically ^ download and utilize many popular emulators in just a couple of steps.

## STEP TWO: Obtaining roms

That covers the emulators. The roms, well, those I cannot tell you to how to find. Even if I did, sometimes those sites have a habit of disappearing, so a link I put here might die, or worse, switch over to supplying malware, on short notice.

I can't tell you where to look, but I'll tell you who can: Google. What is more, Google puts a lot of effort to removing sites that are known to host malware. A link from a Google search isn't a guarantee that a site is clean, so keep your virus checker up to date, but it's a good indication. Further, most browsers these days check visited URLs against a list of known malware sources.

Like the emulator, roms will probably come in a ZIP, but they may instead come in a RAR archive, or once in a great while in an LZH, an archive type originating from Japan. You can use 7zip to extract those.

Sometimes you might find romhacks available pre-patched. This may save you a step, but note that the hack author likely doesn't approve of its distribution like this. I have patched all of the romhacks in this book myself and can verify that they work.

## STEP THREE: Patching roms

Now things get a little more complex. I may lose some of you here, but please, please, try to persevere! If you can master this process the whole romhack world will open up for you.

Patches are distributed generally in ZIPs and RARs, like roms. When you extract them, you'll usually end up with at least two files, the **patch** and a **readme**.

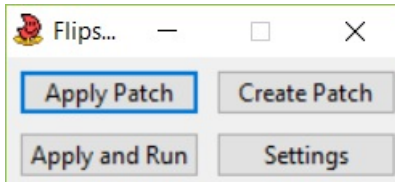
The readme is almost always a text file. If you open it, it'll usually open in Notepad or something similar. My suggestion, if you're running Windows, is to download and install the program [Notepad++](#), which is a better general text file reader, but Notepad itself is usually fine. Other systems are likely to have their own alternatives.

If there is a readme, you should always read it. It might just contain information on who made it, but there might be special instructions, explanations or caveats in there. Any special instructions in that file are more important than what I might tell you here; for example, some patches come with their own special patching program that takes care of everything for you. A few might require you to download and install an "expander" program, which has to work on a rom before the patch is applied. 95% of the time though, you'll just be told to apply the patch to the rom, and the process will be pretty much the same as what I'm about to tell you.

There are four general kinds of patch files in use by the romhacking community. You can tell them apart by their file extension, the part of the filename after the dot. They might be capitalized or lower-case; for readability, I capitalize them here. They are:

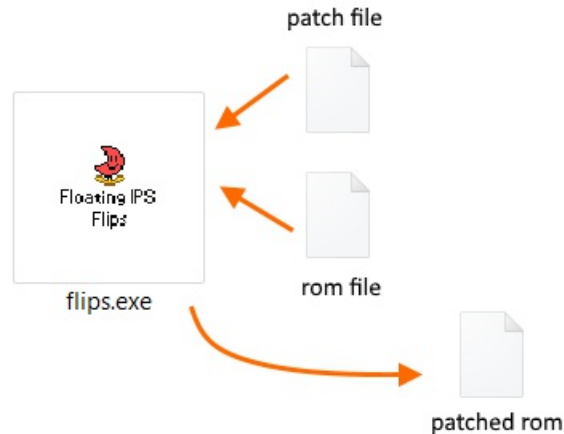
.IPS: By far the most common kind of patch. There are several good programs that can apply IPS patches. My considered suggestion is to use the program Floating IPS (or "flips.exe") to apply them, [available here](#), because

it can also apply BPS patches, and it automatically makes a copy of the original rom and patches *that* instead of messing around with the original, in case you haven't backed it up. Floating IPS steps you through the patching process easily: you select the patch to apply, the rom to apply it to, and a filename for the result.



^ It's called Floating IPS, but ^  
it handles both ips and bps formats.

.BPS: A big problem with IPS patches is they contain no checking information to make sure the patching process has worked correctly. It is an unfortunate fact of rom sites that often the file you download is slightly wrong, or invisibly not the precise version the patch was expecting. Frequently, a rom file can actually be incorrect even if it works perfectly in an emulator! If even one byte of the original doesn't match what the patch author expected, it could cause the whole process to fail, and with IPS patches, you won't have any way of knowing until you try it out and it fails to work. BPS patches provide a solution to this; if the result of applying a BPS patch doesn't match what the patch author expected, it'll tell you it failed. You'll usually end up with the result anyway; you can try it, but it's unlikely to have worked. Floating IPS works on BPS files too, so if you have a choice of patch types you should go with BPS.



^ Run the patcher program, and open the patch file ^  
and the rom file, to produce the romhack.

.XDELTA: This is a type of patch that is sometimes used for very large hacks. If a patch has data that has been moved around in the rom's address space, it could result in a very large IPS patch. XDELTA patches use a different format that addresses this, although they still are often fairly large. Use can use the program [XdeltaUI](#) to apply them.

.UPS: Of all the hacks I researched, I only encountered one that requires use of a UPS patcher. The program [Tsukuyomi UPS](#) can be used to apply them.

Finally, a very small number of romhacks are sometimes distributed as pre-patched files. You'll find that many Sonic hacks are like this. Usually you should patch files yourself if you can, as patch authors don't often approve of distributing their patches already applied to roms for legal reasons. Still, though, if you download a hack and it has the extension BIN, that is what has happened. Load it directly into your Mega Drive/Genesis emulator.

By the way, once RetroArch is running, you can probably open roms in it by simply dragging their file icon, from File Explorer, Finder or what have you, into its window. If you have more than one emulator that can open it, you might have to select which one to use from a window. If you're on Windows and have a lot of other programs open, you might have to Alt-Tab to RetroArch just to see that window.



## **I patched my SNES rom and tried it out, and the result was garbled or locked up the emulator, help!**

Each emulated platform has its own conventions, often arising from the implementation details of the earliest emulators for that platform. So it is that SNES roms can come in two forms, with or without a header. (Other platforms may also have headers, particularly NES, but generally require that they exist to work at all, so unheadered versions are rare.) If you have a rom with or without a header and need the other type, don't fear, there are utilities (like [SNESstuff](#)) that can remove or add a header for you. Just remember to apply or remove it before patching--if you patch first it's too late and the rom is already corrupted. This is a good reason to make backups of your roms before patching. Note that this is generally only a problem with IPS patches; BPS contains safeguards to make sure you're patching the right file.

Some emulators can be set up to search a folder for patches and, if it finds one that matches the name of the rom, applies it automatically in memory, leaving the rom file itself alone. RetroArch currently doesn't support this so I don't explain how to do it, but if you use a different emulation solution you might want to look into it.

## **The readme says I need a headered/unheadered rom, how do I tell the difference, and what do I do if I have the wrong kind?**

Here is some super helpful advice. Roms with headers almost always have a file size reported to be an odd number of kilobytes! So, if the size is 1,024 KB, it has no header, but if the size is 1,025, it probably has one. [Here's KingMike, of KingMike Translations, saying the same thing](#). If the patch doesn't specify then you'll probably have to try both. And, confoundedly, sometimes the download page will say one thing but be wrong! The readme, if there is one, will probably be accurate, but there will be times when you have to try both and see which one will work.

<input type="checkbox"/> SMW-MariosTreasureHunt2.smc	4,097 KB	6/7
<input type="checkbox"/> SMW-mylittlepuzzles1 with header.smc	4,097 KB	7/7
<input type="checkbox"/> SMW-mylittlepuzzles1 without header.smc	4,096 KB	7/7
<input type="checkbox"/> SMW-mylittlepuzzles2.smc	4,096 KB	6/7

^ Two versions of the same rom, but one has a header ^

and the other doesn't. Notice, the one with the header  
is an odd number of kilobytes in size!

### **I still can't get it to work! What gives?**

Welcome to my personal hell. Sometimes the version you find out on the internet is not the right version. It might be a previous, incorrect dump, or it might have a leet crack screen on it, or it might be for a different software release of the game than the hack author used in making the patch. All of these things can mess up the process, and often the only thing you can do about it is to try getting it from a different place and seeing if the new copy will work. Note, sometimes a readme will say you need "PRG0" or "PRG1", these are different releases of the game. A few may demand a specific release, like the EU version of a game. If it's important enough to be mentioned in the readme, then it probably cannot be ignored.

It is also possible that the emulator will not work with that specific hack. RetroArch makes it fairly simple to obtain multiple emulators for each platform, so try a different one. Once in a while, it won't work no matter what you do. The traditional thing to do in these cases is curse the heavens.

### **This patch is a "bin," what kind is that?**

It's probably a Sonic the Hedgehog hack. Since so many Sonic hacks are recompiled (a benefit of having a solid working disassembly available) and thus may move code around, IPS patches often become unwieldy, often matching or even exceeding the size of the rom. Because of this, it is more common in Sonic hacking to just go ahead and distribute the whole, modified rom. Just load the BIN file into your Mega Drive/Genesis emulator and you should be good to go. Note that you will never find already-patched roms like that on RHDN; they have a strict policy against it, as do many other sites.

### **What do all these file extensions mean?**

Extensions are given in allcaps for clarity, but are more often in lowercase!

.NES: NES or Famicom roms.

.FDS: Famicom Disk System, these are actually images of a proprietary floppy disk format Nintendo used in Japan for the Famicom Disk System

add-on. Notably, these disks contained a small area that was writable by the disk drive, so their contents can change during play, say, as saved games are recorded to it.

.SFC/.SMC: SNES or Super Famicom roms. May or may not have a header.

.BIN/.GEN/.MD: Mega Drive/Genesis roms Warning: .bin files are easy to confuse with other types, since it's a semi-common extension for generic data files.

.PCE: PC Engine roms. A fairly rare type for hacking, the US release of this console was the TurboGrafx 16.

.ISO: CD Rom/DVD disk images. These are used for pretty much all consoles that use optical media: TGCD, all four PlayStation tiers, PSP, Dreamcast, Saturn, Gamecube, Wii, Wii U and so on. It's also used for normal CD-ROMs, DVD and other optical disks, even music CDs.

.DS: Nintendo DS game cards.

.IPS: The most common kind of patch file. You *apply* this file to a rom to change it. The file is either changed in place or a new copy is made, depending on your patcher. Some emulators support automatic patching at run-time. These are useful because you don't have to worry about confusing the original with the mod, or of accidentally overwriting your only good copy.

.BPS: Another kind of patch, a bit superior to IPS but not as frequently used.

.XDELTA: Yet another kind of patch, sometimes used for very large patches, or patches with a lot of assembly mods.

## Hacking Games Yourself

Ah! So you've been inspired to try to make one of these things yourself! Congratulations! Please, take my advice and don't.

You're asking spend weeks, months, maybe years of your life making a thing you *cannot* sell for money, that will probably only be seen by a few hundred people, that may possibly be derided by clueless YouTubers, and on the slim chance it achieves real success could always be obliterated by a blast from a publisher's Lawyer Cannon. I cannot in good conscience suggest that you do such a thing. I can only hope you decide to do it anyway.

In the event that you're the kind of person to my ignore good advice, I offer the better advice of Tomato. He's a professional translator, and a longtime respected game hack translator. Among other projects, he's the guy who wrote the script for the famous Mother 3 translation. Here are his Tips For Romhack Projects, transcribed from [a tweet from him](#) and used with permission:

- Starting a project is easy, finishing it is hard. If you're easily distracted, try a smaller project or something else entirely first.
- Big projects will be exciting to work on at first, but be prepared for 90% of the work to be dull and exhausting.
- It's best not to start a project out of negativity.
- Seeing a big project through usually means giving up a fraction of your life.
- Don't start a large-scale project if you haven't had experience with other projects first.
- The project's team should start as small as possible and remain as small as possible. A team can grow slowly as the project grows, but starting with an excessively large team will cause many (maybe most) problems. Only bring people on board if what they can provide is 100% necessary. With fan translations, you usually only need to start with two people: 1 translator and 1 programmer.
- Ideally, the leader of the team is the one who started the project, could do a large amount of the work alone, and can put the most work into it.

- Don't do a project to gain fame, attention, or popularity. Similarly, don't bring anyone on board who lives for these things.
- Collaborative projects almost always have a clash of egos at many times, so make sure everyone involved is mature enough to set their ego aside when disagreements arise.
- Team members should be able to take constructive criticism from outsiders AND should probably be the type to actively seek such criticism.
- Focus on the work and not on the internal team politics. The team shouldn't be seen in the same way as a forum community. A team should start small enough that there shouldn't be need for a "manager" or "admin."
- Don't get distracted by the PR side of things (such as trying to look good or looking for what people are saying about your project).
- Don't announce anything or show off anything until you've made significant progress. When you do show something off to the public, do it quickly and then go immediately back to work.
- As soon as money is involved in a fan project, things will suddenly get much more complicated and ugly.

## **How about some practical advance?**

I am not a romhacker myself. Long ago I did some things kind of like that, for disk games on the old Commodore 64 home computer. But I have no real authority to offer advice now.

The first thing I can suggest is learning about the system you want to hack for. If you're just changing graphics, some emulators will show you the contents of video memory while a game is playing. If you can then find those contents in the rom data file itself, you'll know what to change. But sometimes the graphics stored in the rom are compressed, and, not being represented in the game's data as a byte-for-byte match, it'll be harder both to locate and to edit.

The archives of RHDN (romhacking.net) are full of utilities and documents that will be of aid to you. Some games have editor programs, of varying degrees of usability, that might help you. The editors section in the

appendices points out many of them. A good general-purpose rom graphic editor program is the unfortunately-named [Tile Molester](#).

There are several forums on the internet where romhack creators hang out. Check there, get to know the people, and ask questions. There's a lot of good technical knowledge floating around out there.

Once you're done, most of the programs you use for applying patches can also be used to create them, if you have a copy of the original and one with your changes both handy.



## Inclusion Notes

The most numerous category of hack is the simple graphic replacement. There are thousands of these, and few are worth anyone's time, and have titles like Super Dong Bros. I have deemed most of them ineligible for inclusion, but there are a few exceptions, usually in the cases of gender inclusion (Some people would fairly like to play The Legend of Zelda actually *as* Zelda!) If a hack has more than just a simple graphic improvement (as with Yoshi in Sonic 2), its chances of inclusion increase substantially.

Another common category is the challenge patch. Lots of games (Bill Cipher voice: LOTS OF GAMES) have had more difficult versions hacked together. These are a hugely mixed bag. There is a persistent belief among neophyte game designers, readily observable on the Super Mario Maker level archives, that harder means better. Anyway, there are simply too many bad challenge hacks to count so for the most part I discard the category. There *are* some particularly notable hacks included, but they have to be just that, really good. Further, I don't have much tolerance for glitchy graphics (unless that's the purpose), but if it's in a hack intended to test how well you can hit frame-perfect input windows, I will throw you into the Garbage Trash.

For translations, I am sorry, but for the most part only English translations are included here. It's nothing against other languages, it's just that I can't speak them! Also, if I included every worthy translation of every language it'd take even longer to prepare these books. I don't even promise to include every good English game translation. These books may cover a lot of material (oh yes), but I make no claim to comprehensiveness. There's always something hidden and awesome you don't know anything about. I'm also excluding menu-only translations and works-in-progress.

With a few exceptions, I have tried to keep the focus on retro games. What exceptions there are just happen to be particularly low-hanging fruit to include for me, notably in the realm of hacked Wii games.

Finally. If I play a hack and there is anything offensive in it, it was usually excluded. I'm not talking about curse words, but I am talking about shock factor. I'm sorry (no I'm not), but with over 600 things in my examination

queue for this book, I have to be selective just to get the project done. The early days of romhacking were filled with edgelord games that used ethnic slurs as a matter of course, reveled in Nazi imagery, or presented otherwise juvenile content. The only exceptions are for literary reasons (and you'd better be damn confident of the artistic merit of your story if you're "going there" in a video game, dig?) and, if the game is otherwise really good, translations that are accurately representing their originals.

For those with difficulty getting emulators set up, or want to see before you patch, or just want to watch game videos, I have tried to find YouTube video of every hack covered in this book, within certain limits. I have purposely sought out videos *without voiceovers*, that present their subjects without commentary. I sought complete playthroughs, but sometimes just demonstrations, depending on what's available. I also looked, whenever possible, for non-speedrun videos, but sometimes they're the only good resource. It should go without saying that, if you keep watching a video playthrough of a game, you're going to encounter spoilers.

## What the heck do these numbers mean?

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, really? 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.

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. (Only one game has it, and it was included because it makes a notoriously bad game somewhat playable.)
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](http://theinternetarchive.org). (And a good place to contribute money to, if you're of the mind, is the Internet Archive.)

## SECTION 1: HACKS

Everything covered in this book is a hack, of course, but in practice we can draw a solid line between general *hacks*, which take a game and change it in some substantive way from the original, and *translations*, which are meant to interpret a game created in one language and culture and make it understandable in another.

We could divide these general hacks into several subtypes, in (generally) increasing difficulty of creation:

**Graphic Hacks** change nothing about a game but how it looks. They might switch out Link for Zelda for instance, or Mario for any number of unsavory things (as people who've followed romhacks for some time will know). Hacks that just change text without requiring any special program support also tend to fall under this category. Because this rarely makes a substantive difference to gameplay there are but a handful of graphic hacks in this book.

**Level Hacks**, which change game data in a more complex way but still leave the code mostly the same, are a bit harder to define, because what is a "level" varies greatly. Super Mario Bros. 3 and Super Mario World, for example, have not only a bunch of normal levels but also an overworld to give them context. I consider this overworld itself to be a kind of level, in that for the most part it is still data acted upon by the engine. A few games have editor programs available for them that make modifying roms, if not trivial, then at least easier than hex editing the data into the rom one byte at a time, and these games tend to have many more level hacks available for them than other games.

**Total Conversions** outright remake the game, using the engine as the basis for something else. (Like, "Something Else.") Sometimes it's a game like the original, but other times it turns into something *really* different. These often end up being fascinating, because it's quite difficult to reprogram a game into your own creature like that. Often one would think it'd be easier just to start from scratch with a fan game, but I'm not going to be judgmental.



**Miscellaneous** hacks are those that don't easily fit into this rubric. Sometimes a considerable amount of coding goes into something that turns out to have only a modest effect on the game, or someone finds just that feature that increases the enjoyment of a game ten-fold. These are some of the most interesting hacks we cover.

## Hacks: Super Mario Bros series

It is fitting to start out with Mario hacks, because just a couple of years before this writing Nintendo released the first of the Super Mario Maker games, bringing to ordinary players the kind of level design fun that up until then had been reserved for romhackers and Nintendo's designers themselves.

Super Mario World is a game, in particular, of which there are many, many hacks, due to the presence of a well-regarded editor, Lunar Magic. There's lots of variety there, and many of them are really difficult. I've therefore chosen to limit the SMW hacks mostly to those that are particularly interesting, and leaving the level edits to the SMW Central Contest Compilations, which have enough levels to keep even a Mario Maker maniac busy for a long time. If I didn't limit the selection in some way, the whole book could have ended up being Super Mario World. (This is also true of Super Metroid and, in the next part, Sonic the Hedgehog.)

A few more hacks to keep you going—some of these could just as well have been the subject of main articles:

[100 Second Challenge](#) (J^P): Too difficult to make it in as one of the features, but it's still relatively playable, and there's a lot of cool features there. It doesn't limit the number of lives you use, which is of great help. [Here's a playlist of JoyTale running through it, using save states](#). When you see some of the levels in this thing, you won't hold it against them. By the by, JoyTale runs a lot of SMW hacks, and [has a ton of playlists to watch](#).

[100 Rooms of Enemies](#) (Daizo Dee Von): Inspired by the two Pits of 100 Trials in Super Paper Mario, this is a challenge hack that asks you to defeat, well, 100 rooms of various Mario enemies, some with new programming, culminating in a custom-programmed Thwomp boss. [Here is Self-made Island's complete playthrough on YouTube](#).

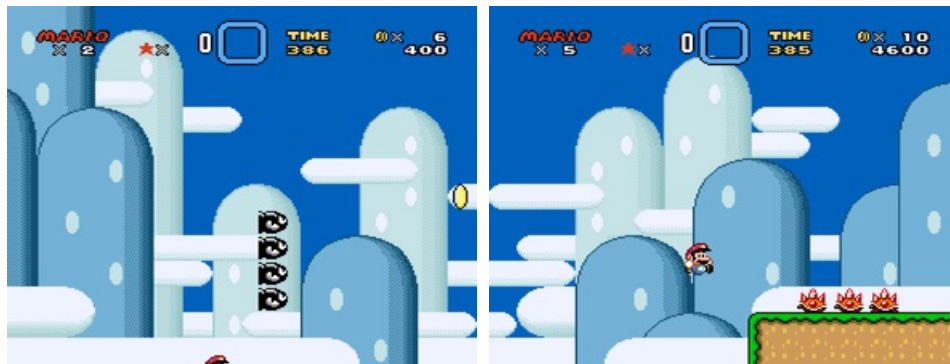
[The Creator](#) (dggonzalz): A great hack with only a moderate difficulty level, great for casual play. There are lots of neat engine hacks shown off here, like giving Mario a wall jump-move, granting Yoshi the ability effectively to flutter-jump, new enemies, and uping the number of fireballs Mario can have

on-screen at once from two to ten! The only real flaw here is that the game is incomplete, with only about half of the levels finished, and it's unlikely to be worked on for the foreseeable future. It's a shame because there's lots of great ideas on display here. There is a playthrough of what's there, by EvilGuy19 : [1](#) - [2](#) - [3](#) - [4](#) - [5](#)

Yogui's [Something](#) and [Something Else](#) are a couple of other interesting, if difficult, hacks you might want to have a go at. FPI Productions has also made some interesting hacks in their [The Second Reality Project series](#), among others.

I wanted to include some Mario 64 hacks, but playing some of them causes me to conclude that the tech just isn't there yet. Camera issues make many of them unplayable. If you want to give them a try, a couple I found interesting, for a while at least, were [Super Mario and the Marvel Adventure](#) (Kampel64) and [Luigi and the Forest Ruins](#) (Mariocrash, TheGael95).

Finally... I must at least mention the Kaizo and Pit games. Kaizo Mario World, its sequels and imitators, are amazingly difficult Mario World hacks that take extreme skill to finish, and even then you'll probably die a lot.



^ These two screenshots are as far as I am ^  
going to go to show off Kaizo Mario World.

- [Kaizo Mario World](#) - [Kaizo Mario World 2](#) - [Kaizo Mario World 3](#) (Takemoto): Legend has it the first of these notorious hacks was made by a Japanese romhacker as a challenge to his roommate. The word "Kaizo" is now used to describe the whole category of hack. [Here's a run of Kaizo Mario World from AGDQ 2015](#), by dram55.

- [Item Abuse](#) - [Item Abuse 2](#) - [Brutal Mario](#), probably others (Panga aka PangaeaPanga, aka Penangbenny, real name Alex Tan): Panga is himself a speedrunner.
- [Super Panga World](#) - Played recently at SGDQ 2017. [Actually, here's the run on YouTube](#), played by DoDeChehedron, with PangaeaPanga himself among those providing commentary.
- [Banzai Mario World](#) (GbreezeSunset): Supposed to be an introductory, or "Light Kaizo" hack. If you aspire to someday topple one of these formidable hacks, you might could start your training here.
- [Pit of Despair](#) - [Pit of Death](#) (Moltov): When I included a rating of 9 in the "Difficulty" scale, these hacks are why. They are generally not possible to finish without tool assists. Have a look: [Despair](#) - [Death](#). Now these are not the only tool-assist hacks, but they're often referred to as "Pits," as in Pit of (Something).

## 1. Extra Mario Bros (Super Mario Bros.)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** ATA

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/369/>

**Synopsis:** Mario drops into a series of non-linear worlds, where he must choose the right pipe to proceed, and which has permanent powerups to find. A terrific re-purposing of the Super Mario Bros. engine to create an almost Metroid-like experience.

Extra Mario Bros. is intended to be a mashup of the play style and some of the graphics of Metroid with Super Mario Bros. Take a moment to appreciate the audacity of that idea.

How difficult is it to make a game like this? I cannot tell you entirely, but I know some of the difficulties the original Super Mario Bros. engine has to work with. The game is not intended to scroll backward, for example. Special area destinations are determined by screen scroll, meaning if two enterable pipes are too close to each other they'll both go to the same location unless special measures are hard-coded into the game (such as with warp zones). The fact that the player can manipulate movement in ways that don't scroll the screen when it "should" is the cause of both the infamous "minus world" glitch, and another glitch beloved of speedrunners that allows access to the 6-7-8 warp zone through a pipe instead of the usual invisiblock/vine route.

More than that, item block contents are partly determined by the block's X position in the stage, and the game worlds are represented in memory, not as tilemaps, but as pointers that allow the tile drawing engine to produce large objects like pipes "on the fly," a compression trick necessary to fit Super Mario Bros's 32 large worlds into the game's 32 kilobytes of rom. Things like this are why you cannot, as you generally can in Super Mario Maker, create arbitrary worlds to explore entirely in a level editor. Some changes would force you change not just data, but code.

The tendency, when hacking roms, is to go for the lowest hanging fruit. Instead of coding up new enemy types and finding room in the rom for them, why not just take another enemy and change its graphics? Instead of implementing a new powerup, reuse another item's code. Instead of creating new kinds of blocks, take the ones already in the game and figure out how to use them in new ways. This is not so much laziness on the hack author's part, but a way to reduce the likelihood of introducing new bugs into the game. But it can also be taken to extremes; most hacks *just* change the graphics or level layouts. The most interesting route is usually through "ASM coding," changing not just the data of the game but the actual programming. But there is a sense of diminishing returns with this, where adding each new feature adds exponentially to the hacker's headaches. To make Super Mario Bros. scroll backward might take more effort than creating your own PC platformer with bi-directional scroll; or instead, why not pick Super Mario Bros. 3 as your starting point, which comes with backward scroll built-in?

That is what makes Extra Mario Bros so astonishing. It *is* a substantive hack of the original Super Mario Bros, not Mario 2, 3 or later. It *does* implement new enemies. But more than that, it abandons the strict world-based progression of the original game and makes something that looks a lot more like a "Metroidvania," a free-roaming exploration game that players navigate using their own wit and memory, and with permanent powerups hidden to find. That isn't to say that the game lets the player scroll backward, that's a puzzle too difficult within the constraints, but there are "loops" in the pipe destinations that players can traverse one way, and in that way find his way back to previous zones.

That's not to say that Extra Mario Bros. is easy to explore, heck no. If you

are going to have any chance finishing this one you're pretty much gonna need to make a map, and I mean with pen and paper. By-hand mapping is something of a lost art these days, and to solve (the word is appropriate here) a game like this you pretty much have to be looking for a challenge, and not just a fun romp with Mario and goombas. But the actual platforming here isn't really as challenging as just finding your way around, which is an interesting experience to have in a 2D Mario game.

[Here is a playthrough of the game](#), on YouTube, by cu11ing.



^ The outlined blocks are switch blocks. ^  
Exclamation point blocks turn them on or off.



^ The water here is animated. ^



^ The game supplies Mario World goombas as a ^  
special service to you, the player.



^ Nice cave graphics. ^



^ There are underwater areas too. ^



## 2. Super Mario Bros. Special for NES (Super Mario Bros.)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** TRIFORCE89, Levi "Karatorian" Aho, frantik

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (you sometimes get stuck on purpose, as in original SMB Special), **Fun:** 4/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3281/>

**Synopsis:** An obscure version of Super Mario Bros. made by Hudson for Japanese home computers, adapted into a less annoying, but still very weird, hack of NES SMB.

The existence of Super Mario Bros. Special is surprising to someone who only knows of the modern Nintendo, or even to most people who remember the classic, NES-era Nintendo.

Back in what we might call the "pre-crash" era, that misty time before the Famicom, Nintendo licensed the rights to make a plethora of versions of their arcade hits Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr. and Mario Bros. for a wide variety of consoles and home computers, ranging in quality from awful (Coleco for Atari 2600), to pretty good (Coleco for Colecovision), to better than Nintendo's NES port (two great ports for the Commodore 64, by [Atarisoft](#) and [Ocean](#), both with the "Cement Factory" level missing from the NES). But once the Famicom came out, most of Nintendo's games have been, up until the recent mobile games, for Nintendo systems only.

Super Mario Bros. Special represents one of the few times that Nintendo handed the keys of their franchise to another company, not to make a game on Nintendo's behalf (such as Alpha Dream making Mario & Luigi RPGs, or Flagship making the Zelda Oracle of Seasons and Oracle of Ages games), but to release themselves... *and* for other systems than Nintendo's own. Nintendo licensed Zelda characters for the CDi system for a number of games that many people think of as ill-advised. But even those games are completely new, and difficult to confuse with Nintendo's own products. Super Mario Bros. Special was made by Hudson Soft, not for the Famicom, but for three different models of Japanese home computer, and is basically a funky remake of Super Mario Bros. This hack is a port of that game back to the Famicom/NES. In the process it gains some play niceties, such as smooth scrolling, that make it *much* less frustrating to play. The original SMB Special's worlds didn't smoothly glide across the screen, but revealed themselves one screen at a time.

But even with smooth scrolling, Super Mario Bros. Special is a deeply odd game. It was probably seen as less odd at the time, because of the less settled video game design language at that time. There are certain unspoken rules to game design, rules that Nintendo themselves helped formulate (but based upon lessons many companies learned in arcades), about what video games should and should not do to the player.

Some of these rules:

- "Powerup" items should always be good for the player
- No item should be impossible to collect
- Finding secret areas should never trap the player but always reward them by advancing them in the game
- If the player is doomed to die, that death should follow immediately (like he's already falling off-screen),
- Other than through losing lives, players should not suffer *permanent* harm, and
- leaps of faith requiring that the player make a risky guess as to what they must do should be avoided.

Super Mario Bros. follows these rules pretty closely. Nintendo's own Japanese sequel, Super Mario Bros. 2 (known in other parts as "Super Mario

Bros: The Lost Levels" or "Super Mario Bros for Super Players") doesn't pull its punches nearly as much. (For the ultimate example of Nintendo design evil, check out the infamous "second quest" to The Legend of Zelda.) When the player unconsciously understands those rules, they allow them to be more adventurous in playing the game, to take chances on hidden elements. They are what it means for a game to *play fair* with players. It's okay to try to go down every pipe, for the player comes to realize, from experience, that none are going to dump them into a death pit. When a game violates these expectations, players perceive it as developer cruelty. The game is "trolling" the player.

The existence of SMB2 and Zelda's second quest, however, points to the fact that Nintendo already knew what I'm going to now tell you: *these conventions are arbitrary*. They are a line in the sand, a compromise reached between developers and players regarding what is fair in the land of video games. There are other kinds of fairness. Some games willingly adhere to even stronger player protections, and they seem easier, to the player, for it. Others decided in the opposite direction, and if you think there is no purpose in the video game world for such abominations, there is a flourishing genre of YouTube video, of Kaizo superplays, that suggests that there is.

All this is lead-up to the revelation that Super Mario Bros. Special plays dirty. Some of its secret routes (not many, but a couple) kill the player. There are places where Super Mario can get stuck unable to escape. There are pipes you can go down that lead to an inescapable room, and you must let time expire. Though, of course, Nintendo's own Lost Levels has reverse warps. Japanese players of the era had it rough.

For a long while, the classic depiction of the evils of Super Mario Bros. Special was MrPodoboo's series of YouTube videos, [gathered together in this playlist](#). But really, if you're interested in Super Mario Bros. Special, you should play it yourself. And not the computer versions either. Save yourself the frustration and play this hack!

From Hardcore Gaming 101, [here's more information on the original Super Mario Bros. Special, as well as Hudson's other riffs on the theme](#).



^ The game gets different fast. ^



^ "I think that cloud is watching me." ^

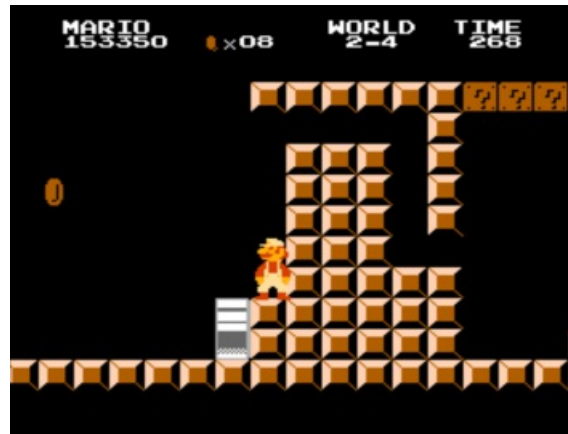


^ Those blocks there were invisible. ^

Imagine discovering them when the goombas were closer.



^ A blocked-off passage under water. ^



^ I hate this room. ^

If you jump big Mario into that passage up there he'll be stuck!

### 3. Vs. Airman (Super Mario Bros.)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** ATA

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/369/>

**Synopsis:** Mario has been dropped into a world alien to him: an amazing recreation of the Airman level from Mega man 2! He doesn't have a gun, but he's got a good pair of stompin' shoes. Can he made it through?

This is a very short hack that's still worth playing a time or two. It's a testament to ATA's hacking skill that, watching a video playthrough of the hack (see below), it's hard to tell for sure which game was the original.

One's appreciation of this hack tends to mirror the understanding of the viewer. If you've never played either game before, well then: feh? If you're familiar with both, you might think it a curiosity. People who know what a feat creating a game engine is, and how different games can have very different bases, will be interested. And people who recognize what a trick this is on a simulated NES will be rightfully amazed, as the original Super Mario engine has no facility for the giant appearing Air Tikkis, all of the enemies had to be coded from scratch (including the "Fan Fiends" towards the end), and Airman as a boss is included fully intact, and is much harder to survive without a gun in hand and, at most, one extra hit you can take.

Mostly though, it's the dearth of similar hacks that speaks to the merits of this one's construction. There are lots of hacks that *promise* you can take one game character into another world (as well as a number of other personages, including, for some reason, Mr. T and Wilford Brimley), but few can pull it off anything like this one.

By the way, the music in the hack is from Japanese fan video [Airman ga Taosenai](#).

Here is [Vincent Hernandez's playthrough of the hack, on YouTube](#).



^ "PROTIP: Hold A+B to turn the stars into birds!" ^



^ Out for a stroll in Crazy Gonzo Robot Land. ^



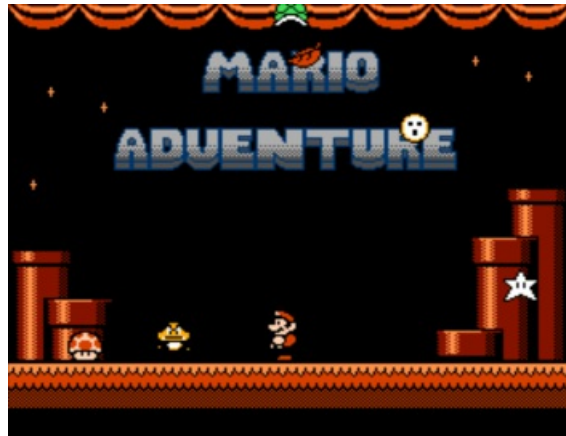
^ What you can't see here is how the huge Air Tiki just suddenly fades in as you approach! ^



^ Those lightning throwers take two stomps to kill, but tend to drop a powerup. ^



#### 4. Mario Adventure (Super Mario Bros. 3)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** DahrkDaiz

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/70>

The changes wrought upon the Mario 3 engine here are extensive, and kind of amazing to see. For starters, there's a random weather and day/night system. I know, among the lacks that Super Mario Bros. 3 has, "it doesn't simulate weather or time of day" is not often mentioned, but it has here been remedied. And it plays quite a substantial role in the game! Not only does the presence of rain or snow change the physics of a level, but sometimes enemies and other aspects change depending on the state, and sometimes a level is much harder, or easier, based upon the time and local precipitation. If you have difficulty with That One Level (the game is full of [That One Levels](#)), you might could get an easier version of the level by doing something else to advance the time.

The difficulty is pretty high, but is decreased significantly by giving the player infinite lives. Yes, years before Super Mario Odyssey! One implication of removing the lives from a Mario game, however, is the player ends up deprived of meaningful rewards. Why bother collecting coins or one-ups when they don't matter for anything? Arcade games could award score bonuses at least, but those have fallen way out of favor in console play. But Mario Adventure has a solution for that too; coins gathered are now saved

into a running total, and can be spent on minigames to earn powerups. 1-up mushrooms now award 50 coins apiece.

The powerup system has also been revamped, now there are states with names like "Fire Fire Mario." A fair amount of care has gone into it, and as you'd expect from a bona-fide Mario game each of the new states has interesting implications and abilities, which I leave it up to you to discover. In case you need one powerup but have another one, the hack lets you swap between two help powerups at any time, instantly, with the select button.

Levels may be reentered after completion, either to collect more coins, get a powerup, or search for secrets. However, now most levels end with Boom Boom, the fortress boss from the original game, so if you had trouble with him you're in for a lot more of it. The last level of each world is again an airship, that moves around the map as you lose lives to it, but the major goal of each world isn't just to finish it. Each world has a secret key hidden somewhere within it, and collecting them all from across seven worlds grants access to world 8. Peach gives you a hint to the key's location when you beat the airship. Being able to reenter levels after finishing them facilitates the search, and you can also choose what order you explore the worlds in. And you don't have to use save states to record your progress, as the hack automatically saves your progress as you go with SRAM support.

All in all, Mario Adventure is quite the terrific little hack, even if the difficulty seems a little high at times. It's still regarded highly even over a decade after its release, so why not give it a try?

The site Vintage Computing proclaimed it to be [the best Mario hack](#), although the article's over ten years old. It's still pretty good though!

Jobexi [played through the whole game in a series of YouTube videos](#), watching the whole series takes about four hours.



^ Sometimes, it's GOOD to be out in the rain. ^



^ Did you ever wonder where the wood for all those blocks came from? ^



^ I only wanted to see you ^  
throwing hammers at me in the purple rain.



^ Bowser's subjects pay a fortune in coin taxes ^  
to support these tank monstrosities.



^ These fire-spitting Nippers are bad news! ^

## 5. Super Mario 3Mix (Super Mario Bros. 3)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Southbird

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (sometimes the graphics seem glitchy),  
**Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2068/>

This game is notable at the very least for being challenging without being overwhelming. That, by itself, counts for a lot in the world of romhacks.

While a hack of Super Mario 3, the game goes all out to include interesting elements from throughout the series. Many worlds are styled after a different game (either Mario or otherwise). Although the lines blur sometimes, like when you encounter a Super Mario World Ghost House in the first world, out of place and with surprisingly accurate graphics for a Famicom/NES hack. It's filled with incredible ASM features, new enemies and bosses. It's one of the most accessible total conversion hacks out there.

The world themes are:

1. Super Mario Bros. Mostly remixes of levels from the first game.
2. Super Mario Bros. 2. Remixes of levels from Mario 2 (USA). Rideable Shyguys appear as enemies, and has Mouser and Wart as custom bosses.
3. Boo's Woods. A spooky world notable for having, for music, some hilariously off-key (I assume purposefully so) renditions of Mario 3 music.

Some levels are remixes of areas from Super Mario Land 2, and the Carrot and Penguin powerups appear here.

4. Based on Super Mario World, which is a neat trick on an NES. Includes a reasonably complete version of Yoshi! Sadly, he's only in a few places and cannot be taken between levels.

5. A desert world not unlike World 2 from SMB, but with new enemies and the return of the Carrot powerup. More Mario 2 elements are here including diggable sand. And that's not all that sand can do....

6. Inspired by Super Mario Sunshine, this world features beaches and seaside sights, as well as a couple of cameos from that game.

7. Mario Galaxy stuff. Really? I'm thinking someone's messing with my script. Weird gravity effects and other strange uses of the Mario 3 engine are shown off here.

8. Standard final world stuff, like Hammer Bros. gauntlets and forced scroll areas.

0. There's a World Zero that pipes in the other worlds leads to, where you can pick up keys for some secret end.

By the way, save states might help you here but aren't necessary, you can always reload your game to start with five lives (the hack has save game support) and there are plenty of extras in the hack.

Here is Vincent Hernandez's [series of YouTube videos playing through Super Mario 3Mix](#).



^ Welcome to Callback Land! ^



^ Who else thinks it looks like Toad's ^  
wearing a greaser's leather jacket? Ayyyyy....



^ Where does the air those Ptoois use to ^  
keep up those spiked balls come from?



^ Yes, this screen is from an NES hack! ^





^ Sparks. Why did it have to be sparks? ^



^ Oh yes, there are more autoscroll airship levels. ^



## 6. Super Mario Arcade



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** zacmario

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3406/>  
<https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=15456>

When you're sorting through a huge list of romhacks, trying to find some to recommend, it isn't long before you start to look for the hacks extraordinary, the ones that try things not often seen in their competition. If you wanted yet another level pack you're probably better off buying Super Mario Maker. But there are things that Super Mario Maker does not, or cannot, do, and that you can't really get out of most hacks either. Those are the games that I've focused on here. And one of my favorite Super Mario World hacks is Super Mario Arcade, a game that seeks to regress some of the advancements of SMW to a state more appropriate to an arcade experience.

The world map is gone. Don't bother looking for secret exists for there aren't any. The five Dragon Coins in many levels have been replace with three Princess Coins, but they're still worth an extra life.

About those extra lives. You should stock up on those. Super Mario Arcade isn't nearly as difficult as some level hacks (for those, check the next writeup) but there are a few levels that will cause you to rapidly hemorrhage lives. There are 24 courses in the current version of the hack, and they follow the traditional castle-every-four-levels pattern.

This is a romhack, and being such its native environment is not a console but an emulator, and so there is a temptation to abuse save states to get through it. What you do in the privacy of your own home is your business, of course, no matter what I or Shigeru Miyamoto or Mike Pence might have to say about it. I would suggest, however, that you might want to consider avoiding them for this hack. It's not an overwhelming challenge, and it's kind of fun to try to get through all 24 levels in one go.

As for me? I used save states. I had a deadline to make.

Here's Big Brawler [playing through an earlier Super Mario Arcade in a YouTube video](#). That version ends after just a few levels though; only 8 instead of 24. (I can tell you, by the way, that the ending hasn't gotten much better. The fun of this one is definitely in the journey.)



^ Those adorable ladybug creatures ^  
are the goombas of the hack.



^ You can flip the blocks like Super Mario World, ^  
but you cannot spin jump in this hack.



^ There are a few new elements in the game. ^  
These spinning logs try to dump you into deadly water.



^ This level in World 3 is where the ^  
game takes off the kid gloves.

## 7. SMWCentral Level Compilations (Super Mario World)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** The community of SMWCentral

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

**URLs:**

1st Annual: <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=13947>

7th Annual: <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=6872>

8th Annual: <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=11254> - <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2419/>

9th Annual (great!): <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=14812> - <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3246/>

**Synopsis:** Compilations of the many entries in SMWCentral's annual level-making contest. Get ready for adventures and remarkable feats!

There are lots of Super Mario World level hacks. You can find them on a website called SMWCentral, which is kind of the internet's capital of Super Mario World hacking. In its mighty database you can find a huge collection of hacks, of all shapes, sizes, and ability to make you pull out your hair. There are so many that it's very difficult to chose from among them a really solid hack to present here.

For some years now SMWCentral has hosted a yearly level making competition. Its large userbase goes to work, using the noted Super Mario

World level editor Lunar Magic, and they make levels to compete against each other for the honor of being the best Mario level for that year. The results end up being the same kind of thing as seen in Super Mario Maker, but the base level of competence on display is much, much higher, and also a lot more varied, since Lunar Magic is an extremely capable (if not nearly as easy to learn) editor, and there's a lot less incentive to make autoplay or music levels.

For several of the years that the competition has been going, people have taken the levels made for it and put them all into huge level compilation hacks, with world maps and many of the amenities of a real Mario game. That's what these are, and they are awesome.

I take great pleasure in introducing these. Just one of these hacks will keep you playing for many days. The most recent (9th Annual) is astonishing in its presentation; I honestly believe that Nintendo could do no better. That one, like Mario Adventure, discards the life system, and lets you just enjoy the courses on their own. (It does offer to tell you how many times you've died all together, in case you're interested.) The game does track which courses you've finished and which exits you've found, and although the Dragon Coins don't give you an extra life, when you get all of them in a level, the game does remember that fact.

In the 9th annual hack, clearing levels doesn't open paths; all the levels are available from the start, grouped according to theme. Two special paths present the best and worst-rated levels submitted. If you want to see wonders, go to the best-rated path and bask. These are great levels, and the way they're presented on the map screen does them justice.



^ "Aw c'mon, don't be so hard on yourself." ^



^ The colors on this map screen are glorious! ^



^ Ferris Wheels in Mario World finally reach ^  
their ultimate deadly potential.





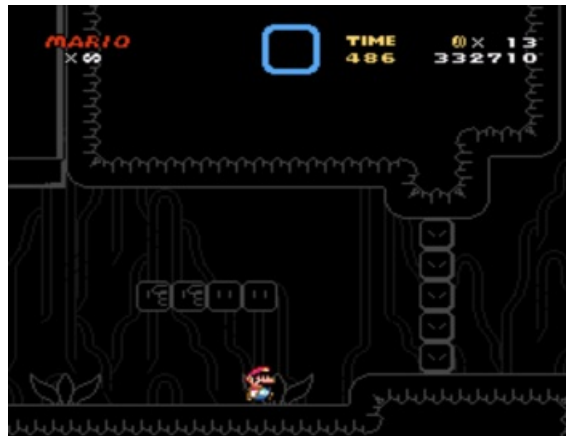
^ The serene colors belie the havoc of this scene. ^



^ "Oh god oh god oh god just let me stand somewhere normal!" ^



^ Where does a romhack get off looking this good? ^



^ A shot from the #1 hack from contest #9. ^  
Play it and find out why it's so popular!



## 8. Super Mario World Competition Cartridge (Super Mario World)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** arnpoly

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

**URL:** <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=5521>

**Synopsis:** Changes the scoring and adds a time limit to provide a way for players to fairly score attack Super Mario World.

The past few years, fueled by the rise of Let's Players and A/SGDQ, have seen a rise in the popularity of speedrunning, the playing of games, often streamed or in some other public venue, as quickly as possible, for fun.

The reasons that people speedrun games are varied, but I consider that the root of them is the drive to competition. These are games, supposedly tests of skill, and sometimes people want to play them against each other. It happens that going for the shortest time to competition is a nearly universal measure of playing skill. Although the skill measured is not always the same as that used in playing the game normally, you can always time a person to see how long it takes him to get through something. In the process it cuts out a lot of the bullshit that sometimes accompanies playing games. You can't farm for extra lives or points, for that takes too much time. Just race to the end! And it's easy for casual players to spectate, too. A player doesn't have to understand all the details of the game's systems to know why a really good speedrun is special; it just obviously is.

Yet, playing for maximum speed often ignores many other aspects of a game, and often asks a player to try to break the game, taking advantage of glitches and bugs, or at least play in ways unanticipated by the developers. There are other meaningful forms of competition, like score attacks, although they're under-valued right now after years of points being a nothing thing.

Well, back in the NES and SNES era, Nintendo manufactured special cartridges to facilitate competitive score attack gameplay:

- The most famous of these was used at [the 1990 Nintendo World Championships](#), which used a cart that presented portions of Super Mario Bros., Rad Racer and Tetris. The carts were later given away at prizes in a Nintendo Power contest and are very rare today.
- Nintendo made [special score attack Starfox cartridges](#) for the Super Starfox Weekend promotion, and later sold those carts in Nintendo Power.
- Then there was the [Donkey Kong Country Competition Cartridge](#) used during Powerfest '94 and the second Blockbuster Video World Video Game Championships, which were also sold through Nintendo Power.

The Donkey Kong Country cart is of special interest because that game doesn't actually have a scoring system, so one was invented specifically for it. The player has five minutes to run the score up as high as possible. Collecting bananas, KONG letters and defeating enemies are all worth various numbers of points, but the big award comes from completing levels, in order to reduce the incentive to stay on one level and farm points by dying and collecting easy awards repeatedly.

This hack, Super Mario World Competition, does for Super Mario World what that cart does for Donkey Kong Country. Like Super Mario Arcade it removes the map screen, but the levels themselves are unchanged.

Now, Super Mario games with scoring usually have an easily manipulable system where you can not only farm coins for points, but also earn thousands of points by knocking over enemies with turtle shells, so the scoring was completely redesigned to be more in line with the DKC competition cart. The highest awards come from getting lots of stars at the

end-of-course goal tape, so high scores generally mean not just playing quickly but maximizing that award, and earning other points along the way incidentally. After six minutes Mario will be warped to an empty room so his score can be recorded, and the game is over.



^ Five minutes and 25 seconds to go.... ^



^ Will the detour to this bonus area score enough points ^  
to make up for the time it costs to get through it?



^ Mario's happy; he just earned a big score bonus! ^



^ Keyholes get you out of the level quickly, but is it worth skipping the Exit Gate? ^

Maybe you just should hold onto the key as a swimming aid!

## 9. My Little Puzzles trilogy (Super Mario World)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** Chosentw0, others (ASM elements)

**Difficulty:** 6-7/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (the game's solution to stopping you from getting pushed through some blocks is INSTANT DEATH), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=12920> -  
<https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=14080> -  
<https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=14882>

**Synopsis:** Super Mario World's elements refashioned into a very difficult puzzle-platformer.

Did you ever look at the trappings of Mario games and think to yourself, these are the makings of a great puzzle game?

Consider it for a moment. Mario is better off when he's big, yes? He can break blocks and take a hit. But he has a lot of trouble fitting into small areas. There are potential arrangements of blocks (that the developers of Super Mario Bros. are very careful to avoid!) that Super Mario cannot escape from and must wait for time to expire, but Small Mario can get through easily. In Super Mario 3, Fiery Mario can destroy enemies with fireballs, yes, but there are places where you're better off kicking Koopa shells and letting it clear away bricks, which fireballs can't help you with.

Nintendo, oddly, has only rarely examined the puzzle possibilities of the Mario rule-set, which may have reached their peak with Super Mario World. Yoshi, from a platformer perspective, is a strange entity. He exists even when scrolled off-screen: both him and Baby Yoshi don't "expire,"

despawning, when not visible. In fact, Yoshi can move when off-screen, if you take a hit while riding him he panics and runs off, and he will walk on and bounce off of blocks over half the level away, something no other entity can do. His tongue is even weirder; you can use it to transport items through solid walls, place objects on ledges you yourself cannot jump to, and of course colored shells in Yoshi's mouth have interesting effects.

What Nintendo has been reluctant to do, Chosentw0 took and ran with. His trilogy of Super Mario World puzzle games are some of the most interesting Mario gameplay you could hope to find. There are some extra elements added to the world, in the form of special blocks, but the focus is on the objects from the original game. One kind of block (re-purposed from the blue Switch Palace blocks) kills Mario on touch regardless of powerup, but it's mostly used to make sure he doesn't take a rogue powerup into a stage. There are also keyblocks that consume a key and disappear if you bring one to it, blocks you cannot carry items past, and blocks that refuse passage if there are any sprites existing other than Mario. (Remember, Yoshi can even exist off-screen!) The focus is on the implications of these objects in Mario's universe, and there are some strange results indeed.

The result is a particularly challenging game. I managed to finish the first few puzzles in the first one in preparation for writing about these hacks, but they get harder fast. A good introduction to the first hack, in fact, is the tutorial area at the beginning of the second one, which rapidly introduces all the special things introduced in the first game. Even so, there are unexpected behaviors of some of the special blocks that might catch you off-guard. Like (this is a minor spoiler, but it's an unintuitive one) the no-item block cannot see items in Yoshi's mouth.

The best thing about the series is that they don't rely on glitches at all. There are absolutely no Kaizo tricks required, everything (or Chosentw0 claims, at least) can be figured out without esoteric knowledge of bugs. That is, however, not much consolation when you've been staring at a turtle shell, a mushroom, a key and a baby Yoshi for half-and-hour, smashing them together in various ways and hoping something clicks.

By the way, Chosentw0 says (in his readme) that not only are save states okay to use when playing these hacks, they're greatly recommended. I

agree, you're absolutely going to need them.



^ Part of the fun is learning what the new blocks do. ^  
Those X blocks to the left are deadly if you're invincible!



^ What the heck do those upside-down clouds do? ^



^ These puzzles will push your knowledge, logic ^  
and platforming skills to their limits.



^ Those blocks don't let you hold an item in your hands ^  
as you pass through, but maybe there's a way....



## 10. VS. Super Mario Bros.: Home Edition (Super Mario Bros.)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** BMF54123

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1014/>

**Synopsis:** Did you know Super Mario Bros. got an arcade release? And that it's pretty darn difficult? This hack lets you experience it easily in an NES emulator.

So let's go back time and look at a bit of video game history.

Back when Nintendo was first hitting it big with the Famicom/NES, they were still a company that had fingers in many pies. They were making Game & Watch standalone portables, for instance, and they were still making arcade games, which they had been doing since Donkey Kong and before.

At the time they were mostly working on a single arcade platform, the VS. System, that they would release conversion kits for, so a manufacturer could buy a game, and when earning began to decline, they could get a relatively inexpensive kit (often amounting to a replacement circuit board and new cabinet art) and turn their investment into a new game. The VS. System was an upgrade for Nintendo's older machines from the Donkey Kong era, which used special monitors to make it difficult to convert the system to run a competitor's games.

There were two types of VS. system actually, the UniSystem that could play one game, and the DualSystem which could play two. Most of the games that Nintendo released for it were conversions of NES games, both those

made by Nintendo and those they licensed from other companies. That's how there's an arcade version of NES Castlevania, called VS. Castlevania. (Most of these games have "VS." in the title. Branding, you see.) Of particular interest is that many of these games, especially those made by Nintendo themselves, have differences from the NES versions. In VS. Duck Hunt there are bonus stages, and you actually can shoot the dog during them (this will end the level, so it's not good to do). VS. Balloon Fight is a wonder to behold; playable on the DualSystem, each player gets his own monitor, so playfields can scroll vertically and be larger than one screen! It also has special deluxe remix of Balloon Fight's awesome bonus stage music. VS. Excitebike is a much fuller experience than the limited NES game. (VS. Excitebike was actually my first exposure to the game. I was greatly disappointed when I got the NES version.)

This brings us to VS. Super Mario Bros., Nintendo's official arcade version of Super Mario Bros., and this hack, which is a conversion for stock NES hardware and emulation. It starts out pretty similar to the NES version, but it isn't long before you encounter some pretty substantial changes. The needs of arcade play are different from home play, the game has to be designed to keep players cycling as much as possible, so extra life "loops" have been removed. It's generally harder to earn extra lives than in the home version. Warp zones are reduced and generally don't take you as far. And later on whole levels are switched out for some from the much harder Japanese Super Mario Bros. 2. There's even a high score screen and name entry board!

This hack makes available the DIP switches from the arcade machine for setting on a special boot-up screen, which allows you to set the difficulty of the game. And it even supplies virtual SRAM for saving high scores. It's a cool little hack for those seeking an arcade experience, or simply a new, harder (but faithful) variant of Super Mario Bros. to play.

[World of Longplays goes through VS. Super Mario Bros. on YouTube.](#)

[John's Arcade \(a website and YouTube channel\) has a page telling all about the Vs. System.](#)



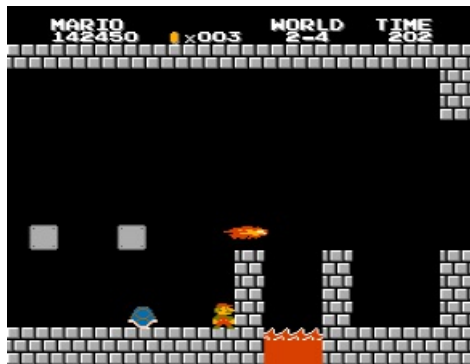
SUPER PLAYER'S			
1.	AAA	5W-4	221100
2.	BBB	5W-3	220200
3.	CCC	5W-3	218800
4.	DDD	3W-4	214500
5.	EEE	2W-1	199550
6.	FFF	2W-1	187000
7.	GGG	1W-2	184050
8.	HHH	1W-3	152000
9.	III	1W-2	141000
10.	JKL	1W-1	120550

^ "SUPER PLAYER'S" ^

Gotta love classic Nintendo grammar.



" No fair, that's supposed to be an extra life! ^



^ Bowser had some more fire pits put in. ^



^ This level was outright stolen from Lost Levels! ^



^ The jazzy music behind this screen was forgotten for decades, ^  
until last year it showed up in Super Mario Maker!

## Hacks: Metroid series

Both Metroid and Super Metroid have full-featured editors available so there's plenty of hacks to choose from. There's hundreds of Super Metroid hacks alone, including some very well-regarded ones. The people who they're well-regarded by, however, are Super Metroid enthusiasts, so it's difficult to find really good hacks that aren't also really hard. I know of no game quite like Super Metroid for picking up difficult-to-perform, strangely-named techniques. There's [bomb\\_jump](#) and [mockball](#) and [shinespark](#) and [blue\\_suit](#) and [crystal\\_flash](#) and...\*

Lest people think this is intended to be a snub against those other games, and as with the Mario hacks, I don't claim the written-up hacks in this book are the best out there, just that they're pretty good and generally enjoyable. The bottom of this introduction lists some of the harder ones, if you want to try them.

On the specific subject of Super Metroid.... It's been 23 years since it was released, so here's some tips in case you need to refresh your memory, or never played it in the first place (in which case you really should play the original, which is readily available on Wii, Wii U and New 3DS Virtual Console):

The game's map is not infallible. Sometimes you'll appear to reach the edge of a room, but there's actually a passage beyond it. Even the game's scrolling conspires, in places, to make it seem like there's not more to a room than there really is.

There's an art to searching for secret passages. With this many hacks and this many hack makers, you're going to encounter every method of obscuring passable routes possible. Super Metroid is a game primarily about exploring and finding things, sometimes easily, sometimes with great difficulty, so the more you enjoy finding things, the more you'll enjoy the game.

The two best items for finding secrets are the X-Ray Scope, which reveals all block types in its field of view, and the Power Bombs, which will uncover the types of all special blocks it doesn't outright destroy. Both tend to be late

game finds for this reason, so if you find one or the other early, be ready to use the heck out of it.

Most hacks (but certainly not all) follow an item progression similar to the original game: Morphing Ball, Missiles, Bombs. Collecting bombs in particular is the beginning of serious passage-searching, since they can both destroy level 2 destructible blocks and, in many hacks, reveal the types of blocks they can't destroy.

This will catch you at least once. You can't find any way to progress. You've tried every weapon. Where could the path be? And then you accidentally walk into the wall and find it's completely passable, an illusion.

Since it's a lot easier than trying to create new enemies, you'll find the foes from Super Metroid reused in many contexts. In particular look out for Bomb Torizo, the statue that comes to life when you collect the Bombs, usually pretty early in the game. It could be either very easy or hard depending on how much health the hack creator decide to give it and what other items you've collected, so if you're using them, it's worth making a save state before picking up the bombs. And don't skimp on the missiles; it has an attack that shoots rocks at you, which you can shoot to get both missiles and health.

Actually, don't forget about missiles in general. They make short work of some enemies that may take 20 or more shots. The same goes for Super Missiles, which can utterly demolish some of the bosses, but they're harder to refill.

Near the end (or even earlier), you might be unfortunate enough to encounter the Golden Torizo, a deluxe version of the Bomb Torizo, who's frustrating to fight because he dodges missiles and *catches* Super Missiles, throwing them back at you. The best way to fight it is either the Charge Beam or lots of Super Missiles, since it can only hold one at a time. If you encounter the Golden Torizo before finding either of those items you can safely assume the hack creator is a jerk.

In Super Metroid, Samus has a few secret attacks to try, that aren't required but might make these hacks easier in some places:

- Once you have both the Charge Beam and Bombs, you can drop five bombs around you at once by rolling into a ball while charged.
- Also while charged, you can do a lot of damage against many enemies simply by doing a somersault jump into them. This is sometimes called a "pseudo-Screw Attack."
- There are things in the game called "charge combos," which can be used if you have the Charge Beam, at least one other beam, and the Power Bombs active. You turn off all your beams except Charge and one other, and charge it up while Power Bombs are selected as your weapon. The effects are cool but never necessary for exploration, and rarely come into play early in hacks because you usually find Power Bombs late because of how they can reveal block types, giving away a creator's secrets.

There are a few techniques that will greatly increase the range of hacks you can clear:

- Wall jumping is one of them. The original Super Metroid has a great shaft for practicing wall jumping in Brinstar, after you get the Speed Booster.
- When Samus stands and jumps normally she is three blocks high, and rolled into a ball she's just one block high. It's possible to enter passages that are two blocks high by somersaulting into them, since Samus is two blocks high when spinning.
- Having to use the Infinite Bomb Jump is another telltale sign of hack author jerkiness, not just because of difficulty but because, even if you can do it reliably, it's slow. It's just laying bombs with such timing that Samus is propelled into the air higher and higher. [This video shows how it's done.](#)
- It's technically possible to roll into a ball at the top of Samus' jump and enter a one-block-high passage up there. The trick is just to roll up, by pressing down twice quickly, while ascending in your jump. It's not too difficult with practice.
- [Shinesparking](#) is a particularly infuriating technique that you'll be called on to perform more than once. Build up a charge with the Speed Booster then suddenly press down while at full run. Samus will stop suddenly in

place and glow for a few seconds. In this state, she can launch in a straight line in any of five directions at the cost of some energy, obliterating enemies and crossing gaps. The thing is that Shinesparking destroys Speed Booster blocks, which are ordinarily only destroyed by running through them. If you find random Speed Booster blocks in an area, it's most likely that the hack creator has devised a Shinespark puzzle in that area. [This video lays out all the details.](#)

Remember: Red doors open when hit with five regular Missiles or one Super Missile. Green doors open under fire from a Super Missile. Orange doors require a Power Bomb. Gray doors are trigger-activated and only become able to be opened when some condition is met, like destroying all the enemies in a room or defeating a boss somewhere. These colors are not usually changed by hacks, but once in a while one does, so be wary!

Now armed as you are with esoteric techniques, you might stand a chance against these other Super Metroid hacks:

[Super Metroid MINI](#) (Mr. Hiryu): Not actually all that Mini in more recent versions. There are some graphics glitches once in a while, and a couple of places that, to get out of them, you'll need to roll in to a ball in the air. There is one optional Power Bomb room I found that may need infinite bomb jumping to escape. (It's in the right side of Brinstar, soon after you get your initial Power Bombs.) Wall jumping, while needed in places, is not excessive. You'll probably spend the early game low on energy tanks, necessitating careful play. Worth checking into for a good medium-hard difficulty hack, but the middle game is marred by having to play semi-underwater areas without the Gravity Suit, and having to put up with Super Metroid's frustrating water physics. At least one place in the game requires leaping out of water then a wall jump off of two blocks' height of wall to escape.

[Super Metroid Redesign](#) (Drewseph): Has a good reputation as one of the first great Super Metroid hacks, but I was put off by an overdone wall jump section. Wall jumps aren't usually that hard to pull off in Super Metroid, but the game has had its physics adjusted, and as a side-effect wall jumps are actually harder, and with my controller (an Xbox 360 clone) very difficult to pull off well. If you can get past that part (maybe you have a better controller) you'll find an exceptionally large game ahead of you.



[Super Metroid Legacy](#) (Banana Oyaji): From Japan. Has a different sense of design from most hacks. Legacy is 12 years old now, and well-regarded in the Super Metroid hacking scene. Unfortunately though, a game is as hard as the single hardest required thing in it, and there is an infuriatingly, ridiculously obscure, yet necessary, secret you have to find midway through before you get the X-Ray Scope. (If you don't mind spoilers, look at [the place I cued up in this YouTube video](#), and note that destructible block must be *bombed*, not shot, and you don't have Power Bombs yet.)

[Metroid Super ZeroMission](#) (SB): Also from Japan, this is a very long game with some quite tricky areas (like jumping off of breakaway floors), although technically nothing that requires glitchy tricks. [This is a complete playthrough on YouTube](#), by KyleRXZero.

[Super Metroid Rotation](#) (SMILEuser96) and [Super Metroid Inverted](#) (CrimsonSunbird): These frankly absurd hacks take the game and, with as few concessions to playability as possible, rotate the game world 90 degrees and flip it upside down, respectively. They're pretty hard (I hope you know how to wall jump!), but fun to watch someone else play. So, here's a [Super Metroid Rotation speedrun by Feral5x](#).

[Retroid](#) (ProjectXVIII): A remake of Metroid using Super Metroid's engine. The game isn't exactly like NES Metroid, but less has changed here than in, say, Zero Mission. If you just want graphic improvements of the original Metroid in its own engine, ['Roidz](#) and [Mdbtroid](#) are mostly the original game with visual edits.

[Super Metroid Panic Mode](#) (personitis): Adds a touch of classic Gauntlet to the game. When you pick up your first Missile tank, the game starts draining your health away at a steady rate. All the usual sources of health regaining are available to you, but you should be especially wary around elevator transitions. A challenging, but interesting, play!

[So Little Garden](#) (MetroidMST) isn't huge, but it's still basically an exploration hack. It's very linear, but it might help to take notes for interesting places to return to once you get major powerups. Note, bomb jumping will avail you not here, and neither will wall jumping, they've been disabled!

[B2TW](#) (Grime) - Is a very short hack where Samus is stuck as a ball the

whole time. It's a lot more about action than exploration, too. After a tight part at the beginning it's not very hard.

\* (inhale) ...and [murder beam](#) and [spacetime beam](#) and [chainsaw beam](#) and [gravity jump](#) and [arm pumping](#) and [X-Ray climbing](#) and [alcatraz](#) and [pseudoscrew](#) and ...

## 11. Metroid + Saving, Metroid99 (Metroid)



**Platform:** NES

**Creators:** snarfblam, Maximum Potion

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

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1186/> -  
<https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/504/>

**Synopsis:** Modern play niceties (saving, mapping, restarting with full health) retrofitted onto NES Metroid.

Metroid is regarded as a classic NES game for good reason. Its successful attempts to establish atmosphere given very limited resources, its integration of mood, its ingenious sound design and the overall gameplay, both in establishing the "Metroidvania" paradigm of a large maze where your explorable territory is expanded by the items you find in it (everyone's remarked on this), and from the use of Missiles as a resource gained through exploration skill that affects your ability to succeed at the very end of the game in the Mother Brain boss room (no one remarks on this). Yep, there's lots to like in Metroid.

There's also lots to hate in it.

It's my firm belief that game design doesn't go obsolete, that a game that's good once is always good. But it is also true that perception of games is heavily dependent on novelty, and without that novelty, games that weren't really as good as they seemed on release can turn out to be worse in

hindsight. You may see this as a convenient loophole for me. I don't think it's *quite* a loophole, but I recognize it looks like one.

Anyway, *Metroid* is a great game, but it's true that players have gotten used to some more recent innovations in game design that *Metroid* could greatly benefit from having. Actually, those "recent innovations" are over twenty years old. Well, they are bolted onto the game by this hack.

One of them is a map feature. Pause the game and it shows you the layout of corridors around where you are. You can even scroll it around and see the whole layout of Zebes! It's not really an automap because the corridors are displayed whether you've already explored them or not, and some might regard that as cheating, seeing as not only does it effectively reveal the whole layout of the game, but you can use it to see which corridors actually end at that barrier, and which actually extend beyond it, that you might could pass through if you found a path that could be bombed open.

But I do not mind those changes. I don't mind them, even though I paid my dues to *Metroid* long ago, without a strategy guide, without a map, without help at all even. I did that, and I remember well both my frustration with getting stuck in that one shaft in Norfair, and how I felt when, on a whim, I tried bombing my way through, and it *worked*. I wasn't thrilled to get through or satisfied with my searching skill, I was pretty darn outraged. "How was I supposed to know to do that?" As I found out later, I wasn't supposed to know. I was supposed to get fed up enough that I tried bombing every square!

In *The Legend of Zelda* there are lots of secret caves that can be found, but (in the first quest) all the ones that *must* be found have a clue pointing you to them. *Metroid* has secrets that you *have* to find, and no clues they exist. There are a couple of places in the game where you actually do have to resort to just bombing every square and hoping one of them opens. A map, even the basic one in this hack, lays bare that there must be a way through, and while that is a substantive change to the game, it's one I wish I had when I first played it. Additionally, by showing you passages before you can get to them, the hack gives you an incentive to explore in a direction. Did you know that the last area of the game, the Mother Brain boss room, is

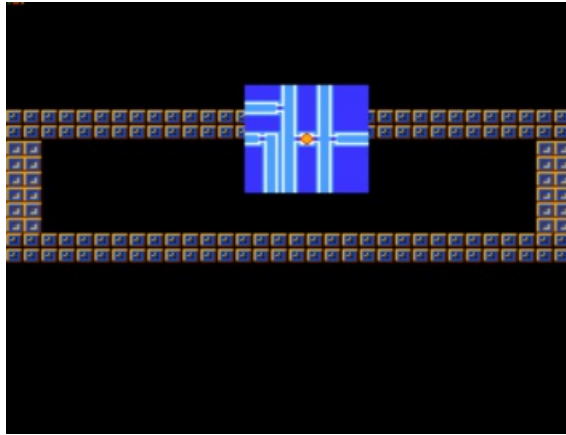
right above the corridors where you begin the game? This map hack shows them to you, waiting up there, taunting you with their existence.

Another addition is a save feature, letting you get around that password system. The first release of Metroid did have a save function, supported by its being released on magnetic disk for the Famicom Disk System. Dropping passwords also means dropping Justin Bailey, the famous cheat password that gives you a bunch of stuff and lets you play Samus suit-less, which was supposed to be a reward for completing the game quickly. But it also means you don't have to worry about tracking sheets of paper, or writing the code down wrong. It's better this way.

I consider this hack is awesome, and not just for how much it improves the game. Most NES games push the hardware pretty hard. Any that are programmed with a degree of professionalism will have a good frame rate, status bars, large background layer bosses and other tricks, and all of these things take a certain amount of time away from the machine's beleaguered 1.7 MHz processor, from the short period between frames during which the program must update all the visible moving objects, scroll the screen, poll the controller, move the player and handle all the interactions between things. All this, and using the limited RAM in the system. Extra features like an in-game map are extravagances compared to that. That it's possible to implement an in-game map at all is pretty amazing.

I include a second hack in this entry, a very small hack that simply fills Samus' energy to full whenever you start a new life. Without it, you might have six energy tanks when resuming the game, but you'll still only start with the 30 health you'd have at the beginning, requiring a long process of grinding for energy drops. Life is too short for that.

The Saving + Map hack is useful enough that two other prominent Metroid Hacks included here use it, Incursion and Rogue Dawn, both incorporate it, with the blessing of its author.



^ A map in Metroid! ^  
Just what the game always needed!



^ The changed Game Over screen is ^  
reminiscent of the Super Metroid Game Over screen.

## 12. Metroid Deluxe & Deluxe Reduxe (Metroid)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** The Rooser (Andrew Emmott), snarfblam

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/99/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3134/>

**Synopsis:** It's Metroid with a new map. That is all. That is enough.

When one is working on a romhack, I imagine, a question to ask is: how much is too much? These are games that work on their own. Sometimes you want to liven them up a bit with new areas to explore or enemies to defeat. Sometimes, though, a new map is enough.

That's the case with this one, which is a Metroid in which Samus explores an alternate Zebes. A handful of assumptions about the original game are overturned; the Maru Mari, or "Morphing Ball" or later games, for instance is some distance from the start. You're more likely to find missile doors before Missiles, too.

In some ways, the game is actually easier than Metroid. There aren't any places, like the way back up from the Ice Beam in Brinstar, where it's tricky getting enough height off a jump to make it back into the game. There are no long vertical shafts of destructible blocks, where you have to rely on their regeneration timing to make it out. And thankfully, there's fewer secret

passages you have to find to succeed. (I only remember one from a full playthrough, and--spoilers!--it was in an item room.)

Released in 2006, Metroid Deluxe is a venerable hack, #99 in RHDN's hack database, and generally well-remembered, but it's been left rather behind in the race towards technical prowess in hackery. But there is another reason to play it now.

The previous entry, on Metroid + Saving, is a hack that adds saving and a world map to the game, two features that Metroid desperately needs that weren't around when it was new. Now lots of people have finished Metroid, and might even want to do so again, but people who played it back in the day have already trodden those paths. Playing through a different game world without mapping and saving might not be as appealing to folks who have jobs and kids.

Last year The Rooser revisited his old hack and added snarfblam's save and map hack to it, making a combo he calls Metroid Deluxe Reduxe. Now you can have the experience of playing a freshly redesigned world *with* modern features! It'll still take you some time, but you'll probably finish a lot faster than you did with the original back in the day, of if you're a new player, you have a much better chance of finishing without becoming hopelessly lost among the twisty channels and vicious critters of the Zebesian underworld.

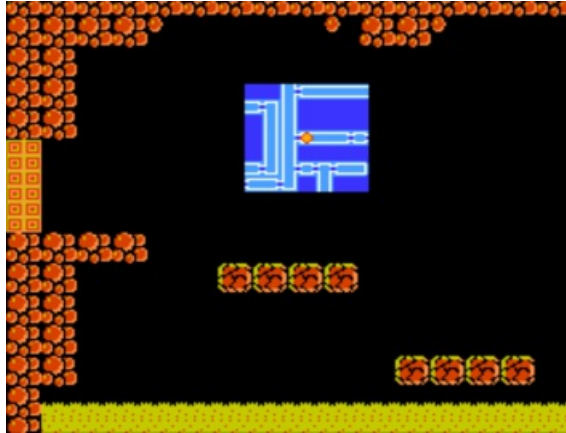
If you'd rather watch than play, YouTuber VD has a whole playthrough of Deluxe (the original hack), collecting every item while taking no damage:

[Part 1](#) - [Part 2](#) - [Part 3](#) - [Part 4](#) - [Part 5](#) - [Part 6](#) - [Part 7](#)



^ I found the one with the prize inside! ^





^ Aw yiss got me some of that map action. ^



^ I just like this screen. Don't judge me. ^



^ Those things are called "dessgeegas?" Really? ^

How do the upside-down ones have backward gravity?



^ Oh god, it's a remixed Tourian.... ^

### 13. Metroid Incursion (Metroid)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Grimlock (Richard Outman), snarfbam

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I got stuck and needed a reset early in one test play, although I'm not quite sure how. Also, the destroyable blocks in Kraid's Hideout leave awfully square holes....), **Fun:** 4/5

**URL:** <http://metroidconstruction.com/hack.php?id=29>

**Synopsis:** Samus has to infiltrate yet another planet, and exterminate yet another Kraid and Ridley, and ultimately destroy yet another Mother Brain. But at least this time it looks nicer!

Metroid has long been revered for its atmosphere. Its stark tunnels and ambient music assist in making its world seem as something naturally occurring, rather than specifically made with a game's challenges in mind. Yet, Metroid's worlds are awfully abstract sometimes. Rocks, Bubbles, Bricks, Pipes. How many variations of these things can there be? Not a huge number it seems.

Metroid Incursion is, like Deluxe, a map hack. Its world is just a remap of the original. There are no new enemies or powerups. What there is, though, is new tiles, and the effect is rather startling.

Instead of blue rocks, the starting area is made of city buildings! There are still pipes, but there are also supporting beams, and hooks hanging from cables, and antennas that can be stood upon, and power lines, and even

streets! True, there are no people around, and it's odd that all this civic infrastructure is for the benefit of enemies that act like the zoomers and rippers of Metroid (they've been given a mechanical re-skin). But to think that Metroid's tired tile engine could produce things like this is interesting.

The later areas also have new themes. Norfair's been turned into a sewer world. Kraid's place is an underground world of dirt and tunnels, with some rather tricky items hidden by taking advantage of Metroid's scroll system. Some things can't be obtained unless you enter their area when the scroll's going a different direction! And Ridley's lair is a weapons factory, with tanks and spaceships laying around its long corridors.

The version I played was "Incursion Plus," which also added the amenities of the Metroid + Saving patch, which also lets you have the ice and wave beams at the same time (increasing their power) and providing a very helpful map. If you've been through the original Metroid, I'm sure you've had enough of map-less exploring of vast featureless caverns. I wholeheartedly recommend this version.

In the end, it's just another remap of Metroid, for better or worse, and one that's a bit more straightforward than usual. A lot of Metroid series hacks play with item availability, forcing you to do without the Maru Mari ("Morphing Ball"), Missiles, Long Beam or Bombs for long periods. That's not the case here, you'll find them at about the same times you would have in Metroid, with the possible exception of the Bombs, they're delayed a bit. And there are a couple of secret areas in Norfair that aren't on the map. They're not too difficult to find, and I mostly mention it just to remind you that such things exist in this game.

Anyway, that's Incursion. It's not hugely difficult, I recommend a controller with autofire (or you can enable that in RetroArch, mapped to a spare button) to help you blast through multi-hit enemies. On my first serious play, I managed to finish quickly enough to get the "Swimsuit" ending (which is unchanged), so it's not an extremely long game to finish.

[Here's KRocketneo's playthrough of the hack on YouTube.](#)



^ The local schoolkids mistook Samus for a basketball. ^  
 She hates it when they dribble her.



^ "And there, at the end of the chain, was a hook!" ^  
 "Yes, she used it as a platform. The pointy bit hurt her feet!"



^ Deadly health-sapping mud. ^



^ This is the leopard-print sector of the planet. ^  
See if you can escape its fabulous dangers!



^ There is something shocking in seeing actual TANKS ^  
in the original Metroid game.



^ "There was a time when I thought a great deal about the metroids. ^  
"I went to the space aquarium and stayed for hours watching them.  
"Now I am a metroid." (Apologies to Julio Cortazar)

## 14. Metroid Rogue Dawn (Metroid)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Grimlock, Optomon, snarfbam

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3280/>

**Synopsis:** Another Metroid map hack? Hold on for a moment, look again. This is the best NES Metroid hack that I know of.

So, Deluxe changed the map but nothing else, Incursion also changed the tiles, and now we have Rogue Dawn, which changes Samus' sprites and also changes the story a bit. Grimlock (one of the makers of Rogue Dawn) also worked on Incursion.

I will set aside the matter of the new backstory, which I'm not too interested in. (Too many romhacks that try to tell a story end up sounding like Crossover Goulash for dinner, starring the maker's most very precious OC.) But what I can tell you is *the graphics are great*, probably about as good as the NES can pull off.

Grimlock puts the experience working on Incursion to good use, the tunnels and passages here look about as different from the rectangular tiles of Metroid as you can get. There's also underwater physics now, and walkable slopes, and a world that feels a lot more open-ended than most Metroid hacks.

There's even changed sound effects and music, not too flashy or showy either, and not rips from other games (that I can tell anyway). The game also uses snarfblam's map and save hacks, which as far as I'm concerned should be included in every Metroid hack. It even uses another hack that puts a small 3x3 map in the corner of the screen as you play, which almost feels like showing off.

I haven't gotten very far in it because of that open-endedness. I've completed Deluxe and Incursion, but this one I just have so much fun exploring the normal caverns that I don't focus so much on finishing it.

There's something difficult I will try to put into words here, to describe how Rogue Dawn is different from those other hacks. Bear with me here for a moment.

Metroid's engine has certain limitations that affect the design of its world. An area can only scroll vertically or horizontally, for example. And for nearly all of original Metroid, these types of areas alternate. If you leave a vertical scroll area by a door, you will end up in a horizontal scroll area, and vice versa. There is an exception (near the end of the game), but it's *almost* universal. If you've played Metroid a lot you might have never noticed noticing it, but you pick up on it unconsciously. When I went through Incursion, there is a vertical room that led to another vertical room, and I kind of felt a little uneasy when it happened until I realized, oh, the scroll's still vertical. My brain made an assumption about the world, and then that assumption was violated.

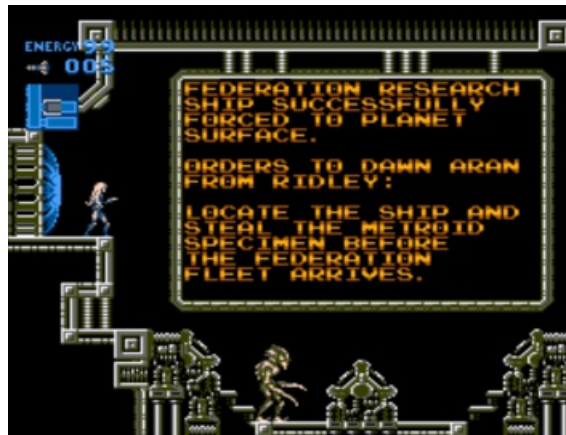
All video games make assumptions, and part of the process of playing them is learning them, internalizing them. Then sometimes a game will break one of those assumptions, and depending on how artfully it was done you either think it was clever or cheating.

Rogue Dawn has assumptions, yes. Areas still scroll either horizontally or vertically. But beyond that, the game feels a lot less constrained than Metroid, even though it's based on mostly the same engine. That tends to slow you down as you play, but it also makes the game more interesting, and so the experience starts to verge into Super Metroid territory. I kind of wonder what would happen if Nintendo approached Grimlock with an offer to



make a new Metroid game the same way Sega approached the makers of Sonic Mania. We might have gotten something wondrous out of it.

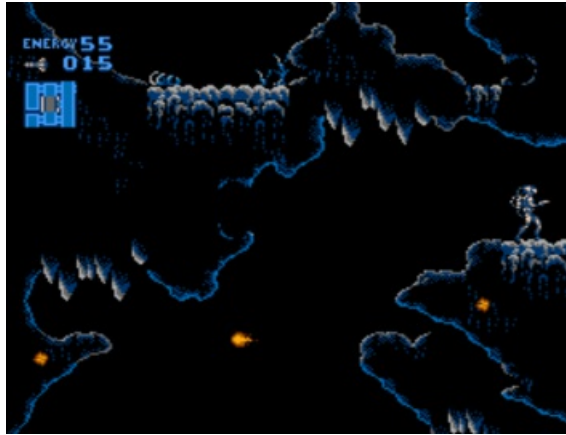
Rogue Dawn's pretty new and there aren't many good, solid ordinary (not speedrun, not voiced over) runs of it on YouTube. [Here is Koh1fds playing Beta 3.](#)



^ The game's framed as a kind of prequel to Metroid ^  
with a lady protagonist working for the pirates sharing  
Samus' last name. Hmmm....



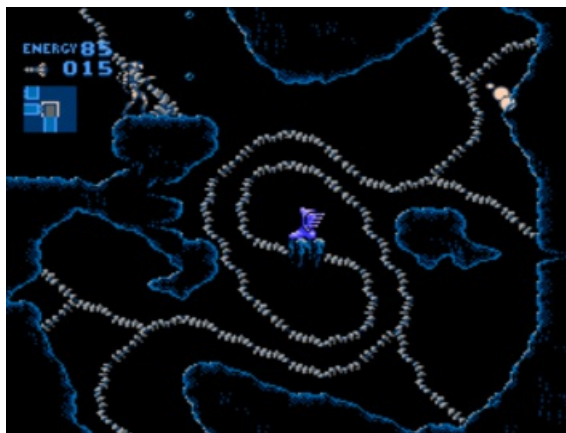
^ HOLY CATS WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT ^  
IS THIS THE METROID ENGINE?



^ I'm sorry, I'm just so in love with the look of this game! ^  
Even your character looks like a retro 50s space hero!



^ The caverns especially look organic and naturally-occurring. ^  
A far cry from the square blocks of Metroid!



^ Oh come on, now the creator is just showing off. ^

The game even has a small bit of the map displayed in the corner!

## 15. Super Metroid Y-Faster (Super Metroid)



**Platform:** SNES

**Creator:** Metaquarius

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I spotted one glitch for a half-second on a screen transition), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://metroidconstruction.com/hack.php?id=324>

**Synopsis:** It's a pretty cool and well constructed hack on its own, but that extra smidge of greatness is the one hour time limit.

After a thankfully perfunctory version of the Super Metroid opening (I know about the last Metroid by now, and have been through the Space Colony a dozen times already), you're plopped right down onto Zebes. Your inventory already contains the Morph Ball, the Bombs and a whole Energy Tank. Generous! It's nice playing a hack that doesn't make you work for basic navigation tools.

There are some tricky spots near the beginning where you might get dumped into water with high-damage-causing fish and have to laboriously work your way out, or use the Grapple Beam to climb a wall, and to get a couple of items it's useful to be able to roll into a ball at the top of a jump. There's also the occasional wall jump spot, and one extended shaft you need to use that maneuver to ascend. But once you get established, it's not really a hugely difficult hack. Finally one without excessive challenge! I was starting to worry. Hey, what's the timer in the upper corner of the screen?

The gimmick of this hack is that Samus only has one hour to finish the game. It's kind of like an extended version of the shaft escape sequence from the original game, except it's not a shaft, it's the whole consarned game. Yet the game is still as atmospheric and full of trickery as a standard (good) Super Metroid hack is.

You are not going to finish this hack on your first attempt. You just aren't going to know a good way to complete it. I've had two tries now and I still don't even know where the boss check room is. But it's still fun to explore! This is one of the more interesting hacks I know of for non-linear gameplay. So many hacks, if you don't find the one place somewhere in the territory you've been through that leads to the first Missile/Super Missile/Power Bomb/Varia/High Jump Boots/etc, you're just stuck until you find it, and finding it might require bombing every surface available in that area. It's really great when the game is coy with the damn Morphing Ball, argh. Y-Faster is designed in such a way that, no matter where you are, most of the items are fairly useful, so you can approach the game in a number of ways. The creator also says each area can be completed (by which I think he means the boss beaten and major items collected) without visiting the others.

[Metaquarius' teaser video for the hack, on YouTube.](#)

[Here's nekoja's 100% run of the game.](#)

Metaquarius also is known for making [Z-Factor](#), another prominent Super Metroid hack, which is a bit longer and more difficult, but doesn't have the time limit.



^ Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.... ^



^ There's no time for hanging around, Samus! ^



^ Samus happens upon a meeting of the Zebes ^  
Background Monster Choir Society.



^ This is one of my favorite screenshots. ^  
Look out for the SPIKES!



^ I seem to remember this being a frustrating room. ^



## 16. Search for Items (Super Metroid)



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Terimakasih

**Difficulty:** 5/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (minor graphic glitches, and Samus' ship is in the wrong place on the map!), **Fun:** 4/5

**URL:** <http://metroidconstruction.com/hack.php?id=47>

**Synopsis:** An older hack (from 2005), it's not difficult at all, but just fun to wander through finding stuff.

This is a book written for outsiders to the romhacking community, by an outsider. The scene itself is its own subculture, in fact many of the major games are sub-subcultures to themselves, with their own perceptions of hack worthiness, trends and tendencies, to which our visits are basically cultural tourism.

As a result, just like the natives in that French village you stayed in on vacation probably know a dozen terrific hole-in-the-wall restaurants that you'd never suspect existed that you'll rush by on the way to safe, familiar McDonalds, the best games in Super Metroid romhacking, as judged by the hack creators themselves, will be different from the ones that we find most fun to play. (For a list of more substantial Super Metroid hacks, see the introduction to this section.)

This is why I'm choosing to write on Search For Items, quite an old hack by now that's largely been superseded by others. It's still fondly considered by



many in the scene, judging from its reviews on Metroid Construction, and it doesn't require esoteric tricks to complete. If you've emigrated to Super Metroidvania and want to know where better hacks are, you know where to look.

One nice thing is that, unlike many hacks, the Morphing Ball is right near the ship, about as far away from your start location as it was in Original Recipe Metroid, and progression from there isn't that different from the unhacked game.

It is good to remember, when playing this, how different enemies have different weaknesses. The green heads that shoot blue fireballs, for example, can be destroyed with Super Missiles.

One tip I offer is to remind you: the glass tube can be destroyed with a Power Bomb. And it even works if you're outside the tube when you use it!



^ Fake Kraids don't know they're fake. ^



^ I SEE YOU ^

I CONTINUE TO SEE YOU.  
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MUCH SEEING I AM OF YOU.



^ Just because a door is gray, don't forget about it.... ^



^ Welcome to hell! ^  
On the menu today: damage!

## 17. Super Metroid Less Linear Edition (Super Metroid)



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** LexLuthermeister

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3150/>

**Synopsis:** What was formerly the province of elite speedrunners, Super Metroid sequence breaking, is now available to everyone, due to this modest yet wonderful hack.

The Metroid games are interesting to study from a game design perspective. The first game, famously (or infamously), is quite non-linear. After you get the Morph Ball, first Missiles and Bombs, early finds in the game's huge world, you can go into nearly the whole game. The only necessary exploration item left to find is the High Jump Boots. It's possible to finish original Metroid with 15% or less of the items in the game collected, a fact commemorated wonderfully by the sequel/remake Metroid Zero Mission, which appears at first to take a structured, Super Metroid-like approach to the game, but in fact effectively has two tiers of secrets: the ordinary kind players are expected to find, and *real* secrets, which let players sequence break on purpose, and finding them all is rewarded by offering special ending pictures to players who finish with 15% of items or less.

Zero Mission is designed this way as a compromise between the Metroid way of doing things, which is to dump players in the world and expect them to figure it out, and the Super Metroid way, to offer a programmed experience

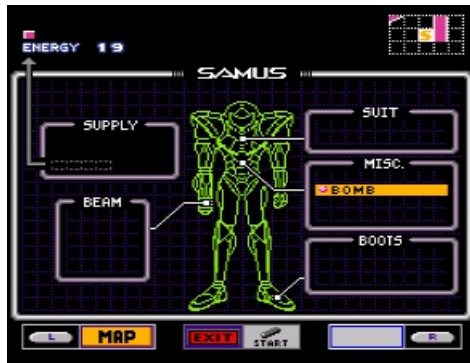
for the most part with the illusion of free exploration, but with hidden side jaunts for extra stuff. Super Metroid is designed that way to allow players to get accustomed to the game, to learn to play in the Nintendo fashion: by doing. Although the route Samus takes throughout Zebes meanders, it might as well be a straight line, with challenges growing slowly more complex and difficult the further along the line you are.

Now, that is how Super Metroid is *supposed* to be played. As it happens, speedrunners have long known that there are lots of ways to jump the tracks and get to places before Samus is supposed to be there. These have largely busted the game open and allowed for extreme sequence breaks, low item runs and the like, *if* you know and can perform the techniques needed to do so. Can you infinite ball jump? Can you wall jump up a single vertical wall? Can you "murder beam," whatever that is? If you can sequence break, you're a wizard. Most of us are not wizards.

Super Metroid Less Linear Edition removes the Hogwarts degree requirement to sequence break the game. Doors that used to require missiles no longer do. Most doors that are colored gray until you do something have been detached from that thing. You don't have to beat Spore Spawn (that wiggly plant thing) to get your first Super Missiles. You can get Power Bombs way early. You do still have to traipse around the big big maze to get the things you need to win the game, but the order you do it in has been opened up. You can go *left* from the Morph Ball at the beginning of the game. It's a whole new way of enjoying the original game, and yes, it'll probably get you killed sometimes because you can find tough enemies much earlier than before. But that's what save rooms are for.

Note, until you get the High Jump Boots, you may have to do some spin jumping to get out of a few messes you might get yourself in. This is a skill not needed in original Super Metroid except if you fall into a certain pit, but most people can do it with practice.

[eternizedDragon7 has uploaded a playthrough of Super Metroid Less Linear Edition on YouTube.](#)



^ Well, you got the bomb before you got the ball. ^  
 Congratulations?



^ You shouldn't beeee here yeeet.... ^



^ A Zeb has one mission in life: to fly out of a pipe and ^  
 collide with someone. Today, that someone is carrying power bombs.



^ Power bombs are a good item to get early, because ^  
they destroy so many kinds of blocks, and reveal  
types of things they don't destroy.

## 18. Attack of the Rinkas (Super Metroid)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** pontarou

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1226/>

**Synopsis:** An endurance test where you're asked to destroy as many Rinka enemies as you can in a one-room level before running out of health. That's all that's here... or is it?

Rinkas are an enemy from the original Metroid, where they only appeared in a few areas of the game, but where they appeared they made a mark: they were the fire rings in the final area, that got sent at you in never-ending waves, and had to be suffered through while you sought a good place to stand to throw missiles directly into Mother Brain's cracked glass cranium. Metroid's final area is a masterpiece of tension and gameplay: there were multiple ways to tackle the challenge, but none of them were quite perfect, they all eventually required shifting for a bit, and that's because of Rinkas, which were sent from specific spots in the background and aimed directly at you.

Rinkas could go through walls so they would always reach you unless you got out of the way, and they never dropped health or missile items for you to use, so there was no way to come out ahead in fighting them. You could freeze one with the Ice Beam, which helped both in that it could serve as a good platform to stand on while firing missiles at Mother Brain, and because the NES could only handle three Rinkas on-screen at once. If you froze all



three, you had a respite during which you could stand and fire missiles... provided the Rinkas weren't in your way, of course. And it didn't take long for them to thaw, and subject you to dodgy round fiery hell once more.

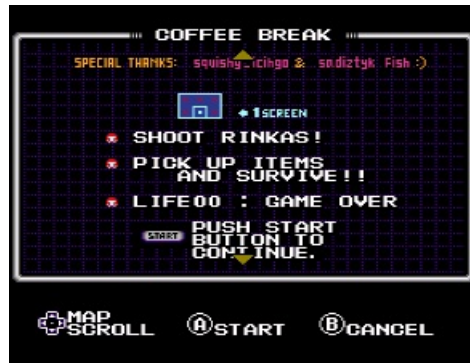
Super Metroid innovated on Metroid in so many ways, but in the lead up to Mother Brain, once again, it was you against the Rinkas in the search for a good place to stand. (Then after you blew her up you found out it wasn't *quite* over.)

Attack of the Rinkas is essentially the Mother Brain room made to be the whole game. Except this time you have a place to stand: it's a nice little two-block-wide platform in the middle of a room of spikes. The Rinka spawn points are along the borders. There are three difficulty levels, but the room is the same on all of them; on easy you start with extra energy tanks while on hard you begin with Samus' basic suit, instead of the damage-halving Varia Suit the other levels let you use.

Every time you destroy a Rinka (it takes two shots) you earn a point. You win if you manage to get to a score of 999. But the higher your score is, the faster the Rinkas move towards you after they generate. Even if you dodge one, Rinkas despawn immediately once they go off-screen, leaving its slot free for another to harass you. Each spawn point is one slot; if you manage to scroll some of them off-screen you'll have fewer to worry about, but no matter how many are shooting at you, the game soon becomes about how fast you can press the fire button, and before long the answer becomes *not fast enough*. Fortunately Rinkas in this hack *do* leave health as you destroy them, but it's pitiful in supply. You get five health for every health pickup, but Rinka collisions cost you fifteen.

Fortunately there are powerups buried in the walls of the rooms around you. There's a health refilling/expanding Energy Tank placed right in plain sight to the left, but there's an annoying enemy placed near it that you can't hurt. There's a number of other weird things in the room in fact. There's at least two more hidden Energy Tanks, and quite a number of other things. To say more on this would count as a spoiler, but a curious and clever player might find that there are more tools to aid them in surviving the onslaught than there seems to be at first.





^ The game's helpful introduction screen. ^

Enjoy your time in COFFEE BREAK!



^ You don't have to collect these items hidden around the room, but they might be helpful.



^ "La la la, just shootin' rinkas. This is easy! ^

I sure hope it gets harder!"



^ Some extra health hidden in a wall. ^  
Will it be enough?



^ WHAT THE HELL WHERE DID THAT COME FROM ^

## 19. Oxide (Super Metroid)



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Cyclamen32

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

**URL:** <http://metroidconstruction.com/hack.php?id=26>

**Synopsis:** The highest-rated Super Metroid hack that's generally finishable by normal people.

You might have noticed that a lot of romhacks have a reputation for being super-tough. There's a reason for this, or rather, a chain of reasons.

- Good romhacks take a lot of time to make, especially if ASM changes are wrought.
- Good romhacks also take a lot of effort to make, and in-depth knowledge of the game.
- Because of both these things, the people who care enough to make a hack of a game are those who have invested a lot into it, who are true fans.
- True fans have played a ton of the game in question, and are probably very good at it.
- True fans know their most likely audience: other true fans, who also have played the game many times.
- The result: to make the game more interesting to people who know every last detail about it, the game generally has to feel like a continuation, difficulty-wise, from the previous one.

I spent a great deal of time playing Super Metroid hacks for this section. I found a lot of interesting and fun hacks; witness the length of the "other hacks" part of the section introduction to see the fruits of that. But most of those hacks are quite difficult in one way or another. A game is as difficult as the hardest thing in it, so if a hack has even one place where you must infinite bomb jump, or wall jump up a complex sequence of surfaces with enemies bouncing around, that's a whole swath of potential players that have been excluded. True fans won't mind, but normal folks will bloody their hands and break their bones.

Oxide is the highest rated hack on Metroid Construction, as of this writing, of "Beginner" difficulty. That's easier than even the original Super Metroid. That doesn't mean it's devoid of challenge (there's one room I found where the difficulty of escaping from shallow water was infuriating), but generally the hack is about just roaming around, finding cool powerups, and just figuring out how to get to places. That's okay. The hack is of a generous size too, so you'll be going for a couple of hours. Once you're done with it, your freshly-calloused hands might be tough enough for harder fare.



^ This is a much more laid-back hack than the average. ^



^ That doesn't mean the game won't throw Draygon at you ^  
with two energy tanks, though.



^ Notice how Samus has 575 missiles? ^  
Those all came from a single awesome missile tank!



^ This is a super annoying room because ^  
it's hard to jump out of water.  
Try rolling into a ball and bombing your way out of it.

## **Hacks: Other games**

Not all hacks are of Mario, Metroid, Mega Man or Sonic. It's harder to hack games that don't have full editors or disassemblies available, but some people still do it.

These are my favorite hacks of all, sometimes turning terrible games into something playable, sometimes taking great games and focusing on one particularly awesome element, sometimes adding features to a game it always needed.

## 20. Castlevania 2 Retranslated (Castlevania II: Simon's Quest)



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** Bisqwit

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (the intro crashes some emulators on conclusion, but it doesn't affect play), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1032/> - Homepage (web app makes customized patches!): <http://iki.fi/bisqwit/cv2fin/>

**Synopsis:** Basically, it takes the least-loved of the classic Castlevania games, and one of the most ridiculously obtuse NES games of all, and makes it not only playable, but enjoyable, through astounding technical feats. Please do not play this game without this hack!

Like Metroid + Saving, this is another patch that makes one of the more notorious classic NES games more playable. But the difference is much greater with this patch than that one. I would say, in fact, that if you're playing from scratch without prior knowledge of the game, that you *should not play the unpatched Castlevania II*. I say this as a Castlevania fan in general and someone who has played through this game many times. I am not joking. It is the salt that makes a bitter experience palatable.

First, the hack has saving, like the FDS release of the game in Japan had, *and* it has optional passwords, so you can still use codes you got in the unpatched game.

Messages appear on-screen much faster, are re-translated from Japanese, and use all the lines of the message box so text can be (and typically is) twice as long.

The places in the game where you have to do something arbitrary in a special place to advance, which had no clear hints about them in the original game making them huge [Guide Dang Its](#), now have clues letting you know what to do.

There is an in-game map now, although it doesn't take the form of a Super Metroid or Symphony of the Night-style map. Instead, it's a scan of the Japanese manual digitized into the game! But it's not as useless as it sounds, because you can scan around and get the names of locations (a huge sticking point of the US localization is there's no way to know what the heck each location is called without a guide!), and find out where you are currently on it. And the signposts in the towns now *work*, they're readable, and tell you not only the name of the current town but what locations are to the left and right.

There are "cluebooks" hidden throughout the game that offer important advice. Unlike the villagers, they don't lie (although in the original game they weren't always useful). Now, the game tracks which ones you've found, and even saves what they say so you can read them later!

Wonderfully, the transition from day to night and back no longer suddenly pauses the game, pops up a slow text box, then takes several seconds to fade to black and then back in to the new palette's colors before resuming play. Actually, the transition doesn't pause *at all*. The game just transitions to the new colors in the background while the action continues! Why didn't the developers do that to begin with?

The cherry on top of all of this is a new animated intro depicting the prologue of the game, complete with scenes from the end of the first Castlevania! Wait a few seconds at the title screen to view it. I've spotted it crashing the game on conclusion in some emulators, mind you, if this happens to you just reset and everything should be fine.

This patch does not make Castlevania II a pushover, mind you. The breakable bricks are still capriciously scattered around the game world, and the fake walls that would sometimes dump you into enemies, spikes and



even to your death are still there and unmarked as ever. But the patch still does a lot to help players get through a very frustrating, yet ultimately rewarding, game. And hey, when it comes down to it, Castlevania II might have tricky traps and weird puzzles, but once you get those out of the way the actual combat in it is much easier than either Castlevania I or III, so count yer curses.

Best of all is, if you go to the patch's homepage, a web app will ask you exactly which parts of the patch you want, and actually construct a patch for you with the features you care about. My test play was done with a version with all the features enabled.



^ The new intro is pretty awesome! ^

A completely unnecessary touch that really establishes the game.



^ Check out this illustrated map screen! ^

You can even move a cursor around and find out the names of things!



^ Finally those dang signs actually tell you useful stuff! ^



^ The hidden cluebooks are not only rewritten, ^  
but the game saves the ones you find and lets you  
browse through them from the pause screen!

## 21. Castlevania RPG, Simplified, Pencylvania (Castlevania)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creators:** Lomax, Megafield64, unknown

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2545/> -

<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1726/> -

<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1440/>

**Synopsis:** Two hacks that make the original Castlevania easier, and one that just makes it look weird.

There are a good number of hacks on RHDN of the original Castlevania, one of the most perfect video games ever created, and most of them run afoul of the main issue of making changes to an almost perfect thing: you're much more likely to break something that worked well than fix something that worked poorly. I've tried most of them, and they just aren't that good yet.

I am joined in this lament by obsessive RHDN Castlevania reviewer TheLuigiLightning, who has reviewed many of the hacks of the game and found most of them lacking. (For what it's worth, one hack he likes is [Stairs of DOOM](#), but I wasn't a fan of that one either.) Some people think the game looks too bright for being a Serious Video Game (in which you fight the Mummies and Frankenstein's Monster), and so they change the palette to be darker to the point where you can barely see anything. Some people think the game is too easy (really!) and add medusa heads bothering while you fight freaking Death.

Here are three hacks that are not too difficult. They are kind of weird, but you may enjoy them. And I hope that TheLuigiLightning has finally returned to his coffin, in peace at last.

## Castlevania RPG



Get this. Some of the more recent Castlevania games (those in the exploratory "Metroidvania" style) are action-RPGs, where your vampire slaying guy (or gal, in Order of Ecclesia) earns experience point that eventually add up to levels, stat boosts and other advantages. Action-RPGs tend to suffer from a problem: how much room should be left for player skill? If the player doesn't earn a single XP, should the game still be winnable? Conversely, how difficult should the game be if the player has grinded up a lot of extra levels?

Well now there's another game subject to these issues: the original Castlevania, which is not a Metroidvania at all but a traditional level-based action platformer. The way it was done is pretty slick: they took the score counter, knocked a couple of zeros off of it, and now it's an experience counter. Everything that earned you points before now earns you, instead, one one-hundredth as many XP.

I'm not going to say it works well, because as it stands, it really doesn't? To make room for the level counter they replaced the boss health meter, and the level timer is completely gone. What is more, there is a particular known exploit in the first level where you can use Holy Water (or Boomerang if you're on a later loop) to kill lots of zombies and earn thousands of points in bonuses. A persistent player can easily top 80,000 points in that section

before time starts to run low, and hey guess what's no longer a limiting factor?

But it's still undoubtedly fun to play with a Simon Belmont who's overpowered, rather than the enemies, for a change. It's not like stock Castlevania is a walk in the park after all.

### Castlevania Simplified



Also along the lines of making the game easier is this hack, which simply aims to make the game finishable without a huge amount of effort. Most of the bottomless pits have been covered over. Most enemies only do one health bar of damage. You start with five lives instead of three. Small hearts are now worth two, and Daggers, a.k.a. the "Weapon Blessed With Suck," have been completely removed from the game. And porkchops (the mystery meat sealed up in the walls) now refill your whole health bar.

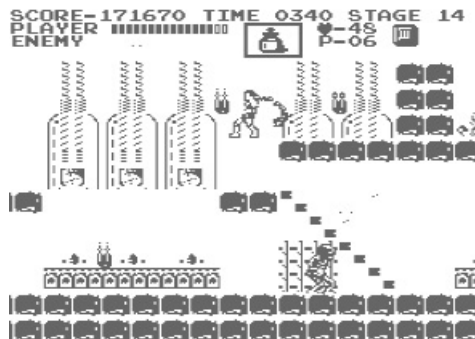
I personally think that this is a case of multiple easings of difficulty compounding on each other and making the game laughably easy, but then, a lot of people think the game is hella hard. Heck, some of you will probably still die to Dracula. Well, good luck anyway.

### Pencilvania



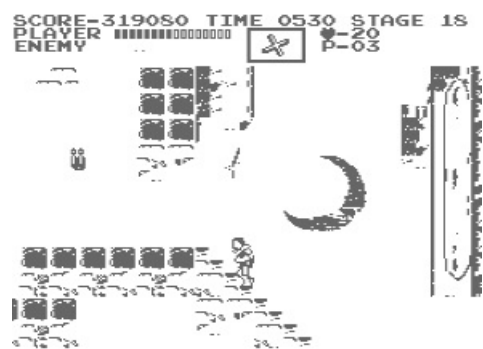
Did I include this one just because of that silly pun? Could be! But it's a surprisingly aesthetic hack on top of that, even if it doesn't change the gameplay at all.

All this hack does is change the game's palette so that it looks kind of like it was on a Gameboy. But the effect is kind of nice. After trying to play through a number of hacks that thought they were doing the game a service by darkening things, it's soothing to play through one that actually brightens it, even if it washes out all the colors in the process.



^ I just love the look! ^

It's also really creepy when you get an item that flashes the screen, and the colors flicker normal for a moment.



^ I had to include this shot, c'mon. ^



## 22. Advance Wars War Room Challenge (Advance Wars 2)



**Platform:** Gameboy Advance

**Creators:** Xenesis and the community of Wars World News.

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/909/> -  
<http://forums.warsworldnews.com/viewtopic.php?t=13051>

**Synopsis:** Advance Wars 2 is one of the best video wargames ever made. Some extremely enthusiastic fans made a version that's all ranked trial maps, with very stringent requirements for the best rating. The result is combat candy.

This is great. The Wars series is one of those undersung heroes of Nintendo's lineup. (The games are mostly named based on the system they appear on: Famicom Wars, Super Famicom Wars, Gameboy Wars, and thus [Gameboy] Advance Wars.) For a while it looked like Nintendo was finally getting what made them so terrific, as after being overlooked for US release entirely up until then, we then got two Advance Wars games, and then two DS Advance Wars games, a Gamecube action/strategy game sort of in the style called Battalion Wars, then that got a sequel for the Wii!

And then, nothing.

It's been nearly a decade now since the last Wars game, Days of Ruin came out. Now the big name in portable action strategy is, if you can believe it, Fire Emblem! Yes! The ultra-hard permadeath fantasy wargames! I know, I



can't believe it either! As near as I can tell Nintendo just narrowly avoided renaming it "Fight For Me, My Waifus!"

Yes, I'm kidding around. I love the Fire Emblem games too. But the irony is not lost on me that FE is the big name in strategy these days, while the Wars games, whose meteoric rise once had no end in sight, have been left behind. Further, the last game was the post-apocalyptic Days of Ruin, which, although having arguably the best-designed features and system of the whole series, abandoned the whimsical premise of the series. War is serious business, yes, but too much grimdark dark grimness weighs on the soul. If I wanted so much of that, I'd go out and sell my soul to Games Workshop.

The game that struck the best balance between simplicity and challenge was probably Advance Wars 2, which I think remains the most popular game in the series. It's certainly the game that me and my friends put the most time into (we racked up so many hours the game stopped counting them at 999).

Perhaps seeing that no story they could add to it would be worthwhile, the people at fansite Wars World News put together a splendiferous little hack that removes all the features from the game except for the trial mode, War Room. The maps included are either all new or are repeats with little changes to trip players up. Like the other games, winning is only the basic objective, with special features available for getting "S" ranks on each map, which includes not only both not losing too many units and destroying lots of enemies, but meeting a "par time" that always seems impossible to come anywhere close to making.

War Room Challenge is the closest thing we'll get to a new Advance Wars game, probably, until Nintendo decides their Waifu Brigade isn't bringing in enough gold pieces. Fortunately, there's a lot of content in there to keep you satisfied.

On YouTube, user NumberJuan77 has been playing through the various maps in War Room Challenge and trying to get S ranks, saving his successes [to their Advance Wars playlist](#). Watching might be useful for picking up some tips!



^ This is Spann Island, the first map. ^

In the original game, to get an S for speed you had to beat it in 13 days.

Now for that rank you have to do it in 10!



^ Battling Hachi's hordes, a ton of little ^  
guys swarming through the woods.



^ Inexpensive B-Copters are good against all ground units ^  
except Anti-Air. But they wilt under Fighter aircraft fire.



^ Artillery and Rocket Launchers are defenseless up close, ^  
but murder from a distance. Break through to demolish them!

## 23. Gyromite No Robot patch



**Platform:** NES

**Creator:** the jabu

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2268/>

**Synopsis:** Gyromite is finally playable without that darn R.O.B. accessory, and modified to keep the game interesting without it.

Have you ever heard of R.O.B., the "Robotic Operating Buddy?" If you've played Smash Bros. you probably have, since ROB has been a character since Brawl and was a fundamental element of that game's story. How quaint!

Back in the day, in the US Nintendo faced an uphill battle to get stores to carry their Nintendo Entertainment System in an environment where retailers had recently been burned by large amounts of unsold inventory for pre-crash systems like the Atari VCS/2600 and 5200, Mattel's Intellivision, and Coleco's, um, Colecovision. (Fun facts: Coleco rode their way to toy fame atop the Cabbage Patch Kids craze. The technical-sounding name COLECO actually stood for *CON*necticut *LE*ather *CO*mpany.)

Anyway, part of Nintendo's strategy was marketing, making their little gray gamebox look like something that'd fit in with stereo components. That's why they decided to call it the Nintendo *Entertainment System*, and why, while it might be primary-colored plumber run-and-bop action on the inside,

it was all business on the outside. They did something like this in Japan too. Even though the Famicom looks a lot more playful, its name, FAMiLy COMputer, promises more than simple fun and games.

Chief among their introductory product line was the Deluxe Set, which came with a deluxe price, and also two cartridges and two extra components, the Zapper light gun, and the R.O.B. The Zapper was the focus of one of the pack-in games: Duck Hunt, a simple but fun title that gave people a taste of the possibilities and paved the way for more involved titles later. The other pack-in was Gyromite, or "Robot Gyro," as the unlocalized title screen proclaimed, which aimed to do the same for R.O.B.

But despite getting two games instead of one, Deluxe Set owners were kind of left in the lurch because the base set's pack-in game was none other than Super Mario Bros., one of the greatest video games ever made, and as most kids will tell you, one great game is worth more than two mediocre ones. The Zapper's a *light gun* though, and promises fun above shooting ducks, so it was soon put into its own boxes and sold separately. R.O.B. could also be obtained separately (according to [Jeremy Parish](#) [YouTube]) but did not last long. Only one other game was made for ROB, Stack Up, which isn't very interesting.

But let's get back to Gyromite. As it turns out, there's kind of a fun game hidden away there! Professor Hector has to grab all the bombs out of his laboratory without getting caught by the monsters that for some reason infest the place. Hector's abilities closely mirror those of the guy from Lode Runner: he can walk left and right, and climb poles up and down, but he can't jump. But unlike the Lode Runner, he can't dig either. Instead, to ward him from monster attack, he relies on his robot's (and your ROB's) ability to manipulate red and blue pillars scattered around each level.

What I'm about to tell you is kind of hard to believe, but it's all true:

The original Gyromite had you move the pillars in an interesting, though convoluted, way: the second NES controller was placed in a contraption connected to a couple of colored pedestals. The pedestals were levers that, when weighted downward, would depress the B or A button on P2's controller, and these would cause the pillars in the game to lift up or fall, if the same-colored pedestal were pressed or released.

Your R.O.B., the manipulator of the weights, would be operated using the A, B and Start buttons on the Player 1 controller, but there were no wires leading from it to the NES. (It was even self-powered, with four AA batteries.) The commands were sent to it through the TV screen, in a similar manner to the bright flashes that told the Zapper where the gun was pointed. Through the screen, photo-sensors in ROB's head could be directed to cause it to pick up special weighted tops from holders, then rotate around to place them in a module that would spin them. Once they were going appropriately fast, ROB could then be directed to lift them up and place them, balanced while spinning, on one of the pedestals, and thus depress its button. ROB can also, in a pinch, press buttons with a non-spinning top, but if he let go of it it'll fall over, and the player would have to reach over and put it back in its holder so ROB could find it again. This would also happen if a top ran out of spin, which would require another visit to the spinner.

To summarize this process:

- The player holds the P1 controller, and in addition to using the control pad to direct Professor Hector, uses the buttons to make the screen flash colors.
- ROB sees the flashes and, based on their color, uses it to decide whether to rotate, lift its claws up or down, or close or open those claws.
- Through these flashes, ROB is told to pick up the tops, spin in the spinner, then pick them up and rest them on a pedestal.
- The pedestal, now weighted, presses a button on the P2 controller.
- In the game, the pillars matching the color of the pedestal would rise up.
- When it comes time to lower the pillars again, ROB can lift the top up to release the button.

It takes ROB several painful seconds to perform each maneuver while the action in the game continues. Is there any wonder to why ROB didn't take off in popularity? Maybe you've spotted the flaw in all this: *there is nothing stopping a player from just picking up the P2 controller and operating the B and A buttons themselves*. Of course it's hard to hold two controllers at once, but is it really more difficult than directing ROB through operating the pillars through the application of *spinning tops*? Or you could just recruit a human friend to operate the second controller, who doesn't require four

batteries to function. Or you could play a different game, that more sensibly localizes all its necessary functions on one controller.

A different game? But I want to play Gyromite, dammit! If only someone would create a romhack that did this for me.... oh, they did. That hack is this one. Also, the game's timer has been reset for each level, since before it was extremely long to account for all the time ROB needed to perform its manipulations. It still takes a while for the difficulty to increase, but now the fairly good action puzzle game that's always been hiding in Gyromite has a chance to shine.

As an encore, the jabu also made Game B playable, in which a sleep-walking Hector (still wearing his lab coat) must be guarded as he wanders his lab by operating the pillars to keep him safe. It's actually more fun than Game A!

[Here is Journeyman83's demonstration of how ROB operated, in "Direct Mode."](#) (YouTube) [And here is zoclates demonstrating it in use in Gyromite's Phase 40.](#)



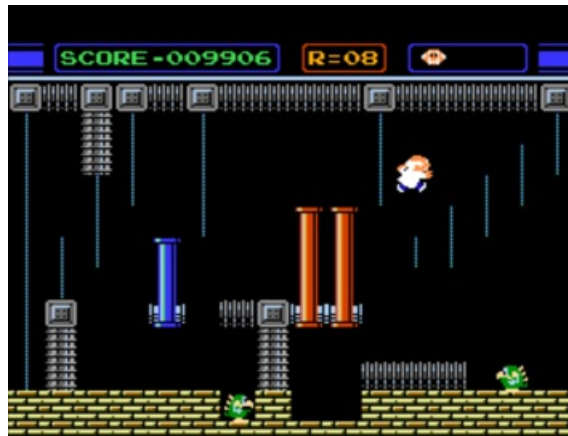
^ Professor Hector's blood pressure has gone way down ^  
since he stopped relying on that darn robot assistant.





^ Press A or B on the Player One controller to move the pillars. ^

"What a brilliant idea! Hey guys, we don't even need this second controller!"



^ Game B has you protecting a Lemming-like,^  
sleepwalking Hector from his ludicrously dangerous workplace.





^ Goddammit it Hector, I don't care if you think they're cute, ^  
killer monsters are bad things to keep around the lab.

## 24. Gradius AC, Twinbee AC, Salamander Arrangement Chronicle, Gradius II AC (Gradius, Twinbee, Life Force, Gradius II)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Messatu

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1573/> -  
<https://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1638/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1639/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/1574/>

**Synopsis:** Some crazy, beautiful person hacked these Konami NES and Famicom shooters to be more like their arcade counterparts.

Who is Messatu? God I'd like to shake their hand. These are some of my favorite games of all, and I imagine there aren't many people in the world who would appreciate his amazingly hard work in making these NES and Famicom games pretend to be arcade machines, but I'm writing this, and I'm one of them. If you like them too then you owe it to yourself to check these out!

Gradius: This is the most awesome of the hacks, for two reasons. First, *the Vic Viper can now build up to four options*. That's possible?! In the original home version it could only get up to two! Why didn't Konami do that themselves? I had that game as a kid and I feel kind of cheated now! Second, in the second and third levels, *the screen can scroll vertically as well*

*as horizontally*. I imagine this wasn't done in the original because it would have required more expensive hardware, or maybe hardware that didn't exist at the time (Gradius was an early Famicom release, before the plethora of special mappers companies developed that allowed the hardware to do far more than it was originally intended), but now the change is made, and the difference is amazing. There are other little touches too, like how the Big Core fighter emerges from behind the volcanoes in the first level. On the negative, yet understandable, side, the music is actually a little worse in this version. And there's no version of the famous [Gradius Morning Music!](#)

[Here is a playthrough of the first loop of Gradius AC on YouTube, by Gbriel Valdez.](#)

Twinbee: I'm not sure if the game was made easier in the conversion because I managed to make it to Stage 5 on my first try of the AC-hacked version, but it's not like I haven't been there before in the Famicom version. Twinbee is a neat little game for up to two players (co-op) that is now largely overshadowed by later sequels. This one doesn't have Light or Pastel or anime hijinks. It's just a cool, vertically-scrolling cute-em-up with silly enemies like eggplant planes and angry toilet seats, and which punishes you for the audacity of earning a force field by sending a horde of evil eggs at you. The music, by the way, is insanely catchy.

Salamander/Life Force: When you start up this hack and are greeted with the WHOOSH of the Salamander fireball spinning through the title, you have to know you're in for something special. I played up to the last level (*without* the Konami Code, thank you very much) in the previous version of this and was annoyed that there wasn't any other changes... but a new version of the hack went up in May, and wow. Wait until you see the parallax scrolling effect in the first level! It's a type technically possible on the NES but rarely seen. Later levels are also changed, and while they're not exactly like the arcade, a pleasing synthesis seems to have been made.

Gradius II: The king of NES/Famicom Gradius versions, which only received a US release on Wii Virtual Console, and even there it competes with the CD-based PC Engine version, which follows the arcade pretty closely. On the Famicom it was known for playing loosely with the game, including new (and often harder) sections of levels, like a solar area akin to Salamander/Life

Force's right in the first level. The changes here are fairly minor; the Famicom-only sections are still in there, but the normal boss and penultimate boss musics have been swapped back to how the arcade staff had them. That's a matter that's important to some of us.



^ For people who played the original on NES, ^  
the vertical scroll in this area is wonderful to behold.



^ It also happens here in the Moai stage. ^



^ The "Life Force" title screen has nothing on this version, ^  
with the spinning fireball zooming around the kanji!



^ I am sad that you can't see how the background at ^  
the top of the screen is scrolling at a different rate.  
It's an awesome effect on NES hardware.

## 25. Tecmo Super Bowl Roster Updates (Tecmo Super Bowl)



Note: the screenshots here are of Tecmonster's hack, not tecmobowl.org's, which uses a special emulator.

**Platform:** NES

**Creators:** tecmobowl.org, Tecmonster, qbvikings, fatcheerleader

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

**URLs:** <http://tecmobowl.org/> - <http://tecmobowl.org/files/file/502-tecmonsters-tecmo-super-bowl-2017/> - <http://tecmobowl.org/files/file/500-qbvikings-tecmo-super-bowl-2016-2017/> - <http://tecmobowl.org/forums/topic/68903-nes-tsb-ncaa-2016/>

**Synopsis:** The best version of the legendary NES football game, hacked to use current-day rosters. It can't ever be official, but it can be great.

From the front page of the Tecmobowl.org website:

"Tecmo Super Bowl is the greatest sports video game of all time. Now, 25 years after TSB made 8-Bit legends of Bo Jackson and Lawrence Taylor, TecmoBowl.org proudly announces the release of Tecmo Super Bowl 2017. This site's 10th yearly iteration updates Tecmo's NES classic with up-to-date rosters, graphics, schedules and play books for all 32 NFL squads."

Ten years running. These are people who care about this game, who care about football. Despite all this love, Tecmo Super Bowl will probably never see an official sequel in my lifetime. These days EA (formerly Electronic Arts, a name they never use anymore probably because the tremendous, concentrated irony would cause the crying of angels) have the rights to both

the teams and the players locked up tight. The NFL and EA have a cozy arrangement, and Tecmo Bowl isn't the only popular football series obliterated by their partnership. Did you ever find yourself wondering "Whatever happened to NFL Blitz?" Simply, that is what happened to it. Now Midway, the makers of Blitz, is a memory, and even if Tecmo, now Koei Tecmo, could get the rights to use the players again, there is a strong chance they wouldn't be able to re-bottle that lightning.

So, what cannot be done officially, for money, romhackers will sometimes do unofficially, out of love.

This is a catch-all entry for multiple hacks, all of the same game for generally the same purpose: making Tecmo Super Bowl playable with current player rosters and stats.

The main one is the Tecmobowl.org Official hack. I am actually having difficulty finding the rom itself. I think maybe they use some automatic code injection into the rom to actually implement it? Instead, to play it you use the original game rom with a special emulator, a modification of Nestopia, that implements online play, stats and leagues! The process of setting up to play is rather convoluted, but it's described in detail [here](#).







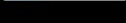
The other mentioned patches are produced by other fans for your football video game pleasure. Of particular note is the last one, which actually implements many of the 2016 NCAA teams. Tecmonster's hack in particular lists a wealth of changes and bugfixes; if you're not interested in online-enabled play, that might be the one to check out.

In case you might want to get involved with team editing for your own purposes, check out the [Tecmo Super Bowl Resource Site](#).

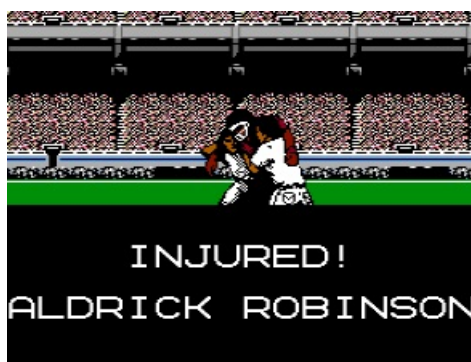


^ Yahoo, it's the current teams! ^

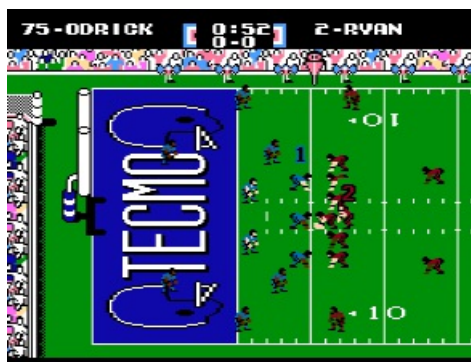
They've changed since 1991, haven't they?  
I admit it, I don't know much about football.

ATLANTA FALCONS				RB	
		24-DEVONTA FREEMAN			
PHYSICAL CONDITION: AVERAGE					
RUSHING		RECEIVE		KR	PR
ATT.	0	NO.	0	NO.	0
YDS.	0	YDS.	0	YDS.	0
AVG.	0.0	AVG.	0.0	AVG.	0.0
TD.	0	TD.	0	TD.	0
ABILITY					
QUICKNESS				56	
ACCELERATION				38	
SPEED				63	
HITTING POWER				31	
BALL CONTROL				50	
RECEPTIONS				31	

^ Here is the page of stats for Devonta Freeman, ^  
of the Atlanta Falcons. He couldn't have been playing in 1991.



^ Oh! Bad news for ALDRICK ROBINSON. ^  
It's off to Tecmo Cartoon Hospital for you!





^ Here is the obligatory shot of gameplay. ^

A lot of people dearly love Tecmo Bowl, but I am afraid it's not for me. Awesome concept though!

## 26. Super Pitfall 30th Anniversary Edition (Super Pitfall)



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Nesrocks

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 3/5 (Entirely because the original game was also pretty janky), **Fun:** 3/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/3060/>

**Synopsis:** Not the sequel Pitfall II should have gotten, but a lot better than the one it did get.

Once again, it's story-time. Gather 'round children, and I'll tell you a sad tale.

The world is full of tragedies, of course, and the world of video game development is no different. You might not believe this, but once upon a time the biggest game system around was a wood-grain console with joysticks with a single "fire" button, physical switches on the console, and all of 128 bytes of RAM. Designing and programming a video game under the constraints of the Atari VCS (aka 2600) was a ludicrous technical challenge. If you don't already know the bizarre practices one had to put up with to code for it, look for the book *Racing the Beam* from MIT Press.

One of those early developers was David Crane, a DeVry graduate in Electrical Engineering who worked at Atari on some of their earliest VCS software. At the time it was the practice of game companies not to credit their developers, out of fear that they would be stolen away by other companies, and also not share with them any of the huge profits their games were earning. So David Crane and some of his colleagues at Atari instead

left and formed their own company, the same Activision (more or less) that now makes the Call of Duty games. That's now. Back then, they made games about [chickens crossing roads](#), [the three little pigs](#), and [whatever the heck Megaman was](#).

Their biggest hit was Pitfall!, a game that's still vaguely remembered even today. It wasn't the first platformer, but it was enormously influential. It gave players a huge world to explore, 256 screens long, but were the same every game, and could be mapped. It also gave players different ways to explore it—they could stay on the surface and explore slowly, or go underground, where every screen explored went three above-ground screens in that direction, but made one have to jump over dangerous scorpions. It was also possible to miss treasures that way, the 32 treasures that were the goal of the game. Yet if you didn't go underground you'd run out of time, as you only had 20 minutes to finish.

20 minutes! Now of course game lengths are measured in hours, but 20 minutes is very long for a game stored in a 4K cartridge. If you judge a game by a program size to time played ratio, Pitfall was amazing, even at that time.

Pitfall was pretty great, but then came David Crane's follow-up, Pitfall II, probably the most technically advanced game for the Atari VCS, better than many NES platformers.

Bold words! And of course I wouldn't put it up against Mario or Mega Man. But there were lots of bad games for the NES, don't forget, and Pitfall II was remarkably prescient in its design. It didn't have limited lives, or a time limit! Players were allowed to just explore however they wanted! There was a score that could be used to measure skill, but it could be entirely ignored! And--this is the big thing--it had checkpoints, places you'd return to if you died instead of starting over. This was huge.

[Pitfall II also had some of the best music for the Atari VCS](#). Like how later Famicom cartridges would use special chips to push the console's abilities beyond what came in the case, Pitfall II also used a special chip to provide for much better music than had been possible up to that point. For its time, Pitfall II was a little box of wonders.

Unfortunately, the world did not appreciate it, largely for reasons that were

not its fault. Pitfall II hit the scene right around the time of 1983's Great Game Crash, which destroyed Coleco, got Mattel out of the game industry for good, and ultimately caused Atari's sale and breakup into home electronics and arcade companies. Pitfall was popular enough [to get its own Saturday Morning cartoon](#), but most players never saw Pitfall II on its native platform.

Sega made an arcade version of Pitfall II under license (an odd thing). But then! On the NES, there was Super Pitfall, a notoriously bad game, developed by [the king of bad Famicom and NES ports](#), Micronics. It did nothing to further the franchise's popularity. Like all Micronics games, the work was farmed out to them anonymously, but we know it was them. It has their telltale aroma. It's got all the trademark Micronics badness: a terrible framerate, bad music, simplistic graphics, and mystifying design decisions. It was full of important secrets that appeared only if you jumped in the right place, that you could only find by accident or after being told where they were.

Nesrocks made a hack of Super Pitfall, called Super Pitfall 30th Anniversary Edition, oriented towards fixing some of many of its many problems. It doesn't do a complete job of it, really. The frame rate is still terrible, you're still going to die because of not being sure when you can jump off the end of a ledge, and enemies can respawn the moment they leave the screen, which sometimes results in cheap deaths. But if you run out of lives the game remembers the major objectives you reached, there are fewer death traps, all the game elements are visible from the start, and the gun (now an item you find at the start) has infinite ammo. It's still an immensely difficult game (you should consider save states to be fair game until you've passed it at least once), but at least it's somewhat worth playing, now.

David Crane, creator and original programmer of Pitfall and Pitfall II who was no doubt annoyed at how Super Pitfall soiled his game's reputation, [expressed his appreciation and endorsement of the hack in a comment on RHDN's forums](#).

[Here is ShiryuGL's demonstration of the hack on YouTube. It might be worth comparing it to the original...](#) it's so much worse!

Chronotendo, Dr. Sparkle's effort to document every Famicom and NES game, covered [Super Pitfall in episode 10](#).



^ There's probably a snake that will rush Harry as soon ^  
as he leaps that pit. Welcome to Super Pitfall!



^ Hey, it's the balloon from Pitfall II! ^  
What, you've never played that game?



^ The original had two extremely secret ^

areas that you had to find to win.

Now, you can just walk through doors to go to them!



^ This is the second secret area. ^

Word is that your niece Rhonda is somewhere around this place.

## 27. Recca Pure (Summer Carnival '92: Recca)



Oh god it's Recca.

**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Silver X

**Difficulty:** 7/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (the title screen is glitched when switching to hard mode, but only in Nestopia UE), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/207/>  
<https://sites.google.com/site/panicus/games>

**Synopsis:** The infamous hardest shooter on the Famicom has hidden modes. This hack unlocks them, making the game even harder. Hooray?

This game, usually shortened to just "Recca," was the subject of a context run by NaxatSoft. It was developed by KID, who made several other awesome shooters like Burai Fighter, which got a US localization published by Taxan (Naxat backward). Wikipedia lets us know that the company became known for bishojo games, which to me seems slightly odd considering how macho-manly your typical high-speed STG box of knives pretends to be. But then half of those spaceships end up having female pilots anyway. You gotta respect the progressive hiring practices of the earth defense force.

Recca is known for pushing a lot of sprites at very high speeds without slowing down. Part of this is done, according to that same Wikipedia article, by showing explosions every other frame. I noticed that most enemies move so quickly that you can actually track their movements across frames as a strobing effect. By the way, speaking of which, if you suffer from epileptic

attacks when exposed to bright flashing lights I'd stay away from this game. You might even want to consider staying away from it if you're merely a human being.

From a gameplay perspective, the things that make Recca interesting, besides the many many extremely fast enemies buzzing around everywhere like killer cyberbees, is that you don't have a stock of bombs like many shooters of the type. Instead, you can set off a bomb by stopping firing for a couple of seconds then starting again. Considering ordinary survival in Recca consists of holding the B button down with white-hot intensity, I have say this isn't the easiest function to trigger.

This patch translates what little Japanese was in the game, and also makes available from the start two features that had to be unlocked in the original release, Hard Mode and Zanki Attack. Press Select from the title screen to activate Hard Mode, which causes the screen to freak out with flickering flames. (I am told that "Recca," in Japanese, means "raging fire.") It extends an already bonecrushing four stage game to seven stages, the prospect of playing which fills me, no, I don't think it's joy. It's some other substance. Zanki Attack--are you seated for this? It starts you with 50 lives, but causes all the enemies you shoot to burst apart into bullets! Just what you always wanted!

I'm having some fun poking fun at the game's great great (great great grand) difficulty, but it's not a bad game at all. You can respect a game that kills you over and over again, just as you can admire the workmanship of the hilt on a sword sticking out from your guts, at least before you lose consciousness. I do think it's maybe tuned a little too difficult though.

I played a good number of games of Recca in preparation for this writeup but couldn't get further than halfway through Stage 2, and I am actually not horribly bad at shooters. (I've beaten Zancac without cheats at least.) I actually got further in Zanki Attack than the normal game (to Stage 3 at least), because you have such incentive not to fire your weapon you end up using a lot of bombs, and bombs destroy enemy bullets.

Summer Carnival '92: Recca is available (untranslated, unhacked) on Wii Virtual Console.

[World of Longplays has two hours of video of Recca on YouTube](#). Their player



is good, assuming they're not using invincibility cheats. (You have to watch out for that with some channels....)



^ Hey look everyone, It's Recca! ^

You're about to see how many ways a spaceship can explode!



^ It's hard to take screenshots during all ^  
the hyperfast STG action and stuff.



^ Zap zap zap kablam pow zzzzt zzzt bang bang pow blam. ^



## 28. Oh No! More Zombies Ate My Neighbors (Zombies Ate My Neighbors)



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Stanley\_Decker, sloat

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (some scrolling issues around level 8), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/623/>

**Synopsis:** The sleeper hit action game made by Lucasarts when they were at their prime, now with more (even harder) levels.

(I sit in a corner, wearing a sign reading "Ask me about Zombies Ate My Neighbors.")

(You unwisely click on me and select "Talk.")

"You mean the latest masterpiece of action-adventure from Lucasfilm?"

Well no, it's no longer the latest. I think Lucasarts hasn't done any games that weren't Star Wars for many years now, and that was before the whole shebang was bought by the Disney Corporation. So while the company stews in their collective juices in trying to figure out how to design Luke Skywalker and friends for the next Kingdom Hearts game, let's go back and look at one of their most unsung successes.

Zombies Ate My Neighbors (or just "Zombies" in Europe) is basically Commando, for up to two players playing co-op, in a multi-directional scrolling field filled with secrets and a huge variety of enemies. Instead of rescuing POWs, you're trying to save your hapless neighbors from anything

that's ever threatened coeds in a horror movie. In a touch from Defender, saving them isn't just the theme, you actually are trying to rescue them: the enemies will sometimes target them instead of you, and if one is attacked they die instantly. If all your neighbors die the game ends (a real possibility in later levels), but more importantly: every 40,000 points you get an extra neighbor, but if you have a full complement of ten neighbors already you get an extra life! ZAMN is a darn tough game and you'll need every life you can get, so the beginning of a successful run usually means getting all your neighbors through it for the first 8 or 12 levels.

Every aspect of the original game exudes just the right atmosphere and sense of fun. The enemies are a silly yet deadly bunch, with hugely varying strengths and weaknesses, roaming about big maze-like levels full of lots of different weapons and destructible scenery. Drawers and cabinets in the game contain random items (and sometimes a point of unavoidable damage), which, due to the fact you're constantly running out of a dozen different kinds of specialized ammo, matters greatly to the play. Some walls are cracked and can be blown open by bazooka fire or, if you're clever, the attacks of certain monsters. And in addition to normal keys to open normal doors, there are skull keys that you almost always have to rely on the random item generator to find, that open skull doors with interesting secrets inside of them, including, if you manage to find one at the very start, a hidden level based on Lucasarts' classic adventure Day of the Tentacle!

The randomness of the game is part of what makes Zombies Ate My Neighbors such a blast. The game plays differently depending on what random pickups you've managed to collect. You might have a game where you've gotten a lot of bazooka ammo, or you might be given only the bare minimum to make it through. The same goes for weed eaters, silverware (a must for dealing with werewolves!), popsicles, holy talismans, flamethrower fuel, fire extinguisher charge, or even simple cartridges for your multipurpose watergun, which is among the worst of things to run out of.

The first thing that this hack does right is actually a removal. You no longer start with ammo for the watergun! Instead, the game gives you a couple of random items from among all of the game's types! You might be forced to kill simple zombies, for a short while at least, with anything. Fortunately there is guaranteed watergun ammo on the first level, but I take it my point

is clear: you'll be forced to improvise a lot more often here than even the original ZAMN. And to compensate for the slight unfairness: it's possible for one of your starting items to be a Skull Key. Oh yeah.

The hack's creators did a lot to make the game feel like a continuation of the original. The first game had a humorous title (and sometimes subtitle) for each of the levels, and the new level titles have been updated too. The levels of the first game were littered with secret bonuses to discover and collect in specific levels (like a bonus for destroying a lot of the evil purple weeds, or for not using the bazooka on a level where you'd really like to use the bazooka), and the new stages also have them.

Finally, the game just feels right. It plays just like the original for the most part. It's a bit tougher, and in a couple of places annoying (football players in hotel hallways?), but then so was the original game. Do you have a friend who likes playing old SNES games as much as you presumably do? Go get him and play ZAMN, the original, first. But if you've already finished that (meaning you're both *good*), this is a nice extension.

[Here's ParallaxDG's playthrough of Oh No! More Zombies Ate My Neighbors.](#)



^ Just another day in suburbia. Same houses, ^  
same cars, same evil plants throwing deadly flowers at you.



^ A giant baby is on the field during the big game. ^  
 You'd think they'd call off the game because of this.  
 You'd be wrong.

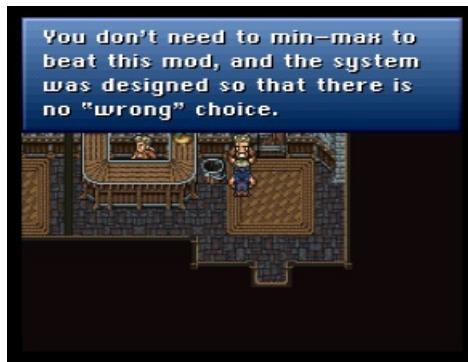


^ Julie used to be a nice girl, but then ^  
 she started hanging with the wrong crowd.



^ Martians love the great savings at Menards! ^

## 29. FF6 Brave New World (Final Fantasy III US)



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** BTB, Synchysi & creators of contributing patches

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

**URLs:** (as of July 21 2017)

<http://www.insanedifficulty.com/board/index.php?/topic/8167-brave-new-world-185-is-now-available/>

BUT apply this patch to it afterward:

<http://ngplus.net/index.php?/forums/topic/127-compilation-of-all-patches-released-for-185-so-far/>

AND note that when a new full version comes out these pages may not reflect it. The RHDN page, at <http://www.romhacking.net/hacks/2095/>, should update when the new version is released (as of this writing, it says 1.8.5)

ALSO you can keep up with the discussion on the hack in its sub-forum:

<http://ngplus.net/index.php?/forums/forum/5-final-fantasy-vi-brave-new-world/>

**Synopsis:** It's surprisingly little-known information, but most Final Fantasy games are riddled with bugs, and fan-favorite VI (III in the US) is no different. Some people set about fixing them, and ended up just going ahead and making a complete gameplay overhaul hack.

First off, this is a hack still undergoing active development! During the writing of this patch substantial progress was made by its authors towards



the release of version 1.8.6. Of course, I cannot write about a version of the game that doesn't even exist yet.

A well-populated category of hack in the archives of RHDN is the Final Fantasy bugfix patch. Lots of Final Fantasy games have bugs. Some of them have been elevated to the category of treasured game lore like FF6's item duplication bug, or the Vanish/Doom exploit, while others remain little-known to fans. In the original game, the special weapon abilities in the original game did not work, no matter what that Nintendo Player's Guide said, a bug keeps them from functioning. And to keep the focus on #6, the Evade% stat mentioned on the character stats screen does nothing at all, and the Vigor stat is nearly as useless.

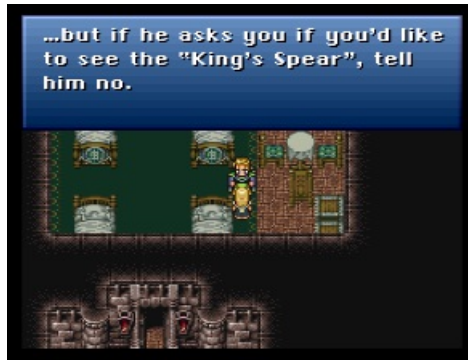
The fact that so many of these bugs are overlooked, especially in Final Fantasy VI, is a testament to the gameplay and that they aren't that serious. [But the game does have many, many bugs](#), and could have used a second run through QA before released onto cold and unchanging ROM chips.

The creators of Final Fantasy 6: Brave New World have undertaken, not just to fix these bugs, but re-translating the game while redesigning the combat systems. The result doesn't change the story significantly, it's still the same characters doing the same things, but the underpinnings are substantially different. The result has made the game harder, but not greatly so. One particularly noticeable such change is that Tents and Sleeping Bags have been removed from the game entirely, and you cannot automatically retry a failed battle; losing a fight forces you to reload from your last save in order to keep going.

Some enemies have been re-scripted and have new tricks to watch out for. Theft from enemies has also been reworked; now, generally only enemies who one would think would have something worth stealing, that is to say, people, will have possessions, as opposed to random animals or monsters. (I have a nice collection of Gum Pods taken off of squirrels to attest to that.) The dash ability, a necessary convenience that formerly required you to equip a Relic to obtain, has been assigned to the Y button where it always belonged. MP losses and gains have been given their own colored numbers to represent them. There's many more differences; the game has reworked the Beginners Classrooms in the game to explain them.



If you're expecting a new scenario here then you will be disappointed, this hack is dedicated to perfecting Final Fantasy IV (or "III US") as it is, not making it into something else (with the exception of a handful of added memes and references). But it's still a lot of fun to play, regardless of that.



^ This might seem like a poor fan script edit, ^  
but it's actually pretty in keeping with Edgar's character.

He's kind of a jerk.

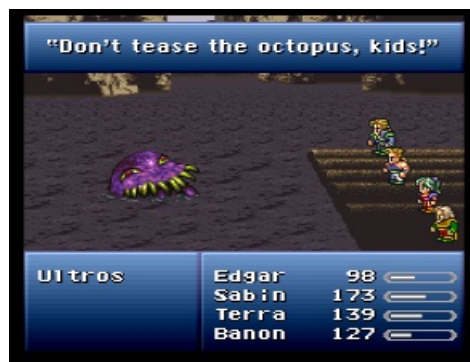


^ This little girl is my hero. ^

She's actually scripted to enter the bar and sit  
at that table while you're wandering around talking to folk.



^ It's all carrier pigeons in FF6 world. ^  
No telephones! No motor cars! Not a single luxury!



^ Ultros, father of a hundred memes. ^

## 30. Female Character Graphics Hacks



**Platform:** Famicom/NES, Gameboy

**Creators:** Mike Mika, infidelity, Princess Translations, K.K. Drunkinski, Zynk Oxhyde

**Difficulty:** As original games, **Stability:** 5/5, **Fun:** 4/5

**URLs:** See text.

**Synopsis:** A good number of hacks change the graphics (and sometimes text) to make the meek female kidnap victim/helper the primary character. Here are some notable ones.

Some time back one hacker [made news](#) (Wired) for, concerned that his young daughter was learning to be passive from the games she was playing, modifying the graphics data of NES Donkey Kong so that Pauline was the main character and Mario was the one in need of rescue.

It is true that even now, many years after the release of the NES, female characters are still sometimes rescue objects and rewards for the heroism for a male protagonist. This attitude is baked into 90% of Mario and Zelda games, despite the fact that, in the latter case (and to continual schoolyard confusion), the game is named after the one being rescued rather than the rescuer.

Sometimes Nintendo does try to reverse the situation. Peach was playable in Super Mario Bros. 2 (USA) and Super Mario 3D World. Zelda does at least

assist Link the odd time (especially at the end of Wind Waker and sometimes in Spirit Tracks). But these cases are still infrequent.

You might have noticed that there are no other graphics hacks in this book, or its succeeding parts. I don't think there's much interesting enough in a simple graphics replacement to write about. ("In this one Master Higgins was replaced by Wilford Brimley. Next!") At least with these, I can point to the admirable efforts of some hack creators to promote female empowerment.

I'm still grouping them all into one item though. I've got lots of patches to cover, so any excuse to squeeze a few more in.

[Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition](#): The hack that made the news. I'm pretty sure it wasn't the first such hack, though it might be the first one for Donkey Kong. Note that this is a hack of the NES port and not the arcade version.

[The Quest of Zelda](#): This graphic hack makes Link become the character to be rescued and Zelda the one rescuing. This effectively makes the game's story: "The princess of the land rescues a passing elf kid dressed as Peter Pan from an evil wizard," but maybe she just really cares about her subjects. It also changes many of the graphics: background, enemies and NPCs. Note that Zelda Randomizer (see the Randomizer section at the end of the book) will also let you switch Link and Zelda's places, and also let you play as a number of other characters. ("Welcome to the Legend of Stalfos!")

[Final Fantasy with Female Characters](#): We're talking about NES Final Fantasy here, not any of the many many sequels. This hack is a graphics swap, that also fixes some game bugs and changes the font. There is a second gender swap hack on RHDN, [Women of Light](#), but reviewers have noted that it contains a serious bug that halts progress.

[Sonia Belmont in Castlevania](#): Sonia is the mother of Trevor Belmont, the main character of Castlevania III, and is also the star of Castlevania Legends for the Gameboy. Her adventure has since been removed from the series canon, but at least with this patch you can play through the first game in the series as her. Note that just the graphics were changed, the main character is still identified at the end as Simon Belmont.

[Roll-Chan](#) - [Roll-Chan 2](#) - [Roll-Chan 3](#) - [Roll-Chan 4](#) - [Roll-Chan 5](#) - [Roll-Chan 6](#) - [Roll-Chan World](#) - [Roll-Chan World 2](#) - [Roll-Chan World 3](#) - [Roll-Chan](#)

[World 4](#) - [Roll-Chan World 5](#): Roll is Mega Man's sister. (He was Rock in the Japanese games. Rock and Roll, geddit?) I'm not quite sure what to make of Zynk Oxhyde's character swap patches of every NES and Gameboy Mega man game, but they exist, and so I'm reporting that fact. These hacks also change name references and large-scale character graphics, so there's a bit more happening there than just the sprite work. I'll say this: Roll seems like she's having a lot of fun blowing up the goggle-eyed machines of Dr. Wily.

There does exist another gender swap Mega man patch, but it's so weird and interesting that it's getting its own entry with the Mega Man/Rockman general section in Part Two.



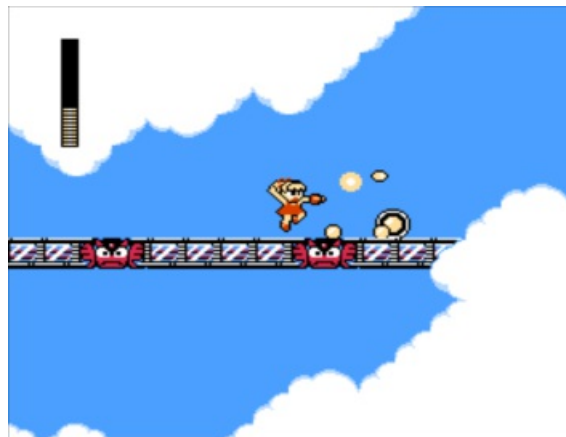
^ Some of the graphics in Quest of Zelda were ^  
taken from the Gameboy Zelda games.



^ Unexpected cameo from the ^  
Dragon Quest slimes.



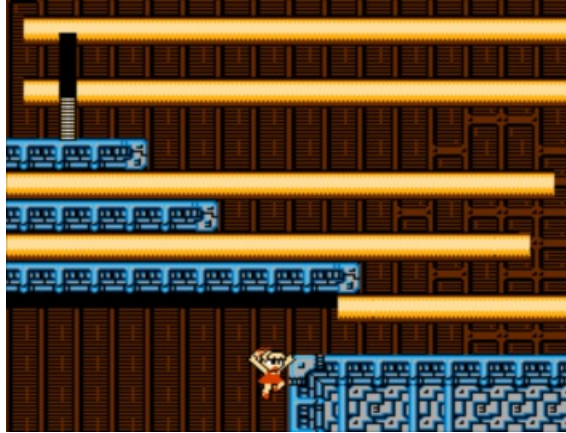
^ This monster is called Manhandla, but I guess ^  
 they'll have to change that, right? Right?  
 Is anyone out there? I hear crickets.



^ There are Roll-chan hacks for every ^  
 NES and Gameboy Mega Man game.



^ This Metool just told Roll the awful truth ^  
about Roman Polanski.



^ Here, Roll demonstrates that she is AWESOME. ^

## SECTION TWO: FAN TRANSLATIONS

Romhacks come in many types, but one of the most numerous, indeed frequent enough to devote half the book to, is to translate games intended for one language to another.

A good translation will seek to reduce the authorial voice of the translator as much as possible, and produce the product that would have been the result of a professional, in-house localization team. Most good fan translations are really fan localizations, which take cultural elements of the original game that don't reproduce well in the other culture and adapt them to be more understandable. This kind of translation cannot avoid drawing something from the voice of the localizer, but the best ones, while cognizant of that, will still seek to keep the focus on the game and not themselves.

Part of why some games don't get brought into English in the first place is because of translation difficulty. A game development company has to make a judgment call over whether the increased sales is worth the expense of localization. Because of this, translation patches seem to be treated a little more leniently than other hacks by companies, and many translators freely offer their work to developers or publishers.

Note that, since English is the language of this book, all of the hacks in this book are translations into English. I cannot judge the quality of a game's translation into a language that I do not read or speak. Although all the hacks presented here are English, it is a mistake to assume that all translation hacks are to English. Lots of game translations are now made for all kinds of languages. English is a moderately challenging target for a translation, but at least it's not Arabic, which doesn't read left-to-right and doesn't use alphabetic characters.



### 31. Mad City translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Stardust Crusaders

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1554/>

**Synopsis:** That one extremely tough brawling/shooting/driving Konami game for the NES? Adventures of Bayou Billy, was that it? Yeah, it was actually decently playable in Japan, and much more fun.

There are a number of completely unsubstantiated myths that float around gaming. One of my favorites is that, in the transition from Japanese game to US localization, games are generally made easier for American audiences. I like it because it's so manifestly untrue.

It's not that you can't find examples of Japanese games that were ruled too difficult, as-is or at all, for a US release. Gyrzor (Contra in the US) was hellishly difficult sure, but the localization changes brought it into the range of the suitably playable. The original Super Mario Bros. 2 was like an expert course level hack for the first game. But that was a case where afterward, Nintendo themselves seemed to think the game was too difficult. And can you blame them? It has *reverse warp zones*! Since then, while Nintendo hasn't disowned it, they also haven't gone that crazy in terms of difficulty again--with the exception of Legend of Zelda's second quest, and I remind you, US audiences *did* get that.

If there is a trend, and I'm not saying there is, I'd think it's more that games tend to be made *harder* for overseas audiences. Working Designs, for example, is infamous for making their English localizations of anime-styled Japanese games unplayably hard, sometimes to the degree that you came to suspect they secretly hated their customers. Castlevania 3 (Akumajou Densetsu) was made harder: enemies generally do less damage in the original version, and the Doppelganger boss became absurdly hard in the US. And so it is with The Adventures of Bayou Billy, previously known as Mad City.

This is a translation of Mad City, the Japanese version, to English. For the most part, it just reinserts the English script of the official localization, which wasn't that bad, into the original game. AoBB's difficulty was laughably high; enemies tended to do more damage, and had much more health, than the US version. The driving sequence gave you less time to reach the end, and you were more likely to get gunned down in the shooting segments. The original the game was still no pushover, but was a lot more reasonable, at least for the first loop (like many Konami games from the time, finish it once and you could take your remaining lives through the game a second time at an increased difficulty).

Additionally, there are some other interesting features in this version, including three hidden endings and a silly "quiz mode" that just asks you trivia questions about the game. (It doesn't grade you or even ask you for the answers. It's just *questions*.) [The details on how to find these hidden features are in the GameFAQs cheats page for the game.](#)



^ I like to call these low-level enemies "Jethros." ^



^ The two driving levels aren't exactly Rad Racer, ^  
 but at least they're beatable by human person beings now.



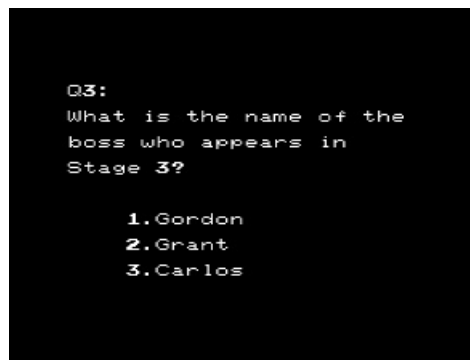
^ The clientele of POOL and BAR don't ^  
 take kindly to hick strangers on their turf.



^ Fact: This evil animal trainer has an ^  
infinite number of dogs until defeated.  
If only she used her powers for good.



^ Wait, I beat the bad guy who kidnapped mah girl. ^  
Who are these guys? Just really loyal henchmen?



^ There are some weird things about Mad City. ^

If you lose the game and don't continue, you unlock this odd quiz mode.

It doesn't let you answer the questions, it just displays them.

## 32. Ganbare Goemon! & Ganbare Goemon II



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Spinner 8 & others, Stardust Crusaders

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1496/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1329/>

**Synopsis:** Classic Konami NES games that aren't often seen outside Japan.

Back on the SNES Konami, rather hopefully, released a game called Mystical Ninja, a weird two-player co-op game starring--get this--Kid Ying and Dr. Yang. It was a fun, if obscure, little game. It happened, not many played it, and the world rolled on.

Then on the Nintendo 64, after Mario 64 made 3D platforming very popular for the system, there was Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon, a silly little 3D action/exploration with some surprisingly large environments. And after that was Goemon's Great Adventure. And that, other than an appearance in the GBA kart game Konami Krazy Racers, is pretty much what we've seen of Goemon in most of the rest of the world.

But it turns out there have been many Goemon games, most of them wacky action games with a wide cast of characters. There's even been a Goemon anime!

These two games do not include the first Goemon game Konami made, that would be "Mr. Goemon" for arcades (the original Goemon is a character from Japanese legend), but they settled a style for several other games, weird

maze games through traditional Japanese streets with secret passages and other mazes within them. In both of these games (and Legend of the Mystical Ninja), playfields are typically side-view run-and-jump areas, but each scene has some depth, and Goemon can move in eight directions in addition to jumping. In most games, starting with Ganbare Goemon 2, another player may join in for co-op play, usually as a crazy, blue-suited ninja sidekick named Ebisumaru who has no analogue in folklore.

These games are interesting because their play don't have many exact analogues outside their series. They are unique. The object of each level is to collect three Gate Passes, which can then be used to open the way to the next level. But unlike many other games that have you chase MacGuffins, these are pretty laid back about how you get them. You can either buy them with money you earn fighting enemies and found in rocks and purses on the street, or you can find hidden areas where they may be sometimes found outright, or you might be able to pay to enter a "secret passage" area that's a first-person, Wizardry-style maze, where there's no enemies or time limit but there are many treasures, including Passes, to be found for the taking. Once you have three passes, you must find the gate to the next area and enter it, which may be a task in itself in some levels. The thing is, it's up to the player which course he pursues, one of them, two, or even all three, leaving the game open to multiple play styles.

In addition to thief-catchers and guys just hanging out who you can bop for cash and points, there are ladies you can catch (but who cost you money if you attack them!), sometimes traditional Japanese spirits who show up as opponents, and lots of shops and stuff to enter, selling a variety of helpful items. Some Goemon games (though not the NES ones) even let you play simplified versions of other Konami hits, like a level of Gradius.

The Ganbare Goemon games are mostly silly fun. The second is a bit more challenging than the first, but it's also got more variety, and the addition of a second player on-screen at once opens it up for playing with friends. One thing I suggest is, jump around or over the boxes and purses you find on the ground to get stuff out of them. If a coin flies into the air you don't have to collect it, it's like the coins in blocks in Mario and you get it automatically. If a cat comes out, get it to power up your weapon, and if a weird mask comes out collect them to get sandals that speed your character's movement and

increase jump distance. You can get up to three of those sandals and greatly increase your maneuverability, and you keep them until you lose a life.

Of the things you can buy in stores, some food will refill your health immediately, while some others are held in reserve until you need them, when they're automatically eaten. Candles are a very useful item that reveal hidden staircases automatically for a limited time (usually you have to jump in the right spots to make them appear). You can spend money at Inns to get a room and refill your health that way. And a good number of houses just have hints or some silly text.

Some other Goemon games were RPGs, and still others had 2D platforming areas. The first N64 game mentioned above was sort of a Mario 64-style game, with Gate Passes replacing the Power Stars. Several of the games have giant robot fights, which are a highlight of the whole series, and must be experienced, as there's not much like them elsewhere in video gaming. They're kind of like a high-powered version of Punch-Out!

For more information on the series, I suggest you check out [the Hardcore Gaming 101 article on Goemon](#), but beware! It'll make you impatient to find translation patches for the other Goemon games, and they don't exist yet....

Goemon is based off of the legends of Ishikawa Goemon ([Wikipedia](#)). Although we're pretty sure he existed, his status as a folk hero has meant the details of his life have been wildly fictionalized. I guess these video games are about as authentic as anything else? Like Robin Hood, he was a noble thief character, who stole from the rich to give to the poor. His face is sometimes seen looking out from traditional Japanese woodblock prints. The stories say that eventually he met a tragic end, boiled alive with his son in a big pot of water. (That element is absent from the games, fortunately.)





^ This scene is from the first game. ^  
Wacky feudal Japanese hijinks!



^ One bad jump and Goemon's out a life. ^  
More game characters have to come  
from the factory waterproofed.



^ Goemon & its sequel both have these ^  
Wizardry-style 3D maze sections!

There's no enemies and no time limit, just bonuses to find.



^ The graphics in Goemon II got a considerable upgrade. ^



^ It also has bosses in some levels. ^

### 33. Esper Dream 2 translation

## Esper Dream 2

New Game  
Load Game  
©1992 KONAMI  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/1045/>  
<http://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=ed2>

#### **Description:**

Good ol' classic Konami. A company that in recent years has become a synonym for rapacity used to be one of the hottest outfits going. A monster in arcades, on consoles, and for Japanese home computers, even their lesser output usually had something interesting about it. Castlevania, Contra, Goonies and Gradius were all theirs, each a series with at least one major sequel, and that's not even getting into Metal Gear and Silent Hill. They produced so many games for the NES that they ran against Nintendo's per-licensee limits on the number of titles they could produce, so they founded a US subsidiary, Ultra Games, to publish their lesser titles--which included the NES port of the original Metal Gear.

That's not to say that they published all of their Japanese titles in the US either, as there were several notable games that they never really attempted to push in the US. The Goemon and Twinbee series are major examples. Another one, which only got a couple of entries, was the Esper Dream games, which are fairly light action-RPGs where combat moves to a separate screen, generated semi-randomly, where you and a potential ally fight silly monsters. The "esper" in the title comes from a passing fad in

Japan involving psychic powers, which also saw expression in the Mother series.

Esper Dream 2 follows the RPG template pretty closely. You explore a series of areas, each entered through a bookshelf in a library, and you can choose which order you tackle them. To a limited extent the game accounts for this (enemy numbers and types get harder based on level), but other aspects make it clear you're supposed to take them in numerical order (skipping #3, which isn't actually playable). You're aided by a single companion that follows you through each world, and also get one or two weapon or armor ("suit") upgrades in each, which go up exponentially in price as you go but so does the cash dropped by enemies. Players can leave a world at nearly any time through the use of the starter Teleport power.

One nice thing about the game is a kind of difficulty select, in the form of a Speed setting accessible through the pause screen. This selection doesn't effect text speed, as you might think for an RPG, but instead movement and combat speed. The game defaults to the slowest speed, which makes it seem pretty boring, but the action is fairly brisk at the fastest. The player is free to set the speed to whatever he feels his reflexes can handle, even in the middle of a battle. The speed setting makes the action of the game accessible to all ages, although young players might have trouble with some of the later dungeons.

The real highlight of the game is the music. Konami has always had terrific music composers, and excellent sound drivers with which to show off their work. My favorite tune is the one for the weapon shops, it's worth lingering there a few moments to hear it.

Here's [Hardcore Gaming 101 on the Esper Dream series](#) (they like this one).



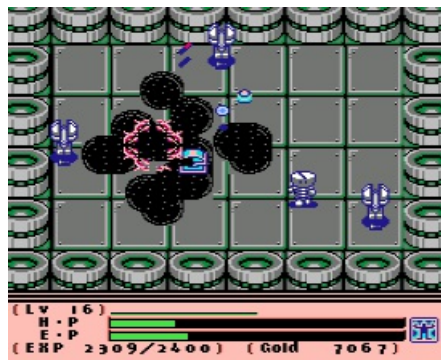
^ You have to find a Scuba Suit to get down here... ^  
I guess it's invisible?



^ The weirdest of the four playable worlds ^  
of the game is this space-time train.



^ EVIL SPACE RABBIT ATTACK ^  
No one tell Jimmy Carter.



^ One of the weapons you pick up mid-game ^  
are these landmines, which can be used to blow  
holes in walls in the battle screen.

### 34. Valkyrie's Adventure: Legend of the Time Key & Valkyrie no Densetsu (Valkyrie no Bouken & Valkyrie no Densetsu) translations



**Platform:** Famicom/NES, PC Engine/TurboGrafx 16

**Creators:** (I) Dvd Translations, (II) cabbage, Shawn Cox

**Difficulty:** 6/10 & 5/10, **Stability:** 4 & 5/5 (the first game was kinda glitchy, regardless of the patch), **Fun:** 4 & 5/5

**URLs:** (I) <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1378/> -  
<http://dvdtranslations.eludevisibility.org/valkyrie.html> (II)  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/2637/>

**Synopsis:** Valkyrie (not the one from Gauntlet), forever excluded from the US market, in her two primary adventures.

Valkyrie has not actually starred in a lot of games. These two are arguably the main ones.

#### **I.Valkyrie no Bouken: Toki no Kagi Densetsu (Valkyrie's Adventure: Legend of the Time Key)**

The first game is kind of a Zelda-like (if roguelike can be a term then so can Zelda-like, I say), but with a scrolling screen. It's got the ludicrous difficulty of a lot of early Famicom games, with tough enemies, short attack ranges, slow movement and required puzzles that are more like secrets. You start this one out with a lot of grinding just to be survivable against anything but the blue (weakest) enemies. Red enemies are stronger, and the black-suited

ogres in the mountains north of where you start shoot fireballs that will kill poor Valkyrie quickly. Make lots of save states here--this is a game where they're almost fair, take it from someone who once tried playing it the "classic" way.

In addition to money, enemies can also drop Red and Yellow potions. Use items by pausing, then selecting with the control pad. You can select Magic from the pause screen by pressing up and down, and use it with the A button. If you don't select any magic all those magic points will go to waste, so be sure to take advantage of it! The fireball magic is a strong missile weapon, while the wand heals you! Somewhere to the east (right) of where you begin is Inn. Entering gives you a password, and lets you use a bed to refill your health in exchange for some of the money you got for killing monsters. Also, if your experience (the number in the lower-right of the screen) exceeds the number listed at the top in the Inn, visiting the bed will also give you an experience level and increased stats. Any bed visit will also refill your magic, for a small cost. There are other Inns in the game, but they're awfully rare.

There is an extensive underworld in this game with unique enemies and traps, but it'll be some time before you find it. The game is really quite open-ended in terms of exploration, which I tend to like in games, but if you aren't a fan of that style, or if you prefer to have your games looking at *least* as good as the original Legend of Zelda graphically, you probably won't enjoy this much. But if you allow yourself to get into it, it's an odd thing, but it's quite possible to enjoy this simplistic little adventure (I blame the music), so long as you don't expect too much out of it.

You'll probably need this: [Frankie\\_Spankie's walkthrough of Valkyrie no Bouken](#).

## **II. Valkyrie no Densetsu (Legend of Valkyrie)**

This was first a beloved arcade game that, again, never made it to the US, presumably because the teenage male population of US arcades at the time wouldn't cotton to playing as a girl who didn't at least gad about in bikini armor. Valkyrie is sensibly attired in a long white skirt and breastplate, and her creators didn't feel the need to tart her up. That is a good thing: Valkyrie no Densetsu presents a charming, storybook world where such material



would be out of place. Sadly the PCE version doesn't support the arcade's two player mode, where 2P gets to play as Xandra, the most charismatic lizard-person in all of gaming.

The square Zelda-trees of the first game are missing, replaced with good 16-bit graphics. (In the arcade, there's also lots of awesome scaling effects. One boss is so large that the screen zooms way out so you can see the whole thing!) Valkyrie's sword can now shoot blue fireballs by default, but more often you'll be using one of the many time-limited magic swords you can find, which buffer at the bottom of the screen, the next one activating when the previous one expires. Valkyrie can also jump now, which the game acknowledges by having tricky isometric platforming segments.

The music in the first game is a simple and repetitive, yet catchy, soaring tune. The second one greatly expands on that with loads of terrific music. It's the kind of game that's worth playing for the sound alone. A highlight of it all is the game's ending, which is a orchestral remix of the overworld theme from the first game. The game's also got lots of secrets and multiple paths to explore, some hidden. It all comes together to make a nicely challenging, if unexpected, adventure for fans of run-and-gun games like Commando and Mercs.

The Valkyrie games are wonderful (although the second one significantly more-so) titles that assumptions as to audience kept from US shores for decades. If you'd like to know more about them, the always-excellent Hardcore Gaming 101 [has a good article with more info](#).



^ Just another lazy day in monster-infested Not-Hyrule. ^  
Enemies appear suddenly, and some will kill you and kill you.



^ This is an Inn. You get a password here, can gain levels ^  
if you have enough experience, and can  
trade cash for health by resting in the bed.



^ This ship is one of many items to find. But Valkie's ^  
inventory is full! She'll have to use up or sell an item to  
make room for other stuff.



^ The underworld, a particularly hostile place. ^



^ The beginning of the PC Engine game. ^  
The arcade version supported two players co-op.



^ No one remembers poor Xandra. ^

## 35. Cave Noire translation



With Konami, it was always "Push Start Key."

**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1707/>

**Synopsis:** A deceptively deep roguelike-ish dungeon crawler from 1991, mixed with strong resource management and puzzle solving elements. An unacknowledged classic of the field.

This is one of those weird little overseas games you find out about decades after it was published, and wonder why the heck it was never brought out here. It's essentially a series of quest minigames where you use your wits to survive a treacherous dungeon. The only penalty for dying is having to start the quest from the beginning.

To attack an enemy, press towards it. A cursor will appear to ensure that you want to attack, then press A to confirm it or B to cancel. Or you might want to avoid them. Each monster type has a distinctive movement pattern, and if you can figure out where it will go you may be able to get by without fighting. For example, crabs move left until they hit a wall, then they move right, and spiders tend to follow the walls.

It is important to note, for purposes of avoiding damage, that enemies go about attacking in a weird way. They only get an attack against you if you

move next to them, or if you're adjacent to them and fail to move away. So long as you can keep moving to spaces that aren't adjacent to monsters you won't get hit. Sometimes the implications of this are a bit counter-intuitive, though.

Sometimes a question mark will appear over your character's head. This means he's noticed something suspicious nearby. Try running into walls to check them for secret passages. Some areas that seem to be pits you can actually walk on; a symbol of a walking person will appear over your guys head when he detects these nearby. Some areas are filled with fog that dissipates when you approach it, revealing the layout of the level and its contents as you go.

You can select what the objective of the next quest is, either Gold (just find it and you're good), to kill Monsters (risky, of course), to collect Orbs (like Gold, but takes up an inventory slot!) or Fairies (you have to use keys to release them from their cages). Once you meet the objective you still must escape; doors will start appearing on that level allowing you to leave immediately. Or, you can keep going.

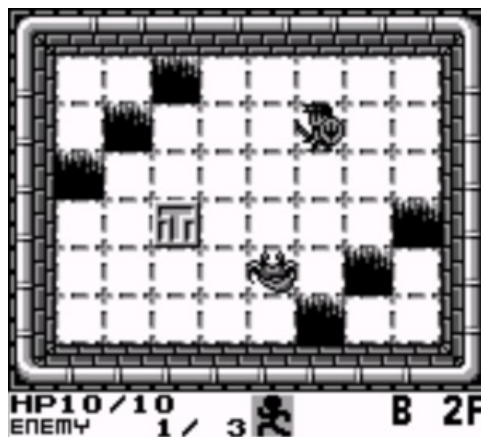
Some of the items you may find (there are more):

- Lamplit: Clears out fog from a level.
- Cloak: Enemies don't attack you while you are cloaked, but it only lasts a few turns.
- Heal potion and scroll: Restore hit points.
- Fire scrolls: There are two kinds of these, useful for damaging monsters.
- Antidote: Cures poison, natch.
- Raise HP Potion: Increases maximum HP by one.
- Shield, Magic Sword, Luck Charm: Increases Defense, Attack or Luck stats respectively, but there's a catch. Unlike Raise HP Potions, to work, these items must be in your inventory, and you only have room to carry eight things!
- Orb (looks like a chalice): An objective to one of the quests. Sometimes appears in quests where they're not needed.
- Key: Opens a Fairy Cage (stand next to the cage to use it). Doing so destroys all the monsters in the room.

It's difficult to solidly categorize Cave Noire. It has several attributes in common with roguelikes, yes: turn-based movement and combat, the maps are randomly chosen each quest from a number of possibilities, and you get random items to work with each game. But the enemies tend to act more as you'd expect them to work in a puzzle game. Unless your quest objective is specifically to kill monsters, you're better off using their movement patterns to get by them without conflict, as sources of healing are scarce.

[Nine minutes of Cave Noire gameplay by player BioBlame are on YouTube here.](#)

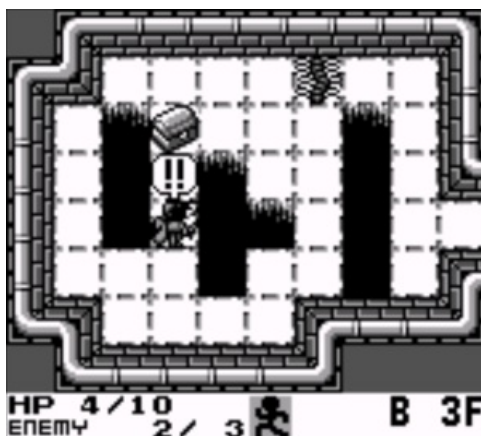
A good source of information on the game is [this Cave Noire FAQ found on GameFAQs](#). It's not a walkthrough but more of an extended manual. Particularly note section 2.4, on the order of the turns in the game, which is important knowledge for the harder quests!



^ The pits drop you to the next floor with damage. ^

The T-thingy is a teleporter.

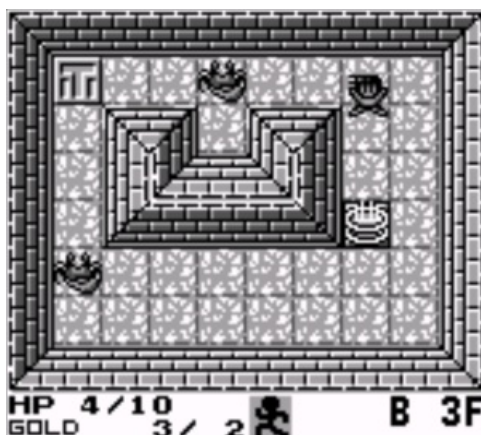
The monster is for the smacking of you.



^ Your guy is pretty alarmed! ^

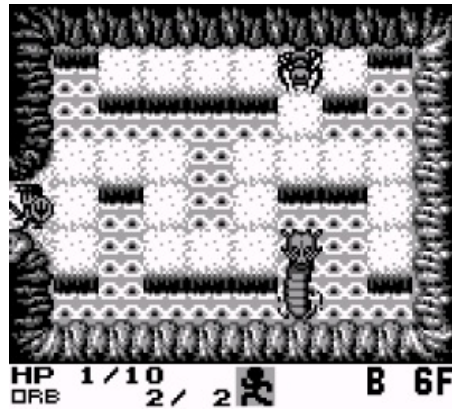
The ground at his feet will crumble on the next turn.

Better move to safety!



^ Each monster type has its own movement pattern. ^

To conserve health in later quests,  
it's important to take advantage of this!



^ That Salamander thing in the lava is bad bad news. ^  
It hit me for 9 health in one turn!



## 36. Mother 3 translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Jeffman, Tomato, Mother 3 Translation Team

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (sometimes the wrong item will show as Equipped in an inventory window), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://mother3.fobby.net/>

**Synopsis:** What a translation! What a game! You really do have to play this one, for mere superlatives don't do it justice.

Such warmth. Such generosity of spirit. Such humanity. The Mother games are written by an honest-to-god author, and I don't mean of the likes of trash fantasy, or silly collections of romhack descriptions for that matter. They are among the few games I can think of deserving of the title *Literature*, and here, the remaining one not to get an official localization is given a translation worthy of its stature.

Those are some strong words I used up there. "Trash fantasy?" you might ask. "Does he think this of Dragon Quest, of Final Fantasy games?" Well, yeah, I kind of do, and I wouldn't limit it to those. *Practically all CRPG/JRPG storylines are intellectually slight.* That doesn't mean I don't enjoy them, indeed, I enjoy them a great deal. I played through some of Final Fantasy V again for these books (see Part Two), and some FFVI hacks, and right away I fell back into how much fun they are. The characters *are* memorable, the story *is* engaging, the gameplay *is* interesting....

But all of that isn't always enough. They are still *trivial*. They do not grow and take up residence in the brain. They are not the sorts of things to draw from. They are like candy, when people need solid meat and vegetables to grow. They are crowd-pleasing, action blockbusters. They are superhero movies and Tom Clancy novels. They don't make one think, generally. They wash over you, through you, and you become engaged with them for a while, and then they are gone, and you are not much changed by their passing. An event in those games may make you feel happy, sad, or angry, but those emotions are painted on with broad strokes. You are not a better person for having played them.

They are part of why Roger Ebert thought that games could not be art. They definitely *can* be art, it's an easy proof to construct, but examples of it are hard to come by. The latter two games in the Mother series are among the clearest of those examples we have.

You are free to disagree with me, of course, and I have been wrong before.

But it does feel like there is *something* in the Mother games that you don't find in many other places in video gaming. There is a weight to them.

Mother 3 is unafraid to give you hilarious comedy and terrible tragedy within seconds of each other, and it doesn't feel artificial. There is a simple beauty to it.

The first of the series (recently released officially, at last, by Nintendo on Wii-U Virtual Console) has some of the elements the later games would have, but it's kind of bogged down by its attachment to Dragon Quest play style and norms. The second one made it to the US as Earthbound, and it is great, although maybe a little less, ultimately, than Mother 3. Still, they're all games that will show you weird things.

In one, young children travel around the world to save it from an alien horror. In the other, another young child becomes a being just as great and horrible. Always, at the end, it isn't force that wins but empathy and kindness. Wonders lie behind every corner. Help comes from unlikely sources. Gang leaders help you save the world. Respected businessmen ally themselves with world-destroying monsters. Time and again unusual beings help you out: Mr. Saturns and Magypsies, save frogs and exit mice, hint guys, lonely thieves and band musicians.

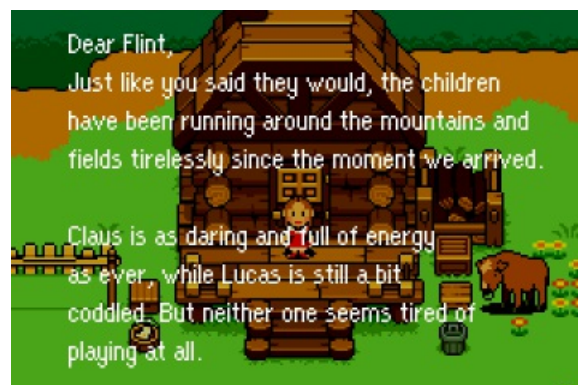
Throughout them all, the same gentle voice and sense of humor persist. Words don't do them justice, so I'm going to stop saying them here. Just, you have to play them.



^ To people who've played Mother 2, aka Earthbound, ^ this statement won't seem nearly so strange.



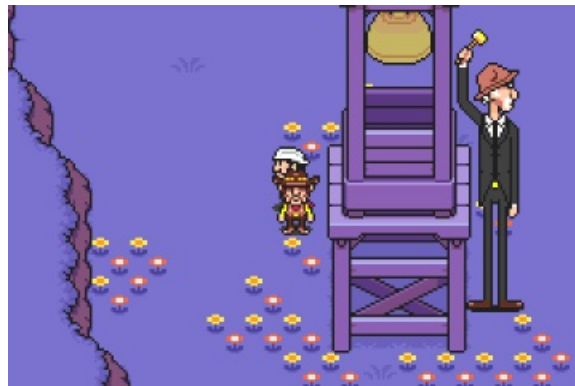
^ The Mole Cricket, your first battle of many! ^ Its not your most formidable opponent.



^ A letter to Dad from Mom. ^  
This isn't ominous AT ALL.



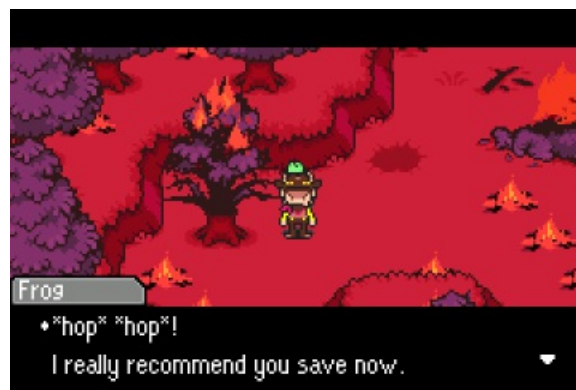
^ That's Flint. Professional Reckless Nice Guy. ^  
RPG Protagonist Extraordinaire.



^ Okay so let's find our way to the burning forest ^  
HOLY CATS WHO THE HELL IS THAT GUY?



^ Lots of enemies have special battle music. ^  
 Mr. Batty's is an obvious riff on the Batman 60's show!  
 The musical battle system is a highlight of the game.



^ When a frog recommends a save, who can refuse? ^



^ Each chapter of Mother 3 has different protagonists. ^  
 Duster here, thief-in-training, leads Chapter 2.

### 37. Panel De Pon translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Zuqkeo

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1144/>

**Synopsis:** Nintendo can't seem to decide what to call this action/puzzle game, which has gone under four different names in different times and places. This is a translation of the original.

Man, Lip and her friends can't catch a break. Lip, you see, is the Fairy of Flowers, and she and all her hyper-girly friends live in a magic land where apparently what they do most of the day is challenge each other to ridiculously deep block-based puzzle games in the Puyo style. Unlike Puyo Puyo, however, the blocks don't fall here, but slowly creep up from the bottom of the screen, although the game still ends if the stack reaches the top. Your agency in this is the ability to swap any two horizontally-adjacent blocks. (Not on the temporary basis of 10000000 or You Have To Build A Boat, mind you, when you swap two blocks they stay swapped, even if you made no matches.) To prevent this you have to, yes, clear out blocks, and to do that you have to, yes, match the same color three-or-more in a row, and in doing this, yes, you can dump garbage blocks on your opponent. Certain things are constants in action puzzle blockland. One cool aspect of it is, if you're about to lose (the "panic" music is playing) but make a good series of matches, the game will award you "STOP time," which halts the rise of the

stack while you search for more matches to make. Large chains clear more blocks and earn you more points, but also dump more, and more difficult, garbage on the other player.

Like I said, Lip and friends can't get a break, because Nintendo refuses to release the game with this themeing in the US. First, they actually went and licensed the Tetris name for it, calling it Tetris Attack and putting Yoshi and friends in it. Yoshi's Island had just come out, so it was sort of the flavor-of-the-month at Nintendo. Then Pokemon hit it big, so for N64 they re-released it as Pokemon Puzzle League. Then on DS it became just "Puzzle League." It means that overseas territories got to play a terrific game, but what's up with snubbing the fairies so often? I tell you, the fix is in.

Well this is the original release. The Pokemon Puzzle League re-release added a "3D mode" with a circular bin, but other than that, and whatever the character flavor of the moment is, Panel De Pon has always been largely the same game. Lip's fairy wand, by the way, sometimes called "Lip's Stick," is one of the many crazy random items that can be found in the Smash Bros. games, where it's been around since at least Melee. If you hit an enemy with its short-range attack a flower grows on their head for a little while, which causes damage to slowly accrue on them. There, now you know where that came from. You're welcome.



^ After the Girly Apocalypse, Lip and friends ^  
will be the sole survivors.





^ Windy doesn't have the most creative of names. ^  
She has nothing to do with Old-Fashioned Hamburgers.



^ Thanatos here shows up a few levels in to challenge ^  
Lip to one try at a high game difficulty.  
This is what he says if you win.





^ Vs. Mode is of the standard Puyo style, ^  
where making large combos drops more and  
harder garbage blocks on your opponent.

## 38. Crisis Force translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Stardust Crusaders

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/1353/>

**Synopsis:** Sweet mother of glob, it's an amazing Konami shooter for the Famicom that never made it to the US!

Konami was one of the kings of Famicom development, even some of their least polished games (Famicom/NES Metal Gear) are fondly remembered these days, and some of their games are among the best on the system. (Especially Castlevania. 'tis awesome.)

A lot of this book is already filled with Konami games. There's the Castlevania hacks, and the multiple Gadius & Twinbee AC hacks. For translations there's Goemon, Cave Noire, Kid Dracula, Mad City, Maze of Galious, Wai Wai World and Konami Rampart. I tell you they're all great, for otherwise they wouldn't be in here.

Well of them all, in terms of technical accomplishment, this is the greatest. Crisis Force is a shooter demonstrating a complete mastery of Famicom coding and effects. There are arguably better shooters for the system (Konami's own Gadius games add more strategy than you generally see in what is, in Japan, called a "STG," and Compile made tons of great shooters),

but none of them pushes the hardware as much as this one does. It's just a wonder to behold.

For example, parallax scrolling is a pretty cool trick on the Famicom/NES. The system doesn't have multiple background planes though, like 16-bit systems tended to have, so to do parallax generally games either used what's called a *raster interrupt* to manipulate the hardware's drawing of the background layer on a specific scanline as it was being sent to the display, or else had to use cycle counting, precise knowledge of how long each instruction took to execute, in order to catch the beam at the precise point it had to be. (A problem with the cycle counting is that it ties the game's engine to the refresh rate of the display, making it much harder to port to the PAL television standard used in much of Europe.)

Parallax scrolling is a nifty trick for any Famicom programmer to have in their arsenal, but it has a big limitation: it only works *horizontally*. You can have different parts of the background scrolling at different speeds, but only if the seams between them are horizontal. The display draws the picture one line at a time you see, and it draws them side-to-side. Not only does the way the hardware work make it improbable the trick could work vertically, but you'd have to cycle-count to the right spot on the display on *each line*, each of the 224 times the beam completed its left-to-right passage on a frame, instead of waiting until the beam got to *one* specific line and doing your manipulation there. The hardware doesn't have that kind of interrupt, and furthermore interrupting the game so many times each frame would use up a large part of the time the game would need to perform game logic. It might be cool to do for a demo, but those don't have to run a playable game.

Well, this is all based on my knowledge of programming and 80s console graphics hardware. I don't have encyclopedic knowledge of the system. And Crisis Force proves that, because there's vertical parallax scrolling on display right there at the end of level 1! (I do have *an idea* for how it was done, but I'm not *certain*.)

The rest of the tricks on display, I leave it for you to discover. Keep in mind though, you'll have to build up your skills a fair bit to make it through the game....



^ It's such a shame you can't see the ^  
awesome scrolling effect here!



^ These flames move back and forth ^  
while the ground scrolls by at high speed.



^ Just in case you doubted it was a Konami shooter, ^  
some volcanoes show up.



^ A late boss, with deadly extend-o-arms. ^

### 39. Armadillo translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Vice Translations

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/774/>

**Synopsis:** You're Billy the Shell, a guy who can turn into a ball, and you're trying to rescue your GF from the Black Bean Gang. Armadillo's an innovative platformer that never made it to the US.

Armadillo is a unique and stylish game that everyone should try playing for a bit. It takes rather some getting used to, but has such a distinctive and weird feel. It'll prove to be difficult for many, but there's a lot of interesting ideas at work in this neglected game.

First, each level has a world map. There are small squares, which aren't anywhere in particular, and big squares, which are the actual platforming levels. Even though they don't do much, you have to enter each small square and clear it before you can get to the levels. This matters because each little square gives the boss a chance to run away from you. The boss is also on the map, and if you're careful you might be able to attack him without finishing every level, by sneaking up on him in his square. It's hard to do though, because he tries to hide behind unfinished levels.

The idea of the platforming parts is you can turn into a ball at any moment, including in the middle of a jump. While round, you can jump higher (by

bouncing) and move faster, and, without a powerup, being a ball is the only way you can defeat enemies. But being a ball makes it difficult to stop moving, and means that you bounce, a lot, including off of walls, and roll down slopes. It's good that you can turn back into a humanoid person at any time as well, and doing so can help you to keep your footing or avoid destroying a block you had hoped to stand on. But then you're vulnerable to enemies! Whether trying to fight the Black Bean Gang or trying to cross a highway, it seems armadillos can't catch a break.

Levels are short, often not more than a few screens, and odd. Lots of them have out-of-the-way bonus areas with crazy powerups, like being able to turn into a kangaroo. If you get hit in the head by an apple you become small. Obviously? The music is unusual, but kind of catchy, I think anyway! Also as you play you find dice. No one really seems to know what's up with the dice. You can get up to five in a level, and you might get points at the end of a level based on what you found.

Sometimes within a level you'll see, in the background, a bar, sushi joint, or other such building. They look like mere decoration, but they're actually enterable if you try. They contain a goat guy who gives you hints. Don't pass these up, the advice is often useful.

The game is hard from the start. Control while in ball-form is genuinely difficult, but you have to do it to defeat foes and get to some places. While a ball though, you can bounce in place, holding the jump button, and go higher and higher to get to those hard-to-reach ledges. But any horizontal movement as a ball will send you careening about, bouncing off of walls and possibly into pits. Being a guy means much better control, but also enemy vulnerability. Switching between the states is the key to success, and you can do it at any time. It's definitely a challenge, so if you're looking for an easy clear you're not going to find it in Armadillo.

[YouTuber DragoonMyuutsu plays through the whole game in this playlist.](#)

Armadillo may actually be better known as a bootleg game called Super Mario IV (no relation to Super Mario World), which was hacked to put in Mario in place of Billy the Shell. You might consider a testament to the game's quality. [Here's video of the bootleg cart in operation](#), from YouTuber AlexSRMD.

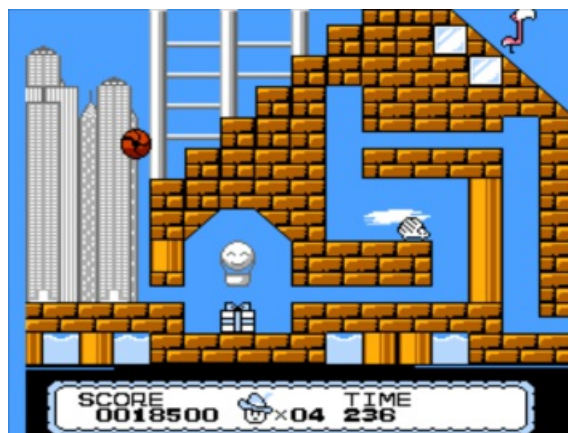




^ Map screens in platformers around that time ^  
tended to have board game elements. Remember  
Mario 3's roaming Hammer Bros. and Airships?



^ That Sushi House back there can actually be entered. ^



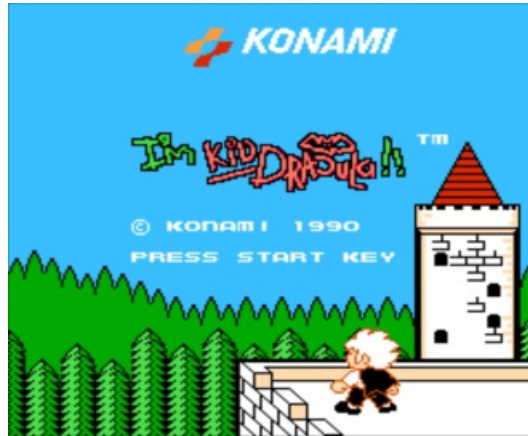


^ One of the joys of Armadillo is figuring ^  
out how to enter the game's many secret areas.



^ That's a pinball bumper. ^  
It's not the last time you'll  
be reminded of Sonic the Hedgehog.

## 40. I'm Kid Dracula (Akumajou Special: Boku Dracula-kun) translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Vice Translations

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/169/>

**Synopsis:** Alucard, Dracula's son from the Castlevania games, had to have been a kid at some time, right? What if, when he was, he was a fairly adventurous tyke? Well then here you go.

Oh I love this game. It's a perfect reminder of how willing Konami was to take the mickey out of their own franchises. Do you take the Castlevania games, with their amazingly difficult arcade action, at all seriously? Mwa-ha-ha, now you get to play as a fireball-throwing vampire kid beating up Jasons and Nazi KKK members and making them cry! Don't try to tell me this isn't canon! You better believe Alucard traveled around smacking bad guys in his youth!

Is this Alucard though? Maybe it was Dracula himself in his early days? Dracula-kun ("Kid Dracula" according to the subseries' only English release, for Gameboy) has the traditional attack Drac gets in the Castlevania games, horizontally-launched fireballs, but Alucard also gets those in CVIII. The game's story says that he borrowed his father cape, and even in Konami's far mutated version of Bram Stoker's story Dracula is a first-gen vampire, so it *\*has\** to be his son Adrian, aka "Alucard."

What was that? Describe the game? Oh, if you insist.

Kid Dracula wakes up to find out that the Demon Lord Galamoth (an uppity lizard guy) has usurped his role as king of the monsters. (No, not the SNK kaiju wrestling game... um, never mind.) Obviously his papa is king of the monsters, but I'm sure Daddy Drac loves his son very much and lets him believe what he wants. So it's up to the boy to go out and beat up the monsters himself and foil the scheme of that naughty demon through a number of side-scrolling levels. After each one he picks up a new power that he carries the rest of the game. Throughout each level he can collect coins from defeated enemies, which after he can plunk into one of four bonus rounds, hosted by what seems to be the TV announcer from The Goonies II and sometime assisted by the Statue of Liberty. What would Vlad say if he knew his kid was up to these kind of dealings with humans?

Anyway, the game itself is pretty good, it shows off lots of Konami's Famicom-era tricks, has a great upbeat remix of the first level music from Castlevania III, and is a quick and amiable play. From a game design standpoint it's kind of ordinary, I mean there's not a lot of secrets to find, and since earning new abilities comes as you pass levels you always have the same options available at each stage of the game, decreasing the opportunity for strategy and the role of skill, but eh, it's a goofy game where you're a vampire kid fryin' beasties. I think that's good all by itself.

Konami at the time kind of had two "tiers" of canon, I guess you could say? Most of their game series were self-contained. The Gradius/Nemesis/Salamander/Life Force games, for example, had their lore and didn't usually invite references from outside of it. The same went for Gryzor/Contra/Probotector, and, for the most part, for Castlevania.

But there were also their more light-hearted series, and those could borrow, not just from each other, but from the "serious" ones. Twinbee originated this, I think, by lending the Wai Wai World games Prof. Cinnamon, the genius of Donburi Island. Ganbare Goemon also crosses over a lot. And then there's the Parodius games, which cross over all over the dang place, and indeed one of them has a playable Kid Dracula character. Even the semi-recent (and kind of creepy) Otomedius games pull in some of that crossover

zaniness. And there are some characters in all this, especially Konami Man and Konami Girl, who seem to exist specifically as cross-over fuel.

But then we got Symphony of the Night, in which you can find and equip the Vic Viper's shield from Gradius as a protective item! And Order of Ecclesia has a findable Vic Viper, Twinbee and Konami Man hidden in the game, what are we to make of that? I guess you could say, the only sane answer to the question of Konami cross-series continuity is, aa bu-bu-bu-ba-ba-ba-(head explodes).

[Boku Dracula-kun in the Castlevania wiki.](#)

[Here is a manual \(including a short Japanese comic\) of this game.](#) He drinks apple juice to power up! Check out that Bat TV!

[Here's the manual to the Gameboy sequel, also in Japanese.](#)

[YouTube playthrough of the untranslated game.](#)



^ I miss the Konami that would make ^  
crazy things like this. You can't convince me  
that K.D. isn't Alucard!



^ The first level is filled with references ^  
to the NES Castlevania games.



^ The game doesn't give you the Bat ^  
power until later, so you're stuck jumping  
between these moving platforms.



^ Here, Kid Dracula faces off against one of ^  
the lesser-known of legendary horror monsters,  
the Giant Angry Chicken.



^ Kid Dracula is always impeccably dressed, even ^  
when you'd think he should bundle up.

## 41. Sugoro Quest translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** AlanMidas, KingMike's Translations

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/218/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1233/> (Note: apply the first one, then the second to the rom produced by it to fix a major glitch!)

**Synopsis:** A silly and charming RPG board game, presented as a kind of random adventure generator. This one's a secret classic guys, I'm serious.

When you play a JRPG, what is the experience like? Does it feel like an adventure, a quest like you'd read in a story, with ups and downs, setbacks and lucky strokes, won through with wit and strategy? Or does it feel like you just beat a bunch of nothing enemies in order to increase your numbers enough to overcome a checkpoint obstacle monster, proving your stats are high enough to enter the next area, buy stronger equipment and start building your numbers higher for the next checkpoint?

If it's the latter, then I submit to you that this is not what RPGs are supposed to be. Famously, the genre got its start with Dungeons & Dragons, and geeks sitting around tables deciding on the actions of imaginary "fighting men," dwarfs and elves. But a bit less known is that Gary Gygax invented the game based off of the works of dozens of fantasy authors. People love to point out J.R.R. Tolkien, but the game is much closer in spirit to Robert Howard's Conan stories, and Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey

Mouser stories, among others. They're games based off of stories, and thus inherently narrative driven, but in a pen-and-paper game it's an uncertain narrative, that may or may not turn out as the players, or even the referee, may intend.

JRPGs rarely capture this aspect of roleplay gaming. Western CRPGs are a little better, but honestly not much. You might be able to control the order of events, but someone playing with sufficient caution will be able to overcome the challenges supplied by the game, which are generally of the same type on each play. That's just how they're designed. You want the experience to vary on another playthrough? Pfft, buy another game.

Sugoro Quest is a game that bucks that, by presenting each adventure as a simple board game. You roll a die and move spaces on the board, and what happens to you is determined by the space you land on. Generally (but not always) the trip is a one-way path. Since the die is random for the most part, the spaces you land on could be a mixture of battle spaces (empty squares) and recovery spaces (fountain squares). You might meet a lot of helpful townsfolk, who provide advice and material aid. You might happen to hit the toughest monsters on the board (each monster space has a specific foe). The most important areas, castles, caves and bosses, you don't have to land on with an exact count but always happen when you pass by their spaces. Some spaces provide decisions you have to make, with your choice determining which way your character progresses at a fork in the path.

The design of Sugoro Quest is worthy of study. The layout of the board combines with the probabilities of the die to make some spaces more likely to be landed on than others. The result is, each play is like its own narrative, sometimes very easy, sometimes very hard. Some spaces turn out to be very important to land on, and characters who miss it are in for a hard time. The player has some ability to bend fate to his advantage: there are consumable items you can find that guarantee certain numbers come up. There's even a spell that the Half-Elf and Elf characters can learn that can control the die.

The player has four characters, Fighter, Dwarf, Elf and Half-Elf, to get through the game, and their strengths and weaknesses are starkly defined. Fighter is actually kind of an all-around character, learning some magic but



mostly relying on attack power. Dwarf focuses on attack power, and learns no spells until he reaches a very high level. Elf is concerned mostly with magic, meaning you have to shepherd your magic points to be effective, and Half-Elf is strange, not a magic or attack powerhouse, but learns the movement die-controlling spell early.

When you get into battle, the dice theme becomes even more prominent. You and the enemy monster both roll a die, and the higher number wins. Although it looks like you're rolling a six-sided die, in fact every character has his own attack and magic die, each of which becomes capable of rolling higher numbers as they gain levels. Other random events come into play in fights too: the "dice man" that rolls for the monster may decide to throw it at your character and possibly knock them out! Then there are the cases where your and the enemy's roll tie. Then you keep rolling dice until one beats the other, and then the victor does damage corresponding to all his dice! This is like the "critical hit" possibility in some games, and either puts you in a bad state or allow you to score an easy win.

There are six scenarios in the game. The game lets you take them out of order, but honestly, I wouldn't bring a character into an adventure unless they've finished all those that came before, or else they'll probably be dangerously under-leveled. Players having trouble with a given character/scenario combination can help overcome it by replaying scenarios, or using money gained by the other characters to prop up that character's equipment.

Here's a few tips to get you started. The only place the game saves is in town between quests, at "Escargo Records," so be sure to do that each time before adventuring. Sometimes a piece of your equipment might get blessed on a space of the board and made a little more effective. It's nice when that happens, but it's always better to upgrade to the next better item in the town shop rather than rely on blessings. If you search on a space, sometimes you find items. You frequently find Stones this way, which might seem like a bad thing, but they can actually be very helpful in battle: throwing a stone at an enemy does damage without consuming a turn! And interestingly, your character has very high maximums in HP and MP; these statistics have a natural level they start an adventure at depending on your

experience, but you can easily exceed this with Herbs, spells and fountain spaces.

Youtuber iPlay Retro went through the whole game, in case you're curious about it: [Part 1](#) - [Part 2](#) - [Part 3](#)

If it sounds a bit familiar, [I wrote about Sugoro Quest before, back at GameSetWatch](#).



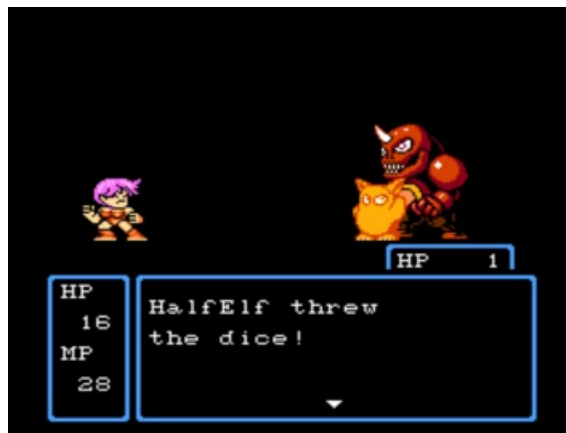
^ You and the enemy both roll dice, ^  
and the higher number wins.



^ This is a simple board, later maps are much more complex. ^



^ Waver here is one of the more ^ inexplicable foes in the game. No one really knows what this cosplayer's deal is.



^ Half-Elf only has average attack \*and\* magic. ^ Playing her means you have to improvise more often using attacks or magic according to need.

## 42. 100 World Story (Hyaku no Sekai no Monogatari) translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** AlanMidas

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/85/>

**Synopsis:** Another RPG board game, but a competitive one. Race other players (either human or CPU-controlled) to get the most experience and stuff out of a random map within a turn limit. Or you could, you know, try to finish the quest, if you feel like it.

Sugoro Quest used a single-player board game paradigm, with die rolls determining movement, to simulate the semi-random events of a pen-and-paper RPG session. 100 World Story is a bit more simulationist, but a lot more random. The result doesn't work extremely well as a fantasy roleplay game, but is good as a party game, so long as you don't take the experience too seriously.

Each of the three scenarios starts you off on a randomized land in "Hyukiria World," with a small amount of gold at a king's castle. Instead of rolling dice, you choose where your character moves on each turn. You start out surrounded by question-marks covering each square, and the paths between spaces are randomly determined before the game starts. The number of spaces you get to travel appears to have a random component, but you can

choose to end your movement and take the event on a space. If there's a monster on a space, however, you have to stop and fight.

At the start of the game your character is level one and probably going to die in most fights. To become more survivable you have to buy better equipment from a town (*and* equip it, of course), and accomplish quests. Quests are usually simple fetch objectives (like, go to this place and take this item or character to that other place) and are randomly generated. Some quests, you're told, are "for everyone," and since getting a quest usually ends your turn it's not rare at all for another character, on his next turn, to pick up the fetch item before you can even react to the information. Such is life in Hyukiria World. Fortunately you have the opportunity to poach opponent quests too. (Note: quest givers often give you a direction to search and a distance to get to their destinations, as well as the name of a location. When a location is discovered, the game will tell you its name. The names and locations are random each game, but if you go to the Map from the turn menu, the game will remind you of the names of everywhere that the players have explored up to that point.)

Completing a quest usually gives you a large chunk of experience points, enough to gain several levels, and some cash too. Once you've got one or two of those under your belt you might want to go after one of the green "Item" spaces on the map, which are tasks that carry you towards the "objective" of the scenario. One scenario has you trying to slay a dragon, for instance. But the dragon is protected by a magic barrier, and the Item spaces hold people who have different ways of overcoming the barrier: one can dispel it if you bring her the right item, and another will let you through it once you reach a target experience level. Even once you've done that, the dragon will probably kill you unless you're very strong. The penalty for dying isn't very huge, you're mostly just sent back to the castle with a little less experience, but it can take two or three turns just getting back to the dragon for another attempt.

Fights in this game are particularly interesting. Once a battle is begun you're stuck in it until one side wins or you flee. Battles do not take place in their own little "world," like in many games: instead every turn of the fight is one "turn" of the game! Even if you defeat the enemy with one blow, that ends the day. If you get caught in a drawn-out battle the other players will get

extra turns, so it seems like it's worth it to avoid fighting until you're pretty strong from finishing quests, if you can. What's more, other players can get to your battle and participate in it, possibly stealing your reward, or even find and start a battle with you. Again, the penalty for losing (and reward for winning) is not huge, but it can cause you to lose an experience level or two.

On top of all of this, each scenario has a number of special programmed events that take place at certain times. The dragon slaying quest has a hero that appears at a random (unspecified!) town some number of turns in, and the first player to get to him with enough experience gets him as a companion.

When the turns run out, the game adds up the experience, items, gold and deeds of all the players and produces a score, which determines the winner, tells you what everyone goes on to do with their lives, and the game's over. While it's not a short game, neither is it very long, and it's crazy fun while it goes. The randomness, like the events in Mario Party, make it so that no one is ever guaranteed victory, but over a number of games you might notice certain patterns to the events that may help you out. That's just about all the protection you have against the razor's edge of chance that the game gives you.

The sheer randomness (and the translation patch, which is entertainingly janky) of 100 World Story has given it something of a following on the internet. It can be fun to play with computer players, but for maximum joy, definitely go at this with other humans. Signing off from Hyukiria World!

The charming site [The Unofficial Shrine to 100 Worlds Story](#) doesn't really convey a huge amount of reliable information about the game, but it does a good job of illustrating the game's zany mood.

This is one of those games where you could watch a whole successful playthrough and still want to play! So, [here is World of Longplay's nearly-three-hour run](#), which should give you a good indication of what the game is like.

Special thanks to Keith Burgun, creator of 100 Rogues and Auro, for pointing me to this game years ago.



^ The map, with unexplored areas ^  
covered by question-marks.



^ A turn in combat consumes one ^  
day of game time! Don't get bogged down  
in a fight you can't finish quickly!



^ It's easy to miss this map in your action menu! ^  
 Use it to remind yourself of what all the places are named.



^ One of the game's randomly-appearing quests. ^



### 43. Konami WaiWai World translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Zynk Oxhyde

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1995/>

**Synopsis:** Welcome to Konamiland! We've got a bit of a problem as Dr. Wormwood has kidnapped a bunch of game heroes and licensed characters. It's up to Konami Man and Girl to save them, and ensure profitability for Konami's next quarter.

The Wai Wai World series was basically Konami's version of how Smash Bros. somehow brings together all of Nintendo's characters. In addition to platforming action adventure games, they brought the concept to Konami Krazy Racers (which itself was obviously inspired by Mario Kart) and, of course, [Parodius](#) (YouTube).

Dr. Cinnamon, the inventor of Twinbee, Winbee and Gwinbee (cute spaceships with their own series, and which also crossover here) has noticed that Dr. Wormwood has captured several Konami heroes, and he asks superhero Konami Man and bikini-wearing robot Konami Girl to go into each world and release them from their cells. Once this is done they become playable characters and can help rescue the others. The whole thing can be played two-player co-op, and in fact the whole game seems like a light trifle, a silly thing that Japanese kids could use as an excuse to hang out with their

kid friends, playing Simon Belmont and Goemon why not, spending the afternoon after school having a good time.

Well all that's true except for the thing about it being light, because this is a hard game.

It's like there's some rule about Famicom games of the age, that they had to be deadly bonecrushers. I've played through some of it and it's definitely a game where you have to adapt a procedure to play. Like, always be firing your weapon while you're exploring. Always! The game doesn't scroll the screen until you get right up to the edge for some crazy reason (possibly related to 2P mode, but it happens in 1P mode too), and if you're not constantly attacking the darkness off screen an enemy could appear and ping you for a hit of damage before you can react.

If there was a game that was actually improved by the use of save states, it was this. You're constantly getting pecked at for little damage, but it adds up over time. If a character kicks the bitbucket, it costs 100 moneys to revive him\*. If all your characters run out of health, you use half your cash and you only get your two starters revived for that, the rest have to be paid for at the 100 each rate. This is the money you have to use to use your sub-weapons too. A total wipe can require some serious grinding to recover from, while a savestate will let you ignore all of that.

(\* What is the money in this game? It was actually bullets in the original. Zynk Oxhyde, creator of the translation patch, changed it to cash.)

So anyway, each of the characters has a special ability to help you out. Goemon can open the ? boxes and get the items out of them (usually hearts from what I saw). Simon Belmont has a weapon that doesn't suck, that whip's range is just as great here as it was in Castlevania. Mikey can squeeze into small areas, and so on. In addition to rescuing the characters, you also have to find their sub-weapons, which is a harder challenge overall. You'll really have to lean on those save states there.

Most of the text in this game comes from Dr. Cinnamon's descriptions of the characters, which is basically just advertising for Konami's other titles. The hack creator changed some of the graphics in the game as well, unnecessary things that make the game not quite the same as the original. I don't really approve, but the changes are fairly minor.

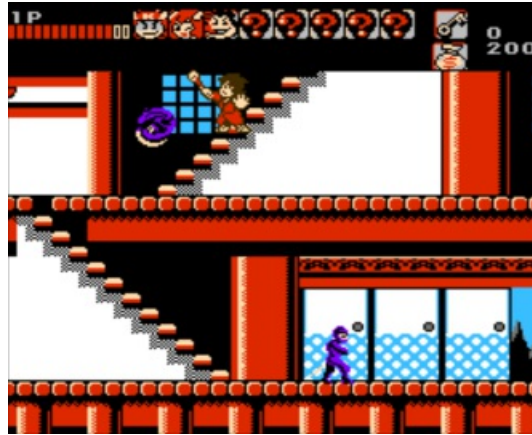
A lot of the fun in this game (dare I say, most of it) comes from the crazy crossovers. Two of the characters deserve special mention. One is King Kong, who Konami released a game about, King Kong 2: Ikari no Megaton Punch. It itself has [a translation patch for it](#), from DvD Translations, in case you want to try it out. The other is none other than Mikey Walsh from The Goonies! Konami just happened to have limited rights to games based on those movies at the time. You don't need a translation patch to play his two games; The Goonies got an English release as "VS. The Goonies," a UniSystem arcade game, although its Famicom version, oddly, only saw US shores as an exclusive game in Nintendo's Playchoice machines. The Goonies II was a popular NES game, of course.

[If you want more information on this inexplicable series, Hardcore Gaming 101 has the scoop.](#) [They also have a great page on Parodius](#), that is to say "Parody Gradius."

[SaikyoMog put together a playthrough of this game and posted it to YouTube.](#) Note: SaikyoMog passed away February 2015. [This was his Twitter feed](#). His YouTube channel is loaded with interesting videos, including some that were recorded before he passed away and have been posted since then by his father. [Check it out, maybe?](#)



^ Simon's been kidnapped, so take a garishly-suited ^  
superhero into Dracula castle's and tear through the  
monsters with your clashing colors!



^ Goemon's got a stage in this too. ^  
No Ebisumaru though.



^ This is a chapter of the Belmont family's saga, ^  
when Simon visited the Goon Docks in Astoria, that you  
won't see mentioned in that Netflix cartoon.



^ I think this is the Contra area. ^  
The monsters here are pretty tough.

## 44. Maze of Galious (Majou Densetsu II: Daimashikyou Galious) translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Manipulate

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

**URLs:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/182/> -  
<https://www.zophar.net/translations/nes/english/maze-of-galious.html>

**Synopsis:** A foundational puzzle/platformer from Konami, a challenging (but not overwhelmingly so!) game in the diabolical maze style.

There are times playing this where a player of more recent indie fare will say to himself, "this is a lot like La-Mulana!" And he should, that game was directly inspired by this one, essentially an early Metroidvania.

Popolon and Aphrodite (here purposely mistranslated as "Venus" for technical reasons) have a typically ridiculous quest to defeat the evil Galious (it's always "the evil" someone) to rescue... um, their future son? Who was kidnapped from heaven? I thought they had better security than that? I don't know, I didn't quite figure it out because I jumped right to the game, which is pretty darn great!

The graphics are blah, the monsters simple (mostly), but the exploring and the puzzles are very very fun. There's all kinds of nifty things to find and abilities to gain. The game is divided into a big over-maze, within which are

doors to five other, individual mazes, which would be like dungeons if the main world wasn't itself a big dungeon. There's so much to find and do.

One of the things about this game is that your characters can be switched between at any time. You can tell Aphrodite's the female character because she's pink, the one color girls who weren't Samus Aran were allowed to be in Famicom/NES games. Popolon can break blocks with his sword with a single hit, but Aphrodite has the special ability of knowing to hold her breath in the water, so she loses health much more slowly there. Each has their own health and experience bar. In a bit of behavior that will be familiar to anyone who's played La Mulana, killing enemies fills up the experience bar, but the only reward for filling it is getting your health refilled.

It is such a nifty game, programmed by Konami when it seemed everything they did was great. It's actually a sequel to a game called Nightmare ([YouTube video from GMIX6809](#)), which despite the name is actually a weird kind of vertical shooter, where you have a guy (Popolon again) roaming around an autoscroll field, attacking enemies always straight up. It's okay, but MoG seems like such a more interesting game than it.

Both Nightmare and Maze of Galious were originally made for MSX Japanese home computers. (The MS actually stands for Microsoft, BTW.) One thing about the MSX is that it had little support for screen scrolling, so scrolling games usually jerked along on character cell-size increments, which makes some of the Gradius/Nemesis games released for those machines, while well-regarded, difficult for current-day players to get into. For it, Maze of Galious didn't scroll, but went by in screen-sized increments, which suited it well enough that it's considered to be a better version than the Famicom port. The MSX version appears to be a rather more substantial game; if you like this version, you might want to seek it out!

[Here's a full run of the MSX version](#) by YouTuber バイファイの局, not translated though, which is important when you're playing because of important text messages.

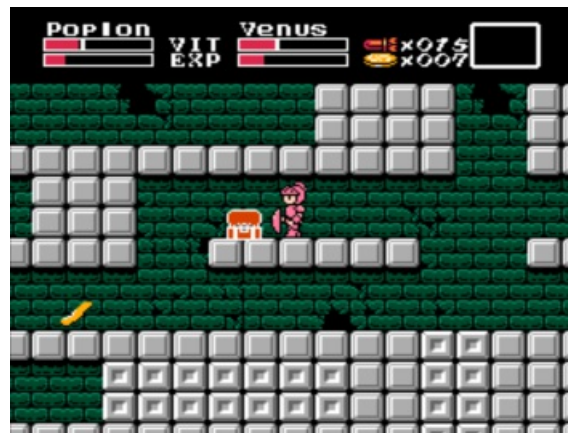
[Skull-o Man's walkthrough of the Famicom version](#) might help with some of the more unexplained elements.



^ Despite how it looks, you can climb up and down through ^ floors that have a ladder beneath them.

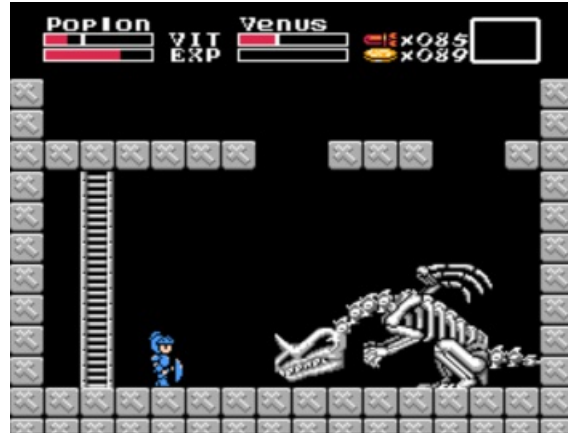


^ This is what the "main" area looks like. ^  
The other dungeons are hidden somewhere in this maze.



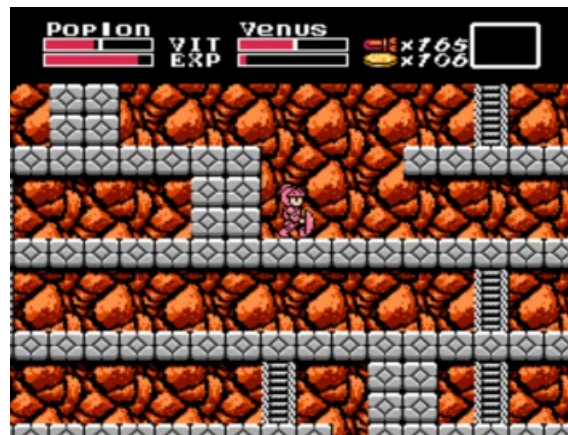


^ There's lots of treasure to find in the game. ^  
What it's all good for is for you to discover.



^ Big skele-dragon time. ^

Beating this guy seems to be more a matter of getting  
your licks in than trying to avoid all damage.



^ A peak at dungeon #2. ^

## 45. Gunman's Proof (Ganpuru) translation



"It's STRANGE WORLD"

**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/622/> -  
<http://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=ganpuru>

**Description:** A silly (in a good way) Sci-Fi Western (in the sense of cowboys and gunfights) Zelda-like.

Let's get the premise out of the way first. Gunman's Proof is a cool game in which you're a little kid, living in a town that's simultaneously in the American Old West (neat!) and on an island (what?). The town is suffering from the attacks of the "Demiseed Gang," which, it turns out, is led by an outlaw from outer space. Some space police come down to apprehend him, but don't do well out and about in Earth's atmosphere, so they ask the kid if one of them can inhabit his body until the criminal is brought to justice, and the kid, naturally, says yes. The other townsfolk don't know this, so the kid going out and wiping out successively more powerful weird gang bosses comes as a great surprise to them, particularly to the kid's friends, to the Sheriff who pays off their bounties, and to the kid's parents wondering what kind of beast they've raised.

So the game doesn't take itself too seriously, and feels a bit like Earthbound in a way, but it's not an RPG. It's a fairly challenging Zelda-like, except your character has a missile weapon instead of a measly sword! What's more you can talk to a guy in town after every dungeon to unlock random drops from enemies of much more powerful missile weapons like machine guns, shotguns and bazookas. But while your default peashooter has unlimited ammo, all the random weapons have a set number of shots. With careful play though they can be made to last for a bit, since they aren't timed, and can even be found and brought into dungeons.

The dungeons are a particularly interesting mutation of the Zelda formula. They have full layouts and maps just like Link to the Past (press Select to see where you've been so far), and have interesting tricks in them. But most of each dungeon is actually optional. There are no special, ability-increasing equipment to find in dungeons like in LttP, and there's no compass or complete dungeon map to find. What there is is treasure that gives you a large score bonus at the end of the dungeon. Yes, it's a Zelda-ish game with a scoring system! You get graded on each dungeon based on the time it took you to finish it, and possibly a score award for good grades (I've never gotten better than a D). I think it's unlikely that you'll get a good time unless you go right to the boss. But the treasures scattered around make up for it.

It's really interesting how much like Zelda the game world is. I wonder if they licensed the LttP engine from Nintendo somehow, or if they maybe reverse-engineered the game. The are cliffs you can jump down; in fact, you can jump off cliffs from any angle, instead of just down. There are pits that are bordered with the same jagged edges that LttP pits got. There are ladders that take you between planes, and they slow down your walking like LttP's ladders do. And the map screen might have been taken right from Link to the Past. If there is no Zelda code in this, then at the very least the game was purposely made to remind the player of it. There's kind of a tradition of games that suspiciously copy Zeldas. In addition to Gunman's Proof, the original Zelda had the two PC Engine/TurboGrafx Neutopia games copying it in style, and the Sega Master System's Golden Axe Warrior also copying it in appearance. Oh, and don't forget that Zelda II had Battle of Olympus, which apes its closely in several ways.

It is easy to play Gunman's Proof as a simple exploratory shooter, sort of like Zelda Mercs, but there are some important abilities your kid-wearing alien hero shouldn't forget about if he wants to do well. One is the B button, which causes you to crawl on the ground and evade most gunfire. The moment you learn to start using this, your skill at Gunman's Proof will improve significantly. You're slowed while crawling but not stuck in place. A guy in the saloon in town will teach you to charge your shots by holding the shoot button, which have the ability to penetrate enemies and do damage to several in line. You travel at the same speed while charging as not, so you might as well get into the habit of constantly charging if no enemies are around. And most of all, the X button launches one of your limited number of fireworks. Fireworks are represented by small icons in the upper-right of the screen, and you can carry up to three. They are very useful in a pinch, and are particularly great to use against bosses. If you pick up another when you're already carrying three the excess is lost, so you might as well make use of them rather than waste shots.

**Cultural note:** Some of the low-level bad guys might be thought to look like unflattering characters of people of African descent. I do not know if this was intentional on the part of the game's creators, and don't feel qualified to judge myself (I am painfully white). But I figured it should be noted.



^ Don't forget about crawling! ^

Projectile weapons pass over your head!



^ Navi: "Link! Use the map to help you get around the dungeon!" ^  
Alien cowboy kid: "I'm not Link. Honest, he went over there!"  
(Points to opposite side of dungeon, whistles innocently.)



^ It's boss time. This is where you should use ^  
those fireworks you've been saving!



^ "Halt! Who are you, armadillo guy?" ^

"My name's Billy the Shell, I got lost and fell out of my own game!"

"A likely story." (opens fire)

## 46. Rampart (Konami version) translation



**Platform:** Famicom/NES

**Creator:** Magnus Nilsson, MrRichard999, rainponcho

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

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/2661/>

**Description:** Atari Games' brilliant arcade release, the swan song to their golden age, but recreated in Konami's image.

What an odd game. Seriously, this is one of the strangest I can name, and it's not just because of the game itself. It has a bit of a history.

Once upon a time there was a company called Atari. They made Pong, Asteroids, Centipede, Missile Command and Tempest, and a lot of others. It is difficult to overstate how high Atari's star rose back in the early 80s. Arcades were amazingly popular, more popular than they've ever been since. For a short while, arcade operators pulled in billions of dollars of quarters *a year*. All that money drew in a horde of competitors, especially from Japan--Taito's Space Invaders was about as popular even as Atari's best (even more popular in Japan), but Atari was more consistent. Then the Great Game Crash hit in 1983, adults abandoned arcades to kids, and Atari was never the same again.

But while arcades had lost most of their luster, Atari (now Atari Games, separate from the company that made home computers) didn't stop making great games. If the previous era had been their golden age, then this might



be called silver. Marble Madness, Gauntlet, 720 Degrees, Vindicators, Toobin', Hard Drivin, the list goes on.

All of this prologue is to focus us on a certain time in gaming history, the year 1989. We didn't know it yet, but arcades were about to undergo another great change. 1991 would see the release of Capcom's Street Fighter II, an amazingly popular title that would reorient arcades towards fighting games. As it turns out, Atari was great at making a wide variety of game, but they mostly sucked at making fighters. It would be a dark time for the company, and they'd only really emerge from it after fighting games waned a bit, Midway bought them, and they experienced a brief resurgence with the Gauntlet Legends and San Francisco Rush games before, in a cost-cutting move, the longest-lived surviving game studio was closed by its owners. So it goes.

But just before that period, in 1989 Atari released Rampart, an action-puzzle game with a strong medieval theme. Players would defend castle walls against either cannonballs shot by off-shore ships or, in a multiplayer game, the cannons of other players. Periodically the battle would cease with a ringing digitized "CEASE FIRE!" and then players would have to rebuild the walls around their castles with puzzle pieces. The pieces could be freely moved and rotated, but could only be placed in entirety; anything beneath the piece would block it. Within a limited time a player had to have a wall completely surrounding one castle to stay in the game, receive additional cannons, and continue the fight. The combination of theme (the digitized effects and music, blaring out from a cabinet with good speakers, were striking) and challenging gameplay (it got hard *fast*, but was open to a multitude of strategies) made it rather successful.

You can measure the popularity of a middle-period Atari game by how many ports it got, and Rampart might be the Atari game with the most official ports of all, in addition to the [arcade](#) there's versions for (all links are YouTube): [Sega Master System](#), the [SNES](#) (a highlight), the [Genesis](#), the [Lynx](#), the [Gameboy](#) (weird version), [Gameboy Color](#), [Gameboy Advance](#) (separate releases!), [PC](#) (a good version, approximates arcade with extra elements), Mac (can't find video of it), [Commodore 64](#), [Amiga](#) and [Atari ST](#). There was even a PS3 port that was close to the arcade version with internet-enabled online play, and it was included as official emulation in



Midway Arcade Treasures for Gamecube, PS2, the original Xbox and PC. Whew! For the NES... there were *two*.

The NES version [isn't a bad port](#), at least the frame rate is consistent and they took a decent stab at the music. (*No one* gets the music exactly right, even the emulations over-emphasize the drums!) The best non-emulation home ports (SNES and PC) were both made by Bitmasters, who I think also did the NES version. The version we're here to look at, however, is the other version, the one made by Konami for the Famicom, and only released in Japan.

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Konami Rampart has four different difficulty levels, in addition to two-player mode. Each difficulty level has a different theme. Practice is the closest to the original, with actual castles and cannons, although you're not fighting against sailing ships but tanks and soldiers. Easy is the weirdest, where instead of a home castle you have to defend Little Red Riding Hood (who the hack names "Ellie") by placing apple-throwing elves within a fenced area. (The translation says she's being defended by her boyfriend Tam, but doesn't explain why there's multiple copies of him.) "Normal" is a standard fantasy scenario with a mythological angle, where you have to defend a Greek hero against legendary monsters. And Hard Mode sends the whole game to feudal Japan, and asks you to defend a stationary warlord from ninjas and such. All of these scenarios have the same underlying game elements, which are mostly recognizable from Atari's Rampart; they may look different, but what matters takes place on the Platonic plane of ideals.

Also different is the style of the game. Atari Rampart gives you the same objective on every map: survive until the enemy ships are sufficiently depleted. In the game's oddest change, Konami Rampart changes your objective on every map. Some maps you have to earn a target score, some maps require you wipe out all the ship-analogues and grunt-analogues, and a few maps want you to do something special, like capture Grandma's house or erect a wall all the way around a gigantic dragon taking up much of the map.

Frustratingly, sometimes the objective is obscured at the start of a level. Many levels begin with both a score goal and a reasonable number of

enemies to destroy, but once you get close to one or the other goal, the game will declare, in a cutscene, that you've been ambushed, or the situation has otherwise changed, and in one instant greatly raise the points you have to earn, or the enemies you must eliminate. These bait-and-switch situations increase in number on the harder difficulty levels, especially on Hard, where most maps seem to have an ambush, and it feels like you should just ignore the goal, and play as well as you can and hope that's good enough. *All* levels, unlike the arcade game, have a turn limit that you must finish an objective by or else start over. All levels also have a password, which helps a lot.

The changing win conditions demonstrate the worst aspect of Konami Rampart: how *arbitrary* it feels. Sometimes a player gets the feeling he's dancing to the game designer's tune rather than actually overcoming a challenge. When you work hard to get within hailing distance of a goal only to have the finish line moved a good ten paces back, when the game could have just posted the true requirements at the start of the board, it's easy to feel like you're being manipulated.

Yet the game is still pretty fun. There's a lot of different challenges in the game that keeps it varied, and unlike all the emulated versions, the game expects you to be using a control pad instead of a trackball, and thus controls pretty well. And even at its hardest, it never gets as challenging as arcade Rampart's last two levels, which have stymied the ambitions of many a would-be conqueror.



^ SELECT YOUR CHARACTER: ^

General MacArthur, little girl,

mythological hero or Japanese warlord.



^ Those little things around that castle are called ^  
different things in different levels, but what they are is Grunts.  
They move around, get in the way of your pieces, and destroy castles!



^ One high-level trick is to obliterate your own ^  
walls in hard-to-fill areas. It's easier to rebuild  
a missing wall than patch its holes!



^ Some of the trees in this shot are enemies. ^

They give away their positions when they move or shoot at your walls. Capturing them destroys them instantly.



^ The bad thing about Grunts is they move under your ^  
pieces and block movement. Capture them to destroy them,  
or shoot them with your cannons.



^ The more castles you capture, the more cannons ^  
you get. But this version limits you to 12 total!



^ This is the last level of Easy Mode. ^  
Finally, the end of the long and arduous campaign to take  
Grandma's house. Next stop: Tripoli!

## 47. Wizardry I-II-III: Story of Llylgamyn translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

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

**URL:** <https://www.romhacking.net/translations/496/>

**Description:** Yes, Wizardry! The foundational computer RPG, formerly warlock king over an entire genre. It lives on in Japan, and this SNES port of the first three of the classic Apple II games may be part of why.

Back in the 80s, CRPGs were very different than they are now. There was once a time when games like Wizardry were the norm, and there were games that might now be called Wizardry-likes, games like The Bard's Tale series, the Might & Magic series, and even, on the NES, Interplay's unique and interesting Swords & Serpents.

The genre got its start with pen-and-paper games like D&D, which had a kind of adversarial, referee-vs-players arrangement. The rulebooks of the time told referees (or "GMs") to play fair with players, but it also suggested keeping unruly players in line with untimely character death, such as in the old "rocks fall everyone dies" joke. Games tended to pit players against tough opponents. Most characters in classic D&D were not expected to survive first level, and *those* characters were considered to be above the average serf, heroes among the common folk. And needless to say, if a character died, there was no "saved game" for a character to return to. Start rolling your next character, and be quick about it, the rest of the party's



about to face the goblin horde and you'd hate for your new guy to miss a share of the treasure.

The Wizardry series were originally popular Apple II games, among the first widely popular CRPGs, and they sought to bring that kind of feel to home computers. They are party-based games, but here by necessity one player controls the whole group. Based on an earlier PLATO game called Oubliette (which is a long story), the player guides his group through a treacherous, first-person dungeon, loaded with tricks and traps, while fending off random attacks from monsters. This patch is for a SNES recreation of the Apple II game and its sequels, with full-color graphics and other amenities like an automap (if you know how to access it; try the spell Dumapic). It may now be the most accessible way to play these gaming classics, saving players from having to worry about making and tracking "Scenario Disks" and making the game slightly less annoying in some situations. For example, you don't have to bother with torches or casting the "Milwa" light spell; the game does that for you, and even gives you the benefit of some secret door detection.

Getting started in Wizardry is a bit confusing for people without access to the manual and unfamiliar with its Apple II origins. First, after the company screens and title, you want to select "Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord," from the screen with the books. That's the first Wizardry scenario, and characters won't be prepared for the other ones (Knight of Diamonds and Legacy of Llylgamyn) unless they've been through that one first. Then, the first time you play only, you should go to the "Select Switch" screen and change all the language settings to "Eng." The translation patch was implemented as something where you can select either Japanese for English for various options, but still defaults to Japanese! Don't change the other options on this list. Just take my word for it, most of them are for purists trying to better simulate the original experience. There, now you're ready to roll up your characters!

As I said, Wizardry simulates the process of playing pen-and-paper roleplaying games like Dungeons & Dragons. It is a close link to the genre's roots, and so to start you'll have to create your guys. Your characters are based in a castle in a town built near a ten-floor dungeon. The castle is represented entirely by a series of menus; it is presented as a series of

utility functions for manipulating and equipping your characters. The fun of the game is in the dungeon, but until your group is made you can't do much. While this version of Wizardry comes with a group of generic characters made for you, if you want the authentic experience, you should definitely make your own characters. It's more fun that way, and you can use the pre-made guys as backups, as a rescue team in case something horrible happens to the guys you made....

You make characters from the "Edge of Town" menu. Go there and select Training Grounds. This is where you make new characters, fresh victims for this extremely hostile world. You give each of them a name, decide on their race (Human, Elf, Dwarf, Gnome or Hobbit) and alignment (Good, Neutral or Evil) then decide on their stats, or "parameters." The game takes care of rolling the dice for your statistics for you. Those statistics which will get bonuses or negatives based on the race you choose, but you also get some bonus points that you can assign yourself. The game uses a D&D-like statistics system, so 18 is considered an extremely high score. The stats determine which classes are available; if you have bad stats, your character might not qualify for anything! You should be prepared to spend some time here to get your in-game surrogates just right. For this game you'll want to make a full party of six characters, and you'll want to make sure to include at least one Thief with high Luck, one Cleric with high Piety, one Mage with high I.Q., and at least one Fighter with high Strength. There's more options available, the super-classes, Bishops, Samurai, Lords and Ninja, but it's a lot harder to roll them up at character creation. The full details of what race, alignment and class mean are in the game's manual, [which you can read online here](#). While a made and finalized character cannot be edited, your decisions are not set in stone: as characters gain levels, they'll tend to gain (and once in a while, lose) stat points, and you can take a character back to the training grounds later to switch to a different class. This will reset their stats and abilities a bit, but in the long run will result in a much more powerful character. This is how most people finally achieve the super classes.

And now, let's take a short break.

\* \* \* \* \*



Hello reader. Are you doing well today? Looking forward to playing an awesome roleplaying game, but are bogged down by what you might see as unnecessary bookkeeping? Yes, Wizardry is great. But I feel like I have to stop you here, for a moment, and tell you something important about the nature of the journey upon which you are about to embark. I might end up saving you a lot of time and effort. Heed well these words!

**Wizardry is a Serious Game.** You know how some people are serious about fantasy sports leagues? Serious in just that way. It's a hardcore simulation of dungeon exploration! It plays, as we shall see, for keeps.

It pretends to be a kind of Dungeons & Dragons experience on your computer (or Super Famicom or SNES or emulator). For years (until the "Gold Box" games were released, which are even more detailed) it was the closest thing you could get to actual D&D on your home computer. That is the appeal. "Wizardry" is actually the game system; the "Scenario Disks" were like modules you could buy for it. This rom packages the system and the three main modules together for you.

When you roll up a character, you shouldn't be thinking of it as a distracting and unnecessary step you have to go through to get to the game. You should think of it as inventing a fantasy person, living in your save data. You should think of it the same way as you would if you were rolling it up for a D&D session. Give them a name. Invest some amount of empathy in your bag of numbers. You can even give them a backstory if you want, although it won't matter to the Wizardry system. This is why I told you it's better to make your own characters instead of using the pre-made party. Rolling them up and caring about their fates is the whole point of the game.

If you're not going to do that, if you see rolling up your guys as tedious make-work, then you really shouldn't be playing. Go on to another game, maybe a JRPG or something like that that makes your characters for you, nice and prepackaged and the same every time you play. But know that you're a victim of your era. People, *many* people, used to play this all night long, and genuinely care about the fates of their characters, who they expended much sweat and energy over, and who, if they died, it might have been the result either of something they did or of uncaring fate, but it wasn't because a scenario writer decided, "Okay, now it's time for Uriel to die."

It's harsh and uncaring, yes, but it's also honest. Dungeon exploration is dangerous business, and many characters don't make it back alive. That is the appeal. If it doesn't *seem* appealing, to you, then you probably are not going to enjoy Wizardry. I cannot blame you for that; some people just won't get into it. There are other games. Try the next one.

\* \* \* \* \*

After your characters are created, you'll have to put them into a party to play with them. You do that at Gilgamesh's Tavern. Once a character is in a party, its fate is joined with the other characters in that group until it's removed. Sometimes (like when a character is killed or paralyzed), the game will remove the character for you when you return to the Castle. It'll look like it's vanished, but it's not gone. It's kind of in stasis, in your reserve character list, and time doesn't pass for it. You could re-add it if you wanted at the Tavern, but it's better to go to the Temple of Cant and pay to cure it. The Temple only performs its curing services on characters not currently in a party.

Once everyone's in your party list, it's time to equip your character, at Boltac's Trading Post. Wizardry considers each character *individually* while its here. You might want to get an item for a character that, with its gold, it cannot afford. You might be able to get around this by selecting Pool Gold, which takes the gold of all your characters and gives it to that one. The game will gray out the names of items a character can't use. Generally, the more expensive an item is, the better it works. The worth of defensive gear is measured in "AC," for Armor Class. In Wizardry, like in original Dungeons & Dragons, the *lower* an item's AC is, the better protected is the character. Unlike other RPGs you might have played, Boltac's is the only shop in the game, and you'll return to it several times to get more expensive items. Of course, you should remember to equip the item after you buy it.

To ultimately succeed at Wizardry, you must play carefully, and even then accidents will happen. Characters are fragile; if one runs out of hit points he dies on the spot, and bringing a character back to life is an expensive and uncertain process that could result in the character instead being turned into ashes. Overcoming that is *really* expensive, and also uncertain, for an ashed

character who fails their roll to be resurrected is gone *permanently*. Basically, the game tears up their character sheet! *Wizardry plays for keeps!*

To get hit points back, you'll either have to use healing spells, purchased healing potions (which are not cheap), or go to the Adventurer's Inn in the castle and rest those hit points back up. Resting in the inn for hit points ages characters, so a popular trick is to just rest your Priest, gets their healing spells back, dip into the dungeon to use those spells to heal the other characters, then go back to the Inn to repeat until everyone's at full health. You should also rest a character at the Inn when they have enough experience points to gain a level.

The game autosaves frequently. There is no explicit save game command because the game is *always saving*, after everything you do! If you turn off the game (or close the emulator) while the party is in the dungeon, when you turn it back on your group will appear to be missing! This is because they are currently considered an "Out Party." You'll have to go to the maze menu and "Restart an 'Out' Party" to resume their progress.

And if your whole group dies while in the dungeon, then what? Well that is tough to deal with. Your group's corpses are still out there, on the square they died on. What you can do is create another group of guys and go out and rescue them. Of course, they'll be level 1 at the start, and you'll probably have to build them up too! You could use the pre-made team for this to save a bit of time. It's actually a good idea in *Wizardry* to sort of play it twice, or even three times in parallel, with different adventuring groups, building everyone up evenly so you'll have rescue teams available when one whole group dies in the dungeon. Again, it's because this is *Wizardry* we're talking about here, an adventuring *simulation*. It is not a game for the faint of heart. (Make sure to leave empty slots in the rescue team's roster; to bring characters back to town, you'll have to have room in your group for them.)

As for actually exploring the dungeon, it takes place on a grid-based map. An advance over the Apple II games is that the game is automatically mapping for you, although you don't get to look at that map without casting the spell Dumapic (which, fortunately, is 1st level). It might help you to make your own map on graph paper; you could copy the Dumapic map

when it's revealed. Spells in Wizardry are separated by level, and a character has a number of spell points at each level, like, 5 1st level spells, 4 2nd level, 3 3rd level and so on. You could run out of one level of spells, but still have points available for other levels. There are also completely different spells for Priests and Mages.

You'll encounter random monsters as you're wandering around, and also set encounters on certain squares, often after breaking open a door. Sometimes they'll be friendly and give you the opportunity to avoid a fight, although doing that often will cause characters to drift towards "Good" alignment. Attacking friendlies similarly causes a drift towards "Evil." Good characters don't like to join parties with Evil characters, and vice versa. Sometimes the monsters you're facing are represented generically at first, like as "5 humanoids," until you've lasted a turn or two. There is a spell, *Latumapic*, that will identify monsters immediately. Whether or not you should bother with it, I leave for you to decide.

The monsters you face on the first floor of the dungeon tend to be fairly weak. It is a fine idea to spend a while on the first floor, mapping it out a piece at a time and returning often to the castle and the Adventurer's Inn for healing and spells, until your characters have gained a few levels. When you defeat a group of monsters, sometimes they leave you a chest. This is why you should bring a Thief with high Agility and especially Luck with you, to search for and disarm traps. There are lots of horrible things trapped chests can do both to your thief and to your whole group. It is absolutely possible to beat an easy group of monsters then lose your entire group to an Exploding Box trap on a chest they left behind! Once your mages learn the spell *Calfo*, you can use it to detect (but not disarm) traps with 95% accuracy. Sometimes, however, you'll find a chest has an Exploding Box trap, or Poison Needle, or Stunner, and you'll think *not worth the risk*. That is fine. That is *good*. You're starting to play Wizardry the way it was intended: *with the utmost care*. The game exists to punish the unwary.

Eventually, while exploring the first floor, you'll find the teleporter. You probably won't even notice when you hit it, you'll just be suddenly somewhere else. Don't panic, there is a way out of the place it sends you. There's always a way out.

Sometimes the game will ask "Will you search?" Usually, the right answer is yes. If you're retrieving an Out Party and are on the right square, you must search.

There is also an area of magic darkness on the first floor, which might be confusing. You'll have to bump around and try to navigate by feel until you get out of it. Know, however, that the magic darkness area also contains an elevator that can be used to get deeper in the dungeon quickly. Later in the game you'll learn the teleport spell *Malor*, which can be used to get to some places quickly... but if you accidentally teleport into solid stone with it, your party is *permanently killed and cannot be rescued*. Wizardry plays for keeps!

One oddity about Wizardry is that spells are referred to only by their weird made-up names. Your priests and mages automatically learn spells as they advance in level, but their uses are not explained directly by the game. Players were expected to look up what each spell meant in the manual, and eventually just learn what the spell names mean. Again, this aspect, this immersing yourself in another world, is the point of Wizardry. That might seem annoying, or frustrating to you. Or it might just seem strange, or even oddly fascinating. It is what it is. It used to be that this kind of thing is what being a CRPG *meant*. Whether you thank your lucky stars to live in a more enlightened age, or feel kind of sad that no one makes these kinds of experiences anymore (even the recent made-in-Japan Wizardry games tend to be watered down), it's all the same to Wizardry, frozen in time at the moment it was made. Either way, it is time to move on to the next game.

Note: you can use save states for Wizardry, I mean it's not against the law or anything, but it's missing the point. I think you shouldn't use them for this game. You aren't really playing a game like this if you allow go-backs. A good DM wouldn't allow them either.

[Oubliette \(the inspiration for Wizardry\) on CRPG Addict.](#)

[Wizardry I: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord on CRPG Addict.](#)

You'll need a list of spells to make headway. [Here's a good one.](#) [The game's manual will be useful](#), and in fact you should consider it required reading if you decide to get into this most formidable game.



^ "We're a bunch of 1st level schmucks an' we're ^ explorin the dungeon. We've got the same survival chance as carnival goldfish an' it's cheaper to make someone new than resurrect us."



^ "Consarned bushwackers! Daggumit, ah'd ^ rather holler at a bunch of hornytoads, ya gaddurn varmits!"



^ First level monsters: dangerous if they gang up on one guy. ^

First level chests: COULD WIPE YOUR WHOLE PARTY.



^ All glory to the gods, at last I can cast a DUMAPIC! ^

It lets you see the automap! In the original game it just told you where you are. You can turn the Dumapic map off in the options menu.



^ On the first level, the monsters aren't seriously ^  
dangerous, but that won't be true for long....



## 48. The Glory of Heracles I-IV (Herakles no Eikou I-IV) translations



**Platform:** Famicom/NES, Super Famicom/SNES

Creators (in order): DvD Translations, The Spooky Bard, DQ Translations, Translation Corporation

**Difficulty:** 4-5/10 (the newer games are easier), **Stability:** 4-5/10 (the older games are glitchier), **Fun:** 4-5 (the newer games are more fun)/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/1681/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/154/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/967/> -  
<http://www.romhacking.net/translations/823/>

**Description:** A series of four classic JRPGs (two Famicom, two Super Famicom) that never made it to the States (well, until the fifth game unexpectedly turned up for DS a few years ago).

All of these are Data East-published JRPGs with a heavy classical Greek flavor. They tend to be fairly old-school in style (especially the first two, which have a lot of grinding), and borrow heavily from Dragon Quest. There is still a lot to like here for fans of the genre, if they're willing to put up with the grind in the first two games. A fifth game in the series was released for DS, and did get an English conversion. It's been a while since it came out though, so for the moment it seems that Heracles' labors have ceased. BTW, for those who aren't aware, "Heracles" and "Hercules" are the same person, the later being a Roman adaptation of the Greek myth. It's also sometimes spelled with a 'K': Herakles.

I. Toujin Makyō Den: Heracles no Eikou (Labors of the Divine Hero: The Glory of Heracles) — This game is a serious throwback, with a single character party, a reliance on items for healing, and a need to use candles in caves to provide a one-space square of visibility. This is the only game where you actually are Heracles; in the others he's just a party member. The game is also very non-linear. People in the first town will suggest going south, but although the enemies there are easy, a very tough one prevents further exploration beyond that way until you come back with a two-handed weapon, which you can only get by exploring north. Interestingly, all the towns are just regions on the world map, they don't go to a separate "area" as you explore them, akin to the old home computer game Faery Tale Adventure. There's lots of other weird touches that make the game a bit more than just a Dragon Quest clone, sometimes good, sometimes bad. Weapons and other equipment wear down with use, and are destroyed if their durability reaches 0. There's enemies that have spells that attack some weapon durability. Get your stuff fixed at Hephaestus' forge in Athens, the starting town. Some enemies are surprisingly vulnerable to certain weapons: two-handed weapons (like the Iron Sword) are very useful in some situations, and copper weapons cut down Enchanters and Wizards amazingly well. No one tells you this that I've seen, it's left for you to discover! Classic JRPGs are one style of game where I think save states are allowable after battles if just to preserve sanity, but note: a bit of insanity, of dealing with unreasonable expectations, are part of the masochistic joy of early role-playing games.

II. Heracles no Eikou II: Titan no Metsubo (The Glory of Heracles II: Titans' Downfall) — You start out as a youth in Athens. It's some time after the first game and the world has become a lot more linear, in the way of JRPGs. One annoying thing is that arbitrary roadblocks arise and just mysteriously vanish when the current quest is over: the boat to the second continent only arrives once you've gotten that centaur to join you, for example. You might not think you have a reason personally to kill Cerberus in that cave, but you'd better do it or you'll never progress. This translation of this one is the earliest of the four games, and it shows sometimes. At one point a kid says of a character, "What a pussy!" There's at least as much grinding as the first game, but now without that thrill of trying to get to places before you're

ready for them and bulking up with later-game equipment. This is the first game to have player-useable spells, and the series' idiosyncratic naming system. The healing spell is "Pow," and the poison-curing one is "KMisu." A [FAQ](#) will help you with the names. The game also has a day/night system, and many important events are only available at certain times.

III. Heracles no Eikou III: Kamigami no Chinmoku (The Glory of Heracles III: Silence of the Gods) — Your character is an amnesiac immortal in this game, an attribute that appears to manifest itself by letting you fall off high places safely. Just to tell you: you're still not Hercules, but he does show up. In the early going you're forced to demonstrate the fall-off-a-ledge trick a couple of times to advance the plot. One very interesting thing is sometimes you're joined by whole groups of helper characters: pixies, oppressed slaves, soldiers. They follow you in formation and act as one character in battle. They are usually a great help for a while, and have a ton of hit points, but they have the drawback that every time the group loses 1/9th of its maximum HP one of the number dies permanently, reducing both the group's attack power and maximum HP. The day/night system is back. Your character is immortal, so if all your hit points are depleted you're "fainted." If you have other party members they may revive you if they have the means (like the Awake Flower item). Note, in this game, your character can operate at 0 HP, it's the "fainted" status that prevents you from acting (which getting hit at 0 HP causes). If you make it to the end of the fight while fainted somehow, it goes away but you're still at 0 HP. Finally, one odd game system here is the ability to bury items in places with soft ground using the Y button and come back for them later.

IV. Heracles no Eikou IV: Kamigami Kara no Okurimono (The Glory of Heracles IV: Gift of the Gods) — RHDN's page on this one notes that a lot of work went into this patch, and it shows. Is it weird to be impressed by a menu system in a Super Famicom/SNES game? Unlike the others, the one here is slick. In fact the whole game exudes style, especially the combats, which suddenly have well-animated monsters and Mode 7 3D effects accentuating actions. The game play is also quite unique, once the story really gets going. The gimmick here is that there are actually 100 specific people in the game you can play as (you start out as a *dog* for reasons that become clear in a long, playable flashback), and whenever you talk with one

of them the screen flashes for a moment. This means you can now play *as* them. The process is seamless, and you can switch at any time outside of battle much like Final Fantasy V's Job system. Your experience level is independent of them, but each body you can play as has its own "fitness" level, which affects what moves it has. Well worth checking out!



^ Why do so many first gen Famicom RPGs look like this? ^

I blame Dragon Quest.



^ One of the things that's in every Heracles game ^  
is your characters giving little battle cries as they fight.



^ This is Heracles II. Graphics have improved a lot ^  
but it looks like Dragon Quest III now.



^ The fighting is Dragon Questy as well, ^  
right down to the cutesy enemy artwork.



^ An age passed. The world turned. ^  
The universe upgraded to 16 bits.

But for some reason there's this border around the dang screen!



^ Starting with Heracles III, you can jump down ledges ^  
in lots of places. You're immortal, so you don't die.  
This is a big plot point in several places, seriously.



^ Another thing about Heracles III & IV is you can have ^  
a horde of followers sometimes. They play like one character,  
but one of them dies permanently if they lose 1/9 of their HP.



^ Heracles IV's story is quite different from the rest. ^

You're actually kind of a spirit that possesses other characters.

It's explained by a long playable intro, but after that, you're a dog.



^ Your combat options are based on your host body. ^

If you're a shepherd, you get shepherd powers. If you're a sheep, you get sheep powers, natch.



## 49. Shiren the Wanderer (Fushigi no Dungeon 2) translation



So we meet again....

**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

**Difficulty:** 6/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (there are some minor text glitches), **Fun:** 5/5

**URL:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/483/> -  
<http://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=shiren>

**Description:** One of the best of the roguelike (a real one!) Mystery Dungeon games even after all this time, the least cluttered with annoying game systems, the most laden with good ones, and it has the tightest design.

I've not played all of the Mystery Dungeon games. To do so would be prohibitively expensive, at least in terms of time spent, and since so many of the games remain untranslated into English I wouldn't be able to make sense of most of them anyway. So I cannot make a lot of definite statements about which ones are the best and worst.

But I'd be blind if I didn't pick up on some patterns. The only Mystery Dungeon game I've played that I've ever had a really good time with has been Shiren the Wanderer, the second in the long-running (and still going!) series and first to use it's "native" license, instead of being a carry-on to another series.



The first Mystery Dungeon game starred Torneko, known as Taloon in the US, the merchant from Dragon Quest/Warrior IV. ([It is translated here.](#)) He went down into the random dungeons to come back with weapons to sell in his shop, and used the money to upgrade his sickle stand. All the enemies came from the adorable-yet-maddening bestiary of the Dragon Quest games, and they brought their most famous tricks along with them: Magicians could put you to sleep, for instance. It was okay, but the monsters didn't have *roguelike*-levels of personality, and the game was rather easy overall.

The line goes that all the Mystery Dungeon games have the same engine, or at least the same controls, and that certainly applies to this one. You explore a series of randomly-generated grids peopled with monsters, traps and items, and it's your job to get through them all. If you run out of hit points you die, and in this game that means you have to start back from square, and level, one, losing all your items and experience levels too. And the monsters are a tricky bunch, most of which not only hit hard but have dangerous attributes you'll also have to look out for.

Does this sound like a forbidding experience to you? I take the view that winning a game is an ending of its own, just as if you died, and that the real purpose of playing a video game like this is to have fun in a fictional world, not to conclude a story. Shiren is a random adventure generator, and starting from scratch increases the variety of adventures you can have.

Later Mystery Dungeon games tend to not remove all your equipment when you die, meaning you stick with the items you like the best instead of trying out new items and finding their advantages. They don't return you to level one when starting out, meaning easier enemies never pose a challenge after the beginning. They're more "balanced," meaning there is less scope for getting an edge with bold, ingenious play. They usually throw a bone to long-time fans by offering bonus dungeons after the main game which play more like traditional roguelikes, but the catch is you have to play through a long, boring semi-roguelike to get to that point, and I hate the idea that I have to complete the entire damn game before I can *enjoy* it. I can say of Shiren the Wanderer that, at least, it doesn't fall prey to that.

Some years back I wrote, over four installments, about Shiren in-depth in my column @Play over at Game Set Watch. Those columns are still on the internet here:

1. [A Journey to Table Mountain, Part 1](#)
2. [A Journey to Table Mountain, Part 2](#)
3. [Fei's Problems](#)
4. [About Shiren In General](#)

They're reprinted in the @Play book, which can be gotten on [Amazon](#) or on [itch.io](#). (I hope you'll forgive the ad, but it seemed relevant, and you can still read nearly all the text for free on GSW!)



^ I have the strongest feeling of deja-vu. ^  
Didn't I do all this before, years ago?



^ If you find an item and think you know what it does, ^

the game will let you name it to help remember.



^ Argh Curse Sisters! ^

They curse your stuff and hit pretty hard too.

## 50. Live-A-Live translation



**Platform:** Super Famicom/SNES

**Creator:** Aeon Genesis

**Difficulty:** 4/10, **Stability:** 4/5 (I observed some minor garbage on the menu screen), **Fun:** 5/5

**URLs:** <http://www.romhacking.net/translations/381/> -  
<http://agtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=lal>

**Description:** This terrific Squaresoft RPG isn't a single game, but nine shorter games in one, and each is a little gem in itself. Don't miss it!

Hack #50 in Part One is a translation for an incredible 16-bit Square RPG. Those weren't uncommon at the time, but even among them all, Live-A-Live is a treasure, not just for storytelling but its gameplay.

Live-A-Live is like an RPG anthology. It's made of nine very different scenarios, which all play very differently from each other (although they share the same battle engine). You can think of it as a collection of short stories. The last two scenarios are only playable after the other seven are completed, and ties them together, but you can actually enjoy this game very well without worrying about that for a while. Most of the mini-adventures are quite playable as-is.

The combat system is also interesting, not to mention challenging, as it goes against Squaresoft norms of the time and happens on a grid. Every action, either yours or the enemy's, has a given attack area. Some actions can only

affect areas orthogonal or diagonal to you, and/or are a minimum distance away, or only affect specific areas like immediately to your left or right. Some enemy attacks are extremely powerful, but have narrow attack areas, so it's very important to keep your characters out of them. All actions require time to execute, including movement, and some of your attacks can push enemies away, so if you're clever (or lucky) you can get an enemy into a cycle of running up to you, only to take damage and getting pushed back. Most of your characters will be underpowered for part of their scenario, so it's useful to learn the tricks as soon as you can.

One thing to watch for. Characters have unlimited movement range in battle, but each step still takes a moment of game time. It's possible for an enemy to interrupt your move with an action of his own. Note that your other character's turns will "bunch up" behind your current character's until you act or pass action, so it's important to keep movement to a minimum. By the way, a character who runs out of hit points is knocked out and gets a halo, but can still be revived by healing. A character who takes another hit in this state disappears for the rest of the fight. Regardless, you get all your "dead" characters back if you win the fight, and everyone's also healed to full HP.

Here's an important little detail. The game doesn't mention this outright, but characters who only pass in battle get much less experience! All a character has to do is one non-pass, non-move action to get a full share of experience points, but they still have to do something at least once per fight. Even an attack on an empty space seems like enough. Keep this in mind if you have a weak character, they have to participate in some way, they won't become more survivable unless they do something other than pass or move on their turn.

You can usually save the game any time not in battle or a cut-scene, and saves are analogous to save states anyway, so it doesn't matter much in game terms which you use.

Most scenarios takes from one to four hours to finish. They are:

Caveman: This is a fairly traditional RPG, build-your-levels scenario, with a lot of broad comedy. (Two of your characters learn fart attacks, and one has another attack where he throws poop.) There's only one spoken line of

dialogue in the whole thing (at the end), and the lack of text makes figuring out what to do in some places tricky. The most interesting things about this scenario are the combination-based shop system (you talk to a shop caveman and pick two items, and he'll try to combine them into a new item), and the encounter system, which isn't entirely random. You hold the Y button down in a wilderness area to sniff the air, and clouds of odor appear where the monsters are, which you can then use as an aid in tracking them down for food and/or experience.

Wrestler: This is the shortest scenario, a sequence of only six fights against various opponents in which you choose the order followed by a boss. Just beating enemies isn't enough, you want them to use moves on you so you can learn them, though you have to survive the move to keep it.

Western: This is a unique scenario where you're an outlaw gunfighter who teams up with a bounty hunter chasing him to protect a town from a gang of outlaws. There's very little combat until the big showdown. The meat of this scenario consists of exploring the town and looking for items to use as traps, then assigning townsfolk to constructing those traps to take out some of the gang before the big fight. There is a time limit to the whole thing, and different townsfolk take different amounts of time as they work. A perfect run, one where you get all the necessary trap items and get them all constructed in time, leaves you fighting only the gang's boss. Not constructing any traps leaves you with an epic fight against fifteen opponents! I particularly like this scenario.

Sci-Fi: This is another amazing and unique adventure, also with very little fighting (unless you count the optional video game which uses the combat engine). You're a newly-built robot operating on a spaceship returning to Earth with a captive alien specimen in the hold, when things start to go wrong. A lot of it plays more like an adventure game than an RPG; you wander around, talk to crew members, figure out puzzles, and unravel the mystery of the troubles plaguing the ship.

Kung-Fu: You're a Kung-Fu master in medieval China (unlike the other chapters, you don't name your character here but your school of martial arts). First you find some pupils, then you train them in your brand of Kung-Fu, helping them to learn your moves and grow in ability. Eventually the

strongest one will join you to seek revenge against bandits that ransack your temple.

Mecha: Another RPG-ish scenario, although your character has the ability to read the minds of NPCs. You can also find robot parts and use them to customize your own robot partner. I found this one a bit confusing and didn't make much progress in it before I had to move on, but apparently this scenario is fairly long.

Ninja: Probably the best scenario, this is a hugely complex adventure where you explore a stronghold in feudal Japan to assassinate an evil lord. You're constantly making decisions both explicit and implicit as you explore, and many of them affect how you'll be able to proceed. There's allies to find, traps to avoid, recurring villains to eliminate, some supernatural threats in there as well, and a couple of tough optional bosses to discover if you're thorough. It plays out somewhat like a non-linear RPG adventure module, where you're allowed to explore the place as you see fit. There are two additional challenges here: one, to kill all 100 people along the way (a bloodthirsty route that reminds me of a slasher movie, as you have to kill a lot of innocent characters including many women--note that demons do not count as kills, only human beings), the other, to try to complete the chapter killing no humans, innocent or guilty (you will have to run sometimes from battle to accomplish this feat). You could play this chapter over several times and not have the same experience twice!

Medieval and Last: To describe these would be a spoiler. Let's just say they tie together elements of the other chapters.

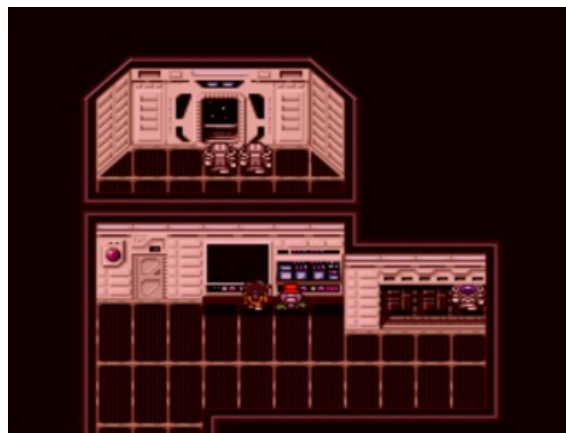
**Cultural note:** There are some minor instances of nudity in the game. Much of it lies among the broad humor in the Caveman chapter. There are a couple of other questionable dialogue elements in there. These things should be seen as a product of their time and culture and as such I do not condone them. This game should probably not be played by children. (It's not really for them anyway.)



^ At the start you have seven scenarios to choose from. ^  
They're all very different from each other.



^ Mecha chapter ^  
This is the first fight you get into in the scenario.





^ The setting of the Sci-Fi chapter is striking. ^  
The ship isn't that large, and it feels claustrophobic  
as the tensions and dangers begin to mount.



^ In the Western scenario, Mad Dog is your antaga-buddy. ^  
A bounty hunter looking to collect a reward on your character,  
you end up joining forces against the Crazy Bunch gang.



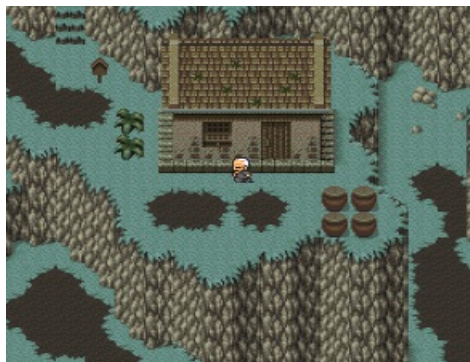
^ As you play the scenarios, some names turn up ^  
again and again. Could there be some connecting  
significance to it all?



^ The Caveman scenario is played out almost ^  
entirely without words, which makes figuring out  
what to do sometimes a puzzle in itself.



^ It's the Wrestling chapter, and that's ^  
Max Morgan you're fighting. He might look a little familiar.



^ Kung-Fu chapter. The overworld graphics ^  
resemble Final Fantasy II/IV US.

## Appendix A: Randomizers

Did you ever play a beloved game and, once it was over, wish that you could play it again but not know the details about it? Like, maybe if the dungeons were different, or items were in different places, or different monsters showed up, or even that the world map had been changed, so that you could have the experience of playing through it again?

That's what *game randomizers* are. A subclass of engine hack, these are usually computer programs written for desktop OSes that take an original copy of the game rom as input, and output a "scrambled" hack of that game with important details changed algorithmically. These are very interesting for taking long-familiar games and making them replayable, often changing the locations of major items and, in the most ambitious randomizers, changing level layouts themselves. A good randomizer will be able to change many aspects of a game, sometimes as far as changing overworld and dungeon maps, but will still ensure the game can be finished. While the results are rarely as good as the original, the degree by which some randomizers can make an old game seem fresh and appealing is surprisingly high.

Game randomizers grew out of the speedrunning community, where people realized that speedrunning a thoroughly explored and known game requires completely different skills than a completely unknown game. Races are held where contestants generate randomized roms based on the same seed, then speedrun at the same time attempting to finish the game first. The results are great fun to watch, but will probably never be embraced by the games' original creators since each randomized game is essentially its own custom, algorithmically-generated romhack.

There's a lot yet to be written on game randomizers, but in the meantime here's a list of links to keep you busy, and a couple of link sites from where you can find more!

### Metroid

NES Metroid Randomizer: <https://www.romhacking.net/utilities/1257/>

SNES Super Metroid Randomizer: <http://dessyreqt.github.io/smrandomizer/>

## **Zelda**

NES The Legend of Zelda Randomizer:

<https://sites.google.com/site/zeldarandomizer/> (Here is my own article on [Zelda Randomizer](#), from [the @Play collection book](#), reprinted on Kotaku.)

NES Zelda 2 Randomizer:

<https://bitbucket.org/digshake/z2randomizer/wiki/Home>

SNES Link to the Past Randomizer:

<https://dessyreqt.github.io/alttprandomizer/>

## **Final Fantasy**

NES Final Fantasy: <https://github.com/Entroper/FF1Randomizer/releases>

NES/Famicom Final Fantasy III (web based):

<https://yacopu.neocities.org/pages/ff3-randomizer/>

SNES Final Fantasy IV "Beyond Babil" Ancient Cave-style randomizer:

[https://github.com/abyssonym/beyond\\_babil](https://github.com/abyssonym/beyond_babil)

SNES Final Fantasy IV Roguelike Randomizer (check later in thread for possible further updates): <http://slickproductions.org/forum/index.php?topic=2306.45>

SNES/Super Famicom Final Fantasy V "Grand Cross" Randomizer:

[https://github.com/abyssonym/grand\\_cross](https://github.com/abyssonym/grand_cross)

SNES Final Fantasy VI Randomizer: <http://ff6randomizer.codeplex.com/>

SNES Final Fantasy VI "Beyond Chaos" Randomizer:

<https://github.com/abyssonym/beyondchaos>

## **"Metroidvania" Castlevanias**

GBA Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow Item Randomizer:

[https://github.com/abyssonym/aos\\_rando](https://github.com/abyssonym/aos_rando)

DS Castlevania Randomizer:

<https://github.com/LagoLunatic/dsvrandom/releases/tag/v1.0.0>

## **Fire Emblem**

GBA Universal Fire Emblem Randomizer:

<https://serenesforest.net/forums/index.php?/topic/55809-universal-gba-fe->

[randomizer-v10/](#)

GBA Fire Emblem 8 Chaos Randomizer: <http://feuniverse.us/t/fe8-chaos-randomizer/2068>

### **Other Games**

NES Goonies 2 Randomizer: Romhacking.net:

<http://www.romhacking.net/utilities/1247/>

NES The Guardian Legend: <http://www.romhacking.net/utilities/1145/>

SNES Earthbound Reshuffler:

<https://secure.fangamer.com/forum/Community/PKHack/EarthBound-Reshuffler-2-0>

SNES Secret of Mana Ancient Cave Randomizer:

<http://secretofmanaancientcave.blogspot.ca/>

GB/GBA/DS Universal Pokemon Randomizer:

<http://pokehacks.dabomstew.com/randomizer/>

N64 Super Mario 64 Chaos Edition (glitch factory):

<https://www.smwcentral.net/?p=section&a=details&id=12307>

2600 Freeway Randomizer: <http://www.romhacking.net/utilities/720/>

### **Collected**

Grand Game Randomizer Link Page:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gamerandomizers/>

RHDN forum list: [http://www.romhacking.net/forum/index.php?](http://www.romhacking.net/forum/index.php?topic=22579.0)

[topic=22579.0](http://www.romhacking.net/forum/index.php?topic=22579.0)

## Appendix B: Editors

I have not used any of these and cannot vouch for them. Some may not work on newer versions of operating systems; to get those to work, you may have to run an older OS using virtualization. These links are presented as a starting point to your own efforts, not their end.

[RHDN's Editors category has lots of entries.](#)

The big guns:

[Lunar Magic](#) (Super Mario World, Windows) - FuSoYa

[Editroid](#) (Metroid, Windows) - snarfbam ([Blog entries on snarfbam's site re: Editroid](#))

[SMILE](#) (Super Metroid, Windows) - Jathys

[SonED2](#) (Sonic Mega Drive/Genesis games, Windows) - Stealth

Second tier:

[Hyrule Magic](#) (The Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past, Windows, warning: tricky) - Sephiroth3

[CoilSnake](#) & [PK Hack](#) (Earthbound, Windows) - MrTenda & AnyoneEB

[FF4kster](#) (Final Fantasy 4/2US, Windows)

Others:

[Zelda Tech](#) (Legend of Zelda, Windows) - snarfbam

[Dungeon Master](#) (Legend of Zelda, Windows) - snarfbam

[njosro's Zelda II Editors](#) (Windows) - njosro

[Stake](#) (Castlevania Windows) - Dan

[Castlevania II Editor](#) (Windows) - Brandon Koopa

[reVamp](#) (Castlevania III, Windows) - +daniel+

[SceneNavi](#) (Zelda: Ocarina of Time) - DigitalZero Domain

[Kirby's Dream Course Editor](#) (Kirby's Dream Course, Windows) - Revenant

[Goldeneye Weapon Set Editor](#) - (Goldeneye 007, Windows) - PaD

[CADeditor](#) (multiple games) - spiiin

[Choose Your Own Adventure](#) (Adventure [VCS/2600], Windows) - Steve Englehardt

[Combat Playfield Editor](#) (Combat [VCS/2600], Windows) - Zach Matley

[Golden Egg](#) (Yoshi's Island, Windows) - Romi

[Lazy Shell](#) (Super Mario RPG, Windows) - giangurgolo, Omega

[MooJelly](#) (Super Mario Land 2, Windows) - SmellyMoo ([GitHub](#))

[Goldeneye Setup Editor](#) (multiple Rare N64 games, Windows) - SubDrag, Zoinkity, Wreck

[Rockman 3 Editor](#) (in Japanese, Windows) - Rock5easily

[Rockman 4 Editor](#) (in Japanese, Windows) - Rock5easily RHDN (4):

[Rockman 5 Editor](#) (in Japanese, Windows) - Rock5easily RHDN (5):

[Rockman 6 Editor](#) (in Japanese, Windows) - Rock5easily RHDN (6):

[Aridia](#) (Phantasy Star III, Windows) - Hugues Johnson

[Eisfrei](#) (Herzog Zwei, Windows) - Hugues Johnson

[Neptune](#) (Adventures of Lolo 1 and 2, Windows) - bbitmaster

[Lode Funner](#) (Load Runner NES/Famicom) - Disch

[Rockman/Mega man 2 Editor](#) (Windows) - Kuwata

[BatDance](#) (Batman [NES], Windows) - Mega-Dog

[IceEdit](#) (Fire & Ice, Windows) - hukka

[Blaster Construction Kit](#) (Blaster Master, Windows) - Benjamin Cutler

[Temporal Flux](#) (Chrono Trigger, Windows) - Geiger

[Blinky](#) (Namco Ms. Pac-Man, Windows) - Dan

[ZAMN-Edit](#) (Zombies Ate My Neighbors, SNES) - Dcahrakos

[SMB3 Map Editor](#) (Super Mario Bros. 3, Windows) - Beneficii

[Mario Improvement 3](#) (Super Mario Nros. 3, DOS) - Abe

[Epic Edit](#) (Super Mario Kart) - stifu (Thomas Goldstein)

[KALE](#) (Kirby's Adventure, Windows) - Devin

[SOM Editor](#) (Secret of Mana, Windows) - Mop, Enker



## Appendix C: Other Games & Miscellaneous

### Recreations & Inspirations

[2600 Space Invaders](#) (Windows)

[Mystery World Dizzy](#) (Homebrew NES)

[Locomalito's many works](#) (Windows, one commercial release for Xbox One)

[Kenta Cho's many works](#) (Windows, Linux)

[Super Mario X](#) - [SMBX2](#) (Windows)

[F-Zero VS](#) - "Michael from Sydney, Australia" (Windows, emulates SNES)

[Super Mario Crossover](#) (Flash)

[AM2R](#) (unofficial download)

[Street Fighter X Mega Man](#) (Official, Capcom)

[Sonic Mania](#) (Commercial, Sega for multiple platforms)

[Mega Man 9](#) & [10](#) (Commercial, Capcom for multiple platforms)

[Mega Man Powered Up!](#) (Commercial, Capcom for PSP)

[Sonic Dream Collection](#) (Windows & Mac, very weird)

### Alternatives

[Super Mario Maker](#) (Commercial, Nintendo for Wii U & 3DS) - [SMM Bookmark](#)

[Mega Maker](#) (Windows) - [Mega Engine](#) (Windows)

[Zelda Classic](#) - [Zelda Classic randomizers!](#) (Windows)

[Game Maker](#) (Commercial, YoYoGames for Windows)

## Appendix D: Sources

### Emulators

[RetroArch](#) (Many platforms)

### Hack Hosts & Collections

Romhacking.net (RHDN): <http://www.romhacking.net/>

Zophar's Domain: <https://www.zophar.net/>

Sonic Retro: <http://info.sonicretro.org/>

Sonic Stuff Research Group (SSRG):  
<http://sonicresearch.org/community/index.php>

SMW Central: <https://www.smwcentral.net/>

Metroid Construction: <http://metroidconstruction.com/hacks.php?x=top>

Metroid Database: <http://www.metroid-database.com>

Zeldix.net: <https://www.zeldix.net/>

GoldenEye Vault: <http://www.goldeneyevault.com>

Gradius Homeworld: <http://www.gradiushomeworld.co.uk>

War World News: <http://www.warsworldnews.com/wp/>

Pokemon Rom Hacks: <http://pokemonromhack.com/list>

Super Mario 64 Hack Wikia: <http://mario64hacks.wikia.com/>

GoldenEye Forever: <http://www.goldeneyeforever.com>

[Starmen.net](#) (Earthbound & Mother series)

[Custom Mario Kart Wii Wiki](#) and [Custom Mario Kart 8 Wiki](#)

### Translation Groups

AeonGenesis: <http://agtp.romhack.net/> -  
<http://agtp.romhack.net/projects.php>

Stardust Crusaders Translations (click on Systems):

<http://yojimbo.eludevisibility.org/>

Bit Ink Studios: <http://bitinkstudios.com/>

Dynamic Designs: <http://www.dynamic-designs.us/index.shtml>

DQ Translations: <http://www.dqtranslations.com/projects>

The Romhacking Aerie: <http://aerie.wingdreams.net/>

KingMike's Translations (archived):

<http://web.archive.org/web/20120815093102/http://kingmike.emuxhaven.n>

TransCorp: <http://transcorp.romhacking.net>

DvD Translations: <http://dvdtranslations.eludevisibility.org>

## **YouTubers**

eternisedDragon7 has many videos of Super Metroid hacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5M90zTdMDWQpxnCgcIuoRA>

MegaGWolf streams and demonstrates a lot of Sonic hacks with audio commentary, and is known to the Sonic hacking scene:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/MegaGWolf>

Amy Rose also shows off Sonic hacks, among others, often to completion:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/cloud198421>

Razor & Zenon is another pair who show off Sonic hacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ApachaiHapachai>

## **Romhack articles**

Polygon on Pokemon hacks:

<https://www.polygon.com/2014/8/22/6054087/pokemon-fan-games-hacked-roms>

Kotaku: How Three Kids Beat Square And Translated *Final Fantasy V* Into English: <http://kotaku.com/how-three-kids-beat-the-odds-and-translated-final-fanta-1794628286>

## Other Sites

Hacksterpiece Theater:

[http://www.vintagecomputing.com/index.php/archives/category/regular\\_feat\\_theatre/](http://www.vintagecomputing.com/index.php/archives/category/regular_feat_theatre/)

The Red Hat Cafe: <http://rhcafe.us.to/>

I-Mockery's list of terrible hacks (warning: offensive content): <http://www.i-mockery.com/romhacks/>

Indie Retro News: <http://www.indieretronews.com/>

Insane Difficulty: <http://www.insanedifficulty.com/board/index.php?app=ccs>

E.Gadd's Workshop: <http://egaddsworkshop.com/forums/>

MegaGWolf's Sonic Hack Showcase on YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP0dvYqPp3NdU5fxGk\\_RIZbh-BCRpzjti](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP0dvYqPp3NdU5fxGk_RIZbh-BCRpzjti)

Final Fantasy VII PC hacking forum: <http://forums.qhimm.com/>

<http://acmlm.kafuka.org/>

Chrontendo: <http://chrontendo.blogspot.com/> -

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Chrontendo> -

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRXRxTxAgO0exLF2bTgcHCzJ-kIaVn4By>

## Utilities

[Floating IPS](#) (applies IPS and BPS patches)

[xdelta UI](#) (applies xdelta patches)

[Tsukuyomi UPS](#) (Applies UPS patches)

[NSRT](#) (General SNES rom utility)

[SNESstuff](#) (Another general SNES rom utility)

## Random

[Tumblr devoted to glitchart](#)

[YouTube - Jailbreaking an unmodified Super Mario World cartridge to install a hex editor and mod loader](#)

## **Hacking Resources**

The Guide to Implementing 2D Platformers:

<http://higherorderfun.com/blog/2012/05/20/the-guide-to-implementing-2d-platformers/>

Sonic Retro's guide to Sonic physics:

[http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic\\_Physics\\_Guide](http://info.sonicretro.org/Sonic_Physics_Guide)

Sonic Retro: Sonic Hacking Guide: Hacking--

[http://info.sonicretro.org/SCHG:Sonic\\_Community\\_Hacking\\_Guide](http://info.sonicretro.org/SCHG:Sonic_Community_Hacking_Guide) - How-to-  
-[http://info.sonicretro.org/SCHG\\_How-to:Guide](http://info.sonicretro.org/SCHG_How-to:Guide)

Silver X's Beginner's Guide to NES romhacking:

<http://www.romhacking.net/documents/58/>

acmlm's tool collection (older):

<http://overclocked.acmlm.org/download/filelist.php?id=2>

MarkeyJester's Guide to 68K Assembly:

[http://mrjester.hapisan.com/04\\_MC68/Index.html](http://mrjester.hapisan.com/04_MC68/Index.html)

wla Cross-Platform Assembler: <http://www.villehelin.com/wla.html>

## **Disassemblies**

Super Mario Bros. high-level disassembly:

<http://www.romhacking.net/documents/635/>

Metroid: <http://www.metroid-database.com/m1/sourcecode.php>

Mega Man/Rockman: <http://bisqwit.iki.fi/jutut/megamansource/>

Sonic series: <http://info.sonicretro.org/Disassemblies>

Secret of Mana: <http://www.darkwoodinc.com/~enker/banks.php>

Pokemon Red & Blue: <https://github.com/pret/pokered>

Pokemon Trading Card Game: <https://github.com/pret/poketcg>

Combat (Atari VCS/2600):

[https://atariage.com/2600/archives/combat\\_asm/index.html](https://atariage.com/2600/archives/combat_asm/index.html)

Coming up in PART TWO

Legend of Zelda series hacks - Sonic the Hedgehog series hacks - Mega Man series hacks

Many more hacks of various games

Fire Emblem & BS Zelda translations, plus lots more

And then... part three? Let's talk about that one when we get there.

